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A Flawed Moralist?: On Kantian and Other Constructive Interpretations of Rousseau's Life and Thought

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What is the spirit and purpose of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thought?[1] Although his works continue to inspire readers and vast fields of scholarship, relatively few have rigorously interpreted the corpus as a whole, given its breadth, diversity of form, and highly apparent contradictions. Chief among these difficulties is the contrast between the austere principles of the normative writings and the defense of a spontaneous, self-indulgent way of life in the autobiographies. Two major interpretive paradigms have grappled with this problem. For one, first articulated by Leo Strauss (1899–1973), the radical freedom and solitude revealed in the autobiographies should be understood as Rousseau's highest and most philosophical ideal; the praise of virtue and duty is ultimately for popular purposes only.[2] The other paradigm essentially inverts this approach. For it, the autobiographical claims are not Rousseau's most fundamental, lucid, or normative; his genuine philosophical contributions are the teachings on virtue and justice, written mainly before the autobiographies. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) built upon Kant to first articulate what I call the "Flawed Moralist" approach.

Here I offer the first comprehensive and critical introduction to the approach initiated by Cassirer, having in a companion article

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done the same for approaches initiated by Strauss.[3] In the former approach, in his fundamental intentions and philosophical significance Rousseau is a "moralist,"[4] giving articulation to plausible and demanding ideals of virtue, justice, liberty, and community. He is "flawed" insofar as he never lived up to these ideals and later came to write of his (often faulty) personality more than he advanced his substantive philosophical ideals. This phase of self-revelation naturally corresponded with a decline of philosophical lucidity and personal well-being. These revelations have complicated the work of interpretation; but when properly understood, his normative philosophy is in no way tainted or undermined by them. Thus, for the Flawed Moralist interpreters, Rousseau's life can be reconciled with his principles in a way that decisively prioritizes the principles and interprets them in a high-minded fashion.

Kantians have played a prominent role here, since Cassirer established the basic framework, much as Kant himself had defused the challenge of the early discourses through his distinction of these early "critical" works from later "constructive" ones. But several of those who have most effectively developed this framework are neither Kantians substantively nor committed to a Kantian reading of Rousseau's philosophy. They nonetheless directly or indirectly follow Cassirer and Kant in the elements that concern us here. They seek to make Rousseau safe for human excellence, today's liberalism, or a sensible republicanism.[5] In addition to the scholars discussed at length here, who fully grapple with these problems, many others have peripherally appealed to this basic reconciliation in order to clear the ground for engaging with Rousseau's normative thought, understood as sincere, fundamentally coherent, and on balance admirable.[6] Although these debates are antiquarian in form, the case of Cassirer illustrates how urgent contemporary questions can hinge on the proper interpretation of epochal figures such as Rousseau and of movements such as the Enlightenment.[7]

After reconstructing the main Flawed Moralist premises, I will suggest that much of this paradigm may be endorsed. It sheds light on those aspects of Rousseau's project that he himself signaled as his best work, and from his intellectual prime. It provides a

straightforward vindication for the seriousness and coherence of the writings through *Emile*, and these are the works with the most enduring intellectual value, at least for those with mainly normative and philosophical concerns. Despite these strengths, there are limits to this paradigm. We question its firm distinction between a lofty normative philosophy and claims amounting to merely personal deviations. First, we find consistent elements of Rousseau's theory of natural goodness to be in some ways subversive of his theories of virtue and community, especially regarding foresight, the status of politics, and the commitment to domestic virtue. Second, the autobiographies develop the idea of natural goodness in philosophically substantive ways, and in depicting Jean-Jacques as preeminent in goodness, they ground a broad range of self-exculpation. Even if the Flawed Moralists are correct that absolute solitude is not Rousseau's deepest aspiration, it remains normatively significant that he offers a two-tiered system of judgment and often vindicates himself on the grounds of goodness alone.

The Personal Deviations and the Lofty Normative Philosophy

The Flawed Moralist interpretation is motivated by noble scholarly goals, at least by the standards of classical, Enlightenment, or progressive moral reason. Insofar as Rousseau might be understood as a persuasive champion of all that is best in human possibility, high-minded scholars might wish to call attention to such a project. Sharing a basic sympathy with Rousseau, and often closely linking his thought with their own,[8] these interpretations differ on several theoretical and normative matters. In the fully Kantian form, we find rationalist ideals—the primacy of practical reason, commitment to a universal and unconditional concept of duty, and a republicanism emphasizing universal dedication to the rule of law.[9] In these approaches, what is sound in Rousseau is precisely what anticipates Kant.[10] But many other—much less Kantian—Rousseaus have been offered for our sympathetic reconsideration, including a Platonist,[11] an Aristotelian,[12] a humanist,[13] a seeker of truth,[14] an advocate of integrity[15] or of democracy,[16] and the conscience of the modern age.[17]

The Flawed Moralist scholars present a high-minded Rousseau, but unlike some simpler approaches, they acknowledge aspects of him that seem to point in less elevated directions, especially in his life. Hence, they must show how an author's thought can fundamentally be separated from his biography. Against the common view that Rousseau's life and work are "so closely interwoven that every attempt to disentangle them must do violence to both by cutting their common vital nerve," Cassirer's *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1932) defends "the opposite hypothesis"[18]—namely, "that Rousseau's fundamental thought, although it had its immediate origin in his nature and individuality, was neither circumscribed nor bound to that individual personality; that in its maturity and perfection this thought puts before us an objective formulation of questions; and that this formulation is valid not for him or his era alone but contains, in full sharpness and definiteness, an inner, strictly objective necessity."[19] In his later essay "Kant and Rousseau" (1944–1945), Cassirer attempts to reestablish, on a principled basis, a functional equivalent of the intellectual innocence that Kant possessed while first reading Rousseau, long before the publication of the *Confessions*:[20]

> There are familiar writings in the Rousseau literature which give us in place of the work almost the man alone, and which describe him only in his dissensions and divisions, in his inner contradictions. The history of ideas threatens here to disappear into biography, and this in turn appears as a pure medical history [*Krankengeschichte*]. Kant possessed a much simpler and self-contained picture of Rousseau, which in just this simplicity was not less but more true than that which modern interpretation has often drawn for us.[21]

Thus, insofar as the personality and behavior revealed in the autobiographies deviate from this thought in its "maturity and perfection," it is beside the point philosophically. This is in keeping with Cassirer's general interpretive method, which strives to look beyond apparent contradictions to find a deeper coherence.[22]

Although sometimes without establishing this major premise of Cassirer, other scholars have tried to distance Rousseau's thought from his biography, and their arguments amount to minor premises in the reconstruction attempted here. Systematizing important distinctions of Kant and Cassirer, even brief Kantian discussions of Rousseau's corpus now commonly distinguish three phases: first, a more critical and diagnostic phase (ca. 1750–1755); second, a more positive and constructive phase (ca. 1761–1764); and finally, a more personal and autobiographical phase (ca. 1766–1778).[23] Their basic strategy is to prioritize the second phase over the other two.

In Kant's original formulation, the distinction between (early) critical writings and (later) constructive writings is largely theoretical, showing how apparently disparate writings might be reconciled according to a higher purpose.[24] Kant was deeply moved and influenced by Rousseau,[25] and thus he was troubled by the (apparent) critique of knowledge in the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and by the (apparent) critique of society and civilization as such in the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*. By positing the early discourses as perhaps intended only to diagnose a problem—the gap between nature and culture in the current order of civilization[26]—he was able to reconcile them with the more clearly moral purposes of the later works, notably *Emile*. The distinction has been adopted by a broad range of scholars, since it helps us see how Rousseau may be pursuing different arguments from different perspectives in order to have different effects on the reader, without needing to contradict or repudiate his earlier thought.

For Kant, this may be more of a useful reconstruction than a strict discernment of authorial intent.[27] As for Cassirer, he is best known for his insistence that Rousseau's corpus, from the first *Discourse* to the *Social Contract*, is substantially coherent when interpreted according to the spirit of the author.[28] At another level, though, Cassirer emphasizes that Rousseau's thought developed only slowly and with difficulty, and his first writings do not allow us to see his full intentions or deepest insights as his later (constructive) works do.[29] In his later essay, Cassirer maintains that in "his

first writings," Rousseau allowed himself "to be swept away . . . by an exuberance of enthusiasm and a rapture of feeling."[30] If Cassirer has been charged with presenting an overly neat and orderly interpretation of the Enlightenment and of the relation between Rousseau and Kant,[31] he should not be faulted for simply ignoring discordant data.

We might pause to consider the more radical charge of Quentin Skinner, that Cassirer follows a "somewhat a priori" assumption that "the business of interpreting Rousseau's thought must center on the discovery of his most 'fundamental thought'."[32] This is part of Skinner's more general criticism of "the mythology of coherence," which supplies an artificial consistency to classic texts and authors under any circumstances, rather than "any genuinely historical reports about thoughts that were actually thought in the past."[33] There are surely scholars who contort themselves seeking to show harmony between claims that cannot feasibly be reconciled, or were never intended to be. However, given Cassirer's acknowledgment of development and—at least in his later essay—of tension in Rousseau, Cassirer's method does not seem too ambitious in its assumptions, however we might dispute particular applications. Rather, it seems appropriate for a philosophical interpretation of a philosophical writer to assume, as a recent scholar has put it, that "the only way to show that an apparent contradiction is a real contradiction is to show that it resists our best efforts to resolve it."[34] Seeking a dynamic center of thought,[35] and judging how far other claims seem compatible with it, are sensible, at least regarding thinkers who aspire to systematic coherence, as Rousseau surely did.[36]

More recent Flawed Moralists have focused on questions such as virtue and social duty, leaving the second *Discourse* a major challenge. At one level, Rousseau himself prepared the way for something like Kant's critical–constructive distinction, since he consistently rejected the inference that his praise of natural humanity was meant practically to entail a return to the primitive life in the forests.[37] And yet we are left wondering how the essentially prehuman "savages" merit so much yearning and moral

stature. Tzvetan Todorov surmounts this by reading the inhabitant of the state of nature as "purely imaginary," and the notion of the state of nature as "only a mental construct, a fiction intended to help us comprehend reality," as well as an "abstraction" that "simply allowed Rousseau to formulate and organize his ideas."[38] This is, as we will see, a first step toward insulating Rousseau's readers against the dangerous charms of absolute solitude, which is often taken to be the fundamental ideal of this "solitary walker."

The Flawed Moralists distance the Genevan from his early works, but they do so even more strenuously from his late autobiographies. Cassirer generally avoids analyzing the autobiographies, although he does make biographically based suggestions about the moral as well as philosophical limitations of Rousseau's final stage.[39] Todorov is representative of more recent Flawed Moralist approaches, which confront the autobiographies and Rousseau's final solitude in a sustained manner. To him, Rousseau portrays multiple ways of life, not always as ideals to which he is committed, but as explorations of "the behavioral logic" of these ways of life, powerfully intuiting their basic assumptions and "the most distant premises and ultimate consequences" flowing from them.[40] It was this logical exploration in which Rousseau engaged when he praised the solitary life in works such as the *Reveries*. Beyond this, the *Reveries* are not "addressed to others" and do not "describe an ideal"; indeed, Rousseau has not found happiness, and he explains the "exceptional circumstances" that led to his extreme isolation.[41] If his final writings insist he has no need of others, we should "doubt, not his sincerity, but his lucidity when we perceive how often this declaration recurs."[42]

Our final Flawed Moralist premise appeals to Rousseau's own acknowledgments of the inconsistency of aspects of his life with his thought. Cassirer sought to answer a reductive, romantic interpretation, according to which the Genevan professed a vague morality of the good heart, which in practice justified any conceivable egotism and limitless desire.[43] By contrast, for Cassirer, "Rousseau was acutely aware of his inability—which he lamented bitterly—to bring his life and his doctrine into true harmony. . . . But it is

completely mistaken to make Rousseau's ethics responsible for the weaknesses of his character and for the conduct of his personal life."[44] Our interpreter then lays out his well-known case that Rousseau in fact offers "not an ethics of feeling but the most categorical form of a pure ethics of obligation [*Gesetzes-Ethik*] that was established before Kant."[45] The contemporary caricature of the romantic Rousseau is least able to do justice to his "theory of law and the state," where he "most emphatically denied the primacy of feeling."[46] Acknowledging some clear weaknesses of his character and peculiarities of his personality,[47] given Cassirer's premises, it is not difficult to distinguish what is fundamental from what is peripheral in the thoughtful study of Rousseau.

A few scholars have more systematically compared Rousseau's normative philosophy with his character. In a book largely dedicated to Rousseau's normative teaching about hypocrisy, Ruth Grant, on balance, defends her advocate of integrity from the related personal charge. She concedes, for instance, that his defenses of his treatment of his children were "rationalizations of a wicked deed."[48] Nonetheless, in general she argues that Rousseau "deserves the benefit of the doubt," since it is "certainly not surprising" that Jean-Jacques does not exemplify all the perfections of the ideal type he advocates.[49] Similarly, for Grant, although he sometimes emphasizes his lack of intention to harm in cases such as Marion and the stolen ribbon, his "emphasis on intentions does not necessarily collapse into limitless subjectivity." Personally, there is evidence he did feel guilt in the cases of Marion and his children. And intellectually, he does not maintain that "intention is the sole standard for morality" or that "each is the sole judge of his own intentions."[50]

It is perhaps Joseph Reisert who has most influentially defended Rousseau as "a friend of virtue," appealing to an important line of argument in the autobiographies themselves. Reisert discusses several of Rousseau's failings of virtue, notably his treatment of Thérèse during his quasi-affair with Sophie d'Houdetot.[51] An obstacle we face in seeing Rousseau "as a teacher of virtue" is that we know he "possessed little of the virtue" he attributes to the

tutor Jean-Jacques in *Emile*. In his autobiographies, Rousseau conceded that he "utterly lacks" the strength of will that he associated with virtue and duty, but insisted that he nonetheless "loves virtue with all his heart."[52] A recent analysis of the *Reveries* by David Lay Williams accords with Reisert's. He notes Rousseau's frequent concessions that he is not virtuous, even though he is good. The *Reveries* grants that his inclinations are sometimes too powerful to attain self-mastery, and "he concedes his inability to measure up to his own moral standards."[53] With this basic approach, it seems, Rousseau could concede his moral flaws and—however he may be judged as a person—could support an independent hearing for his normative ideas.

On Rousseau's Consistent Goodness

These comprehensive interpretations support the constructive—at times, even inspiring—moral and political teachings that countless readers have found in Rousseau. Here, however, we turn to other teachings that seem less edifying and that cannot be relegated to merely personal deviations, neatly distinguishable from a substantive intellectual core. In limning a subversive concept of goodness throughout his works, alongside the preeminent goodness he defended in himself especially in his final writings, we will find an inherent link between the morally questionable aspects of his biography and these elements of his philosophy.

Although Rousseau's "natural goodness" has some significant optimistic implications,[54] it also has a more subversive side. There is a stubborn sub-moral core in Rousseau's concept of human nature—an asociality, a lack of foresight, and a kind of egoism—which expresses itself deeply across his life and work, and not merely as something to be overcome in view of higher norms. This has not been widely recognized beyond a cadre of specialists, but it is not difficult to see why this rougher side of human nature would play a role in his way of thinking. For his anthropology must explain, not only why nature is innocent of humanity's current ills, and not only why (in some sense and contexts) we might repair them, but also why the usual course of civilization has relentlessly

exacerbated these ills.[55] In the nearly universal developments of *amour-propre*, civilized humans express a cruelly self-aggrandizing drive. In this way, Rousseauian natural goodness has a resistant—or even recalcitrant—edge to it,[56] contrary to interpretations that lump it too casually with the indefinite malleability of Helvétius or Condorcet.[57]

This suggests difficulties for the reconciliations of Kant, Cassirer, and the many who follow them. They have some reputable company in downgrading the first *Discourse*, based on the work's merits, as well as Rousseau's own later judgments of it.[58] Flawed Moralists have also plausibly argued that Rousseau should not be seen as an irrationalist, since reason plays a major role in his normative system.[59] And yet it goes too far to say, with Cassirer, that his constructive writings advocate a community of vibrant and free scholarly activity, being based on political justice, in contrast with conventional society's abstraction of knowledge from life, and the corresponding forms of vanity and inflamed *amour-propre*.[60] Instead, Rousseau considers the malignant forms of *amour-propre* to be at least a strong temptation within any human society, and crippling among virtually any conceivable community of scholars. Like the fine arts, this seems to be a case where the "abuse" will always outstrip the "use," if embodied on a large scale on a political level.[61] Similarly, even if Rousseau came to express some ambivalence about the second *Discourse*, it remains a work of the highest intellectual caliber, and its independent significance needs to be considered, even on a strongly developmental account.[62] Moreover, a proper developmental account would acknowledge that it is not only misguided enthusiasts who have been captivated by the idea of natural humanity.[63] For across Rousseau's mature thinking, the solitude of our earliest human nature remains a standard for judgment and a recurring motif for partial imitation.[64] Thus also, in response to Todorov, even though the exact historical status of Rousseau's "pure state of nature" must remain a matter of dispute,[65] his rigorous inference and sustained portrayal of our original solitude surely has a substantial moral standing and aspirational pull in his way of thinking.[66] Altogether, Cassirer's developmental

reconciliation may be credited for intellectual honesty in acknowledging discordant data but has also been justly faulted for dismissing the significance of this data.[67]

If the constructive works (ca. 1758–1764) also prominently include some of the morally troubling elements of Rousseauian natural goodness, then this challenge cannot be neutralized on a developmental basis. Here we can revert to another Kantian strategy, seeing the constructive works as incorporating and reconciling a challenge established in the critical works. For instance, the emphasis on refraining from harm in the critical works can be seen as retained yet integrated into a broader whole in the constructive works.[68] It is less clear that such edifying reconciliations are plausible in cases such as foresight, the status of political life, and the commitment to domestic virtue. Regarding foresight, Rousseau's original humans, alongside various observable "savage" peoples such as the Caribs, profoundly lack it. Their needs, and those of their children, are provided for spontaneously by nature. For instance, Rousseau prominently appeals to the natural economic harmony of original humanity in his 1751 letter justifying the abandonment of his children.[69] The repudiation of foresight would again be emphasized in his autobiographical writings, including his explanation in the *Confessions* of his relationship with Thérèse.[70] Even in *Emile*, the critique of foresight extends further than is commonly recognized, and seems to distance Rousseau from not only the Kantian model of duty and progress,[71] but also the Platonic, Aristotelian, and humanistic models forwarded by our other interpreters.[72]

The status of political life presents a second challenge to many constructive, edifying interpretations of Rousseau. For Cassirer, it is the political realm that most decisively refutes critics' claims that Rousseau teaches a vague morality of the heart, or that he was averse to duty, or that he insisted on the sovereignty of every individual.[73] Many Kantian interpretations appeal prominently to the remarks about "changing human nature" and the superiority of lawfulness and "moral freedom" in comparison with the brute-like status of natural humanity.[74] Although the two have commonly

been equated, there is evidence that Rousseau's idea of political virtue is substantially less natural than his idea of domestic virtue, as developed in *Emile* and *Julie*.[75] Correspondingly, his language in the political realm speaks strongly of human transformation and is much less explicitly concerned with natural standards. This provides a plausible inroad for Kantian interpreters—who are themselves profoundly constructivist and forward-looking—to see Rousseau as a clear predecessor.[76] If Rousseau's natural standard in politics is a merely formal model of psychological equilibrium,[77] this also provides no great difficulty for Kantian and related interpretations. However, unlike for a thoroughgoing constructivist, for Rousseau the political realm provides unusual challenges, precisely because the intensive socialization it requires is further removed from nature.[78] Insofar as we move away from natural harmony, we give rise to corresponding inconveniences, which may be partially remedied (or palliated), but which always remain profoundly unstable, with self-undermining tendencies not far below the surface.[79] None of this is meant to imply that Rousseau's political alternative is not serious or important, but, far from serving as a clinching case of his moralistic intentions, it reveals a tragic layer of his vision and the high but narrow channel for any possible political justice.[80] All this seems to be reinforced by the well-known antipolitical posture he takes in his final autobiographies.[81]

Finally, despite his many years of relative isolation in the country and within small households, he also has an ambiguous relationship to his model of domestic virtue. This is obviously true in his personal life, whether in his relationship with Thérèse, his abandoned children, or his many friendships that ended explosively. But even his theoretical commitment to domestic virtue is called into question by a fascinating yet bizarre section of *Emile* itself.[82] Reflecting on the way of life he would live "if I were rich," he offers "a kind of essay on true taste in the choice of agreeable leisure."[83] In the relative paucity of scholarly comments on this passage, most agree that the moral life outlined is different than the one prescribed to Emile[84]—for instance, this alternative Rousseau has no wife or children.[85] At the same time, he does enjoy interaction

with a broad community of friends.[86] In general, he presents a model of leisure, simplicity, moderation, and decency. Unlike Rousseau's usual models of virtue, however, he would be "sensual and voluptuous," devoting himself to "indolent luxury."[87] Throughout this section, there is little mention of virtues, and none of duty, let alone political engagement.[88]

How far this is meant as an account of Jean-Jacques's actual character, inclinations, or personal normative standards is not clear. For instance, it may be that the very process of becoming rich, or the situation of being rich, is assumed to have transformed not only his behavior but even his moral aspirations.[89] We also do not know whether this should be taken as a serious alternative to the main model presented in *Emile*—perhaps a kind of innocent Epicureanism, instead of the more Stoicizing main account.[90] On the most edifying interpretation, we might see the objective of the digression as presenting a moral minimum, appealing to those who presume they have high taste, but are little concerned with moral notions as such.[91] One might, however, just as plausibly argue that the passage undermines the objective requirement of duties of virtue, since in this passage they do not seem to be necessary for happiness.[92] In any case, the digression seems to reveal an ambiguous commitment to the norms portrayed throughout most of *Emile*. This is all the more remarkable since Rousseau often claimed *Emile* was his greatest and most important book, and as Cassirer points out, it was written the most freely during the height of his constructive period.[93] It calls to mind the Burkean admonition that in educating the young, we should be cautious about providing authors such as Rousseau, who are "indulgent to the peculiarities of their own complexion."[94]

On His Preeminent Goodness

The "if I were rich" digression is only the most striking case of the broader problem, namely, that subversive notions of goodness are threaded throughout the major works on virtue, duty, and justice. To this one can add that Rousseau's conception of himself as uniquely embodying natural goodness, as evident especially in his

final writings, is not merely incidental to his basic philosophical contributions, but must be seen as a substantive philosophy, and one in real tension with several of his normative contentions.

Although the relevant passages have not been widely discussed by Flawed Moralist interpreters, they are among the most jarring in the corpus. Begin with Rousseau's challenge to the readers, invoking the final judgment, from the preamble to the *Confessions*: "Let each of them, here on the steps of your throne, in turn reveal his heart with the same sincerity; and then let one of them say to you, if he dares: *I was better than that man*."[95] Discomfited like many scholars, Peter France offers a developmental and psychological interpretation: "This strident sentence was written at the height of Rousseau's persecution mania, when he believed he was being represented as a monster."[96] Much of the Second Part of the *Confessions* was written during his frantic, haunted winter of 1769–1770, and the definitive preamble also dates from nearly this time, so France's approach is not without basis.[97] This would then apply to a similar claim in Book X about being "all in all, the best of men," as well as a morbid addition to the end of Book XII exclaiming that anyone who would look at his character and still consider him a "dishonorable man" should himself "be choked."[98] Scholars routinely point out that in his superlative claims, Rousseau seems to be presupposing his strong distinction between goodness and virtue, and he is claiming only the former for himself.[99] And yet the claims have more than a little of the "extravagance" that he sometimes questioned in his works.[100]

Unfortunately, his insistence on his preeminent goodness cannot be relegated to the period for which we have clear, independent evidence of his faltering psychological state. For instance, the masterful Neuchâtel preamble to the *Confessions* (1764), dating even before Voltaire revealed the secret about Rousseau's children in *The Sentiment of the Citizens* (December 1764), closes with the same "strident" challenge to the reader as the definitive (but shorter and shriller) preamble.[101] Moving earlier still, we find a similar claim in the *Letters to Malesherbes* (January 1762), a source meant to explain the mindset and intentions that dictated his normative

masterpieces, and written before their condemnation.[102] According to Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, this expression is first found in a 1757 letter to Sophie d'Houdetot, in the midst of Rousseau's quarrel with Friedrich Melchior Grimm: "Ah! If I am a wicked man, then all the human race is vile! Show me a better man than me, show me a soul more affectionate, more sensitive, more in love with the charms of friendship, more touched by decency [*honnête*] and by beauty—show me that, and I will fall silent."[103]

In passages like these, even if Rousseau is, implicitly and sometimes explicitly,[104] not claiming virtue for himself, he does claim a comparative and (sometimes) even superlative position, by a standard that appears to be quite sufficient, if not ultimate. Here we will not be able to sift through all the complexities of the relations between Rousseauian goodness and virtue. We might grant to the Flawed Moralist interpreters that across his writings, virtue is in some important senses a higher value than goodness—for instance, it seems to be more praiseworthy, more useful, and more adapted to communal flourishing and happiness. Nonetheless, he often finds self-evident vindication in staking claim to mere goodness, regardless of his failures of virtue. In this way his fundamental normative standards do seem to be dichotomous, and this is not without consequence, either in theory or practical impact. He provides many justifications and inspirations for virtue, no doubt. But for those who believe they face substantial obstacles to virtue—which is to say, almost all people at almost all times—he provides a comparable number of ready-made excuses to settle for mere goodness. This goodness, it is true, cannot justify every vice or act of malice, but as we might infer from the case of his abandoned children, it can nimbly support a broad range of delinquencies, so long as they were not expressly intended to harm others.[105]

More generally, these excuse-making lines of argument cannot be relegated or subordinated as merely incidental or personal aspects of his writings. The personality is here clearly embodied in the philosophy, and these elements of the philosophy are highly articulated and influential. Indeed, many careful scholars have

found it central to his thought that he posits the source of genuine evil as being entirely outside of the self, and he sharply divides supposed intention from all concrete behavior.[106] Thus, when in the later autobiographical writings this line of reasoning emerges so strongly, this is most accurately seen, not as a random personal disintegration, but as an amplification of a strand of subversive goodness that had always been present.

In what I have called Flawed Moralist interpretations, the core premises are Rousseau's commitment to lofty normative ideals, his regret of his failures to live up to them, and the corresponding separability of his thought from his character and life. Cassirer was correct that it is often plausible to separate thought from biography. In Rousseau's case, however, there is more overlap than Cassirer suggested, especially regarding foresight, the status of politics, the commitment to domestic virtue, and the exculpatory appeal to a standard of mere natural goodness.

If Kantian and constructive interpretations of Rousseau's life and thought are thus limited, what remains? Should we turn to an opposite perspective, and see the autobiographical Rousseau, not as a largely irrelevant deviation, but as revealing the genuine core of his thought? This more subversive approach has been systematically pursued by Strauss and those variously influenced by him. In a companion article, I have sought to show the significance of these approaches, as well as their limits in interpreting Rousseau in accordance with his most reductive and supra-moral lines of reasoning.[107] We are left with a figure who had some lofty commitments, but who combined these with more subversive ones in a perplexing way—and whose point of philosophical emphasis seems to have shifted toward the subversive over time. There is a tension between genuinely philosophical claims; one side should not be dismissed as a merely personal deviation or as exoteric. Beyond this, a more comprehensive and even-handed approach would be necessary to outline the relations between Rousseau's life and thought, and their development as he sought consistency and integrity over the course of a singularly eventful career.[108]

Notes

1. For frequently cited editions of Rousseau, CC = *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: édition critique*, 53 vols., ed. R. A. Leigh (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1965–1995); CW = *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, 13 vols., ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–2010); EPW = *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); LPW = *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); OC = *Oeuvres Complètes*, 5 vols., ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond, Jean Starobinski et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–1995). For frequently cited individual works of Rousseau, Conf. = *Confessions* (CW:5/OC:1); DOI = *Discourse on Inequality* (EPW/OC:3); E = *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979)/ OC:4; *Julie* = *Julie, or the New Heloise* (CW:6/OC:2). For Kant, page numbers and German text follow the Akademie Textausgabe, *Kants Werke*, 9 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968–1977), unless otherwise noted. For Cassirer, the texts of *Das Problem Jean Jacques Rousseau* and "Kant und Rousseau" are from *Über Rousseau*, ed. Guido Kreis (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012).
2. See esp. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 258, 261–63, 292–93; Roger Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 90, 96, 254; Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau's Exemplary Life: The "Confessions" as Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 19–26, 209–10, 218–26; Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 152–63, 176; Heinrich Meier, *The Happiness of the Philosophic Life: Reflections on Rousseau's "Rêveries" in Two Books*, trans. Robert Berman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016 [2011]), ix, 3–4, 45, 93, 165, 196.
3. Matthew D. Mendham, "A Veiled Antinomian? On Straussian and Subversive Interpretations of Rousseau's Life and Thought," *Political Science Reviewer* 43, no.1 (2019): 137–66.
4. For rejections of the application of "moralist" to Rousseau, see Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 183, 210–11, 282n46; and Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1990), 134n29. Cf. Ryan Patrick Hanley's contention that Rousseau is "something more than a mere moralist," given his coherent system and pervasive epistemological concerns ("Rousseau's Virtue Epistemology," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50, no. 2 [2012]: 261).

5. For republican readings that briefly consider the weaknesses of Jean-Jacques's life, see Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the "First Discourse" to the "Social Contract," 1749–1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37–39, 47, 178; Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment: A Republican Critique of the Philosophes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 33–35, 117–19, cf. 153n11.
6. E.g., Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction to His Psychological, Social, and Moral Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 2–3, 6–8, 36, 52; Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–19. The approach is clear in John Rawls: "Rousseau's ideas are deep and consistent; there are shifts of mood and no doubt surface contradictions, but the whole structure of thought hangs together in one unified view" (*Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman [Cambridge, MA: Belknap–Harvard University Press, 2007], 192; see also 200, 228, 241).
7. On Cassirer's challenge to the "virulent ideologies" of his epoch through the subtle implications of his intellectual histories, see Jean Starobinski, "Préface" to *Le problème Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Marc B. de Launay (Paris: Hachette, 1987), ix–xii. See, to similar effect, Robert Wokler, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies*, ed. Bryan Garsten (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 235–37, 240, and Johnson Kent Wright, "'A Bright Clear Mirror': Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*," in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), esp. 91–96.
8. Céline Spector has emphasized this point in her account of the Rawlsian attempt to "fully reintegrate Rousseau into the history of liberal thought" (*Au prisme de Rousseau: Usages politiques contemporains* [Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011], 104; see also 111, 136–38). This is an instance of her general claim that the unusual divergence among Rousseau interpreters is not solely attributable to "its complexity, its richness, its irreducible tensions," but "Rousseau is also deformed—diffracted—by the needs of the cause" (11).

9. E.g., Ernst Cassirer, "Kant and Rousseau," in *Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe*, trans. James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963 [1945]), 57. See the broad range of scholarship cited by David Lay Williams, who generalizes, "The links drawn between Rousseau and Kant typically include their shared commitment to autonomy, virtue, and the rule of law" (*Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007], 208). For instance, Ryan Patrick Hanley has offered an effective treatment of the *Discourse on Political Economy* as Rousseau's most Kantian text, heavily emphasizing the rule of law ("Political Economy and Individual Liberty," in *The Challenge of Rousseau*, ed. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 34–56, esp. 48, 55). See also Ethan Putterman on the centrality and majesty of law for Rousseau (*Rousseau, Law, and the Sovereignty of the People* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], esp. introduction and ch. 1).
10. See "Kant and Rousseau," 33, 42, and esp. 59. Eric Weil put it most famously: "Kant was necessary *to think the thoughts of Rousseau*" ("Jean-Jacques Rousseau and His Politics" [1952], trans. Daniel R. Brunstetter, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols., ed. John T. Scott [London: Routledge, 2006], 1:148).
11. David Lay Williams, "The Platonic Soul of the *Reveries*: The Role of Solitude in Rousseau's Democratic Politics," *History of Political Thought* 33.1 (2012): 87–123, esp. 105; Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment*; cf. Williams, *Rousseau's "Social Contract": An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 217–20, 263–64.
12. Joseph Reisert, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Friend of Virtue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), esp. 9–14, 55–56, 80–81, 176–78.
13. Tzvetan Todorov, *Frail Happiness: An Essay on Rousseau*, trans. John T. Scott and Robert D. Zaretsky (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001 [1985]), 57–58, and ch. 3, esp. 34, 49–53; Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002 [1998]), 97–105, esp. 99.
14. Jason Neidleman, *Rousseau's Ethics of Truth: A Sublime Science of Simple Souls* (London: Routledge, 2017).
15. Ruth Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), esp. 58–62, 74–77, 91, 111–13.
16. James Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), esp. 2 on the more psychological, authoritarian, or pessimistic interpretations that had recently prevailed.

17. Raymond Trousson, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Tallandier, 2003), esp. 188–90, 227–29.
18. *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. and trans. Peter Gay (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 39f/*Das Problem*, 11. Starobinski would later provide an important articulation of the opposed approach, arguing that it is "pointless to try to separate the 'real Rousseau' from his disease" (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 (1957)], 202; see also 170, 368–69, and the direct response to Cassirer, 30–33; cf. "Rousseau and the Peril of Reflection," in *The Living Eye*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989 (1961)], 74). However, in his "Préface" to the French translation of Cassirer, Starobinski grants that "[t]o invalidate [Rousseau's] thought in arguing from the oddities of his psychology is an evasion" (*Le problème Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, xvi). He then clarifies that although one may see his own return to the "psychological" approach as a "regression" in comparison with the systematic readings of Ernst Cassirer, Leo Strauss, Bronisław Baczko, and others, "at no moment was it for me a question of *reducing* the thought of Rousseau" to sublimated desires or unconscious mechanisms (xvi–xvii).
19. *The Question*, 40/*Das Problem*, 11; see also *The Question*, 127–28.
20. The *Confessions* "appeared only later when Kant's notion of Rousseau had long been fixed" ("Kant and Rousseau," 58). See also Weil, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and His Politics," 148. Many of the best-known quotations from Kant about Rousseau's impact on him are from marginal notes of 1764–1765, for instance, about being "overcome" by the beauty of his writing, or the discovery of the dignity of human nature (see "Remarks in the *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*," in *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], esp. 20:43–44 and 58–59). For our purposes, see esp. the following: "The first impression that an understanding reader . . . acquires from the writings of Mr. *J. J. Rousseau* is that he has encountered an uncommon acuity of mind, a noble impetus of genius and a sensitive soul [*eine gefühlvolle Seele*] in such a high degree as has perhaps never before been possessed by a writer of any age or any people. The impression that follows next is bewilderment at strange and absurd opinions, which oppose what is generally held so much" (43/*Bemerkungen in den "Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,"* ed. Marie Rischmüller [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991], 37–38).

21. "Kant and Rousseau," 58/"Kant und Rousseau," 143–44, translation modified. On the connection of biography and philosophy more generally, see "Kant and Rousseau," 55–59, and Peter Gay's "Introduction" to *The Question*, 15–17.
22. See his important preface to *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951 [1932]) esp. v–vi, viii–x; see also *The Question*, e.g., 115. As Gay describes Cassirer's critical method of *Verstehen*, "the critic begins the process of understanding a philosopher's work by searching for a dynamic center of thought" ("Introduction" to *The Question*, 21–22; see also Gay, "The Social History of Ideas: Ernst Cassirer and After," in *The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore [Boston: Beacon Press, 1967], 114–17).
23. Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7–8, developing Rawls, *Lectures*, 193–94. Cohen and Rawls both include the *Letter to d'Alembert* (1758) in the first group, but since Kant and Cassirer equate the "critical" phase with the first two discourses, 1758 has been omitted in the statement here.
24. "In this manner one can also bring into agreement with themselves and with reason the assertions of the famous *J.-J. Rousseau*, which are often misinterpreted and to all appearance conflict with one another. In his writing *on the influence of the sciences* and *on the inequality of human beings*, he shows quite correctly the unavoidable conflict of culture with the nature of the human species as a *physical* species . . .; but in his *Emile*, his *Social Contract* and other writings, he seeks again to solve the harder problem of how culture must proceed in order properly to develop the predispositions of humanity as a *moral* species [*als einer sittlichen Gattung*] to their vocation, so that the latter no longer conflict with humanity as a natural species" ("Conjectural Beginning of Human History," in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, trans. Mary Gregor et al. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 8:116; see 116–17). See also *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*: "One certainly need not accept as his real opinion the hypochondriac (ill-humored) portrayal which *Rousseau* paints of the human species, when it ventures out of the state of nature, for a recommendation to re-enter that state and return to the woods. By means of this picture he expressed our species' difficulty in walking the path of continuous approximation to its destiny" (in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 7:326–27).

25. See esp. Cassirer, "Kant and Rousseau," 1–18; Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5–9; Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment*, 210–15; Jeremiah Alberg, "Rousseau and Kant: Imitation, Genius, and Scandal," in *The Rousseauian Mind*, ed. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (London: Routledge, 2019), 401–4; and note 20 above. Much of this confrontation with Rousseau occurred during a personal and intellectual crisis in 1764–1765. See John H. Zammito, "The Pursuit of Science as Decadence in Kant's Remarks in *'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'*," in *Kant's 'Observations" and "Remarks"*: *A Critical Guide*, ed. Susan Meld Shell and Richard Velkley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 234–46, esp. 235, 238–39. For Rousseau's impact on Kant's ideas of epistemology and cognitive development during this period, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Rethinking Kant's Debts to Rousseau," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99, no. 4 (2017): 380–404.
26. See the passages quoted in note 24 above. In addition, for Kant, as long as there is no federation of states overcoming the threat of war, "*Rousseau* was not so wrong when he preferred . . . the condition of savages" to our current disorders ("Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent," in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 8:26). Kant overcomes Rousseau's ambivalence by framing this as a broader process. That is, nature goads us to fulfill our categorical duty of overcoming the lawless condition, first among individuals and then among states, even if empirical happiness may be better served by "tranquil indolence" in an arcadian pastoral life of perfect concord. See, e.g., "Idea for a Universal History," 8:20–25; review of J. G. Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 8:65; "Toward Perpetual Peace," in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8:365–68; and *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, AK 6:318.
27. See the remark about bringing him into agreement "with reason" in note 24 above; cf. Rawls, *Lectures*, 200, 236.
28. See esp. *The Question*, 65, 125–26; similarly, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 261. See also Kant's unique suitability for understanding Rousseau, since Kant was "the only absolute ethical thinker that the eighteenth century produced" (*The Question*, 70, 58). On reading in the proper spirit, see *The Question*, 39, and "Kant and Rousseau," 45. See, similarly, Rawls, *Lectures*, 192, 200, 228, 241.

29. See *The Question*, 56–57, 99, 105, and esp. 127. Kelly also observes that Cassirer concedes "internal dissensions, divisions, and contradictions" in Rousseau. For discussion and criticism, see *Rousseau's Exemplary Life*, 2, 212. As Weil states it, "Rousseau corrected the two *Discourses*, but never did he renounce them" ("Jean-Jacques Rousseau and His Politics," 159). Rawls also posits a decrease of pessimism from the second *Discourse* to the *Social Contract* (*Lectures*, 206–8, 242).
30. "Kant and Rousseau," 27/"Kant und Rousseau," 115, translation modified. Similarly, Cassirer comments on the Savoyard Vicar: "We never find in it...those sharp paradoxes, those unreconciled contradictions that confront us in Rousseau's first writings.... [H]is passion is never, as in the great peroration of the first *Discourse*, purely rhetorical" (44f/131). Cassirer's earlier book seems less critical of the discourses (see *The Question*, 105).
31. See Peter Gay, "Introduction" to *The Question*, esp. 24; see also 25–26, and Gay, "The Social History of Ideas," 117. In Gay's general discussion, he claims it is a "venial fault" that Cassirer's method "slighted tensions, reduced ambiguities to slightly artificial order" ("The Social History of Ideas," 117; see 115–17). However, Gay elsewhere claims this fault applies more to Cassirer's writings of the 1930s than of the 1944–1945 "Kant and Rousseau" essay ("Introduction" to *Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe*, xii).
32. "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 17 and 17n75. See also 11n41 on Cassirer's Kantian interpretation of the Enlightenment.
33. Ibid., 16, 22; see also 16–22, 29–30.
34. Jonny Thakkar, review of *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's "Republic,"* by Jill Frank, *Political Theory* 48, no. 1 (2020): 123.
35. See note 22 above.
36. See Rousseau, "Last Reply," EPW 63n/OC 3:71–72n; "Preface of a Second Letter to Bordes," EPW 107/ OC 3:103; "Biographical Fragment," CW 12:31/OC 1:1114; *Letters to Malesherbes* II, CW 5:575/ OC 1:1135; *Letter to Beaumont*, CW 9:22/OC 4:928; *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques* III, CW 1:209/OC 1:930. For comment see Grace and Kelly, "Introduction" to *The Challenge of Rousseau*, 1–6, 15, and Melzer, *Natural Goodness*, esp. 4–9. Cf. Arthur Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 112–14, 297, 311, 332–34.
37. E.g., Cassirer, "Kant and Rousseau," 10, 24–26; Todorov, *Frail Happiness*, 11. This stance is confirmed in DOI Note IX, 203–4/207–8;

"Letter to Philopolis," EPW 227/OC 3:235; cf. *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, EPW 50f/OC 3:55–56. For the merely diagnostic status of the early writings, see "Last Reply," EPW 85/OC 3:95, and "Preface of a Second Letter to Bordes," EPW 108/OC 3:104.

38. Todorov, *Frail Happiness*, 13, 10, 47; see also 48, and *Imperfect Garden*, 82, 84–86. See, more briefly, Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 270–71; "Kant and Rousseau," 24, 33–34; Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love*, 36–38, and Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Critique of Inequality: Reconstructing the Second Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 33–37, 62–63. See also Dent on the insignificant and metaphorical role of the "self in isolation" (*Rousseau*, 88–89, 113). Rawls takes a stronger line, distancing even the second *Discourse* from the first stage of primitive humanity: It is "not regarded by Rousseau as an ideal stage at all" (*Lectures*, 197; see also 201, 204, 219, 235–36).
39. See *The Question*, 42, 85, 95/*Das Problem*, 13, 52, 60.
40. Todorov, *Frail Happiness*, 3, 53; see also 19. See the comparison of Todorov's method to Strauss's in Scott and Zaretsky, "Introduction" to *Frail Happiness*, xxiii.
41. *Frail Happiness*, 95. Similarly, in order to avoid *aporia*, Todorov insists on distinguishing the author's personal tastes and his exceptional case from "the general rule (the recommendations he addresses to Emile)" (*Imperfect Garden*, 104).
42. Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, 99; see also 97–105, and *Frail Happiness*, 57–58, ch. 3, esp. 34, 49–53. See, similarly, Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love*, 35, 35n13 (the *Reveries* and *Dialogues* "painfully exemplify, if unintentionally, how madness can result from a failure of recognition"), 85–87, and Reisert, *A Friend of Virtue*, 89n15, 110n6.
43. See Cassirer's quotations from Karl Rosenkranz (*The Question*, 95–96) and Irving Babbitt ("Kant and Rousseau," 14).
44. Cassirer, *The Question*, 95; see also 96. Among these weaknesses, to Rousseau personally, "every external restriction was unbearable" ("Kant and Rousseau," 56). For other negative elements of his disposition, see "Kant and Rousseau," 7.
45. *The Question*, 96. For a qualified endorsement, see Cohen, *A Free Community of Equals*, 183–84n23.
46. "Kant and Rousseau," 30; see also 25, and *The Question*, 96.
47. See the passages cited in note 40 above.
48. See Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity*, 111–13. For other weaknesses of character, see 91.

49. Ibid., 91. Grant suggests some strengths in Rousseau's character, such as disinterestedness and a willingness to sacrifice for the truth (e.g., 74–77, 113).
50. See Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity*, 111, 113, 113n17. For Marion, see Conf. II, 70–73/84–87.
51. See *A Friend of Virtue*, 80–81, esp. 81n5. Reisert also challenges Kelly's idea that the *Confessions* presents Rousseau's life as "exemplary," since on the contrary, Rousseau "insists so strenuously on his own uniqueness" (22n51).
52. *A Friend of Virtue*, 176; see esp. 176–81.
53. See "The Platonic Soul of the *Reveries*," 105. Williams also notes that "Rousseau's personal aspirations for self-mastery are sometimes half-hearted or even abandoned entirely" (ibid.).
54. See "Preface" to *Narcissus*, EPW 101/OC 3:969; *Social Contract* III.12, LPW 110/OC 3:425; *Emile* 31/239; *Letters to Malesherbes* II, CW 5:575/OC 1:1136. See also Neuhouser on the contingency of social inequality (*Rousseau's Critique of Inequality*, chs. 1–2 and 210–12).
55. See esp. Laurence Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), ix–x. The genealogy is suggested in DOI II, 167/170: "[T]he goodness suited to the pure state of nature was no longer the goodness suited to nascent society." Spector criticizes Rawls for omitting *Social Contract* III–IV in his analysis of that book and thereby eliminating or reducing Rousseau's "aptitude to confront the existence of evil in history," as well as humanity's "centrifugal tendencies" and "asocial passions" (*Au prisme de Rousseau*, 107, 116; see also 134–38).
56. Cf. a major thesis of John M. Warner, *Rousseau and the Problem of Human Relations* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), namely, "the intransigence of natural, individuating self-love, which resists with overwhelming strength all efforts to recruit it for social and political purposes" (4).
57. For his rejection of infinite malleability, see "Notes on Helvétius's *On the Mind*," CW 12:211/OC 4:1229; cf. *Julie* V.3, 461–64/563–66. Victor Gourevitch shows the centrality of "almost unlimited perfectibility" in Leo Strauss's reading of Rousseau and argues against it ("On Strauss on Rousseau," in *The Challenge of Rousseau*, ed. Grace and Kelly, 153–57).
58. For the company, see esp. Robert Wokler "The *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and Its Offspring," in *Reappraisals of Rousseau*, ed. Simon Harvey et al. (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1980), 250–56. For Rousseau, see Conf. VIII, 295/352, and the *Avertissement* he prepared in 1763

for a later edition (CW 2:3/OC 3:1237, variant (b)). In contrast, several have pointed to the first *Discourse* being listed among three "principal writings" in *Letters to Malesherbes* (see II, CW 5:575/OC 1:1136).

59. Cassirer provides a strong rationalist reading while also recognizing how Rousseau freed his age from "the domination of intellectualism" (*The Question*, 83; see also 74–75, 82–83, 98, 108–9, 126). The case against his irrationalism has also been bolstered by two sophisticated recent studies: Hanley, "Rousseau's Virtue Epistemology," and Neidleman, *Rousseau's Ethics of Truth*, esp. ch. 3.
60. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 273. See, similarly, the position of George Havens in his 1946 edition of the first *Discourse* (summarized in Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," *Social Research* 14, no. 4 [1947]: 462).
61. On the greater danger of error than the usefulness of truth, see *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* II, EPW 16/OC 3:18. Similarly, *Observations*, EPW 50/OC 3:55; "Preface of a Second Letter to Bordes," EPW 109/OC 3:105; E II, 96/327; III, 171, 204/435, 483. For the role of philosophy in providing real excellence for a few while unleashing destruction for the many, see *Letter to Grimm,* EPW 53/OC 3:60; DOI I, 151f, 184/154, 189. The educational program in the *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (ch. 4) should undermine the attempt to see the *Social Contract* as moving in a more liberal-progressive direction with regard to political education. See the discussion in Matthew D. Mendham, "Rousseau's Partial Reception of Fénelon: From the Corruptions of Luxury to the Contradictions of Society," in *Fénelon in the Enlightenment*, ed. Christoph Schmitt-Maaβ et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 67–72.
62. On later ambivalence, see Conf. X, 420/502. On its high caliber in revealing his principles, see IX, 341/407.
63. Cf. the citations from Todorov and Rawls in note 38 above.
64. Jonathan Marks discusses the usefulness of the critical/constructive distinction, but he comments on Emile that "though he is capable of self-conquest and morality, [he] derives much of his happiness from the sweet freedom and simplicity we encounter in the *Second Discourse*. The portrait of original man is not merely negative or critical but embodies aspects of the human condition and of human happiness that remain an object of Rousseau's constructive works" (*Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 115). The theme is also developed well by Cooper (*Problem of the Good Life*, e.g., 180–81).

65. See Miller, *Dreamer of Democracy*, 95–96, 101–2; Gourevitch, "Rousseau's Pure State of Nature," *Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (1988): 23–59; Kelly, "Rousseau's *Peut-Être*: Reflections on the Status of the State of Nature," *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no. 1 (2006): 75–83; Kelly, "*Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*," in *The Rousseauian Mind*, ed. Grace and Kelly, 166–70, and Robin Douglass, *Rousseau and Hobbes: Nature, Free Will, and the Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64–65.
66. Cf. Robert Wokler's depiction of a kind of circularity in Todorov's attempt to defuse both Jean-Jacques's solitude and that of original humanity ("Todorov's Otherness," *New Literary History* 27, no. 1 [1996]: 48). See also Scott and Zaretsky, "Introduction" to *Frail Happiness*, xxiv, and more generally, Melzer, *Natural Goodness*, 91n3.
67. See Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony*, 2.
68. See *Julie* V.2, 435f/531, VI.7, 559/680, and IV.10, 381/463; E II, 104f/340; V, 442/815.
69. See, e.g., "Letter to Mme de Francueil," 20 April 1751, CW 5:551f/CC 2:143, DOI Note IX, 202f/206f, and Note XVII, 221/222. More specific to our concerns here, a passage in the *Discourse on Inequality* shows the logical progression from a moralistic or progressive charge against oppressive institutions—i.e., marriages driven by parental whims, economics, or social status—and moves on to show the grave limitations even of marriages "over which love and sympathy presided" (DOI Note IX, 200–201/205). For the charge against oppressive institutions regarding marriage, see esp. *Julie*, Second Preface, 17-18/24.
70. This results largely from regarding "distant objects as bait for dupes" (see Conf. IX, 347/413, and VII, 279/333). Cf. IV, 122/146, and VI, 204/244.
71. Kant's primitive peoples lack foresight for the same reason they would in many progressive models—to make the case that a transition to civilization is morally indispensable (see the passages cited in note 26 above).
72. For the critique of foresight, see E II, 79–80, 82-83/301–3, 307; IV, 211/489; cf. Preface to *Narcissus*, EPW 98/OC 2:966. For Emile's alternative, especially as applied to his sexual development, see E V, 411, 418–19, 426, 447/771, 781–82, 792, 821.
73. See *The Question*, 95–96, esp. 96: "Rosenkranz does not exempt *even* Rousseau's politics from this verdict" (emphasis added).
74. *Social Contract* I.8. E.g., Cassirer, *The Question*, 78; Rawls, *Lectures*, 235–39, 242; Cohen, *A Free Community of Equals*, 13, 25, 32, 44, 88; Putterman, *Rousseau, Law, and the Sovereignty of the People*, 18–19, and ch. 3.

75. For the "denaturing" of republican politics, see *Social Contract* I.8, II.7; E I, 40/250; "Geneva Manuscript" II.2, CW 4:101/OC 3:313. For the state as artificial in comparison with the family, see *Discourse on Political Economy*, EPW 3–5/OC 3:241–44; *Social Contract* I.2, III.11; "Geneva Manuscript" I.5. For the "cultivating" of nature in the domestic realm, see E III, 192/465; IV, 233, 254, 314/520, 549, 636; cf. E III, 205/483–84 on two kinds of "natural." See the discussions in Cooper, *Problem of the Good Life*, ch. 1, esp. 25 and 32, as well as 52–53, 124–25, 204n19.
76. Cassirer offers a strong statement of Rousseau's progressive, forward-looking attempt to erect a new political structure "only if the present order . . . is abolished" (*Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 272). However, Rousseau's pessimism about Europe's predominant future is clear in many passages, including *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques* III, CW 1:213/OC 1:935, which Cassirer quotes at length (but misleadingly) on this very page of his text.
77. This is a disputed question; see, for instance, the helpful comments of Williams on Melzer (*Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment*, 282, 282n24). Marks surveys a broad range of scholars who believe Rousseau advocates the demise of nature as a standard (*Perfection and Disharmony*, 16–22).
78. See the passages on denaturing, cited in note 76 above, as well as Melzer, *Natural Goodness*, ch. 10, and Zev Trachtenberg, "Civic Fanaticism and the Dynamics of Pity," in *Rousseau and "l'Infâme": Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 213–15.
79. See Mendham, "Rousseau's Partial Reception of Fénelon," 73–74.
80. These difficulties may largely explain Cohen's decision to bracket questions of the "accessibility" from current circumstances to "the society of the general will" (*A Free Community of Equals*, 14).
81. See esp. *Reveries* VI, CW 8:56/OC 1:1059.
82. This was actually one of the latest additions to the text of the *Emile* (see Dennis Rasmussen, "If Rousseau Were Rich: Another Model of the Good Life," *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 3 [2015]: 499–500n4).
83. See E IV, 344–54/678–91, quoting here from 345/678 and 354/690. The objective is also said to present "an example that is more tangible [*sensible*] and closer to the morals of the reader," unlike the "pure and healthy heart" of Emile (344/678, translation modified).
84. See esp. Rasmussen, "If Rousseau Were Rich," which compares this section with Rousseau's better-known models of the good life, including the solitary dreamer of the autobiographies (e.g., 508–10). See also the

brief discussions of Cooper (*Problem of the Good Life*, 178–79), Marks (*Perfection and Disharmony*, 70–71), and Reisert (*A Friend of Virtue*, 176).

85. The lack of family in this daydream, for Marks, should lead us to wonder whether family is truly nature's end, as the account in *Emile* otherwise suggests (*Perfection and Disharmony*, 116). It may be, however, that Jean-Jacques is only envisioning how he would live if he became rich as a "gray beard," "as I am now," but that he would proceed differently "if I were young" (see E IV, 350/685).
86. For his free associations with friends, including women, see E IV, 348–49, 351–52/683–84, 687–88.
87. He would contrast with "all other rich men" in that he would be "sensual and voluptuous rather than proud and vain and by devoting myself to indolent luxury [*luxe de molesse*] far more than to ostentatious luxury" (E IV, 345/678). This contrasts starkly with his political models, but it may be that his domestic models move in this direction. See esp. *Julie* V.2, 435/531; cf. "Political Fragments" V, CW 4:35f/OC 3:502, and the fragment on taste, CW 11:18/OC 5:483.
88. He opens by saying he would be "wholly occupied" with his pleasures, like "all other rich men" (345/678). But for reasons of health, he would be "temperate out of sensuality" (ibid.). See also the comments on the love of pleasures in 351–52/687–88. According to Kelly, this passage's "praise of a sort of refined hedonism raises issues about Rousseau's ultimate view of the satisfactions that are possible within political life" ("Introduction" to CW 11:xviii).
89. See the preliminary discussion of the impact that various situations would have in transforming his character, and the ways in which he would be "like all other rich men," including disdaining "the rabble" (E IV, 345/678). Similarly, consider "If my opulence had left me some humanity" (348/683) and the remaining trace of a "plebian heart" (*un peu roturier*, 353/689). See, finally, 350/685: If Jean-Jacques might change in many ways upon becoming rich, he would remain constant in one way: "If neither morals nor virtue remain to me, at least there will remain some taste, some sense, some delicacy." This transformation of one's originally decent and simple character is a major theme in the fragment "On Wealth" (see CW 11:7–10/OC 5:470–74).
90. Rasmussen concludes, "Very roughly speaking, rich Rousseau adopts an Epicurean path to happiness, while Emile's is in large part Stoic" ("If Rousseau Were Rich," 17; see also 6). On the main account in *Emile* as largely Stoic, see Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and*

Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 189–202.

91. Cf. E IV, 350/685, quoted in note 84 above, and the fragment on taste, CW 11:18/OC 5:483. For his part, Kant apparently understood the passage as a reflection on "[h]ow freedom in the proper sense (the moral, not the metaphysical) would be the supreme *principium* of all virtue and also of all happiness" (cf. "Remarks in the *Observations*," 20:31/*Bemerkungen*, 29).
92. For instance, Rasmussen reads it as Rousseau's "good taste" serving as "a sort of substitute for virtue" ("If Rousseau Were Rich," 504, 513), and Marks sees it as possibly serving as "a model for the intelligent hedonist" (*Perfection and Disharmony*, 71). For Peter Jimack, Rousseau was only seeking an excuse to "introduce this passage, written long ago, without pedagogical value, but where the author expresses, no doubt with pleasure, his ideal and his personal tastes" (*Le Genèse et la rédaction de "l'Emile" de J.-J. Rousseau* [Genève: Institute et Musée Voltaire, 1960], 229).
93. See "Kant and Rousseau," 3f.
94. "A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly," in *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 47.
95. Conf. I, 5/5, following Angela Scholar's translation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.
96. France, *Rousseau: Confessions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 27.
97. The definitive preamble probably dates to around August 1768 (Gagnebin and Raymond, OC 1:1231, note 2 to p. 5). Similar claims are in the major letter to Saint-Germain, written around the time he was completing the Second Part of the *Confessions*. Immediately following one of the most significant admissions of his abandoned children, Rousseau questions whether any of the people, so "severe toward the faults of others," would be able to plumb the depths of their consciences and "leave a better account" (February 26, 1770, CC 37:248–71, at 255).
98. See Conf. X, 433/516f; XII, 550/656. The latter addition is from a statement made following a public reading from the *Confessions*, apparently in May 1771 (Gagnebin and Raymond, OC 1:1611, note 3 to p. 656).
99. E.g., France, *Rousseau: Confessions*, 27, and Kelly, "Rousseau's *Confessions*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 312.

100. In a favorable letter (written before their quarrel), David Hume recounts a conversation in which Rousseau claimed that although he was not displeased with his own style and eloquence, "I still dread, that my Writings are good for nothing at the bottom, and that all my Theories are full of Extravagance. [*Je craigne toujours que je peche par le fond, et que touts mes systemes ne sont que des extravagances*]" (to Hugh Blair, March 27, 1766, in *Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., ed. J. Y. T. Greig [Oxford: Clarendon, 1932], 2:31; Hume's translation, format modified). Hume later reached a similar conclusion about Rousseau (see Robert Zaretsky and John T. Scott, *The Philosophers' Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume, and the Limits of Human Understanding* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009], 184–85, 208, and Dannis Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship That Shaped Modern Thought* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017], ch. 7, esp. 137, 142–44). See also Conf. IX, 358f/427.
101. "But let each reader imitate me, let him retire within himself as I have done, and let him, from the depths of his conscience, say to himself if he dares: 'I am better than that man was [*je suis meilleur que ne fut cet homme-là*]" (Conf., Appendix, 590/1155, following the translation of Angela Scholar [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 649). See the same final phrase in the letter to Charles Duclos, January 13, 1765, CC 23:100.
102. Though aware of his great flaws and vices, he was "very persuaded that of all the men I have known in my life, none was better than I" (*Letters to Malesherbes* I, CW 5:574/OC 1:1133). Although these letters were written before the condemnation, there was significant fear of persecution in this period (see Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], 315–24). Note, too, that in the 1762 claim, he compares himself only with his acquaintances, not the entire species.
103. November 2, 1757, CC 4:333 (partially quoted in OC 1:1232, note 6 to p. 5, and in Cranston, *The Noble Savage*, 92).
104. It is explicit in the final writing: "I will be happy if by the progress I make with myself I learn to leave life not better, for that is not possible, but more virtuous than I entered it!" (*Reveries* III, CW 8:27/OC 1:1023).
105. Cf. Conf. VIII, 300–301/358–59.
106. E.g., Starobinski, "Rousseau and the Peril of Reflection," 144; Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, 17, 193–94, 231, 244–45;

Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 81–84; Cooper, *Problem of the Good Life*, 192–94.

107. Mendham, "A Veiled Antinomian?"
108. I have sought to provide this in *Hypocrisy and the Philosophical Intentions of Rousseau: The Jean-Jacques Problem* (University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).