

From Nature as Source
to Nature as Ethos

The Making of Natural Man in Rousseau's *Dialogues*

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for Miriam

Abstract

Challenging Jean Starobinski's critique of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques, Dialogues*, this thesis locates arguments for the Rousseauian synthesis and its ideal of Natural Man in the philosophies of nature, habit and the will.

Rousseau's concept of nature represents both a given, timeless inheritance or moral source, but also a unity which individuals actualise through reason and acts of the ethical will. The philosophy of habit suggested in *Emile* eliminates the concepts of *denaturation* and *second nature* invoked by commentators to clarify the relation between nature and habit. Authentic, permanent habits disclose nature; nature transcends itself through habit. A philosophy of the will, meanwhile, specifies the enlightened initiatives that fulfil the human *telos*, sponsoring the Form nature assumes through habit. The modalities of nature, habit and will thereby establish a continuity between the natural and ethical selves.

Nature, habit and will also define the conditions of possibility for Natural Man exemplified by "Jean-Jacques". The *Dialogues* strive to remain intellectually coherent, but Rousseau's self-representation via an objective, third-person perspective proves rhetorically infelicitous for these conditions. The conflict of truth and method at the heart of autobiography abstracts the origins and history that mediate the synthesis that is Natural Man. Readers face a transcendental problem that must account for the points of transition needed for the synthesis to emerge. This account derives from an analysis of Rousseau's *naturel*, a spontaneity that, in fact, corresponds to a moral condition or *ethos* generated by sedimented acts of the ethical will.

The thesis concludes that the *Dialogues* belong to and advance the Rousseau's 'system'. By internalising his own ethical construct, Rousseau and his works coincide. An ethical vision that reconciles goodness and virtue, nature and history demonstrates how Natural Man is possible.

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All references to Rousseau are taken from the five-volume *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Pléiade, 1959-1995). Quotations will be followed by a parenthetical citation of volume number indicated by a Roman numeral followed by page number given in Arabic numbering. References to Rousseau's correspondence are taken from Ralph Leigh's edition, *Correspondance complète*, 51 vols (Oxford: Institut et Musée Voltaire & Geneva: Les Délices, 1965-1971; Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1972-1995) and indicated with the abbreviation *CC* followed by volume number and page number given parenthetically in the text. All references to the *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Geneva: Julien, 1905-) will be abbreviated to *Annales*. Rousseau's orthography has been modernised throughout, while the punctuation given by Leigh and the Pléiade editors has been retained. Modern orthography has also been preferred for other French authors quoted.

Preface

I first read *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* after Finals when it was suggested that this relatively neglected text might yield new opportunities for research on Rousseau. A year later, I left my abandoned project for one of Rousseau's own, *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*. My examination of this unfinished work provided my arguments to establish a synthesis between the ideas of materialism and morals in Rousseau's works, and the University of Oxford with an M.Litt. thesis.

During this period, like all novice students of Rousseau, I came to discover and appreciate the brilliant work of Jean Starobinski. After choosing to embark on research in this area of French studies, I recall a tutor remarking that I had set myself too difficult a task since, in his view, Starobinski had virtually pronounced the final word on Rousseau. Although not quite consigning future generations of Rousseau scholars to silence, the importance of Starobinski's groundbreaking contribution, particularly for the French critical school, remains immense. His classic, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l'obstacle*, anticipates Derrida's formidable Heideggerian reading by over a decade. A later article on Rousseauian autobiography, meanwhile, furthers aspects of the original project by arguing that writing metaphorically displaces and disturbs self-interpretation.¹ In many respects, the subsequent progress of my own work has continued to represent an exchange, a triadic dialogue uncannily similar to that of the text I have chosen to explore, between Starobinski, myself and the voices that speak from *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*.

¹ 'Le Style de l'autobiographie', *Poétique*, I (1970), 257-65.

In a previous incarnation, this thesis had set out to analyse the *Dialogues* and *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* within the framework of the synthesis between morals and materialism I had previously outlined for the doctrinal works. I have had to abandon this original format, my research having lingered on the *Dialogues* for far longer than I ever anticipated. Whether or not this prolonged visit reflects the subtle and intricate complexity of Rousseau's problematic work will be for readers of this thesis to decide.

Acknowledgements

This thesis owes a debt to several persons who have offered invaluable encouragement and opportunities for defining and clarifying my ideas. In particular, I would like to recall my thanks to my friends: to Alan Overd and Paul Selden for their advice and long-standing interest in my work; to Kevin Davy for his tremendous inspiration; and to Philip Jenkins for offering constant enthusiasm and intellectual stimulation. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to David Lee who generously devoted his time to attentively reading my material and to whom I owe a deeper understanding of philosophy. This thesis also owes a huge deal to my family, especially my long-suffering parents Aldo and Lina, whose emotional and financial support throughout my postgraduate years has been unstinting.

I would like to thank Professor Timothy Mathews for kindly offering to steer my project towards completion when my supervisor became unavailable, and the British Academy who funded my research with two Major Studentships between 1997 and 1999.

In dedicating this thesis to my companion, Miriam Simonetti, I express my gratitude for her sustaining love and support.

Chapter One

Introduction

The enigmatic, unsystematic character of Rousseau's writings has proved irresistible to many scholars who have sought in them a unity or coherent 'system'. The attempt to draw a synthesis first arises in connection with Rousseau's political theories and the perceived confrontations between the incompatible demands of liberty and authority, of individualism and collectivism.¹ Since then, the question has assumed a different, but far more intimate form, assisted by the growth of interest in Rousseauian autobiography, that tries to reconcile the man and his work. Of course, there has never been a shortage of critics who have voiced the incompatibilities between the author's life and the staunch values his writings proclaim; biographical facts have often been deployed to discredit the validity of Rousseau's ideas.² This tendency has subsided but a related discontinuity has taken over, arising from the manner in which Rousseau presents himself in the autobiographies, a self-representation which some consider discredits the system worked out between 1759 and 1762 as the solution to the dilemmas laid bare in the two *Discours*.

Although there exists the undoubted danger that the urge for synthesis may in fact attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, Rousseau himself insists that the body of his work constitutes a coherent whole. The synthesising aspiration of major works like *Emile* and *Du Contrat social*, both of which begin by positing a radical choice they subsequently dissolve, is proof of this. In *Emile*, the dichotomy of natural and civil education yields to a natural education assisted by

¹ Albert Schinz summarises the contradictory accusations levelled at Rousseau: "le père de toutes les libertés (morales), et le père de toutes les servitudes (politiques)", *Etat présent des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau* (Baltimore: PMLA, 1941), pp. 30-31. For a brief survey of more recent conflicting interpretations, see Peter Gay's introduction to Ernst Cassirer's *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 4-8.

² See for instance Irving Babbitt's prolonged attacks in *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1919; repr. 1977).

human artifice that also qualifies its beneficiary for citizenship; *Du Contrat social* negotiates the demands of individual liberty and the formative power of the state through the *volonté générale*. Immanuel Kant was probably the first to perceive the Rousseauian synthesis but neo-Kantian interpretations have also helped to force Rousseau into a mould that is not his. My own synthetic reading, which attempts to eliminate perceived discrepancies between Rousseau's doctrinal and autobiographical works, implicitly adopts a position of critical sympathy towards Kant. To avoid distorting Rousseau's thought in turn, I want to examine some of the misconceptions generated by neo-Kantians as well as their critics within the enclosure of the relation between the central ideas promoted by the works published between the late 1750s and the early 1760s, and the autobiography, *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*.

[1.1] *From the Doctrinal Works to the Dialogues*

As readers of Rousseau know well, *Emile* proposes two alternative remedies for our present crisis: the ideal of the good natural man and that of the moral citizen (IV, 249-50). As alienated, selfishly self-concerned *bourgeois* torn between our inclinations and our duty, we suffer from the combined disadvantages of both visions. Bringing an end to human self-division, commentators traditionally hold, comes at the price of having to choose between two incompatible existential ideals, between an individualist philosophy of existence, essentially sentimental, aesthetic and romantic in temper; and the virtuous, patriotic and democratic collectivism of civil society. We must either refuse history and retreat into nature or, it seems, hasten the progress of corruption towards a fuller, socialised state.

This legacy, variously construed as a conflict between feeling and reason, happiness and morality, or *bonté* and *vertu*, issues a renewed challenge to each generation of scholars who have predominantly sought a resolution of the predicament via the second ideal, privileging the hegemony of reason and morality, as they see it, over natural goodness. Ernst Cassirer provides an early, seminal reading in these terms, holding that while the problem of reconciling happiness

and virtue moves Rousseau's thought from the outset, his core concern for freedom ultimately subordinates eudaimonism to deontology, natural goodness to virtue.³ Cassirer's precarious neo-Kantian synthesis has not survived the scrutiny of subsequent critical evaluation. Robert Derathé, among the first to point out the difficulties of this reading, reminds us that Rousseau also formulates an instinctual morality alongside a rational one; Rousseau does not believe man strong enough to abide constantly by the "law of virtue" even while denying that it is sufficient for the purposes of living in society to do without it.⁴ Those who insist on making Rousseau a forerunner of Kant attempt, from a Kantian perspective, an impossible reconciliation between the ethical will spontaneously attuned to the imperative of virtue on the one hand, and being passively moved by happiness, on the other as Asher Horowitz notes: "A life governed by mere feeling would be aimless and shapeless, a meaningless subjection to nature, while the civil life of practical reason is too 'high' an ideal for Rousseau to maintain consistently".⁵ Patrick Riley echoes this view when he claims that "Rousseau's *morale sensitive* (one strand of his thought) is not easy to reconcile with rational self-determination (another, equally authentic, strand)".⁶

The proposed alternatives to Cassirer's interpretation, however, seems equally unsatisfactory. Avoiding the distortions that derive from reading Rousseau exclusively in rationalist terms, Bernard Groethuysen abandons Cassirer's synthetic view in favour of an outright "dualité d'idéals" that reinstates the choice put before us in *Emile*.⁷ More recent critical opinion either reasserts the impossibility of integrating these ideals and the need for radical choice or, through a variation of the neo-Kantian performance, invokes the social ideal to obliterate the natural. Rousseau, claims Arthur M. Melzer, teaches us "to embrace totally either side of the contradiction: complete selfishness or complete sociability [...] Rousseau's constructive thought necessarily bifurcates into two conflicting ideals: extreme individualism and extreme collectivism".⁸ For Judith N. Shklar, by contrast, the Utopian model of Natural Man serves to judge and condemn actuality; the choice between *bonté* and *vertu*

³ *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p. 117.

⁴ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. 187, 119.

⁵ *Rousseau, Nature and History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 16.

⁶ Patrick Riley, 'Freedom of a Particular Kind', in *Rousseau and liberty*, ed. by Robert Wokler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 1-28 (p. 6).

⁷ *J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). pp. 140-69.

⁸ *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 89-91.

is not a call for a decision, but a criticism [...] Nature is no longer an option to men. Education as a conscious choice is a social experience. The alternatives are therefore not nature or society, but domestic or civic education. Is a man to find his maturity in a recreated Golden Age or as a citizen of a Spartan republic? He cannot have both, but he must try one or the other if he is to escape from his present disorientation and inner disorder.⁹

Since a regression to primitive innocence and equality is impossible, our only realistic destiny lies with a choice of ‘denaturations’: Clarendon or the Republic of citizens. Until then, we remain hesitant victims of history, faltering between “a *privacy* that is no longer quite natural and a *community* that is not yet quite moral”.¹⁰

The neo-Kantian interpretation and its alternatives equally assume the need for a choice between the natural and ethical self that falls short of a genuine synthesis as, I think, Rousseau conceives it and one that the early Kant applauded. Before turning to that synthesis, I want to mention some of the defining characteristics that support it and divide Rousseau from the critical philosophy of Kant within the limited scope of critical responses examined thus far.

Although profoundly inspired by Rousseau, Kant’s defence of morality, conceived as a metaphysical thesis requiring demonstration within the bounds of reason alone, could not be further from Rousseau’s heteronomous psychological approach in which the hegemony of reason, inoperative in itself, cannot be sustained without the motivational force of sensibility, of *inclination* we might say.¹¹ Rousseau’s attack targets an empirical ‘ought’; the rational obligations that ought to bind all really bind no one. In contrast to Kant’s attempt to separate fact from value, Rousseau ties the moral will to nature, the ultimate basis for value. In this respect, denaturation as the inevitable or even necessary violence required to achieve positive regeneration not only travesties Rousseauian nature but also destroys the central tenet of Rousseau’s entire philosophy: natural goodness. The reality of good natural inclinations ought to disqualify denaturation as a solution since a future regeneration should look to modifying the circumstances that initially problematise those inclinations and transform natural impulses into vices. Joining

⁹ *Men And Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ Steven Kautz, ‘Privacy and Community’, in *The Legacy of Rousseau*, ed. by Clifford Orwin and Nathan Tarcov (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 249-73, (p. 250).

¹¹ “Si c’est la raison qui fait l’homme, c’est le sentiment qui le conduit” (II, 319); “La sublime raison ne se soutient que par la même vigueur de l’âme qui fait les grandes passions, et l’on ne sert dignement la philosophie qu’avec le même feu qu’on sent pour une maîtresse” (II, 193).

these central propositions together, namely, the ascendancy of sensibility over reason plus a view of the ethical problem as originating in externally generated pressures, Rousseau conceives *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* recalled in Book Nine of the *Confessions*. Since Rousseau's abandoned project figures centrally in this thesis, I shall cite here in full:

L'on a remarqué que la plupart des hommes sont dans le cours de leur vie souvent dissemblables à eux-mêmes et semblent se transformer en des hommes tout différents. Ce n'était pas pour établir une chose aussi connue que je voulais faire un livre: j'avais un objet plus neuf et même plus important. C'était de chercher les causes de ces variations et de m'attacher à celles qui dépendaient de nous pour montrer comment elles pouvaient être dirigées par nous-mêmes pour nous rendre meilleurs et plus sûrs de nous. Car il est sans contredit plus pénible à l'honnête homme de résister à des désirs déjà tout formés qu'il doit vaincre, que de prévenir, changer ou modifier ces mêmes désirs dans leur source, s'il était en état d'y remonter. Un homme tenté résiste une fois parce qu'il est fort, et succombe une autre parce qu'il est faible; s'il eût été le même qu'auparavant il n'aurait pas succombé.

En sondant en moi-même et en recherchant dans les autres à quoi tenaient ces diverses manières d'être je trouvai qu'elles dépendaient en grande partie de l'impression antérieure des objets extérieurs, et que modifiés continuellement par nos sens et par nos organes, nous portions sans nous en appercevoir, dans nos idées, dans nos sentiments, dans nos actions mêmes l'effet de ces modifications. Les frappantes et nombreuses observations que j'avais recueillies étaient au-dessus de toute dispute, et par leurs principes physiques, elles me paraissaient propres à fournir un régime extérieur qui varié selon les circonstances pouvait mettre ou maintenir l'âme dans l'état le plus favorable à la vertu. Que d'écarts on sauverait à la raison, que de vices on empêcherait de naître si l'on savait forcer l'économie animale à favoriser l'ordre moral qu'elle trouble si souvent! Les climats, les saisons, les sons, les couleurs, l'obscurité, la lumière, les éléments, les aliments, le bruit, le silence, le mouvement, le repos, tout agit sur notre machine et sur notre âme par conséquent; tout nous offre mille prises presque assurées pour gouverner dans leur origine les sentiments dont nous nous laissons dominer (*Les Confessions*, I, 408-09).

The mainstay of Rousseau's major intellectual output after the two *Discours* offers a variation on this cardinal idea to which this thesis will constantly refer.

An alternative to the neo-Kantian outlook, invoking *La Morale sensitive* as a remedy for redressing the mistakes of history, belongs to Pierre Burgelin who constructs an ethical synthesis entirely within the context of natural goodness alone. For Burgelin, Rousseau's problem is to reconcile cosmic order and personal existence, a unity regained through happiness in a divinely governed universe.¹² Focusing solely on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, M. B. Ellis offers a vision of natural goodness developed in society through a reconciliation between self-love (*amour de soi*)

¹² *La Philosophie de l'existence de Rousseau* (Geneva: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), pp. 572-73.

and the malevolent or disruptive love of self (*amour-propre*) arising from social relations.¹³ Man is naturally good in the sense that the principle of his nature founds his potential moral excellence, but the novel teaches us that this excellence is achieved only in the community. The individual can only attain moral worth through the conditions of a social existence, its conventions and institutions, rendered legitimate by the accommodation and application of self-love by reason. Nature and society need not, therefore, be at war; Julie, for instance, redeems herself through marriage. Her virtue is the transmutation of passion by natural feeling into ardour for the good life. Through the cultivation of what Ellis terms *moral forces*—conscience, religion, reason and liberty—all of which are the result of the collaboration between natural impulse and reason that makes them active, “society in its ideal form is the regenerating power whereby man transcends the pallid form of his “nature”, which is raised to spheres of morality and virtue”.¹⁴ Thus, for instance, it is precisely *because* man is determined by antecedent experience that he is able, via *La Morale sensitive*, to “further control the use of his moral freedom”.¹⁵

Jean Starobinski proposes a further alternative, closer to the spirit of Kant this time, in his reading of *Emile* whose union of the aesthetic and the moral endeavours to reconquer man’s original unity through rehabilitated *reflexion*, the faculty responsible for his self-division.¹⁶ Associated with perfectibility and emancipation from a brute state, reflexion reflects man’s spiritual destiny, evidence of a moral agency that judges and confers meaning on the world. The acquisition of this new status, according to Starobinski, is borne at some cost, namely, the loss of direct and unmediated contact with nature. However, this intermediate reflexive stage necessarily precedes the emergence of conscience, itself an amalgam of the immediacy of sensation and moral feeling (*sentiment moral*). The responsibility of reflexive reason is to prepare the way for the “practical imperative” of moral feeling towards a new synthesis that brings together the immediacy of instinct and the spiritual demands of conscience:

Rousseau construit donc un schéma dynamique où le développement de l’activité réflexive constitue une phase intermédiaire entre le stade enfantin de la sensation immédiate et la découverte du *sentiment moral*, qui constituera une synthèse

¹³ *Julie or “La Nouvelle Héloïse”*; *A Synthesis of Rousseau’s Thought, 1749-1759* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1949).

¹⁴ *A Synthesis of Rousseau’s Thought*, p. 191.

¹⁵ *A Synthesis of Rousseau’s Thought*, p. 190.

¹⁶ *La Transparence et l’obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

supérieure unissant l'immédiat de l'instinct et l'exigence spirituelle éveillée par la réflexion.¹⁷

Reflexive judgement separates the self from nature but, thanks to reflexivity, conscience not only becomes *self-aware* but acquires a new unity as absolute as the unity reflexivity had lost.¹⁸

For Ellis and Starobinski, the output posterior to the syntheses marks a major, irreducible break between the author and his system which they attribute to Rousseau's mental instability. *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is significant, argues Ellis, because it renders Rousseau's "system", that is, the integration of moral forces held harmoniously together by Julie, "consistent and intelligible".¹⁹ Yet, the forces which "distinguish the author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the work of the preceding decade" throw into sharp relief "the complete lack of moral energy in the Rousseau of the later years" who, Ellis speculates, suffers what she calls a "breakdown".²⁰ Placing the responsibility for the discontinuity between doctrinal and autobiographical works on a form of mental illness also underpins Starobinski's examination of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques, Dialogues*. This evaluation will receive detailed attention in Chapter 5. For the moment, I want to outline the broad import of the *Dialogues* for the destiny of Rousseau's system.

The highly complex *Dialogues*, with its dramatic exchanges between Rousseau the man ("Rousseau"), the writer ("Jean-Jacques") and public opinion ("Le Français"), are by far the least visited of his texts.²¹ Their strategic importance for estimations of Rousseau's system begins with Starobinski's highly influential view that they conclusively destroy the synthesis of the works published between 1759 and 1762. Starobinski insists on the incoherence of the *Dialogues* whose chief deficiency he detects in the inherent contradiction of their structure and vision, divided between aesthetic immediacy and reflexivity.²² Subsequent appraisals of the *Dialogues* by Ronald Grimsley and, more recently, by Huntingdon Williams and John C. O'Neal—both of whom directly acknowledge the eminent Genevan critic as their *maître à*

¹⁷ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 246.

¹⁸ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 247.

¹⁹ *A Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought*, p. 191.

²⁰ *A Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought*, pp. 191-92.

²¹ For the critical fortunes of the *Dialogues*, see James F. Jones Jr., *Rousseau's Dialogues: An Interpretative Essay* (Geneva: Droz, 1991), pp. 43-51.

²² *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 240-60.

penser—endorse his conclusions, reaffirming that the work lies in the grip of intellectual error.²³ The dialectical progression of *Emile* breaks down in the *Dialogues*; the conflict between immediacy and reflexivity not only subsists unresolved, it becomes more accentuated than ever:

C'en est fait de la dialectique qui attribuait à la réflexion une fonction médiatrice entre l'unité première du monde naturel et l'unité supérieure du monde moral. La réflexion est maintenant l'opposé absolu de la nature, l'ennemi irréconciliable; tout se fige dans une antinomie de type manichéen.²⁴

Starobinski proceeds to demonstrate that the intriguing and highly revealing ambitions of *La Morale sensitive* prefigure this breakdown and I shall have more to say about the relation of the project to the *Dialogues*. For the moment, I shall pursue a further incoherence with regards to the author and his system which, commentators claim, the *Dialogues* inaugurate.

The significance of the *Dialogues* cannot be emphasised enough since, as Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly note in the introduction to their edition, the *Dialogues* offer “one of the most important contexts in which [Rousseau] claims that he *has* a system”.²⁵ A key passage of the Third *Dialogue* (I, 934-36) summarises its two main principles. The first, what the two editors call a “revolutionary theodicy”, insists on natural goodness, the social origins of depravity, and a rejection of Original sin; the second, a “prudential conservatism” that “limits the revolutionary consequences” drawn from the first, upholds the irreversibility of human nature and affirms the impossibility of recapturing man’s original innocence and equality.²⁶ Problems arise as a result of attempts to locate the place of the *Dialogues* within this system. Kelly and Masters describe the *Dialogues* as a

²³ Grimsley, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a study in self-awareness* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961). Williams acknowledges Starobinski as the chief influence of his *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. vii. O’Neal, meanwhile, claims, with justification, that Starobinski’s work “furnishes so thorough a treatment of Rousseau’s writings as to constitute a kind of basic handbook for anyone undertaking an examination of Rousseau”, *Seeing and Observing: Rousseau’s Rhetoric of Perception* (Stanford: Alna Libri, 1985), p. 5.

²⁴ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 258.

²⁵ *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. I, ed. by Roger D. Masters & Christopher Kelly, translated by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (London: University Press of New England, 1990), p. xv.

²⁶ *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, p. xxii.

necessary prelude to Rousseau's system that, if it is successful, predisposes the reader to approach the system with an open mind. As such the *Dialogues* is external to the system; as the precondition of [...] the system, it would not be part of the system itself.²⁷

This argument rests on the claim, expressed by the Third *Dialogue*, that the output posterior to *Emile*—Rousseau's defence of his native city and personal reputation—does not form part of the system (I, 933). Yet, the move to externalise the *Dialogues* from Rousseau's system sunders the author from his work and immediately problematises both. Any attempt to recover the system automatically risks sacrificing the personality and vice versa. Masters and Kelly, for instance, take the view that if "Jean-Jacques" "est ce que l'a fait la nature: l'éducation ne l'a que bien peu modifié" (I, 799), this represents a defence of Rousseau's personality "at the expense of his system".²⁸ They concede, however, that the system reflects the author but that this ought not to undermine the systematicity of that system. "Jean-Jacques" discovers

the true principles of human nature only because he is the virtually unique example of someone who has "removed the rust" [*ôter la rouille*, I, 935-36] from his own nature. "Jean-Jacques"'s discovery of his system depends on his having acquired some access to primitive nature. For his books to be true, he must be, in some sense, the man of his books.²⁹

Nevertheless, they add, if "Jean-Jacques" is Natural Man, "then he seems to demonstrate that nature can go backward at least in some individuals".³⁰ Here, Kelly and Masters must grapple with the dilemma that emerges from their exclusion, the bifurcation of system and author which they then seek to minimise by recourse to an unsatisfactory compromise: "in "Jean-Jacques", nature has *not quite* gone backward; the irreversible departure from nature has been given a direction that is both salutary and *somewhat* consistent with nature".³¹ The question remains: does "Jean-Jacques" represent progress or return?

While the *Dialogues* add nothing substantially new to the system, they provide more than simply an initiation into *l'homme et l'œuvre* by offering an exemplary and unprecedented empirical model that draws from that system to demonstrate how Natural Man can remain

²⁷ Rousseau *Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, pp. xxi-xxii.

²⁸ Rousseau *Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, p. xxiii.

²⁹ Rousseau *Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, p. xxiv.

³⁰ Rousseau *Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, p. xxiv.

³¹ Rousseau *Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, pp. xxiv-xxv (my emphasis).

unbroken in a corrupt society. “Jean-Jacques” not only represents the system but, as Natural Man, he *also* upholds the second principle, the veto against a return to primitivism. For this to be possible, the proposed ‘return’ to nature is a return of a special kind, one rendered intelligible by the following passage from *Emile*:

voulant former l’homme de la nature il ne s’agit pas pour cela d’en faire un sauvage et de le reléguer au fond des bois, mais qu’enfermé dans le tourbillon social, il suffit qu’il ne s’y laisse entraîner ni par les passions ni par les opinions des hommes, qu’il voie par ses yeux, qu’il sente par son cœur, qu’aucune autorité ne le gouverne hors celle de sa propre raison (IV, 550-51).

A *prospective* return to nature, where nature represents an ideal moral framework or horizon, has figured in analyses of Rousseau ever since Kant, for whom Natural Man constitutes an ethical and teleological entity opposed to social man as he is. Setting aside the conclusions reached in *Das Problem Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Cassirer’s essay on Rousseau and Kant rightly highlights in this context how Kant realised that “what is truly permanent in human nature is [...] the good *for which* and towards which it moves”.³² The *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* understands that the conflict between nature and culture Rousseau outlines in the two *Discours* gives way, in *Emile* and *Du Contrat social*, to a development of culture that develops the capacities belonging to man’s vocation as a *moral* species, thereby putting an end to the inner conflict that derives from his membership of both moral and natural species. Only when *perfected art becomes nature again* can the human race fulfil its moral destiny (“Vollkommene Kunst wieder Natur wird: als welches das letzte Ziel der sittlichen Bestimmung der Menschengattung ist”).³³ A tradition of readings taking this reunion as its point of departure avoids the straitjacket of the post-Kantian interpretation sketched earlier. Gustave Lanson sees Rousseau’s central problem in how civilised man may recover the benefits of natural man, innocent and happy, without renouncing the advantages of the social state.³⁴ Within the context of the debate between happiness and virtue, Burgelin similarly observes:

³² *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe: Two Essays*, trans. by James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Hermann Randall (Princeton: Princeton University Press; repr. 1970), p. 20.

³³ ‘Muthmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte’ in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VIII, *Abhandlungen nach 1781* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1923), p. 116.

³⁴ ‘L’Unité de la pensée de Rousseau’, *Annales*, 8 (1912), 1-31 (p. 16).

La vertu est seconde par rapport à la nature [...] Mais leur opposition ne peut être que provisoire, elle marque le passage d'un état à l'autre: l'innocence de l'état de nature permettait un simple abandon; la vertu de l'état civil implique au contraire la reprise volontaire de l'instinct, la collaboration de toutes les passions au bonheur.³⁵

The Italian philosopher Nicola Abbagnano also argues that the return to nature could never constitute a return to a state that never was, rather, that this return is progress towards the origins or *telos* from which history has separated man and to which he is destined. The state of nature is not a given but a guiding norm to reconcile what is with what ought to be. Man's natural condition is a duty and a progressive acquisition.³⁶

To make the transition between the doctrinal works and the *Dialogues* requires a re-examination of the ideal of Natural Man proposed in *Emile* since, on first inspection, nothing less resembles that ideal than the tragic figure of "Jean-Jacques" in the *Dialogues*. To this end, I believe we need to describe and establish, through the categories of nature, the self and human agency, what a prospective return to the condition of Natural Man might entail and how, according to Rousseau, it may be achieved. The final section of this chapter will look very briefly at several issues raised by these categories, among the most disputed questions in contemporary philosophy. The need to confine this preliminary exposition to reasonable dimensions necessarily restricts the number of points I am able to discuss. I will, therefore, limit my remarks to a brief consideration of selfhood and the will as embedded within the concept of nature, and their representation in autobiography.

[1.2] *Phenomenology: Inescapable Horizons*

This thesis draws on a particular strand in the phenomenological tradition to broadly defend moral agency against various types of reductionism and to demonstrate, in turn, that Rousseau

³⁵ *La Philosophie de l'existence*, p. 347.

³⁶ "Lo stato di natura o la natura originaria umana è [...] soltanto una *norma* di giudizio, un criterio direttivo [...] Lo stato naturale non è, ma deve essere, non nel senso che l'uomo vi sia infallibilmente diretto, ma solo nel senso che ha la possibilità e l'obbligo di tendere ad esso", *Storia della filosofia*, 6 vols (Milan: TEA, repr. 1995), vol. IV, 'La filosofia moderna dei secoli XVII e XVIII', p. 271.

benefits from readings that adopt this philosophical optic. My starting point is the irreducibility of values posited by agents who exist and move within an encompassing evaluative and discriminating sphere argued for by Charles Taylor.³⁷ For Rousseau, the horizons of this frame are defined by 'nature', a philosophy of which supports the derivative philosophies of will and habit. Against the view of nature or human nature as a moral source for selfhood is the levelling and untenable naturalist perspective of science and some philosophy that this thesis rejects. The concept of 'nature' currently arouses suspicion from the relativist thinking belonging to a certain postmodernism impatient with essentialism in all its forms. Obviously, a defence of nature and especially human nature in the contemporary debate would require another thesis. My own, which strives as much as possible to keep to the issues raised by Rousseauian nature, will not hesitate, however, to explore the important cosmological and ethical strands pertinent to it. My chief concern lies in presenting an accurate picture of Rousseau's thought but, to do so, it is also necessary to do more than simply read Rousseau historically in the light of his own preoccupations, and look beyond the confines of the eighteenth century to evaluate the consequences, as some see them, that derive from this thinking.

The most recent research undertaken by Roger D. Masters, from the perspective of contemporary ethology, neuroscience and behavioural ecology offers, in my view, a rather redundant assessment of Rousseauian nature. Appealing to the behaviour of non-human primates to provide insights into the origins of the human seems deeply flawed in principle. What bearing, we might ask, can the properties possessed by non-human species have on the nature or the Good of humans? We should also wonder at the usefulness of declarations like "[Rousseau's] explanation of amour propre [sic] has been demolished by primatological observation, neuroscientific research and psychological experimentation".³⁸ Rousseau, must we remind ourselves, was quite vocal in his opposition to scientific reductions of the human.³⁹ It becomes difficult (for once!) to talk about a 'legacy' here since the investigative tools of post-Enlightenment naturalism find it difficult to make sense of Rousseau's psychology of motivation

³⁷ *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³⁸ 'Rousseau and the Rediscovery of Human Nature', *The Legacy of Rousseau*, pp. 110-40 (p. 133).

³⁹ Rousseau overthrows the view that material causes provide a necessary and sufficient explanation for the total effect of music, and concludes: "Dans ce siècle où l'on s'efforce de matérialiser toutes les opérations de l'âme et d'ôter toute moralité aux sentiments humains, je suis trompé si la nouvelle philosophie ne devient aussi funeste au bon goût qu'à la vertu" (*Essai sur l'origine des langues*, V, 419).

which draws on a theological vision as much as an ethical theory. A physics of the mind and its non-evaluative criteria of drives, forces and impulses, offers us little insight here.

A more profitable discussion of nature can be found in philosophical *perfectionism*, which also takes into consideration individual moral selves. Thomas Hurka defines perfectionism as “an account of the good human life, or the intrinsically desirable life” characterised by certain properties that define or constitute human nature and which the good life seeks to develop “to realise what is central to human nature”.⁴⁰ For Rousseau, *perfectibilité* is equally a distinctive property of human nature and a result of it (*Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, III, 142). Perfectionism introduces the question of the self since, unlike recent legalistic or contractual moral theory preoccupied with establishing the rights and freedoms of others, it does not neglect what we ought to respect and claim for ourselves but addresses *self-regarding duties* and the problem of how we ought to live our own lives.⁴¹

It may, of course, be argued that the account of the good life and those properties central to human nature are far from timeless and unchanging. The historical context for the importance of nature in the eighteenth century demonstrates this to be so. The contents of the good life as the moral sources certainly change but, argues Taylor, we cannot do without certain “frameworks”, that is, “strongly qualified horizons” or “qualitative discriminations” about the good. Their existence is integral to human agency rather than an optional, factitious addition.⁴² Taylor raises the question of identity in phenomenological terms to develop this point. To exist as a *self* is to be situated in what he calls a “moral space” of questions about the good and in which we find our bearings through evaluation and discrimination of values. Joseph Dunne captures the transcendental character of this space when he comments that “one can no more live without these bearings than, as a being in physical space, one can avoid orienting oneself by basic senses of front or behind, left or right, above or below”.⁴³ ‘Nature’ articulates one such necessary space, the background for Rousseauian moral judgement whose favoured descriptions call upon notion of *contact* with and *internalisation* of, the ideal as well as the sense of an *orientation*

⁴⁰ *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁴¹ *Perfectionism*, p. 5.

⁴² *Sources of the Self*, p. 27.

⁴³ ‘Beyond sovereignty and deconstruction: the storied self’, in *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. by Richard Kearney (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 137-57 (p. 148).

towards it. Rousseau's *meta-ethical naturalism*, to borrow a phrase from Hurka, argues that "facts about human nature directly entail conclusions about the human good", what is essential ought to be developed.⁴⁴ Rousseau ties the essential properties of human nature to metaphysical purposes and even theological considerations. The motivation of *amour de soi* is a case in point.⁴⁵ The teleological or theological grounding for such perfectionist naturalism is not without its problems as we shall see, but without a contextual moral horizon delineated by nature—however that nature is subsequently defined—the representation of self by the *Dialogues* makes no sense. Whatever nature is, it provides the self with its values whose total coherence Rousseau's system articulates. For Taylor, identity arises irresistibly within a framework of questions about the good; the autobiographical self of the *Dialogues* is similarly embedded in Rousseau's system and reflects it by means of an internal transformation of the writer and a sustained commitment to an exemplary *vita nuova*, set against the backdrop of nature as a moral ideal. An entirely textualist reading that assumes a hiatus between self-revelation and doctrine, meanwhile, similarly sacrifices coherence and cannot, therefore, be possible. Rousseau's life provides the prelude and source for his all texts but the two merge in the autobiographies which review and defend both life and works. Indeed, the message of the *Dialogues* is that understanding Rousseau the man means understanding the Rousseauian system and vice versa.

A work like *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, which reinforces the proximity of work and life, text and author, relying on the self (*autos*) to deliver its own life-history (*bios*) through writing (*graphé*), takes us to the heart of a contemporary debate about writing and the question of the self. Recent French critical theory has turned the act of 'graphé' into the supreme gesture that provides 'autos' and 'bios' with their forms. A weaker version of this theory will enable me to argue that the problem of writing is central to the *Dialogues* where the incomplete account of self and life depend squarely on an infelicitous rhetoric of self-disclosure. Still stronger, idealist versions, however, would like to cast the fiction known as the 'self' out into the intellectual abyss altogether. Something of a new orthodoxy would make it a capital offence to invoke the name of the self. Such a ruling is appealed to with reference to more recent French thought, a

⁴⁴ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ The late Iris Murdoch remarked in a recently re-screened television interview that a formulation of the Good as Love calls upon a deeply religious view.

most willing executioner of its own tradition which, ironically, is invariably founded on a philosophy of and in the first person. Part of the problem here is an attempt to collapse the entire category of selfhood into the subject (*subjectus*) of language, historical epistemes or socially entrenched technologies, and the imaginary. The impossibility of dissolving the self into language, by contrast, is highlighted by Hegel's view that the very structure of language, which works by predicating the subject, generates sure metaphysical consequences. The grammatical or logical subject as bearer of predicates and the human subject as bearer of states and activities are equally constituted by the concept.⁴⁶ The obliteration of the self, as Séan Burke's appraisal of the 'death of the author' in the work of Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida demonstrates, inevitably fall victim to the transcendental lure they wish to abolish. The deterministic arguments of this critical theory—the archaeology of intertextuality for instance—exceed originally heuristic approaches to reading and interpretation to pronounce "authorial absence as an inherent property of discourse".⁴⁷ For Barthes, provisional exclusion of the author leads to the announcement that writing evacuates subjectivity and identity by its very essence. Foucault, meanwhile, provisionally posits an anonymous history of discourse in place of positivist history only to declare that anonymity is the essence of discourse and its history. Burke concludes:

Anti-authorialism thus begins in the manner of a scientific reduction and reemerges as the end to which it purported to be the means. The death of the author 'proves' the death of the author: subjectivity is put to one side, therefore subjectivity does not exist. What such circular 'arguments' themselves confirm is that there are no 'proofs' of writing which necessitate authorial disappearance. The decision as to whether we read a text with or without an author remains an act of critical choice governed by the protocols of a certain way of reading rather than any 'truth of writing'.⁴⁸

In tracing the empirical genealogy and autobiographical representation of Rousseau's moral psychology, my own critical choice will keep "the author" very firmly in mind.

This choice is neither a refractory one, given a reading of the *Dialogues* stands in dire need of recapturing a concept of the self, nor unproblematic. The fallacious circularity by which a Barthes or a Foucault attempt to derive *ontological* conclusions about subjectivity from

⁴⁶ Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 281.

⁴⁷ *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 175.

⁴⁸ *The Death and Return of the Author*, p. 176.

methodological premisses also haunts the project of phenomenology. ‘Bracketing’ ontological commitments in the name of an analysis of pure presentations leads itself to a crisis concerning the claims of ‘objectivity’. And yet, unlike phenomenology, one can accuse the elimination of the self by Barthes and Foucault of the failing of “scientific reduction” Burke alludes to. In this respect, they prove themselves heirs to the tradition of Enlightenment naturalism and its levelling tendency. This reductionism, however, yields incoherent positions, as Taylor shows when he draws attention to the “pragmatic contradictions” of the radical and utilitarian Enlightenment, forced to “[speak] from a moral position which it can’t acknowledge” when promoting its version of the good.⁴⁹ From this perspective, my opposition to the structuralist evacuation of subjectivity amounts to aligning myself with Rousseau against what he himself perceived as the reductionist stance of the age.

The significance of this optic becomes even clearer when we address the self as an independent variable and agent in a given evaluative or discriminating framework. Discussions about the will encounter a levelling treatment at the hands of allegedly neutral scientific analyses. Aspects of moral philosophy on this side of the Channel, for instance, have been characterised by an absence of value commitments save for the imperative of rational explanation that derives from a supreme commitment to epistemological considerations. One can sense this in the approach of much analytical philosophy to the controversies over the freedom of the will and the problem of ascertaining knowledge of what are called ‘volitions’.⁵⁰ Since neither bears any relevance to the picture of the will that I would like to draw in my study of Rousseau’s writings, I choose to ignore them.⁵¹ Of more direct relevance is the issue at stake in the Socratic paradox that ‘no one willingly does wrong’.⁵² Here too, the excessively neutral and rational terms in which analytical discussions of this problem take place make it impossible to talk about the intimate relation of the will to a moral framework.

⁴⁹ *Sources of the Self*, pp. 339, 440.

⁵⁰ See for instance Gilbert Ryle’s treatment of the question in *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr. 1984), pp. 62-82.

⁵¹ It will suffice to say that Rousseau always upheld the freedom of the will and that, in reply to how the will produces a physical action, the *Profession de foi* insists this is largely a matter of subjective intuition on the one hand, and that the will is known by its effects not by nature on the other (IV, 576).

⁵² *Protagoras*, 351b-358d.

To a general moral phenomenology of the type espoused by Taylor must be added a phenomenology of the will as a further reply to the incoherent naturalist and formalist perspective of structuralism. The phenomenology ideally suited to my treatment of the Rousseauian will can be found in the early work of Paul Ricœur which reveals a reciprocity between the involuntary and the voluntary, nature and freedom, in which only the relation of the voluntary to the involuntary is intelligible. Ricœur denies that the deterministic aspects of nature or *l'involontaire*, a category that includes motive, need, pleasure, the passions, habit and character, can ever be self-explanatory. The involuntary merely provides the raw materials whose meaning utterly depends on the will and freedom that appropriate them and gives them direction:

Le besoin, l'émotion, l'habitude etc. ne prennent un sens complet qu'en relation avec une volonté qu'ils sollicitent, inclinent et en général affectent, et qui en retour fixe leur sens, c'est-à-dire les détermine par son choix, les meut par son effort et les adopte par son consentement [...]

[...] c'est au contraire la compréhension du volontaire qui est première dans l'homme. Je me comprends d'abord comme celui qui dit "Je veux". L'involontaire se réfère au vouloir comme ce qui lui donne des motifs, des pouvoirs, des assises, voire des limites.⁵³

An understanding of the voluntary, that is, grasping the phenomenon of willing in its significance for the Cogito, depends on recovering the Cogito in the first-person from scientific objectivity. To this end, Ricœur widens the total experience of the Cogito to include

le je désire, je peux, je vis [...] Une commune subjectivité fonde l'homogénéité des structures volontaires et involontaires [...] l'intuition du Cogito est [...] le sens du corps comme source de motifs, comme faisceau de pouvoirs et même comme nature nécessaire: la tâche sera en effet de découvrir même la nécessité en première personne, la nature que je suis.⁵⁴

The profound error of empirical and naturalist frameworks is that they conceive the self as an object and divorce aspects of the involuntary from the Cogito. These frameworks treat the psychological facts of self as a class belonging to a greater class of facts in general; by degrading the experience of consciousness to a fact, they obliterate two distinctive characteristics: intentionality and reference to an "I". This distortion consequently dissolves both the will and freedom, the first as empirically meaningless, the second because it is superfluous: "la liberté n'a

⁵³ Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté*, vol. I, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire* (Paris: Aubier, 1950; repr. 1988), pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 13.

pas de place parmi les objets empiriques; il faut la conversion du regard et la découverte du Cogito”.⁵⁵

The retrieval of the Cogito by the phenomenologies of Taylor, Ricœur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and their critiques of reductive naturalism helps to unpack Rousseau’s self-representation in the *Dialogues*, a unique work that takes the impersonal, objectifying tendency of Enlightenment naturalism to an extreme. Like some postmodern obliterations of the subject, this entirely third-person perspective, Taylor observes, “is connected with, indeed, based on, according a central place to the first person stance. Radical objectivity is only intelligible and accessible through radical subjectivity”.⁵⁶ Reconciling the primacy of subjectivity with the self-imposed demands of detached self-representation constitutes only half the problem. Rousseau complicates the self of the *Dialogues* further still because he assigns personal identity to the entity known as “Jean-Jacques” whose function is to host the inner life and accumulated experience to unify mutability in an ultimate cohesion. The criteria for personality identity in the *Dialogues* reflect this. The Preamble invokes *constitution* (I, 665), the Second *Dialogue* proceeds by way of investigating *le naturel* and *habitude* whilst also appealing to *caractère* (I, 799, 804). According to John D. Barbour, the notion of ‘character’ reflects “a person’s consistency, integrity and fidelity to their deepest commitments”.⁵⁷ The same could be said, however, for Rousseauian nature, habit and even constitution as moral entities that endure in time. Rather than the Cartesian or empirical self that postmodernism rightly problematises, the *Dialogues* invoke a category of selfhood which harmonises permanence and change in a manner that recalls Ricœur’s recent interrogations in *Soi-même comme un autre*. Ricœur re-conceptualises temporal self-identity by abandoning the criterion of numerical similitude (*idem*) to embrace the category of selfhood (*ipse*) instead. A reconciliation of earlier and later forms of identity is possible if we designate self-identity through character (*éthos*), a set of dispositions whose history habit (*éthos*) reveals:

l’habitude donne une histoire au caractère; mais c’est une histoire dans laquelle la sédimentation tend à recouvrir et, à la limite, à abolir l’innovation qui l’a précédée [...] C’est cette sédimentation qui confère au caractère le sorte de permanence

⁵⁵ *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, pp. 12 & 16.

⁵⁶ *Sources of the Self*, p. 176.

⁵⁷ *The Conscience of the Autobiographer: Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 37.

dans le temps que j'interprète ici comme recouvrement de *l'ipse* par *l'idem* [...] cet *ipse* s'annonce comme *idem*.⁵⁸

Character frees the principle of *permanence* from a reduction to sameness (*idem*) thanks to the dialectical exchanges of *disposition*, that is, disposition in the process of formation (habit) and an acquired disposition (character).

Reasons of congruence, not to say of commensurability, further inform my choice of phenomenology since this thesis seeks, in the main, to challenge Starobinski's widely influential phenomenological reading of Rousseau. In the terms in which it is introduced, this reading, as I hope to show, remains incomplete because it attempts to assimilate conflicting presuppositions. What we find in *La Transparence et l'obstacle* is a piece of disguised naturalism which prevents Rousseau's text from speaking for itself. In order properly to articulate the coherence of the *Dialogues* within the terms of their own ethical horizons, Starobinski's unfinished phenomenological project demands a fuller realisation.

In the preface to his celebrated book, Starobinski sets out his method:

Nous avons limité notre tâche à l'observation et à la description des structures qui appartiennent en propre au monde de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A une critique contraignante, qui impose du dehors des valeurs, son ordre, ses classifications préétablis, nous avons préféré une lecture qui s'efforce simplement de déceler l'ordre ou le désordre interne des textes qu'elle interroge, les symboles et les idées selon lesquels la pensée de l'écrivain s'organise [...]

[...] le domaine propre de la vie intérieure ne se délimite que par l'échec de toute relation satisfaisante avec la réalité externe. Rousseau désire la communication et la *transparence* des cœurs; mais il est frustré dans son attente, et, choisissant la voie contraire, il accepte—et suscite—l'*obstacle*, qui lui permet de se replier dans la résignation passive et dans la certitude de son innocence.⁵⁹

No matter how rigorously one seeks to uncover profound structures—and Starobinski's is nothing if not a rigorous reading of Rousseau's texts—a pre-suppositionless, unmediated view of those structures as simply 'out there' awaiting description remains an elusive ideal. But the problem I want to address belongs, rather, to the uneasy alliance between description and explanation, between phenomenology and naturalism in Starobinski's work.

Starobinski's approach remains on the whole consistent with an eidetics of the will. As a phenomenologist, he does not lay the foundations of a psychology of the involuntary in advance

⁵⁸ *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 146.

⁵⁹ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 9-10.

of the will to make the will derivative of the involuntary. However, his descriptive phenomenology does not stand alone but is *supplemented* with the explanatory framework of empirical science for which neither Rousseau nor his texts constitute the source and end of meaning. From this perspective, the deficiency of Starobinski's approach lurks in a residual naturalism derived from his medical training as a psychiatrist which, contrary to the prefatory remarks of *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, applies the externally-generated structures of abnormal pathology to the texts it interprets. Empirical science and phenomenology share the view that partial functions ought to focus around a central function. The tension between them, however, emerges between the reductionism of explanation which has no use for the Cogito, since the simple provides the reason for the complex; and description which does. The problem faced by Starobinski concerns *how* to integrate partial intelligibilities. A thorough-going phenomenology must exclusively opt for a synthesis of the will; Starobinski's diagnosis of *La Morale sensitive*, *ou le matérialisme du sage* and *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, by contrast, pursues a unity in dissociated pathology.

One can see how the early phenomenologies elaborated by Ricœur and Merleau-Ponty, particularly in their task of appropriating or grasping the phenomenon in its full significance for the Cogito, diverge from a naturalist explanation that includes Starobinski's textual analysis. Ricœur rejects any inherent intelligibility of the pathological. Seen from the perspective of the synthesis of the voluntary and the involuntary, he affirms that "les produits de désintégration sont nouveaux et abberants".⁶⁰ The attempt to understand the normal by way of pathological dissociation, he maintains, rests on the illusion that the simplification produced by sickness uncovers simple elements already present in the normal, merely elaborated, disguised or deprived of form by higher level phenomena. Merleau-Ponty's idea of structured and integrated behaviour similarly views abnormality in relation to a totality on which it depends. Pathology represents an instance of "weakening" (*défaillance*) or breakdown in the normal structuration of behaviour.⁶¹ Pathological or unstructured behaviour allows the lower orders of behaviour—the vital in relation to the psychological, the psychological in relation to the rational—to function

⁶⁰ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 9.

⁶¹ *La Structure du comportement*, 7th edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), p. 193.

independently of higher orders, unfolding in isolation from more extensive action. In the language of *Gestalt*, the part is disintegrated from its whole.

The insights of phenomenology and psychiatry make uneasy bedfellows. At this point, the structures of 'transparency' and 'obstacle' lead off in two different directions. The first, Starobinski's own reading of Rousseauian autobiography, crosses into reductive territory when psychical structures are held to function as separate, autonomous causes. On more than one occasion, Starobinski come close to describing Rousseau's existence as a false or artificial unity achieved in slavery, a life reduced to its aesthetic and biological dimensions and lived as a fatality. This is especially true of his interpretation of the *Dialogues* where a uniformity of vision and obsessively repetitive behaviour, achieved through a *rétrécissement* of the environment, allegedly eliminates the threat of incoherence and disorganisation that domination by a constant psychological mechanism induces. Taking *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* as an Archimedean point and extending its critique to the *Dialogues*, Starobinski considers Rousseau's efforts at self-transformation to be a form of alienated and false consciousness. In this and Rousseau's presumed overwhelming, nostalgic lure for the aesthetic, primitive life, lies a subsidiary presupposition of Starobinski's existentialist position on consciousness. We might characterise this position as broadly Hegelian, one that tends to take a critical view of the self that Descartes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant all helped to forge, namely, a rational and self-determining entity able to take a disengaged, instrumental view of itself, its inclinations, desires and habits, to refashion itself according to specifications that belong to a vision of the good. For Starobinski, Rousseau's contradiction emerges from the ambivalence generated by self-consciousness and the activities by which it hopes to transform itself. Rousseau's attitude is fundamentally at odds with the needs that motivate him; but, in failing to adopt an alternative attitude, he persists in looking for resolutions to his problems where he has no hope of finding them.

A second, alternative direction, meanwhile, by-passes all residual naturalism and seeks to arrive at the point at which Starobinski's original project would be complete. This calls for a revitalised phenomenology that integrates Rousseau's motivations into higher not lower levels of behaviour, the rubric Merleau-Ponty terms *l'ordre humain*. At this level, restrictions and limitations are taken over by the will and turned into necessary expressions of being. A fuller

transcendent attitude entails that a being acquires a consciousness of self which is no longer the cause of the structure of consciousness but the object of consciousness. The individual's own needs and motives subsequently become "l'occasion d'une plus grande liberté, s'il s'en sert comme d'un instrument. Cela suppose qu'il la connaît au lieu d'y obéir".⁶² A will motivated by self-knowledge, reason and the ethical will is everything.

In re-evaluating Starobinski's description of individual perception, the creation of meaning and intelligibility represented by Rousseau's texts, I hope to re-articulate those texts with each other and challenge the significance of Rousseau's frustrated ambitions for "transparency", as well as the origins, status and intentionality of the "obstacle" determining his attitude to the world, his actions to modify it and the results this intervention leaves behind. In place of the excluded, persecuted victim passively resigned to his lonely fate, I want to privilege the conditions and results of historical action leading to a model art of living as transcribed by Rousseau's autobiographical self-representation. In order to conceive this model as a response elicited by the hostile situation of Rousseau's world, we need to define its moral framework and establish a philosophy of nature as a moral source.

[1.3] *Nature, Habit, Will and the Dialogues*

In the third of its 'Promenades', the *Rêveries* once again refer to a "system". This system represents the results of Rousseau's search for moral and intellectual truths. Reaffirming his allegiance to these truths which as protection ward off doubt and scepticism to offer consolation for the future, Rousseau locates their basis in

la convénance que j'aperçois entre ma nature immortelle et la constitution de ce monde et l'ordre physique que j'y vois régner. J'y trouve dans l'ordre moral correspondant et dont le système est le résultat de mes recherches les appuis dont j'ai besoin pour supporter les misères de ma vie (*Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, I, 1019).

⁶² *La Structure du comportement*, p. 220.

The system spoken of in the Third 'Promenade' consists in the natural religion expounded by the *Profession de foi*. Deduced from the natural light of reason and feeling, this religion rests on two metaphysical tenets: the existence of God and the freedom of the human self. As *primum mobile* and supreme will, God moves the universe according to definite and ordered laws. Human freedom and its corollary, the immortality of the soul, equally proceed from God and his established order. Immortality of the soul justifies Providence. As the handiwork of God, everything must ultimately take its appointed place in the ordered cosmos. This system, a synthesis of universal harmony and human freedom, provides further insight into the system "Le Français" articulates in the Third *Dialogue*. Rousseau's profession of faith in God and human freedom represent the metaphysical foundation of his system. Providentialism supports Rousseau's philosophy of nature which, in turn, supports his philosophy of will. His philosophy of habit, meanwhile, derives from both. Reference to this system, meanwhile, renders the facts of the *Dialogues* coherent.

This thesis may be thought of as comprising two halves: the first re-examines nature, habit and the will as central components of Rousseau's ethics and moral psychology, the second discovers how these receive special expression in the *Dialogues* to render that autobiography intelligible.

Chapter 2 ('Nature') challenges two contrasting caricatures of Rousseauian nature by upholding a distinction between the given inheritance of human nature and the circumstances in which it emerges and develops, resisting the temptation to reduce nature to either the history of artifice or a timeless, instinctual inheritance. Nature represents a destiny that we equally receive and render actual through the history of action; any 'return' to nature must be thought of as prospective. Considering nature as an essence paradoxically leaves us with no possibilities to consider since, if humans are necessarily good, they are *necessarily* necessarily good. The problem, uncovered by analytical and postmodern philosophy, raises the difficulty of reconciling nature's finality with an absence of the Good. A defence of meta-ethical or moral naturalism also seems to condemn us to the old fallacy of confusing fact ('is') and value ('ought'). My replies to these objections provide conclusions from which the following two chapters derive their sources. The continuity of nature between the categories of *le physique* to *le moral*, or the natural and ethical selves, is mediated by habit. Chapter 3 ('Habit') uncovers Rousseau's philosophy of

habit to eliminate the assignations *denaturation* and *second nature* frequently employed by commentators to conceptualise perfectibility. By defining nature as those *habits that conform to nature*, Rousseau clarifies the relation between nature and the habits that disclose it. Nature lies on either side of habit which it flanks as origin and as outcome while habit represents nature in self-transcendent mode. Behind the acquisition of moral habits and the unfolding natural *telos* lies the contribution of the ethical will. Chapter 4 ('The Will') provides a final set of arguments defending moral naturalism. Rousseauian ethics privileges a specific inclination, the will oriented by self-love, which renders moral or spiritual progress possible and illuminates what autobiography refers to as 'nature' as a spontaneity generated by the sedimentation of so many past willed acts. The ethic of 'living according to nature' represents a vocation against temporal dissolution or weakening of its source in the will.

For Rousseau, possessing a disposition for virtue and affirming that disposition are mutually intensifying. *Vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* exist in a reciprocal dialectical relation. Participation in the community of selves and withdrawal into solitude and contemplation constantly round on one another. The absence of this virtuous circularity creates the problem of "Jean-Jacques" in the *Dialogues*, one that the rest of the thesis sets out and addresses. *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* accepts the challenge to promote a practical personal philosophy that preserves the ethical self without the usual conditions that normally allow that self to persist.

By way of introduction to this phase in my argument, Chapter 5 ('Truth and Method in the *Dialogues*') evaluates and refutes the alleged deficiencies of the *Dialogues*, to demonstrate that it is possible to produce congruence among apparently discrepant facts and thereby to challenge the conclusions reached by Starobinski and his followers. It argues for the ultimate intellectual coherence of Rousseau's work and locates the problems of the *Dialogues*, not in some error that destroys the synthesis, but in the rhetorical infelicity of the dialogic and proto-behaviourist, third-person optic which conspire to make vital features of self-creating agency disappear. "L'autobiographie à la troisième personne", writes Lejeune, "fournit un merveilleux terrain de recherche, puisque par définition [...] elle impose au lecteur de faire, au moins implicitement, une opération de traduction".⁶³ Indeed, since Rousseau portrays the synthesis of Natural Man

⁶³ *Je est un autre* (Pairs: Seuil, 1980), p. 43.

without its origins or history, the text requires that we “translate” the apparent deterministic and involuntary forms into the Cogito grasped in the first person, relocating the ‘facts’ of naturalism and explanation to the sphere of phenomenological description.

The problem of the *Dialogues* amounts to a transcendental problem which accepts the self it portrays as given. The task lies in offering an account of how this self arises by arguments that move from points of fact to points of principle or the conditions of possibility, both logical and ontological. Chapter 6 (“Jean-Jacques” or Natural Man’) explores the traces left behind by the moral agent who logically and genetically precedes the invariable, atemporal self Rousseau puts before his readers by arguing *a priori* for the conditions of possibility of normative inclinations. An analysis of *le naturel* and *l’habitude*, the proofs of Rousseau’s moral identity, shows these to be the outcomes of the ethical will. The central demonstration of the *Dialogues*, that “Jean-Jacques” and his works coincide, is construed as a profound internalisation by Rousseau of his own ethical construct to promote a ‘care of the self’ (*cura sui*) that renews and protects the privileged dispositions of a *sensibilité morale*. Solitude, the support of habit, of imaginative reverie, and the invocation of an *Art de jouir* constitute the forms of this spiritual self-management. Chapter 7 (‘System and Synthesis’) concludes that the *Dialogues* do not stand outside the Rousseauian system but are an extension of it. Responding to Starobinski’s phenomenological and ethical critiques of Rousseau’s self-management, it uncovers a dialectical strategy appropriate to *dialogue* which resolves the duality of ethical ideals to posit a new ethic for Natural Man in society that combines natural goodness and virtue.

Chapter Two

Nature

The concept of nature is central to all of Rousseau's thinking and, as such, has attracted a vast amount of attention on the part of commentators all of whom have sought to elucidate its multi-faceted meaning. I do not intend to offer anything resembling an exhaustive study of the concept of nature, something clearly beyond the limited scope of this thesis which intends to restrict itself, instead, to examining Rousseauian nature principally in its relation to the question of history.

Within the context of this relation, there exists a tendency for commentators to subordinate or evacuate one of these elements in favour of the other. In setting up a binary opposition between nature and history, a series of derivative antinomies then arise between nature or naturalism on the one hand, and the transcendent, the spiritual or the artificial on the other. Indeed, critical approaches, to mis-quote Pascal, may be summed up by a tendency towards two extravagances: *exclure la nature, n'admettre que la nature*. Before entering into a detailed examination of the current debate, one might introduce these extreme positions in the following way. The first regards nature solely from the side of timeless instinct, immediacy and all that spontaneously generates itself within and without human beings. An interpretation which thus minimises the historical framework in favour of the given implicitly belongs to Jean Starobinski: nature in Rousseau symbolises an innate and timeless human inheritance, or else, the preponderant influence of physical constitution and instinctive promptings which a nostalgic Rousseau is said to idealise and erect into a personal philosophy of existence.¹ I will examine these views more

¹ See Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 240-60. Although for different ideological reasons, Clément Rosset similarly reduces nature to a psychological drama unfolding in Rousseau's head; less a belief in nature, Rousseau's naturalism is really an opposition to, and refusal of, artifice, *L'Anti-Nature: éléments pour une philosophie tragique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), pp. 19, 276-77. Rosset's Nietzschean-inspired

closely during my discussion of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*. At the other extreme lies the bias towards collapsing nature into history by stating the case of history to the exclusion of all else. This perspective considers nature as the creation of history, a relatively permanent artifice indistinguishable from the circumstances in which it emerges.

Rousseau's position is far more interesting and also more complex. Maintaining an equilibrium that remains faithful to this position requires attenuating the view of nature and its forms as nothing but the sum of its historical emendations that are only more or less permanent dispositions, but also carefully qualifying how it comes to be that, although manifested in, and rendered actual by history, nature both precedes and opposes that history. I shall examine these two propositions generated from the critical positions I have just sketched on the basis of three main concepts of nature and human nature in Rousseau which may be briefly summarised as follows:

1. Nature as *teleological* and this in two further senses, namely, as a creative, self-sufficient principle or efficient cause (*natura naturans*), distinct from and independent of created or actual Form (*natura naturata*);
2. Nature as *normative*, a view, rooted in ancient cosmology which considers nature as permeated by mathematical and rational intelligence, re-emerging with eighteenth-century Deism and its conception of nature as moral source (Locke, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson) barely distinguishable from the Providential order. This conception is further enriched by the Natural Law tradition founded on the residual nature of man and his relations prior to every convention and positive legislation;
3. Nature as *genetic history*, or the empirical account derived from the Locke's philosophy of psychology, in which the unfolding of human nature is consubstantial with an historical anthropology.

Before concentrating on the specific interaction between nature and history and the critical attempts to obliterate the former through the latter, this chapter will begin by establishing the

analysis accuses Rousseau of projecting into the idea of nature the frustrated hope of all social malcontents and creating for himself the desire or illusion, prompted by a paranoid fear of random chance, to evacuate artifice and cosmic tragedy, *L'Anti-Nature*, p. 26.

modalities of Rousseauian nature as a teleological and normative entity allowing me to argue in favour of the following positions concerning the human essence and its possibilities.

According to Aristotelian teleology, a thing's nature ensures it unfolds in a certain fashion. Within this framework, it becomes possible to consider successive developments unfolding in a continuity across apparently separate orders of change. In Rousseau, this takes the form of a continuity between the sphere of naturalism and that of morality and reason to bridge, and therefore refute, the alleged dichotomy between fact and value, between 'is' and 'ought'. A consideration of nature as an originary efficient cause, meanwhile, serves to emphasise two points. First, to distinguish an actual nature from the subsisting creative force that retains the capacity to bring into existence further potentialities in view of an ideal finality. This residual capacity qualifies nature as a moral source and offers the possibility for human regeneration. Second, this capacity proves nature's autonomy and irreducibility. In contrast to the teleological view of nature drawn to an end by something outside it, nature as an efficient cause represents an intrinsic activity that accounts for change and processes "by the action of material things already existing at the commencement of the change".² This signifies that nature can't be collapsed into artifice or the history of artifice (custom). Nature as normative, meanwhile, underlines the ethical continuity of the human essence and the programme for human regeneration. Nature is not merely an originary given but also a hard-fought unity to which individuals strenuously ascend via a special, intimate awareness and the history of progressive acts of self-transcendence. It is equally a physical, intellectual and moral ideal to which we aspire, as a primitive impetus that prompts us into activity.

[2.1] *Nature as Teleology and Moral Source*

A thing's nature may be described as the set of its permanent features. Nature in Rousseau is dynamic as well as static; change and progress are also natural. Change is necessary since nature

² R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), p. 94.

strives towards the fulfilment of an end but such change is ‘natural’ in different senses. It is natural for an infant to grow into an adult. According to *Emile*, it is also natural for primitive or physical sensibility based upon sensations of pleasure and pain to develop into moral sensibility guided by precepts of reason and judgement in the pursuit of happiness (IV, 248). Of course, the growth and development of living organisms is not the same as that of human aptitudes or sensibility. I will, nevertheless, argue during the course of this thesis that a continuity, mediated by the principle of nature, exists between what Rousseau elsewhere refers to as the province of *le physique* and that of *le moral*.

Nature necessarily involves change because it strives towards fulfilment of an end. These changes are purposive although the means by which they are accomplished are not identical. Natural changes posit ends in two different ways and this gives rise to two intelligibilities of natural processes elucidated by ancient Greek cosmology.³

The first intelligibility, held by Aristotle, explains change with a final cause or *tendency*. Nature is characterised by effort or *nisus* towards a purpose, a teleological endeavour to realise and make actual as yet non-existent, though potential, forms. An obvious example of *nisus* in Rousseau is *amour de soi*, the propensity for self-preservation that strives for the fulfilment and promotion of life and well-being. Elsewhere, the creation and establishment of family ties illustrate a natural potentiality which may remain or pass into a fixed, durable state: “Si la voix du sang n’est fortifiée par l’habitude et les soins, elle s’éteint dans les premières années, et *le cœur meurt, pour ainsi dire, avant que de naître*. Nous voilà dès les premiers pas hors de la nature” (IV, 259; my emphasis). The use of final causes is evident even in the *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, the work in which Rousseau comes closest to elaborating a pure historical anthropology minus final causes. Nature, it affirms, “destines” man to physical well-being free from the depravities of intellect, while human and animal life alike receive physical and psychological robustness when entrusted to its exclusive care.⁴ What Aristotelians call ‘unnatural interference’ to nature’s purpose finds parallels, in the *Discours*, by means of the diagnosis of

³ The distinction is drawn by Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 94.

⁴ “[La nature] nous a destinés à être sains”; “La nature traite tous les animaux abandonnés à ses soins avec une prédilection qui semble montrer combien elle est jalouse de ce droit” (III, 138, 139).

self-inflicted social, physical and moral ills by which Rousseau perennially characterises the excesses of modern life.⁵

Nature in Rousseau's thought accomplishes a pre-determined end when unimpeded for the natural tendency of every animate entity is to fulfil its inner purpose. But it also pre-exists all modifications as an efficient cause. As a principle, nature also pre-exists and remains independent of the modifications it initiates. It is, in Aristotelian terms, an efficient and formal cause besides a final cause. Nature modifies being without yielding to it anything of its power to act subsequently. It initiates and regulates change as well as assuming the forms this change provokes. Such is the development of the organism described by *Emile*:

La nature a, pour fortifier le corps et le faire croître, des moyens qu'on ne doit jamais contrarier [...] Quand la volonté des enfants n'est point gâtée par notre faute, ils ne veulent rien inutilement. Il faut qu'ils sautent, qu'ils courent, qu'ils crient quand ils en ont envie. Tous leurs mouvements sont des *besoins de leur constitution qui cherche à se fortifier* (IV, 312; my emphasis).

Nature exists as a capacity or power ($\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$) to produce change, the potentiality of a thing in passing from one state to another. Such is the justification for the "natural" or "negative" education that Rousseau prescribes when he explains that "il s'agit moins de faire que d'empêcher, le vrai maître est la nature, [l'éducation] ne fait qu'écarter les obstacles qui la contrarient" (CC, XXXIX, 264). Education strives to remove unnatural interferences to the workings of nature; this necessitates that something operate in humans which they may assist or impede by their own interventions. Thus, *Emile* sponsors changes that conform to the principles of nature, encouraging the development of reason and sexuality at the proper time pre-established by nature. Nature cannot, however, be confused with the interventions of education: "L'art qui peut déguiser, plier, étouffer même la nature ne peut la changer tout à fait" (*Emile (Première version, manuscrit Favre)*, IV, 56). As an efficient cause, the forms nature receives do not mean it loses its capacity to act again.

This brings me to a second intelligibility of nature whose origins derive from Platonic, strictly Pythagorean, sources. Nature is similarly both an intrinsic or immanent force that pre-exists and

⁵ Inequality is held responsible for the disorders of modern existence which bring sedentary living for some, exhaustion from overwork for others, constantly renewed desires, over-refined diets, erratic sleeping and eating habits, and fits of extreme emotions all of which undermine psychosomatic well-being (III, 138).

directs change by the imposition of formal causes, and open-ended and, therefore, vulnerable to interference; but it is so by virtue of its mathematical *structure*. Between the ancient Pythagorean-Platonic standpoint and Rousseau's concept of nature as a material (physiological) structure, stands the new science inaugurated by Galileo that restates nature quantitatively and mechanically. This and the subsequent development of French materialism in the eighteenth century, with its emphasis on *organisation*, provides the background for the immanent view of nature explored in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. During a discussion of the possibilities and limitations of education and the plasticity of human nature, Saint-Preux observes that the Wolmar children are beneficiaries of a *bon naturel* or good pre-disposition. Since the children's nature is now sufficiently pliable, he argues that their parents ought to hasten to give it "form" through the interventions of education. This settled and permanent state will, hopefully, pre-empt the contingencies against which the Wolmars will have to struggle and refashion in future. Thus, he suggests they be trained in order to receive a disposition for obedience *now* that will enable them to accept authority and to learn when they need to do so.

Wolmar rejects this as premature and in the ensuing discussion on the respective contributions of nature and education to human development, he comes down firmly on the irreducibility of the former, appealing to Plato for whom "tout le savoir humain, toute la philosophie ne pouvait tirer d'une âme humaine que ce que la nature y avait mis" (*Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, II, 565). Notwithstanding general physiological characteristics common to the species, each person is endowed with a peculiar humoral composition that determines the extent of their perfectibility: "chacun apporte en naissant un tempérament particulier qui détermine son génie et son caractère" (II, 563). Particular aptitudes and turns of mind are the effect of categorical differences in the individual's complexion which education may assist, not create. Only nature bestows certain qualities and destines a person to acquire moral or intellectual capacities to the *nth* power, provided the development of biological foundations takes the course that nature dictates.⁶ A bad education will ruin the body and prevent it from gaining its potential settled state. This leads to the flaws that some attribute to nature, the loss of virtue or excellence of being that is, in turn, the

⁶ Wolmar gives the example of two dogs, equal in bearing, raised in the same house, and treated and fed the same way. Where the one is lively, good tempered, affectionate and intelligent, the other is sluggish, aggressive and incapable of being trained: "La seule différence des tempéraments a produit en eux celle des caractères, comme la seule différence de l'organisation intérieure produit en nous celle des esprits" (II, 565).

basis of the moral virtues for Rousseau. Wolmar accentuates the gulf between nature and education when he claims: “Pour changer un esprit, il faudrait changer l’organisation intérieure; pour changer un caractère, il faudrait changer le tempérament dont il dépend” (II, 566). Borrowing the terms of modern psychology, we can bring out the meaning of this passage in the following way: qualities that are the outcome of education are known as *attitudes* (admiration, contempt, resentment, sympathy); education may similarly determine a disposition to types of behaviour and feelings under particular circumstances (generosity, friendliness, humility). Other pre-dispositions, meanwhile, which Wolmar attributes to the self’s material organisation, are responsible for a person’s innate *liabilities* to emotional states such as irritability, excitableness or fearfulness.⁷ To attempt to create or determine a person’s intellectual or psychological liabilities by nurture is akin, as Wolmar claims, to wanting to change the colour of a person’s hair by the same means (II, 566).

By arguing in this fashion, Rousseau makes Wolmar side with the materialists and this prompts the question: why? While Saint-Preux assimilates nature to something approaching ‘custom’ (II, 564), Wolmar’s rebuttal, via an understanding of ‘nature’ in its strong naturalist sense, targets the empiricists and sensualists for whom nature is merely a relatively permanent disposition. Why this cannot be the case, and why Rousseau regards reducing nature to the relatively permanent forms that it might receive from education a mistake, may be illustrated by C. D. Broad’s hierarchical distinction between different “orders” of dispositions. A *first-order disposition* is a propensity, while the power to acquire this propensity under given circumstances is a *second-order disposition*.⁸ A second-order disposition is the power to acquire or lose a first-order disposition under assigned conditions. The endowment of nature does not determine the extent of our ideas and feelings contracted under assigned circumstances, the products of first-order dispositions. *Natural ability*, or the power to acquire a power, meanwhile, is a mental disposition of at least the second-order. However, the hierarchy of dispositions cannot continue upwards *ad infinitum* since there are “some powers which are not the joint products of its other

⁷ For a distinction between ‘attitudes’ and ‘liabilities’ see William P. Alston, ‘Emotion and Feeling’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York & London: The Free Press & Macmillan, 1967), vols 1-2, pp. 479-86 (p. 479).

⁸ C. D. Broad, *Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933-1938; repr., New York: Octagon, 1976), vol. I, pp. 266-67.

powers of a higher order and the special external circumstances in which it has been placed". These Broad calls immutable and "Supreme dispositions of a substance", capacities that Rousseau, referring to an individual's innate, temperamental complexion, would call "natural" because such dispositions have their basis in the material substrate of nature (II, 565-66).⁹

Closely allied to the idea of a teleological or finalist nature is a position based upon the continuity between *le physique* and *le moral* I alluded to earlier. Characterised as 'naturalist', it pertains directly to the category of specifically ethical basis of existence and forms the second broad characteristic of Rousseauian nature. This position, extremely influential during the first half of the eighteenth century, locates in nature a normative and moral source. Nature realises ends by way of a combination of elements and conditions to produce an overall, harmonious effect. However, a naturalist theory poses problems for ethics in one of two ways. First, the two sides of naturalism, that is, the simple naturalistic basis of Rousseau's philosophy of education, exemplified in the first three books of *Emile*, and the ethical claims made on its behalf are not, for some, easily reconciled. Second, the duality between the real and the ideal, between man-as-he-is and man-as-he-ought-to-be, problematises the idea of a human essence supposedly destined to, and yet incapable of, achieving its finality. The intractabilities generated by nature's finalism will receive attention in the final section of this chapter. In advance of the embarrassments created by the absence or interruption of natural finalism, I wish to concentrate beforehand on establishing the viability of a continuity between the natural and ethical spheres.

The place of naturalism in Rousseau's thinking crucially implicates the very foundations that render his ethical position legitimate. Matteo Perrini sees the moral pretensions of any such naturalism as conceptually flawed by the inclusion in Rousseauian nature of instinctive immediacy.¹⁰ Notwithstanding his reputation as the philosopher of nature, Paul Carton believes Rousseau's Spiritualist credentials flatly contradict his bogus naturalism.¹¹ Spiritualism as a philosophical tendency in France begins with Maine de Biran's "insistence on the spontaneity of the human will and his reflection on the human spirit's activity as a key to the nature of reality" in

⁹ *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 267.

¹⁰ 'Il concetto di natura in Rousseau', *Pedagogia e vita*, 6 (1962), 515-30.

¹¹ Paul Carton, *Le Faux Naturalisme de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Le François, 1951).

direct opposition to the materialist and determinist wings of Enlightenment thought.¹² In essence, the Spiritualist movement revives Cartesian ontology with primacy awarded to the mind and its attributes (thought, freedom), and places a strong emphasis on the radically separate quality of properly ethical or human ends as distinct from the interests of animal or biological life. This need not mean that a Spiritualist philosophy automatically disqualifies naturalism. An investigation of the kind of naturalism Rousseau endorses proves this to be true.

We might define a 'moral' naturalism as a view of the ethical life as the extension of biological life. Moral ideals, in other words, simply represent the premium placed on the needs and instincts that promote physical survival. Holding as fundamental the health and the preservation of life, this naturalism becomes indistinguishable from a materialist conception of ethics.¹³ A wider acceptance of naturalism, meanwhile, would extend such ideals to include whatever promotes psychological well-being and unity based upon the innate, instinctive, spontaneous heritage characterised by the state of nature that man shares with animals. Diderot's *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville* examines a purely naturalist ethics based upon this wider sense. It would seem that, in part at least, Rousseau supports this Enlightenment naturalism. Replying to his critics after publication of the First *Discours*, Rousseau states "Il ne faut point nous faire tant de peur de la vie purement animale, ni la considérer comme le pire état où nous pouvons tomber" (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, III, 78). He goes on to ask: "Erigera-t-on en vertu les facultés de l'instinct pour se nourrir, se perpétuer et se défendre?" To which he answers: "Ce sont des vertus, n'en doutons pas, quand elles sont guidées par la raison et sagement ménagées" (III, 82). We run a serious risk of misconstruing Rousseau's position, however, should we conclude that his naturalism corresponds only to the material substrate of morals, severed from morality in itself. The interests of embodied being and its imperatives reflect the truth of materialism, a mediated truth possessing a relative rather than a categorical value as a means to procure a further end judged to be good. Rousseau's Spiritualist leanings insist that the material

¹² Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. IX, *From Maine de Biran to Sartre* (London: Search Press, 1975), pp. 155-56.

¹³ *Moral or ethical materialism*, according to Ernst Haeckel, "proposes no other aim to man in the course of his life than the most refined possible gratification of his senses", contrasting "material enjoyment" or "external possession" with "moral action" or the "virtuous course of life", *The History of Creation*, 4th edn, trans. by E. Ray Lankester, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1892), vol. I, p. 38.

ought to remain subordinate to a fully moral order pervaded by a higher, usually Providentialist end. Materialism holds an important truth but it is an insight of mediate value not an end in itself.

This principal distinction sets Rousseau's naturalism apart from that of the independent naturalism of the materialist *philosophes* who emphasise the absolute demands of 'organisation' and instinct. Rousseau establishes the link between nature and morality thanks to the inherited legacy of Cartesian dualist metaphysics and the impossibility of dissociating the physical from the moral. Irreducibly spiritual ethical ideals find themselves inescapably grounded in the reality of materialism. The writings concerned with education and *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*, therefore, reserve a special place for materialism, not as an end term, but as a necessary and positive staging post in the development of humans as rational and morally free beings and as a lever to safeguard or correct this development in the light of external interference. Continuous rather than antagonistic, naturalism plays an indispensable role in the human moral vocation since it lies at the service of moral consciousness whose potential it resolves into actuality. Having accommodated this Spiritualist bias, we can further show that Rousseau's meta-ethical naturalism rests on moral consciousness which, in turn, recognises in nature the embodiment of its values.

This naturalism emerges from a current of eighteenth-century thinking, especially prevalent before 1750, that maintains an optimistic and normative view of nature and upholds pre-established harmony and objective natural laws as the foundation for positive ethics.¹⁴ By contrast to the subsequent materialist developments that see in nature a blind determinism indifferent to ethical demands, Rousseauian nature remains thoroughly suffused with the moral, for which it is the source and the original model. As the embodiment of *natural laws*, nature provides the fundamental principle of every normative judgement, the ideal and perfect expression of equality and freedom, those same qualities inseparable from the goals that human legislation and morality express anew through convention. Prior to the positive laws that men give themselves to establish their freedom, nature already operates as a law-like force for equality, justice, life and freedom for all. Before every civil state, it dictates rules to all sentient creatures (III, 141), ensures uniformity in all things (III, 136), dispenses its favours equally (III,

¹⁴ Jean Ehrard, *L'Idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963), p. 692.

144) and bestows order, health and the preservation of life by imposing beneficial constraints on everything that comes under its jurisdiction (III, 138).¹⁵ Elsewhere, and again like the ideal law, nature establishes the independence and freedom of all living beings, either through their dependency on physical necessity or “things” (IV, 311), or by virtue of nature’s universal and uniform influence.¹⁶ In opposition to scientific materialism, Rousseauian nature is a living, moral force in which man participates or with which he aspires to converge; a force consistent in each being and for the totality of beings in the realisation of their essence.

We may sum up this aspiration with the ethic of *living according to nature*. What the eighteenth century means by this is living in conformity with the conception of what Charles Taylor terms the “design of things”.¹⁷ For the positive contents of this ethic, we look to activities that are ranked according to their ability to mirror and contribute to the cosmic design.¹⁸ These will be explored in subsequent chapters. But living according to nature entails an important modification to a classical cosmology and an internalisation on the part of the eighteenth century that I wish to turn to briefly.

The Deist Enlightenment revives an idea central to Greek cosmology, namely, an outlook that apprehends the universe as rationally ordered that, in turn, provides a “moral stimulus” for humans to adopt the same standards in their own endeavours.¹⁹ The spiritual life constantly refers back to the order of the cosmos but what predicates this order is not a hierarchical, rational intelligibility but its *design*. Nature is a structure whose chief virtue consists in the interconnectedness between its means and ends. Likewise, living according to nature no longer signifies living according to the hierarchical goals of reason but promoting any activity that advances this design by guaranteeing the interlocking of private wills for a common, mutual end. To establish how we ought to live, the Deist conception of God blends an estimation of his goodness and the demands he makes of human beings with the Providential order working through nature. As Taylor writes: “the idea that God designs things for the human good [takes]

¹⁵ See Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Vrin, 1983), pp. 226-27.

¹⁶ “Dans l’état même de nature l’homme n’est libre qu’à la faveur de la loi naturelle qui commande à tous” (*Lettres écrites de la montagne*, III, 842).

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 279.

¹⁸ *Sources of the Self*, p. 282.

¹⁹ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 37.

the form of a belief in the good order of nature”.²⁰ God so orders the world as to enable man to achieve his own natural end and good.²¹ Taken together, these ideas provide the background for the Rousseauian ideal whereby the order and design of nature reflect and mediate the fulfilment of the human *telos*, providing a model for the moral world through which man imitates nature, a *monde physique* to which a human, *monde moral* must “correspond”.²²

An important internalisation, meanwhile, also takes place. The moral source of action, formerly located by the Greeks in the perfect rationality and beauty of the universe or, for the Judeo-Christian tradition, residing in the wisdom presupposed by obedience to divine will, now belongs to the self. For Rousseau’s normative view of nature as moral source, individuals apprehend the design from within. Following on from this access to the design, typically understood by Rousseau as the ‘voice’ residing within each self where it can be consulted, lies a further development which recognises that the design itself “includes my being provided with certain inclinations, desires, sentiments”.²³ Reason remains capable of providing insight into the design, but our inclinations and desires offer a more direct and privileged access to it. Apprehending the design calls for self-knowledge that yields a recognition that I too form part of the design. A knowledge of the good merges with a knowledge of my inclinations; self-knowledge reveals that my sentiments are an integral part of what is right and ordered. They are, in other words, *normative*.²⁴ The impulse of conscience, the inner sentiment or voice within, identifies and defines the Good, “since the élan of nature in me *is* the good”.²⁵

The good Rousseau identifies by this moral self-awareness concerns the realisation of the true human end confirmed by the essence I recognise through introspection. This reveals an irreducible given instinct that can’t be dissolved into its constitutive empirical parts (IV, 595) and which comprises of spontaneous inclinations towards self-preservation (*amour de soi*) and pity for the suffering of others from which reason subsequently deduces Natural Law (III, 125-26). My inner self also reveals my intrinsic freedom as a further hallmark of my essence: “Renoncer à

²⁰ *Sources of the Self*, p. 272.

²¹ *Sources of the Self*, pp. 267, 271.

²² To Paul-Claude Moutou in 1769, Rousseau writes: “La nature [...] n’est pas contradictoire avec elle-même; j’y vois régner un ordre physique admirable et qui ne se dément jamais. L’ordre moral y doit correspondre” (CC, XXXVII, 57). Rousseau expresses the same faith some years later in the *Rêveries* (I, 1018-19).

²³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 282.

²⁴ *Sources of the Self*, p. 284.

²⁵ *Sources of the Self*, p. 362.

sa liberté c'est renoncer à sa qualité d'homme" (*Du Contrat social*, III, 356). This freedom derives from the law-like force spontaneously operating in favour of the *independence* of all sentient creatures that continues into the political and moral frameworks as the absence of subjection to the will of others and to one's own passions.²⁶ Man's nature destines him to happiness, the invariable and pre-eminent end and desire of every individual implanted by nature (IV, 814), and to rationality and morality on the condition that the natural capacities and passions that improve man's existence, his sense of unity, his benevolence and sense of justice towards others, develop in the right way. Only then, and thanks to his awakened conscience, can man dispose of "an indestructible impulse or feeling urging him towards this desirable condition of himself and deflecting him from courses that prevent him from attaining it".²⁷

In considering the validity of meta-ethical naturalism, critics have levelled criticism at the semantic inconsistencies of Rousseau's thought. Georges Beauvalon observes that Rousseau combines nature as essence, instinct or inclination, and spontaneous force along with nature as principle of normative judgement (the laws of nature), thereby associating fact and value, a *de facto* entity and a *de jure* entity.²⁸ By virtue of deducing value from fact, the ideal of *conformity to nature* as an ethical "method" or "principle" is alleged to generate fallacies and tautologies. Conformity to nature is, in a sense, an inescapable necessity; we cannot exist outside given conditions; but there are, as Henry Sidgwick suggests, logical problems with deducing ethical conduct from the recognition of natural design because it commits us to what G. E. Moore later calls the *naturalistic fallacy*, namely, deducing non-natural evaluative or prescriptive notions ("what ought to be") from descriptive ones ("what is").²⁹

Although widespread, the argument of 'No 'ought' conclusions from 'is' premises' remains unconvincing. The concept of nature can't be purely descriptive but commingles factual claims and evaluative standards. In a sense this is inescapable but, as Hurka argues, the semantic

²⁶ J. I. MacAdam argues for the ideal of "independence" as providing a continuity between the state of nature and the civil state in 'The Discourse on inequality and the Social contract', *Philosophy*, 42 (1972), 308-21.

²⁷ Plamenatz, *Man and Society: A Critical Examination of Some Important Social and Political Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1963), vol. I, p. 374.

²⁸ *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, 7th edn, ed. by André Lalande (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), pp. 668-69.

²⁹ Henry Sidgwick, *The Method of Ethics*, 7th edition (Hackett: Indianapolis, repr., 1981), bk. I, ch. VI, §2, pp. 81. According to Moore, "propositions about the good are all of them synthetic and never analytic." Where experience or observation detects goodness, the mistake rests on defining a *non-natural quality* (good) in terms of a *natural quality*, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), I, §6-10.

objection flounders because factual objections to evaluations must themselves draw on evaluative concept of truth for their analyses.³⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre also rejects the argument as a truth of logic. Evaluative conclusions validly follow factual premises when we are dealing with “functional concepts”, that is, concepts that pick out the purpose for which something characteristically serves. MacIntyre offers the example of the premises “‘This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping’ and ‘This watch is too heavy to carry about comfortably’” to which it follows that “‘This is a bad watch’”.³¹ The objection that maintains that nature fails to provide a method of ethics is based upon a levelling argument that all that ‘is’ is natural. Clearly, this does not work for a thinker like Rousseau who repeatedly insists on the distinction between man-as-he-is and man-as-he-ought-to-be, between nature and a second nature.

Other commentators, meanwhile, deny any evidence of either an original nature that antecedes history or a nature representing objective moral values in Rousseau’s writings. In the latter case, morality is functional and relative to time and place; men do not discover right and wrong, they gradually invent it. This view is particularly prevalent in studies which emphasise the historical constructedness of nature and often end by collapsing nature into a historical anthropology. While one of the points this thesis supports concerns the human input into nature deriving from acts of self-transcendence, it also aims to argue that the historical view of nature need not reduce or undermine the concept of nature as an active, spontaneous force and moral source.

[2.2] *Nature and History*

I considered nature as an efficient cause or seat of an active power in the context of the dialogue between Saint-Preux and Wolmar. In this present section, I shall argue that Rousseau does not abandon that view of nature in his *Confessions* and that he consistently relies on a directing and

³⁰ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 18.

³¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1985), pp. 57-58.

intrinsic natural activity independent of history to account for the categories of volition, reflexivity and morality.

A third, empirical view of nature, the product of much eighteenth-century thinking derived from Locke, retains that the characteristics of individuals are the effects of their material structure but also insists that this structure is not simply given but is the product of *history*. In other words, the external pressures of history rather than some internally-generated force give form to the entity we call 'nature'. Rousseau is said to choose this model of nature for his *Confessions*. There is, according to Sherringham, no "original nature" in the ontogenetic scheme of that work.³² Rousseau's nature *is* his history, or that sequence of events that imposes unity on seemingly contradictory and inchoate selfhood. The *Confessions* posit two independent but symbiotic and coalescing narratives, one marking the history of Rousseau's feelings, the other the events of his life (I, 278). Situations give rise to feelings and make the inclusion of external events necessary. Conversely, secret dispositions that precede and shape the outcomes of such events require their own elucidation by an *histoire de l'âme*. From the combined workings of these two "chains", Sherringham concludes: "there can be no clear precedence of feeling over events, origins over history, or vice versa".³³ When Rousseau speaks of the "first" or "internal" causes of his personality, he seems to refer to "a situation where an event constitutes neither an absolute beginning nor a simple catalyst for a pre-existent disposition, but some kind of fusion of the two—an original modification or disposition". Rousseau's idea of *trace*, when he explains, for instance, "comment chaque impression qui a fait trace dans mon âme y entra pour la première fois" (*Ebauches des Confessions*, I, 1153) is telling. For Sherringham,

[an] event both makes and reveals a trace which can then be modified through combination with other feelings and events. Without the event there would be no opportunity for feeling and being to manifest themselves; without a prior surface there would nothing for the event to modify or mark.³⁴

The emergence of nature is therefore concomitant with the beginning of history.

³² Sherringham, Michael, 'Rousseau and the Chains of Narrative', in *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 31-66 (p. 40); see I, 174-75, 278 and the preamble to the *Confessions* of 1764, I, 1149.

³³ Sherringham, 'Rousseau and the Chains of Narrative', p. 40.

³⁴ Sherringham, 'Rousseau and the Chains of Narrative', p. 41.

Although a substrate that determines the future being of the self in the form of dispositions or habits, “traces” must themselves depend on a “prior surface” whose existence cannot be coextensive with them. That dispositions must ultimately be based upon characteristics which are themselves *non-dispositional*, thereby avoiding the trap of infinite regress, is an insight that belongs to Rousseau’s acceptance of materialism and helps us to understand the appeals made by Wolmar’s thinking in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Dispositional difference, according to this view, depends on *intrinsic* differences distinguished in the same way that philosophy separates primary and secondary qualities.³⁵ Broad takes up the principle of dispositional characteristics as secondary qualities dependent on primary qualities when he states: “dispositional properties themselves are, no doubt, merely conditional propositions or facts. But we always tend to assume that such conditional facts have a categorical basis in the more or less permanent *internal structure* of the continuant which is their subject”.³⁶ Acquired dispositions require a substrate. Past events alter in an enduring way the nature of an individual, meaning that there are modifications to the body, the brain and the nervous system. The integrity of the body and nervous system is the *categorical basis* for the preservation of modifications brought about by events Broad himself calls “traces”.³⁷

Rousseau did not pursue the characteristics of any such prior surface because there is always the danger, for the position that is not committed to outright materialism, of assimilating nature exclusively with the material properties of physiology. The idea of trace may easily fall within the scope of a materialist or epiphenomenalist account of human determinations and tendencies. When Rousseau speaks of “[les] premières traces de mon être sensible” (I, 18) or seeks to demonstrate how each impression which made a trace in the soul arose for the first time, it is a short step into holding the view that the living body must ultimately constitute the non-dispositional, primary and intrinsic substrate or repository for enduring traces. This much is evident from philosophical thought before Rousseau and brings me to my second point. What is also true about Rousseau’s deployment of the idea of *trace* in the *Confessions* is that, from the perspective of intellectual history, it is a clear nod to a specifically materialist expedient, used

³⁵ This comparison is suggested by W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 108-10.

³⁶ *Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, II. 1, p. 145.

³⁷ *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925) pp. 430-77.

from Descartes to La Mettrie, to account for such persisting phenomena as memory.³⁸ 'Trace' in this framework must inevitably admit some non-dispositional, categorical repository for the accidents and modifications imprinted by experience. However, if traces are made on a surface which precede them, the question immediately arises: what is this "prior surface" and how can we account for its existence?

As a featureless entity, nature could, nevertheless, be said to antecede history. Without quality and determination, nature pre-exists historical occurrences as a pure potentiality, as Matter without Form, as undifferentiated stuff minus any structural organisation. But nature is more than a logical or formal substrate for the transformations that history provides. Contrary to critical interpretations, Rousseau seems to suggest that an original nature *does* in fact exist in the *Confessions*. Traces are themselves dependent on an activity that precedes them since certain events *are allowed to make an impression while others are not*. In this sense nature precedes and determines history, standing between experience on the one hand and the repository of their internalisations, known as the enduring self, on the other. Although shaped by the forms that history will impose on it, nature acts as an autonomous and equal contributor to selfhood. Earlier in the *Confessions*, Rousseau explains:

Quoique cette sensibilité de cœur qui nous fait vraiment jouir de nous soit l'ouvrage de la nature et peut être un produit de l'organisation, elle a besoin de situations qui la développent. Sans ces causes occasionnelles un homme né très sensible ne sentirait rien, et mourrait sans avoir connu son être (I, 104).

The distinction between the actual or *occurrent* on the one hand, and the potential or *dispositional* on the other, to pinpoint a capacity which may or may not remain in reserve proves useful here. Dispositions may be defined in terms of occurrences, for example, when we feel angry and act in a certain way if provoked. Anger has also a dispositional sense, as when one is prone to anger though not at this moment actually being angry but attending to something else. Actual feelings

³⁸ In *Les Passions de l'âme*, Descartes explains memory as the permanent modifications of the movement of "animal spirits"; a willed action of the soul moves the gland in a particular direction of the brain until the spirits encounter traces of the objects the soul wishes to recall. The spirits find it easier to enter certain pores rather than others because of the previous impression of objects, *Œuvres et lettres*, ed. by André Bridoux (Paris: Pléiade, 1952), pp. 715-16. La Mettrie's offers a similarly physiological account of memory. Constitution contributes to its operations; ideas are passive tracings on parts of the brain, all connected to each other so that an idea evokes a similar tracing on the brain and calls up an entire sequence of previously held ideas, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 2 vols (Tours: Fayard, 1984-1987), vol. I, pp. 172-74.

and occurrent thoughts are different from a temporary propensity to have these feelings or thoughts leading to characteristic forms of behaviour. Without occurrences, there is no opportunity for a latent self to become actual. The important point is that sensibility is the result of *both* circumstances and the capacity of nature to receive particular forms. Under these circumstances, the *Confessions*, like *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, presuppose the existence of a *pre-dispositional* and *pre-disposing* nature. This position has the advantage of postulating a power in advance without the need to determine what that power is since potentiality is undetermined without particular instances to define it.³⁹ Where nature is predispositional, one can only know a predisposition by what it triggers off, by what follows the first fact. In this sense, nature also determines as well as receives the modes and attributes of history.

“Occasional” causes evoke the metaphysics of Malebranche and herein lies one of the central ambiguities of the *Confessions*. Held in this sense, a cause has no intrinsic link with its effect. Rousseau points to the need for occasional causes or events in the creation of dispositions that then become incorporated into nature.⁴⁰ Circumstances, in this instance, bring nature into being but nature does not owe its existence to the immediate transitive effect of external history. A *cause occasionelle* may indeed refer to a “condition” rather than an “occasion” but the difference is one of degree, namely, the extent to which a factor is essential to the effect produced. Without a condition there is no effect; an occasion, by contrast, is indifferent because it may be replaced by another. However, both remain *exterior* to the liaison between cause and effect. Thus, although related to the world of events and history, nature remains independent of these. Rousseau may well be his history, his nature the history of its modifications, but nature cannot be reduced to the sum, still less the activity, of such historical emendations. Given its relative independence, nature overlaps, but does not collapse into history.

With this in mind we can turn to Asher Horowitz’s study on Rousseauian nature. This also overstates the case of history in human ontogenesis— a “historical anthropology as the self-constitution of human nature in the social process of labour”—and fails to draw the distinction, consistently upheld by Rousseau, between the origins of human nature and the circumstances in

³⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Z, 1045^b35-1046, 1048^a25-^b4 and 1007^b28.

⁴⁰ An example of such a cause is Rousseau’s meeting with Mme de Warens, responsible for him contracting “la douce habitude des sentiments affectueux” (I, 104).

which it emerges.⁴¹ Horowitz claims that Rousseau repudiates the Enlightenment theory of human nature which it routinely opposes to artifice, and that he “collapses the distinction between nature and artifice, upon which the political thought of the epoch rests, into a conception of nature as the history of artifice”.⁴² A description of nature in these terms merely targets *second nature* or the actuality Rousseau’s works so often condemn but neglects to take account of a submerged, authentic nature beneath the actual history of artifice it has survived and which, Rousseau insists, we must seek out and recapture as a guide for living. Nature as the product of history also yields a purely passive entity; nature is undoubtedly subject to the form history provides but it is also a formative and determining influence on this history in turn.

There are serious derivative problems with such readings, not least of which is the danger of travesty Rousseau’s position on key questions of interpretation. A reductive view of nature seen simply as the sum of its historical emendations contradicts Rousseau’s stand against the sensualists in the debate between Saint-Preux and Wolmar by confusing nature and custom, turning him into a thorough-going empiricist and, because it evacuates the transcendent basis of intuitive feeling, a sceptic in matters of religion.⁴³ The case of free will, cognition and conscience which Horowitz examines likewise evokes difficulties. In the case of free agency, for instance, the tradition that places Rousseau with the Spiritualist camp in opposition to mechanical materialism is allegedly unfounded because the “spirituality” of the soul, the token of freewill in the *Discours sur l’inégalité*, lacks ontological foundation.⁴⁴ Since Rousseau does not intuit freedom from the essence of a non-material substance, Horowitz argues that it represents “a logical presupposition of the emergence of history from nature. It is both a condition of the process of historical development and at the same time a result, inseparable from the conditions of its own development in history”. Horowitz further claims that Rousseau considers free agency

⁴¹ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 82.

⁴² Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 81.

⁴³ Horowitz claims that “God is for Rousseau, if indeed the Savoyard vicar can be identified with him, ‘nothing’ but a plausible inference. Natural religion in his hands turns out to be as much a matter of faith as it is with Hume”, Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 57. Horowitz reaches this conclusion on the basis of a mis-reading of the quality of intuitive truth in the *Profession de foi*: “Je crois donc que le monde est gouverné par une volonté puissante et sage; je le vois, ou plutôt je le sens” (IV, 580-81; my emphasis). Feeling, in this context, does not refer to *inference* but, as the vicar states elsewhere, a profound assent to knowledge in which the heart cannot refuse its consent (IV, 569-70), an experiential and intimate religious conviction exemplified in the Augustinian and pietist traditions Rousseau knew well.

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 63.

as “primarily a biological category rather than an ontological one predicated of an independent substance”, even though this contradicts the dualist position of the *Profession de foi* and the two distinct principles ascribed to human nature, where Rousseau clearly follows Descartes.⁴⁵

For Rousseau, freedom of the will represents more than merely an opportunity to undermine the metaphysical pretensions of materialist opponents as Horowitz suggests. An exclusively historical reading of the will is reductive of freedom as the essence of man, the metaphysical gift he receives from God, but also the moral freedom that provides the possibility for individuals to win merit for themselves. One might say that, without it, we eliminate at a stroke the important moral framework of responsibility in which so much of Rousseau’s discussion about free agency (*liberum arbitrium*) takes place. If freedom were an emergent property of biology, one would then be forced to argue that its inheritance lies in the particular organisation belonging specifically to humans, and that phenomena such as conscience and remorse consequently vary in degree according to individual constitutions or cultures. This type of materialism, however, never found any favour with Rousseau.

Rousseau does not merely lay bare the contradictions of a rigorous and consistent materialism, he puts forward positive arguments that establish his own rival position as a better theory. Nor, simply because it appears incompatible with the mechanical laws of physics, does he for that reason consider free will, along with ‘human nature’, the result of biological and socio-historical developments.⁴⁶ If “there is nothing supernatural about it”, this does not mean that free agency is used in the second *Discours* “as a concept proper to philosophical biology”, rather, that the revealed or supernatural knowledge we have on this count is deliberately set aside from the ontogenetic and phylogenetic account of the second *Discours*, as Rousseau plainly states in the opening remarks of that work.⁴⁷ The account Rousseau provides is not an *historical* anthropology but an essentially “geometrical anthropology” which speculates within the bounds of reason on the possible causes and their effects argued from hypothetical but necessary first principles.⁴⁸ For the supernatural, or indeed divine, basis of this faculty, we must look

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 71.

⁴⁷ “Sans avoir recours aux connaissances surnaturelles [...] En dépouillant cet Etre, ainsi constitué, de tous les dons surnaturels qu’il a pu recevoir, et de toutes les facultés artificielles, qu’il n’a pu acquérir que par de longs progrès; en le considérant, en un mot, tel qu’il a dû sortir des mains de la Nature” (III, 134).

⁴⁸ Gouhier, ‘Nature et histoire dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’, *Annales*, 33 (1953-1955), 7-48, (p. 13).

elsewhere. The ontological basis for freedom is explicit in *Emile*—the third article of faith in the *Profession* on this point is clear enough: “L’homme est donc libre dans ses actions et comme tel animé d’une substance immatérielle” (IV, 586-87).

We read in the *Discours* that the will’s freedom manifests itself in the acts of willing that produce an immediate, phenomenological intuition. On this, the Savoyard vicar is in agreement.⁴⁹ The awareness of freedom, as Victor Goldschmidt argues, is analogous to the Cartesian *cogito* in relation to those things that are subject to doubt; it appears as the sole principle that escapes universal mechanism.⁵⁰ Rousseau’s aims in these pages of the *Discours* is to concede that which properly and legitimately belongs to the province of positivist metaphysics and establish that which lies beyond the competence of the Lockean, genetic method of analysis. Thus, the body, both human and animal, is merely “une machine ingénieuse” (III, 141); applying the Newtonian method to the mind, the formation of ideas in both man and beast may be explained with reference to mechanical laws: “La physique explique en quelque manière le mécanisme des sens et la formation des idées” (III, 142). Freedom, however, is as irreducible as instinct; it is not arrived by the conclusion of a scientific, genealogical analysis since, in the words of the *Profession*, “la philosophie moderne [...] n’admet que ce qu’elle explique” (IV, 595). It is, on the contrary, as Goldschmidt observes, *sui juris*.⁵¹ An experimental physics of the soul must, therefore, recognise its limitations and concede that the intelligibility of human freedom lies outside of its area of investigation. Free will, in conclusion, can’t be explained by genetic analysis, still less as the emergent product of genetic anthropology.

Horowitz’s arguments concerning self-consciousness, particularly in so far as the debts of the *Discours sur l’inégalité* are deemed to lie with Condillac’s “genetic analysis of cognition”, whereby reflection and abstract ideas emerge from “a process of interaction with the external world”, are also less secure than they first appear to be.⁵² Neo-Marxian statements like “human cognition and the malleability of desire are both essentially dependent on the emergence of labour”, meanwhile, ignore the existence of a pre-economic *prudence machinale* and the innate

⁴⁹ “Dans la puissance de vouloir ou plutôt de choisir, et dans le sentiment de cette puissance on ne trouve que des actes purement spirituels” (III, 142); “Je ne connais la volonté que par le sentiment de la mienne” (IV, 586).

⁵⁰ *Anthropologie et politique*, p. 285.

⁵¹ *Anthropologie et politique*, p. 285.

⁵² *Rousseau, Nature and History*, p. 83.

human capacity for reflection (III, 165).⁵³ In general terms, if the awareness of our freedom to acquiesce or resist were the product of socialisation and language “predicated upon the existence of a symbolic order”, one fails to see how such an order first came to be instituted were it not conditional upon the emergence of a pre-existing faculty that might so structure thought. In reality, Rousseau’s sensualism lies within the tradition that remains faithful to Locke and which, while accepting an empirical psychology, also admits innate capacities and operations for the mind (judgement, reflection, desires, the passions) but which remain virtual without experience or occasions in which they may be given expression.⁵⁴ There undoubtedly exists an indeterminacy and plasticity in human nature but equally a substrate irreducible to human praxis, language and history. Horowitz’s psychoanalytical and Marcusean approach argues differently in these matters, but the arguments do not reflect Rousseau’s.

The moral dimension of human beings—conscience, for instance—is rooted in a particular history; as for the passions, they too have their “genealogy”.⁵⁵ This method, while good for describing the vicissitudes of conscience, does not account for its origins in the way that ^athinker sympathetic to religion like Rousseau sees them. Conscience, as the form which the voice of nature takes, may be historical and rooted in human interaction; its origins, Rousseau held, are not. Despite appealing to “a timeless nature and the conviction that this nature is directly accessible to experience”, Horowitz suggests that the absence of any Cartesian-style appeal to a transcendent source of truth undermines this nature.⁵⁶ The *Profession*, however, clearly predicates nature, conceived as the “voice” of conscience, as a direct link to a transcendent source of truth.⁵⁷ The forms conscience and the passions assume depend on their culture and history but their basis is suprahistorical. Rousseauian nature is, in an important sense, both outside time and

⁵³ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 84

⁵⁴ Even in the case of Condillac, who surpassed Locke and applied the historical method to the components of reflection (comparison, judgement, volition etc.), care must be taken not to overstate the extent to which mind “develops out of its own practical relation with an external world”, Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 83.

Condillac’s self is not wholly an empirical self since it is more than the sum of its acquired contents since the statue’s capacity for self-consciousness is both logically and genetically prior to sensation. See Jean A. Perkins, *The Concept of the self in the French Enlightenment* Geneva: Droz, 1969), pp. 53-54.

⁵⁵ “Conscience is dependent in its content and dynamic functional role within the human psyche on the history of society. Just as the passions have their history, conscience too, which, if not one of them, is closely allied, has its own”, Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 141.

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Nature and History*, p. 44.

⁵⁷ “Conscience, conscience! instinct divin, immortelle et céleste voix, guide assuré d’un être ignorant et borné, mais intelligent et libre; juge infaillible du bien et du mal, qui rends l’homme semblable à Dieu; c’est toi qui fais l’excellence de sa nature et la moralité de ses actions” (IV, 600-01).

directly accessible to experience. The experience Rousseau invokes, “the sensitivity of mind to the duty outlined by the voice of conscience”, is not a variable, subjective and unreliable sense experience.⁵⁸ Rousseau wishes to avoid rather than invite the problems of empiricism, particularly the appeal to individual experience that relativise the source of moral values. This sensitivity represents a receptivity *to* a reality which stands apart or is autonomous with respect to the perceiving self. Consciousness receives through sense something it neither produces nor invents.⁵⁹ The innateness of conscience is a claim for its universality and infallibility, given the right conditions. The values received by conscience do not, in an important sense, belong to history because they are discovered, recognised, respected.⁶⁰ History represents the moment and circumstance not the matrix of value.

A thing cannot simply be taken as its history. The problem with equating Rousseau’s concept of nature with the historical development he describes in the second *Discours* fails to note that nature and history always remain, in principle and tragically so, uncoupled. Throughout that work, Rousseau maintains that history has taken a wrong turning; he further insists that, although disfigured or even distant, nature nonetheless subsists. The statue of Glaucus stands behind the disfigurements of time and accident (III, 122). Nature harbours the capacity to return, to re-affirm itself over and against the second nature implanted in us by history. The works of regeneration—*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Emile*, *Du Contrat social*—demonstrate how. The transformations of nature do not affect its essential power to act subsequently. It exists as a force that subtends being, persisting during and despite historical modifications. According to the *Confessions*, the *Discours* uncovers the source of human ills in an all too human and therefore contingent history (I, 388). Given his nature, man’s actual history *could* have been dissimilar to what it in fact was. In different circumstances, history would have been dissimilar from the actual history which the *Discours* hypostasises. This important point is lost on proponents of the strong-historical thesis. Even the second *Discours*, which sets out Rousseau’s genetic anthropology, nevertheless repeatedly refers to nature’s endeavours to ensure the preservation of the species despite the best efforts of civilisation to corrupt human beings. Nature cannot be

⁵⁸ Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature and History*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 76

⁶⁰ *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 72.

reduced to the civilising process since, far from constituting nature, this development has evolved *contrary* to it. Nature cannot, therefore, be reduced to constitutive interaction with the world.

Custom, social and economic relations, history and art all shape and determine nature but, without some original and irreducible substrate, there is nothing upon which to impose a form, nothing to differentiate from the Chaos. But nature is also more than merely a formal or logical residue. Self-love, of which all the passions are modifications, and sympathy for the misfortune of others, are innate. Nature and conscience are not immune to historical processes but neither are they strictly coefficients of history either. The role of history is incontestable although some overstate the emphasis on the historical constructedness of nature. Thus, while nature comes into being through interaction with, and transformations of the external world, it also constitutes a principle outside its own historical development. Rousseauian nature always remains an irreducible autonomous element, a *telos* that is both manifested in history or interacts with culture and history as much as it is fashioned by them. Nature endures successive changes, it is therefore the cumulative product of history but there is a deeper underlying and ahistorical substrate that man has lost but may regain.

From this brief outline, it is clear that Rousseau holds a complex but consistent view of nature. Nature as tendency, the elemental instinct of self-preservation, is nature in its most basic and invariable unity, one that bolsters a naturalised theology and Providentialism. Nature as structure and tendency determines the degree of perfectibility which education may or may not fulfil and beckons to the materialism and epiphenomenalism of such figures as La Mettrie. Finally, nature considered as structure, the closest Rousseau comes to an idea of *tabula rasa*, conveys the empirical and sensualist tenor of genetic anthropology in which nature and history combine to define the anatomical and psychological characteristics of selfhood. The difference of emphasis yields a unity: *La Nouvelle Héloïse* defends the irreducibility of nature against the sensualism of Helvétius; the *Confessions*, meanwhile, highlight external events that, along with a predisposing nature, jointly determine selfhood. Furthermore, Rousseau's comprehensive view of nature conforms to a characteristic philosophical attitude that resists all philosophical and

scientific reduction. Linear theories of human nature, in his view, merely provide necessary but insufficient accounts of human phenomena.

No necessary logical objections impede deriving an 'ought' from an 'is', as we have seen. But I want to take the question a step further. An examination of Rousseauian nature from the perspectives of teleology, morality and history generates a marked contrast between man-as-he-is and man-as-he-ought-to-be. Man's present or actual nature, a second nature born of contingent historical circumstances finds itself in direct conflict with nature understood as an innate fund of instincts, biological and moral, as well as nature considered as an active, Providentially-driven principle. From this conflict, a fundamental theoretical problem arises: what "is" (*natura naturata*) appears to embarrass or undermine the validity of claims about what "ought" to be (*natura naturans*). If we choose to define nature by virtue of its finalism, problems ensue when we consider that human history *could* have been dissimilar to what it in fact was. It is these difficulties and the problems of nature as an open-ended, formal cause subject to potential interference that I will concentrate on next.

[2.3] *Nature's Finalism: Necessity and Absence of the Good*

Although permeated by *nisus*, human nature fails to coincide with the demands of its own end. The element of indeterminacy that ensures that a potentiality doesn't resolve itself into an actuality proves less problematic than it first appears and I shall argue that the absence of this strict necessity becomes necessary to provide room for ethics.

At its most basic, Jacques Ulmann defines nature as a determinism and a finality that promotes a static equilibrium between living beings and their milieu, insuring against internal and exogenous derangement.⁶¹ Any alteration to this equilibrium immediately problematizes nature's finalism, for how can we reconcile a principle with its inefficacy, a necessity of the Good with its absence? The inherent deficiency of nature's teleological principle, the efficacy of final causes in

⁶¹ *La Nature et l'éducation: l'idée de nature dans l'éducation physique et dans l'éducation morale*, 2nd edn (Paris: Vrin, Klincksieck, 1987), pp. 14-15.

determining the course of events, is central to Derrida's deconstruction of Rousseauian nature as a metaphysical category of pure and immanent positivity. For Derrida, the problem lies in the inability of metaphysics to think the concept of nature and origins, an inadequacy he conveys by Rousseau's use of the *supplement*. According to Derrida, the "negativity of evil" for Rousseau is always in the form of supplementarity; exterior to nature, evil supervenes upon nature but by way of compensation for what ought to lack nothing at all in itself.⁶² Thoroughly antinomic, the supplement represents both humanity's good fortune and the origin of its perversion, its progress and its regression towards evil.

Every explanation that leans on a theory of contingency to account for the breakdown of the positivity of nature, meanwhile, faces an intractable problem. Accounting for the non-essential efflorescence of tyranny and enslavement of others (*amour-propre*) from a legitimate and natural claim to existence and self-assertion (*amour de soi*) with reference to contingency simply poses the problem of an inherently deficient natural finalism anew. By incorporating a natural breakdown into a wider finality, as Optimism so often does, contingency ultimately leads us back to the need to explain the chance development of man into what we see him today. In other words, how can nature lose its essence, how is a natural spontaneity without finality ever possible?

A theory of contingency remains insufficient when it attempts to account for the events and forms that supervene on an originally good nature. This much may be illustrated by the tensions present in Rousseau's account of origins and which Derrida explains by way of *différance* and the logic of supplementarity whereby events are both necessary and impossible, never contingent. As Derrida shows, the passage from nature to society represents both a fortuitous, contingent accident and a Providential act, something that should never have happened but also something that had to happen. "Les associations^{~s} des hommes", writes Rousseau, "sont en grande partie l'ouvrage des accidents de la nature" (V, 402), but there is a "necessity of non-necessity" in the turn of such natural events. Because of an absence of the structural factors that would allow the passage from pre-history to society (barbaric shepherd to civil, ploughing man), the transition must come about through a rupture or, as the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* explains,

⁶² *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 209.

a mutation in the climate of the earth brought about by an external teleology: “Celui qui voulut que l’homme fût sociable toucha du doigt l’axe du globe et l’inclina sur l’axe de l’univers. A ce léger mouvement je vois changer la face de la terre et décider la vocation du genre humain” (V, 401). The passage from nature to society, the deficiency which separates nature from itself, is *natural*.⁶³ Under such circumstances, the negativity is both natural and perfectly exterior to the system it comes to overturn, a natural catastrophe neither in, nor out of nature.⁶⁴ The same fundamental *undecidability* characterises the effects, as well as the attributes, of this natural revolution. The progressive movement it inaugurates arrives in the form of a regression; catastrophic events turn potential faculties into actual ones, they are both humanity’s blessing and good fortune, and its curse. Accordingly, Derrida identifies an *économie* of catastrophe and compensation in Rousseau’s text. The negative agency that wills man to be social and unleashes the subsequent evil, the finger that tips the globe’s axis, is offset by Divine Providence which resorts to the instruments of natural accidents (earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions) in order to force people to reunite and recoup their common losses (V, 402).⁶⁵

A deficient finalism also jeopardises nature as an efficient cause. We cannot, Ulmann insists, look to nature to make good this deficiency.⁶⁶ Derrida’s deconstructive reading moves in the same direction. Any appeals to moral naturalism are contradictory since these would need to ask nature to perform a reconciliation between necessity and the Good that it has separated.⁶⁷ Since nature is not self-transcendent but able only to confine man within itself, only reason can raise man above this deficiency and reconcile determinism with a finality for the Good.⁶⁸

Setting to one side Derrida’s logocentric thesis, I believe alternative accounts of Rousseau’s hesitations beyond the disruptive counter-logic of supplementarity in the *Essai sur l’origine des langues* are possible, ones which help us to understand the equivocations of that text and others and the ensuing prescriptive side of Rousseau’s system. According to Derrida, Rousseau naturalises the Fall by turning it into a natural accident.⁶⁹ In wishing to exculpate man and nature,

⁶³ *De La Grammatologie*, p. 364.

⁶⁴ *De La Grammatologie*, p. 366.

⁶⁵ *De La Grammatologie*, p. 367.

⁶⁶ Ulmann asks “comment demander à la nature de compenser ce qui reste précisément insuffisance de la nature?”, *La Nature et l’éducation*, p. 545.

⁶⁷ *La Nature et l’éducation*, p. 547.

⁶⁸ Pierre Burgelin, *La Philosophie de l’existence de Rousseau*, p. 481.

⁶⁹ *De La Grammatologie*, p. 367.

he chooses an external teleology to overturn the natural system of things and therefore problematises natural finalism-cum-Providence. In place of the Derridean economy of catastrophe and compensation, one might simply argue that Rousseau's story incriminates nobody in particular but, consciously or not, prefers to fragment and diffuse responsibility among several factors instead. In the logic of classical reason, this transpires as the inevitable embarrassment that supervenes on an account of the origins of the Fall that strives to implicate neither God, nor nature, nor man in his essence. In other words, a story of origins that must disculpate God, advance a positive natural finality and admit no inherent perversity in mankind while, at the same time, account for the iniquitous, unnatural state in which we now find ourselves.

There are two further ways of addressing the moral consequences of nature's interrupted finalism. The first consists in attributing the interference, as Rousseau so often does, to the "errors" of choice and locate man's 'Fall', not in nature, but in human free agency. To do so, however, requires abandoning the view of nature as an immanent positivity or as inherently deficient, and maintaining instead that human nature exists in a dialectical exchange with reason and the will that transcend it. The second, explaining Rousseau's ambivalent outlook on the passage from the state of nature to the civil state, demands taking an optimist or Leibnizian line. The finality of nature has meaning only at its origins or from the perspective of a reconciliation between nature and history. The genealogical account in the *Discours sur l'inégalité* remains, in this sense, incomplete and as such represents only the latest moment of human history, an ending that is not a conclusion. The actualisation of potential faculties is a disaster seen from the present view because humanity has taken a wrong turning. However, the meaning of the past depends on the present: should men come to see themselves for what they really are then the past is vindicated, it is no longer a catastrophe but, as *Du Contrat social* claims, a positivity and a blessing which takes man out of the state of nature to place him on an incomparably higher moral footing (III, 364).

From these new perspectives, the difficulty lies not in accounting for teleological breakdown but in wanting to find an exclusively *naturalist* solution to this discontinuity. Obviously, nature can't be both subject to breakdown and capable of reconciling the Good with the necessary. Then

again, we do not ask of the *same* nature that it contrive by itself the means for accomplishing this reconciliation. From the separation of nature and its teleology emerges a bifurcation between nature-as-it-ought-to-be and nature-as-it-actually-is, that is, between a nature which history transforms into what Gouhier calls a “supra-history” (*sur-histoire*) and a *second nature* we inherit in its place, subject to perennial attacks by Rousseau.⁷⁰ This second nature, the totality of accidents that predicate nature and provide it with illegitimate forms received through bad habits and error, is clearly incapable of re-asserting nature’s finalism. Its spontaneity works in an opposite direction.

For this reason, a meta-ethical naturalism remains valid. The restoration of nature’s finality or the evacuation of second nature represents the work of the will guided by the values belonging to nature. The task of restoring nature’s finalism relays itself to the will which must create conditions favourable for a natural finality to undertake its course, but meta-ethical naturalism remains viable since, in attempting to bring a potential into actuality, the will orients itself according to the normative guidance offered by nature. Thus, even though a natural finalism no longer accomplishes itself spontaneously, this may ultimately be achieved through a reconciliation of nature and history in which nature continues to indicate the values needed to perform this reconciliation on condition that the will is properly acquainted with them.

On closer inspection, the problematic rupture of finalism and the good doesn’t even unfold within nature but in the relation between nature and human nature. The *Discours sur l’inégalité* presents its readers with two natures: the natural world subject to the determinism of strict causal laws and undetermined, perfectible man. From this perspective, Rousseau stands at the head of a tradition that includes Kant, Schelling, Ravaisson, Boutroux and Merleau-Ponty which holds that natural laws are increasing^{-ly} less necessary as we pass from the physical order of existence where determinism is at its highest, via the biological, to the human order where determinism is at its lowest. Rousseau’s retrospective judgement of the *Discours sur l’inégalité* provided by the *Confessions* encourages this reading.⁷¹ Similarly, his re-working of Genesis identifies the origins of an unequal society as we know it with the moment an individual ringfenced a piece of

⁷⁰ Gouhier, ‘Nature et histoire dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’, p. 47.

⁷¹ “Voyant [...] mes semblables suivre [...] l’aveugle route de leurs [...] erreurs [...] je leur criais [...]: Insensés, qui vous plaignez sans cesse de la nature, apprenez que tous vous maux vous viennent de vous” (I, 388-89).

land, called it his and spawned innumerable imitators (III, 164). Changes in the external environment that produce unnatural human development is always determined by a degree of human control, so that perfectibility allows us to hold to both freewill and the finalist thesis.⁷² Human perfectibility, which engages nature in history, and freedom unfolding in conformity with or against nature, entails the possibility of self-denaturation. The possibility of self-denaturation requires that we conceive human nature rather than nature itself as subject to disequilibrium. Freedom confers man the privilege of raising himself above animals but also falling below them.⁷³ Nature, as Burgelin notes, “ne nous fournit qu’une force d’expansion et une inclination. A nous de faire silence et d’écouter sa voix”.⁷⁴ The possibility of the errant, unguided development of human beings means that nature is not a strict determinism in man but also open to change for the worse. Free agency and the capacity for self-denaturation means that nature’s finality is always merely *provisional* and dependent on what man chooses.⁷⁵

The failure of human nature to converge, out of necessity, upon its proper goals represents the condition of possibility for ethics and the transcendent human will. Man inherits what Gouhier terms *le péché métaphysique*, a Platonic antagonism originating at the level of soul-body dualism.⁷⁶ The soul being yoked to the body, our nature constantly renders an harmonious spiritual existence precarious and, therefore, worthy of merit. Through his will, man may either preserve the integrity and perfection of his nature or become corrupt. Regeneration is still possible, without recourse to supernatural assistance, by virtue of the very freedom of the will that enabled it to choose its corrupt course. We stand in need of correction (*redressement*) rather than redemption.⁷⁷ The potential for evil belongs to human nature but the remedies of wisdom or philosophy draw from the same source. Rousseau’s vision of a promotion and participation in nature’s finality to reconcile nature and history, and the causes that orient the will either for or against this finality, will be the subject of the next and subsequent chapters.

⁷² Christopher Kelly and Roger Masters, ‘Human nature, liberty and progress: Rousseau’s dialogue with the critics of the *Discours sur l’inégalité*’, in *Rousseau and Liberty*, pp. 53-69 (p. 65).

⁷³ “La bête ne peut s’écarter de la règle qui lui est prescrite, même quand il lui serait avantageux de le faire [...] l’homme s’en écarte souvent à son préjudice [...] L’esprit déprave les sens, et [...] la volonté parle encore, quand la nature se tait” (III, 141).

⁷⁴ *La Philosophie de l’existence*, p. 222.

⁷⁵ Ulmann, *La Nature et l’éducation*, p. 87

⁷⁶ Gouhier, ‘Nature et histoire dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’, p. 28.

⁷⁷ ‘Nature et histoire dans la pensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’, p. 30.

A philosophy of habit at the heart of Rousseauian education concerns itself with the orientation of nature's finalism, turn individuals away from the exogenous influences that distance them from it ; a philosophy of the will, meanwhile, looks to a re-orientation or transformation of corrupt personality. Habit preserves the spontaneity of nature by giving it Form, thereby eliminating the creation of the rogue and imperfect forms of second nature which obfuscate nature but which can never replace it. C'est ainsi", explains Wolmar, "qu'un homme devient tout ce qu'il peut être et que l'ouvrage de la nature s'achève en lui par l'éducation" (II, 566). The need for transforming or re-orienting the will arises from the errant and unguided development of human beings that lead to 'denaturation'. Having lost its original spontaneity, the soul reverses its corrupt course by tracing in the opposite direction the successive steps of its degeneration, until it is again united with the fountainhead of its being, its moral source and the possibility of its regeneration.

Chapter Three

Habit

Perhaps uniquely for a philosopher of nature concerned with the moral perfectibility of man through habits implanted by education, it becomes impossible to allocate a legitimate place in Rousseau's thought for the phenomenon known as *second nature*. Far from representing incommensurate entities, Rousseauian nature stands in a dynamic relation to habit which it incorporates into itself as its Form, thereby eliminating the need for a 'second' nature while allowing us to conceptualise the realisation of man's essence as an extension of the natural into the ethical. To demonstrate this, I shall draw on the concept of *habitus*, defined in relation to its variant *consuetudo* and in opposition to *habit*.

Out of the contrast between 'active' and 'passive' habits introduced by Maine de Biran, philosophy distinguishes *habitus* (ἔξις) from simple *habit*.¹ A spiritual reality anchored in the organic, *habitus* modifies the psychological, intellectual and moral life by providing a stability that increases our rational capacities and freedom. Sheer habit, meanwhile, represents an automatism that mechanises our actions and increases inertia.² The full significance of this capital distinction will emerge during my analysis of the *Dialogues*. Before then, we have to examine the notion of *habitus* in more detail.

In his treatise on habit, the philosopher Félix Ravaisson-Mollien provides two main definitions linked to the concepts of state and disposition in relation to temporality. The first places emphasis on duration and the integrity of the elements that comprise a habit: "L'habitude, dans le sens le plus étendu, est la manière d'être générale et permanente, l'état d'une existence considérée, soit

¹ Maine de Biran, *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser*, edited by Pierre Tisserand (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

² See *Dizionario delle idee* (Florence: Sansoni, 1976), article 'Abito, Abitudine', pp. 1-3.

dans l'ensemble de ses éléments, soit dans la succession de ses époques".³ This view of habit corresponds to *habitus* and, since it denotes a possession, is likened to Aristotelian Form. Habit as *habitus* shares many affinities with nature, in that it is a being's essential form, principle and the end of its activity. *Habitus* is, furthermore, a power (δυναμις) which leads to an act (ενεργεια) if unopposed or unhindered.⁴ In the second instance, Ravaisson defines habit in the sense conveyed by the term *consuetudo* (εθος): "Mais ce qu'on entend spécialement par l'*habitude*, ce n'est pas seulement l'habitude acquise, mais l'habitude contractée, par suite d'un changement, à l'égard de ce changement même qui lui a donné naissance".⁵ *Consuetudo* consists of three components:

1. the consequence of a change;
2. a disposition acquired from this change;
3. a disposition towards a further change.

This second sense of habit focuses on how the stability and permanence of a habit comes into existence, and how its possessor has behaved in the past and will behave in the future.

Habitus as a "general and permanent manner of being" is not transitory but persists in relation to the change that gave rise to it. In *consuetudo*, habit is more than a permanent state, deriving not merely from the change that engendered it, but continuing to persist in relation to a change that has ceased to be, or a possible and future change that has yet to occur. Habit is the enduring property acknowledged in this very persistence in time where the reaction to the same change is modified and effort diminishes. *Consuetudo* also implies an interiorization or appropriation on the part of the subject of a force acting upon him. In the subject himself, it presupposes a special receptivity, potentiality or aptitude for such appropriation. A stone, for instance, will never acquire the habit of rising no matter how many times it is thrown into the air. Fire can never be taught to burn downwards.⁶ It is important to note at this early stage the crucial role the given nature of an entity plays in its capacity to acquire a habit, a factor that plays a central role in Rousseau's treatment of the subject. Habituation or *consuetudo*, as every pedagogue knows, represents the preparation for moral discipline by producing in the subject, through frequent

³ Ravaisson, *De L'Habitude*, ed. by Jean Baruzi (Paris, Alcan, 1927), p. 1.

⁴ Jacques L. A. Chevalier, *L'Habitude: essai de métaphysique scientifique* (Paris: Boivin, 1929) p. 7 et seq.

⁵ *De L'Habitude*, p. 1.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103^a19-23.

repetition of acts, a spontaneous inclination for the Good. Ravaisson, after Aristotle and Descartes, assigns this type of habit to the category of ethics and education, terming it a “disposition” and a “virtue”.⁷ The influence of habit (*consuetudo*) provides a continuity, a liaison between the events of yesterday, today and tomorrow. As such, habit is both a form of determinism arising from the past and a forward-looking wisdom or prudence that tends to the future.

In this sense, *consuetudo*, like *habitus*, resembles nature. Nature looks both ways: as cause and effect, the process of acquiring and perfecting what we have potentially or pre-dispositionally as well as a state or possession that will influence future states and events by disposing us in a certain way. One way of perceiving the relation between nature and habit is by way of an integration by the former of the latter. The effects of a change may be permanently incorporated; *consuetudo* may become *habitus* in time. Nature is cumulative because, although a permanent entity, it also absorbs change. This process describes an ideal evolution itself subject to natural principles; it constitutes what ought to be rather than what is. The relation between nature and habit stands in need of elucidation since Rousseau frequently regards them as at odds with one another. Indeed, habit is often responsible for a bifurcation of nature into second nature.

In attempting to define the relationship between habit and nature, philosophers begin by establishing differences between them but then tend to obscure or destroy these differences when speaking of ‘second nature’ to account for the mysterious quality of habit. “Habit”, says Aristotle, “is already like nature” since it is created by frequency. Frequency is a relative term and habit differs from nature in admitting more exceptions, for “as soon as a thing has become habit it is virtually natural; habit is a thing not unlike nature; what happens often is akin to what happens always, natural events happening always, habitual events often”.⁸ Events belonging to the category of habit may overlap but not fully coincide with those of the natural, for these are far more regular. Having drawn this distinction, Aristotle then undermines it by maintaining that a practice long pursued at last assumes the status of a “second nature”.⁹ Jacques Chevalier, who

⁷ “L’habitude est donc une disposition, à l’égard d’un changement, engendrée dans un être par la continuité ou la répétition de ce même changement”, *De L’Habitude*, p. 2.

⁸ *Rhetoric*, I, 11, 1370^a7.

⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152^a30-31.

starts from similar premises, is clearer on these differences. Habit produces a second nature that, compared to true, original nature, is similar in effect but dissimilar in its essence which is repetition. We cannot, therefore, liken habit to nature, either in structure or in source, because it can be acquired, modified or completely lost and therefore is not as inherent to being as nature.¹⁰

Rousseau says as much about education and its relation to nature with the result that the complexities and ambivalence of this relationship also emerge in his writings. Habit is poised between the corruption of our natural inheritance and its affirmation. The expression *seconde nature* inevitably entails a pejorative significance because it posits the existence of an occluded first, underlying and true nature. Habit considered as an expedient to assist nature (*seconder la nature*) constitutes an altogether different proposition. In the best tradition of educators, Rousseau sees habituation as nothing less than the proper destination of education itself: “l’éducation n’est certainement qu’une habitude” (IV, 248).¹¹ As the intervention of human art, habit represents a positive, desired and even necessary catalyst if human nature, understood as fundamentally good, is to realise itself. If habit represents both a potential corruption of nature and its affirmation, our task would seem an easy one, namely, that we simply distinguish the effects of habits according to whether they impede or promote nature. The uneasy relationship between nature and habit subsists, however, for the problematic co-existence of nature and the status of second nature sponsored by habit remains unaccounted for. It is not possible to define the relationship between nature and habit without first fixing the true import and character of second nature.

[3.1] *Nature, Habit and Second Nature*

Long-standing and widespread inaccuracies and misapprehensions about second nature pose obstacles to a proper evaluation of its place in Rousseau’s thought. In an early contribution to the

¹⁰ *L’Habitude*, pp. 12-14.

¹¹ In a letter to Mme Delessert, Rousseau reiterates that education consists solely in contracting good habits in childhood which will assist rather than ruin a child’s natural endowment (CC, XXXIX, 264).

debate, Albert Lemoine took issue with the opening line of *Emile* (“Tout est bien, sortant des mains de l’auteur des choses: tout dégénère entre les mains de l’homme”, IV, 245) arguing that although God makes all things good, nature’s work remains incomplete without the progress of a second nature fostered by human efforts.¹² Yet, Rousseau argues that nature alone provides only the conditions for its fulfilment, not its necessary realisation. Divine handiwork merely ensures an indispensable provision that allows humans to develop into rational and moral beings but this remains the, as yet, unfulfilled end of a *first*, not a second, nature. In education, Patrick Riley attempts to square denaturation with the creation and exercise of the morally autonomous will by pointing to Emile who, at the end of his education, freely consents to assume the selfhood or “second nature” engendered by the tutor’s efforts.¹³ David Cameron, meanwhile, claims Rousseau “grasped the notion that the historical process shapes and forms human beings and produces a second nature fully as important and “natural” as the first”.¹⁴ Every development of this second nature “is a condition which is appropriate to man at each point in the history of the species”, a condition he may or may not “accept or strive to achieve”.¹⁵ This interpretation fails to draw an important distinction, necessary when discussing the Rousseauian conception of human perfectibility, between the *originary* and the *natural*, a distinction to which I shall be returning.¹⁶ Burgelin, who draws this distinction but fails to capitalise on its full significance, also appeals to second nature in order to conceptualise the continuous development of the properly moral life from the natural. Acts performed out of instinctive self-interest or pity must, he says, transform themselves when performed consciously in a just, contractual society through habit and reason: “Nous entrons alors dans une nouvelle zone d’existence: la raison nous invite à renouer le lien en une seconde nature”.¹⁷

Leaning towards the same error are those commentators who avail themselves of the term *denaturation*, and all its unfortunate connotations, as a term of art to describe the emancipation of the innate and instinctive into their civil and moral forms. Denaturation and the existence of a second nature issues directly from the imperative, as some see it, of Rousseau’s educational and

¹² *L’Habitude et l’instinct* (Paris: Ballière, 1875), p. 76.

¹³ ‘Rousseau’s general will: freedom of a particular kind’, in *Rousseau and liberty*, pp. 1-28 (pp. 2 & 10).

¹⁴ *The Social Thought of Rousseau and Burke* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1973), p. 83.

¹⁵ *The Social Thought of Rousseau and Burke*, pp. 92-93.

¹⁶ *La Philosophie de l’existence*, p. 218.

¹⁷ *La Philosophie de l’existence*, p. 222.

political theory which demands a radical break between the properly social sphere of human existence and the given of its natural inheritance.¹⁸ It leads, in effect, to a second nature but one that assumes deformed and travestied characteristics, betraying and counterfeiting the first.¹⁹ The denaturation thesis is highly problematic for three reasons. First, it lends itself admirably to totalitarian readings of Rousseau's social theory as irredeemably totalitarian because it isolates Rousseau's educational and political methods of regeneration from their avowed ambitions to restore human freedom.²⁰ Second, and consistent with the spirit of his philosophy, it is never nature that we ought to eradicate but, Rousseau holds, the conditions that foster denaturation and problematise our nature. Lastly, denaturation admits the illogicality that a natural finality may work against human interests so that it requires educators and legislators to reverse it. Employing denaturation as an inescapable category to think man's properly moral existence in society presupposes an incommensurability between nature and what men, by their own intellectual and moral efforts, create for themselves. But such a radical break generates serious logical inconsistencies. Denaturation simultaneously denotes the, by definition, essentially negative manoeuvre of education and politics and their positive dividend. Denaturation both undermines Rousseau's genetic anthropology and renders it illogical since the passage from the physical to the moral must, in this case, be unnatural. However, the moral in Rousseau does not reverse but restates values implicit in the physical. Rousseau's meta-ethical naturalism and the continuity between *le physique* and *le moral*, explored in greater detail in the following section, render the concept of denaturation entirely redundant. Rousseau allows for emancipation and perfectibility

¹⁸ Commentators feel prompted into adopting this position principally due to the following remarks in *Emile*: "L'homme naturel est tout pour lui: il est l'unité numérique, l'entier absolu qui n'a de rapport qu'à lui-même ou à son semblable. L'homme civil n'est qu'une unité fractionnaire qui tient au dénominateur, et dont la valeur est dans son rapport avec l'entier, qui est le corps social. Les bonnes institutions sociales sont celles qui savent le mieux dénaturer l'homme, lui ôter son existence absolue pour lui en donner une relative, et transporter le *moi* dans l'unité commune; en sorte que chaque particulier ne se croie plus un, mais partie de l'unité, et ne soit plus sensible que dans le tout" (IV, 249). In this context, Iain Hampsher-Monk talks of "the denaturing character of political association", 'Rousseau and totalitarianism—with hindsight?', in *Rousseau and Liberty*, pp. 267-88 (p. 278). Unencumbered with the duties of citizenship, Geraint Parry claims that "Emile would have to be denatured [...] in order to fit into a political community", 'Thinking one's own thoughts: autonomy and the citizen', in *Rousseau and liberty*, pp. 99-120 (p. 107).

¹⁹ In this light, Burgelin's idea of a "dénaturation naturelle" is self-contradictory (*La Philosophie de l'existence de Rousseau*, p. 484). Horowitz rightly says that "the perfection of art [for Rousseau] did not mean the substitution of a second nature based upon a renunciation of the first" (*Rousseau, Nature and History*, p. 213), but then pursues the exploration of "excessive" and "necessary" denaturations to distinguish society as it is versus society as it should be (pp. 216-40).

²⁰ See, for instance, Lester G. Crocker, *Rousseau's "Social contract": An interpretative essay* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University Press, 1968), pp. 20 & 39, n. 39; 'Rousseau's *soi-disant liberty*', in *Rousseau and liberty*, pp. 244-66 (p. 247).

without denaturation; the moral sphere belongs to a continuous unfolding order of things, the totality of which he considers 'natural' (IV, 248).

To 'denature' nature means to interfere with the purpose or final cause of nature. The acquired propensities of second nature render us unnatural; those that assist and realise nature cannot belong to this category. The rejection of second nature, understood as a positive outcome of habit and a moral ideal to which we ought to aspire, occurs in the first book of *Emile*. Rousseau draws a distinction between denaturation or second nature, and the legitimate office of habituation through education. Some inclinations, the argument runs, appear to be natural but do not necessarily originate from nature if they are acquired through purely external or involuntary means. Neither inherent to being nor the product of volition, such tendencies do not truly belong to us. A plant, for instance, continues to grow in a horizontal direction as long as conditions dictate but immediately resumes vertical extension when the artificial constraints are removed (IV, 247-48). The tropic analogy appears a little imprecise since no one would claim vegetation possesses a will capable of being suppressed, but the meaning of Rousseau's thinking is clear enough. Actions imposed from the exterior do not eradicate nature, just as plants resume their 'habitus' as soon as we allow them to do so. If nature is capable of recovering its powers when a change of circumstances permits, clearly there is an apparent nature and a true nature independent of these circumstances. Habit, claims Rousseau, suppresses but never erases nature: "Si j'accorde que l'habitude peut quelquefois étouffer la nature, je concluerai de cela-même que l'une n'est pas l'autre" (IV, 1295, var. [b]). If nature survives habit, habit and nature must, therefore, be distinct.

Rousseau carefully avoids identifying nature with existent but only apparently natural forms. Second nature ought not to be confused with nature as a pre-existing, efficient cause that subtends and survives independently of the change that engendered the former. The acquisition of inclinations or tendencies may be the outcome of habits imposed by force. These, however, do not eradicate nature: "Tant qu'on reste dans le même état on peut garder [les inclinations] qui résultent de l'habitude et qui nous sont le moins naturelles; mais sitôt que la situation change l'habitude cesse, et le naturel revient" (IV, 248). The creation of a second nature always leaves the residue of a 'first nature' so to speak, a more elemental inclination that may subsequently re-

affirm itself. Second nature always remains vulnerable to evacuation by a more primitive original nature whenever a habit is contracted by force. The second draft of the manuscript drives the point home: “Il est arrivé qu’à force de rester en prison un homme s’y accoutumât et n’en voulut plus sortir, qu’il s’y plaise et la préfère à la liberté, mais s’il eût repris quinze jours l’usage de sa liberté jamais il ne l’eût voulu reprendre” (IV, 248(a), 1294). Like a plant’s vertical growth, the recovery of freedom belongs to the nature of man.

Far from a necessary extension into its social forms, second nature stands in direct conflict with nature. The condition of its existence lies in the fact that it shares with nature a relative immunity from change. Some habits *seem* natural but only imperfectly mimic nature’s permanence. However, that which substitutes nature, not being nature, must be a corruption of nature. Our appetites, Rousseau contends, become elaborated in a way that is alien to nature: “Plus nous nous éloignons de l’état de la nature, plus nous perdons de nos goûts naturels; ou plutôt l’habitude nous fait une seconde nature que nous substituons tellement à la première que nul d’entre nous ne connaît plus celle-ci” (IV, 407-08). Contrary to Burgelin’s commentary on *Emile*, habits contracted through education and deemed necessary for a social existence do not “graft” (*greffer*) a second nature onto a first (IV, 1328). This position is, in effect, self-refuting; denaturation does not lead to the proper perfectibility of the human race. A second nature *already* grafts itself onto the first, as the *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité* makes clear: “l’âme et les passions humaines s’altèrent insensiblement, changent pour ainsi dire de nature” (III, 192). This state of affairs describes what is, not what ought to be. The outcome known as second nature represents a false perfectibility (*perfectibilité prétendue*, III, 133) or nature altered for the worse by the development of civilisation as we know it. Artificial conventions have deprived our natural inheritance, deflecting our innate dispositions from their properly natural tendencies and causing damage to being. We have acquired a bodily constitution that renders us weak and feeble, prone to illness and disease, and a condition of spontaneous, egoistic self-regard (*amour-propre*) moved by the hundred passions that it spawns. Second nature is the deformed expression of true nature which it hides but which, like the statue of Glaucus, may be recovered (III, 122).

One might yet argue that *Emile* enshrines the denaturation and second nature I have deemed self-contradictory and alien to Rousseau's intentions. Such represent the various adaptations that aim to promote a graduated loss of instinctual or reflex behaviour in the child. The tutor, for instance, takes much trouble to overcome his pupil's fear of the dark, of silence and of the unknown, gradually suppressing the usual sensory-induced reflexes of the bodily 'machine' by arranging nocturnal games played in the company of friends to associate the objects of fear with ideas of merriment and enjoyment (IV, 384-88). One might also point out that Rousseau sometimes places the demands of utility and circumstance above those of nature. A natural education may well set out to preserve nature in society, but it must overrule nature's demands whenever necessary: "Livrez-le [i.e., the child] d'abord sans gêne à la loi de la nature, mais n'oubliez pas que parmi nous il doit être au-dessus de cette loi" (IV, 376). Rousseau does not, therefore, uphold the pre-eminence of nature since it must yield to demands determined by a social context.

A reply to this counter-objection comes in the form of the important distinction proposed by Burgelin between the *original* and the *natural*, one he derives from a consideration of human nature as contrasted with what Rousseau refers to as "la nature *actuelle* de l'homme" (III, 123; my emphasis).²¹ The latter constitutes itself as infinitely larger than the former because in addition to what man 'is' as a metaphysical entity, it also contains everything that man has become and may become through history. "Nature" thus oscillates between two prime significations: a static sense of original simplicity and a sense of dynamic perfectibility set in motion by the demands of external circumstances.²² The state of nature is inferior to human nature which extends beyond the minimal concept of 'natural man' and his spontaneous, primitive inclinations. For *Emile*, these discriminations signify that in rising above the "law of nature", one passes beyond an original natural inheritance towards a more accomplished nature whose development nevertheless remains faithful to a natural finality.

An additional and complementary argument derives from recognising nature as a *structure*—categorically ruling out interpretations of Rousseau's philosophy as primitivist—whose finality strives towards the unity of its elements, particularly those that relate to man's dual psycho-

²¹ *La Philosophie de l'existence*, p. 218.

²² *La Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 218-19.

physiological make-up. In studying the successive modifications to the equilibrium between the physical and the moral, education strives to sponsor a perfectibility that preserves a natural finality in the civil state.²³ The theory of education, outlined by *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and developed in *Emile*, recommends that nature be allowed to show its hand before we assist it in receiving specific, fixed forms. The imposition of premature or alien forms create a gulf between habit and nature and opens the way for second nature and all its contradictions. Emile's education must begin with no particular determination: "Appropriiez l'éducation de l'homme à l'homme [...] en travaillant à le former exclusivement pour un état, vous le rendez inutile à tout autre" (IV, 468). Premature habits make the individual inflexible and vulnerable to the dictates of necessity. They extend and distort legitimate needs, creating superfluous demands that lead to servitude. Food and sleep taken too regularly become necessary at the end of the same intervals (IV, 282). This explains, on the surface at least, the ambivalent attitude to habit in *Emile*. The pupil must contract no habits or he must contract them all which comes to the same thing, namely, an invulnerability to the arbitrary and the contingent. Emile must learn to go to bed late, rise early, be awakened suddenly or sit up all night without ill effects; he will be ambidextrous, accustomed to eat at any hour of the day, to tolerate being alone day or night, and inured to the seasons. As such, habit precludes the advent of a being at odds with itself and thus rejoins a natural finality, rather than inaugurating a second nature, by working towards the individual's "reign of freedom" (*le règne de sa liberté*, IV, 282).²⁴

Emile provides the fullest exploration of the ongoing perfectibility of nature through habit. From the exercise of the senses and its ensuing *raison sensitive* to the acquisition of manual dexterity, habit extends the possibilities of the pupil's true nature rather than forcing it to degenerate it into some unstable second nature. Emile is familiar with the tools of many trades, his senses are acute and well-practised. All that he lacks is sufficient skill to rival the speed and diligence of good workmen although he already enjoys the advantage of supple limbs and body. The rest may be acquired through habit (IV, 475). Having put the body to instrumental use, he

²³ *La Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 219-20, 234.

²⁴ When Rousseau turns to the education of women, he focuses his sights on accommodating the female nature, as he sees it, in an *unequal* society. Habit again secures freedom by accustoming women to the renunciations that the necessity of social arrangements demand of them. Trained for restraint and obedience, young women spare themselves future suffering by accepting the impositions of propriety and the will of others. They will learn to bear the yoke so as not to feel it (IV, 709).

must acquire a *habitus* that will supplement *potentia*, consolidating ability into skill. Instrumentation is neither natural or unnatural in itself; the decisive factor is the use to which it is put. The institution of the division of labour described in the *Second Discours* turns one's specialisation into dependency on others. Instrumentation serves to deprive the individual of autonomy. The reverse is true of *Emile*; acquired proclivities through habit underwrite self-sufficiency, prolonging and perfecting nature.

To sum up the argument so far, habits and their ensuing adaptations always uphold the supreme law of nature: self-preservation and the avoidance of self-contradiction. In the objections I have discussed, legitimate habits lead not to denaturation through loss of instinct but outcomes that remain within the bounds of a first nature. In effect, they endorse nature, understood as the source of freedom, by other means, namely, the efforts of progressive self-conquest. Fear of the dark undoubtedly derives from an appropriate response to external stimuli each time the interests of survival are threatened. But the loss of such responses do not entail a form of denaturation. Adaptation preserves the elemental instinct and guarantees greater freedom. For *Emile*, the elimination of fear means a liberation from the tyrannies of the imagination and, ultimately, the recovery of freedom at a higher level. Similarly, the boy will drown unless he can conquer his fear of water and learn to swim. Social man rightly educated and trained represents the outcome of a first nature which includes nature as the vocation of progressive self-transcendence. The true role of habit is that of a catalyst for nature towards a discipline that avoids servitude, a condition that Rousseau eminently and invariably holds as *unnatural*.

Fundamental ambivalences nevertheless remain between nature and habit which the obliteration of second nature fails to remove. The relationship between nature and habit is a complex one and generates several ambiguities that stem primarily from the nature of habit itself. As we have noted, habits may equally be immune *and* subject to alteration or erasure through external circumstances; they are both essential *and* accidental; inherent or categorical features traced upon the self's material structure on the one hand, *and nothing but* dispositions that will alter according to different external conditions on the other. Education, says Rousseau, is certainly nothing but habit; however, he continues, it is also true that some forget or lose the

habits implanted in them by education while others retain them (IV, 248). How, we might ask, can this difference come about?

Aristotle reminds us that not everything may contract a habit. Habit is fundamentally linked to the nature of a given entity, a special receptivity, potentiality or aptitude necessary for it to acquire a permanent disposition by internalising and making integral to the structure of its being something external or which did not formerly belong to it. In order to penetrate further into the mysterious relation of habit to nature, we need to uphold Ravaisson's distinction between *habitus* and *consuetudo*. *Habitus*, notes Ravaisson, shares many affinities with nature. The same can be said of Rousseauian habit although this conclusion comes as the result of a profound and original solution to a classic problem. It will be the task of the rest of this chapter to demonstrate how habit taken in its etymological sense unites a capacity for *having* with that of *becoming* and provides nature with the successive history of its evolution. The unity of 'having' and 'becoming' within the single phenomenon of habit accomplishes itself by means of a double-aspect quality peculiar to habit as both condition or state and disposition or tendency. A further duality will show that habit operates on two levels by which nature comes to assume new inherent forms both from within and without. Habit constitutes a *modality* of nature, a natural means by which nature itself comes to assume superior forms. Habit negotiates nature's passage from a potential *tendency* into a permanent and actualised *structure* of being by providing an opportunity for dispositions to pass into *habitus*. Nature, meanwhile, lies on either side of habit, as its origin and as its outcome.

[3.2] *The Nature of Habit, the Habit of Nature*

In order to ask 'what is habit?', Rousseau forces us to ask, 'what is nature?' The answer, provided in *Emile*, states that nature is a series of "dispositions" (or habits) that succeed one another according to a spontaneously natural order, an unfolding relationship between self and world. This begins with primitive sensibility predicated on the imperatives of pain and pleasure,

and passes through the imperative of utility to rest with moral self-awareness, that is, the hegemony of reason capable of conceiving its own happiness:

Nous naissons sensibles, et dès notre naissance nous sommes affectés de diverses manières par les objets qui nous environnent. Sitôt que nous avons, pour ainsi dire, la conscience de nos sensations, nous sommes disposés à rechercher ou à fuir les objets qui les produisent, d'abord selon qu'elles nous sont agréables ou déplaisantes, puis selon la convenance ou disconvenance que nous trouvons entre nous et ces objets, et enfin selon les jugements que nous en portons sur l'idée de bonheur ou de perfection que la raison nous donne. Ces dispositions s'étendent et s'affermissent à mesure que nous devenons plus sensibles et plus éclairés: mais, contraintes par nos habitudes, elles s'altèrent plus ou moins par nos opinions. Avant cette altération elles sont ce que j'appelle en nous la nature (IV, 248).

Of note is Rousseau's view of such dispositions as natural and this in a two-fold manner: in themselves and in the order in which they occur. An evolution unfolds in a certain order itself considered natural. Nature's essence fosters within individuals dispositions that incline them towards the Good, both intellectual and moral, at an appointed time during their genetic development.²⁵ Habit potentially threatens to arrest this natural development, setting in a rigid mould what ought to be passage and progression from one tenor of being to another. While habit may interrupt nature's course, it may also sponsor and affirm this progression. If commentators neglect to cite this passage as a positive definition of nature, this is probably due to Rousseau's original, not to say paradoxical and even tautological, method of defining his terms, a factor that justifies withholding this aspect of nature in reserve for a chapter on habit.

Disposition in *Emile* refers to a fundamental quality and orientation that appropriately characterises sensibility (or the will) at any given moment of its genetic history. A disposition is such that one is either well or ill disposed relative to something external at a particular moment. To be so disposed Rousseau deems 'natural'. Aristotle and Scholastic philosophy also agree on a certain identity of disposition ($\delta\iota\alpha\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$, *dispositio*) and habit (*hexis*, *habitus*). Habits are dispositions but not all dispositions are habitual. Aside from simple dispositions—a disposition to health, for instance, which is unstable and does not enjoy duration—dispositions are tendencies that can develop into habits when they gain a degree of stability and firmness. Both Aristotle and Aquinas define habit as, first, a 'state', 'condition' or 'having' (*hexis*, *habendo*);

²⁵ "Elle dispose l'enfant à tout ce qui peut le mener au vrai quand il est en état de l'entendre, et au bien quand il est en état de l'aimer" (IV, 945).

and second, this having considered in terms of a relation with regards to something else (*se habet*), a disposition or orientation (*aliquo modo se habere*), that determines the nature or activity of the subject, orienting it towards a given direction and in accordance with the subject's ends.²⁶ Habit (*hexis*) is thus a disposition that reflects both a state of being (*being disposed*) and a possession (*having dispositions*).²⁷

What unifies disposition and habit—a possession or 'having'—is a relation to something *extrinsic*. However, Rousseau also regards habit as a phenomenon *intrinsic* to nature and herein lies the solution to the problematic relation between habit and nature. Rousseau declares "il faut borner le nom de nature aux *habitudes conformes à la nature*" (IV, 248; my emphasis). In holding that nature is habit, Rousseau seems, at a first glance, to be siding with the very position held by the sensualists and empiricists and which the passage in *Emile* supposedly aims to cast into doubt ("La nature, nous dit-on, n'est que l'habitude", IV, 247).²⁸ With a flourish as polemical as it is rhetorical, Rousseau concedes ground to proponents of the view that nature is a construct, only to subsequently and doubly reaffirm nature against their reductionism. Rousseau encapsulates habit within two conceptions of nature: as a pre-existing normative principle or source and as an actual manifestation or Form. Like the Aristotelian view of nature as formal or efficient and final cause, the first is not exhausted by the second. It is also clear that, in so doing, Rousseau employs the term *habitude* in a special, technical sense which various philosophical analyses of the term 'habit' help to bring to light.

Scholasticism regards habit or *habitus* as a category of 'accident' (*accidens*) or what would now be termed the *phenomenon* of being, that is, a predicable that accounts for change and modification without implicating a substance in its essential quality. For Augustine, to describe an accident in terms of *habitus* corresponds to speaking of its "condition".²⁹ The reality of a habit is distinct, nature being the referent that habit expresses. Understanding *habitus* as a predicate of

²⁶ See *Metaphysics*, Δ, 19 & 20 and *Summa Theologiae*, question 49, article 2. Aristotle describes habit (*hexis*) as a "having" or "possession" (*Metaphysics*, 1022^b5-10); Aquinas in particular emphasises the etymology of habit, *habere* or "to have", *Summa Theologiae*, 60 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1963-1975), 1a2ae, 49, 1, vol. XXII, pp. 4-9.

²⁷ *Metaphysics*, Δ, 1022^b6-9.

²⁸ From what may be gathered from the second copy of the manuscript of *Emile*, Rousseau was seeking to reply to Voltaire's proposition "La nature [...] n'est rien que l'habitude" and, most probably, to the thesis that prized education at the expense of nature, the position routinely adopted by Helvétius and other sensationists (IV, 1294-95, var. [a]).

²⁹ *The Trinity*, 5.7.

accident characterises the relation between habit and nature in Rousseau as the dependency of habit (predicate) on nature (subject/substance). In positing nature as a habit that *conforms* to nature, Rousseau positions nature on either side of habit, the which enjoys no autonomous existence of its own, either because it conforms to some end which nature determines in advance or because habit represents a mode by which nature actualises its own potential and realises itself externally as a power. Habit as an accident of nature exists as both extrinsic and intrinsic to nature: extrinsic, because of the extent and forms nature may take through perfectibility (*habitus* or ‘having’); intrinsic, since habit denotes an activity of nature in *transcendent mode* (‘becoming’).

Implicit here is an important notion, one which we have already examined, concerning the relation between nature understood as an *originary* and *natural* phenomenon, and one that the idea of the *conformity* between habits and natural principles—a permissible latitude with regards to the forms nature may take through habit—serves to emphasise. Recognising that nature entails a habit that *conforms* to nature underlines the dependency of habit on nature. In order to conform to nature, habit must be similar, analogous or identical to an original or natural model; it must conform by being in harmony with a natural law or end. Conformity may also entail the literal meaning of “having the same form” (*conformis*). Aristotle, for instance, employs the term $\omicron\mu\omicron\epsilon\iota\delta\eta\varsigma$ to denote the tendency, in natural and artificial productions, for like to generate like.³⁰ Considered as a cognate (*con* + *form*), Rousseau’s expression—“habitudes conformes à la nature”—denotes the addition of Form, of exterior appearance, mode, a particular manifestation, expression or material aspect or simply the being of a thing (*forma dat esse rei*). Held in this sense, nature exists as a formal cause, the shape or determination imposed on being through the condition of habit.

The statement of *Emile* does not, however, contradict the empirical conception of nature whereby habit constitutes the occasion for nature to come into being. Although necessary, habit in itself is not sufficient for the permanent forms nature may take, and for this reason Rousseau also considers the action in Aristotelian terms whereby habit provides Form and brings a pre-existing potential into actuality. Habit and nature cannot be simply reduced to the inclusion or

³⁰ *Metaphysics*, 1032^a26.

exclusion of one set of properties in another. The class of the first can overlap into the second but nature is not reducible to a set of habits.

Rousseauian habit is integral to the process by which a thing comes to attain its proper end, to be what it was intended to be. Although a state that resembles Form or Actuality, habit also denotes an intermediary activity between the Potential and the Actual. The pivotal status of habit is a complex one. Viewed from different perspectives, habit appears equally a state and an activity, a having and a becoming. Like nature, habit looks both ways: it represents both cause and effect, an extended process of acquiring and perfecting what we have potentially or pre-dispositionally, as well as a state or possession that will influence future states and events in turn. Habit extended over time refers to an Actuality in relation to the past, a Potentiality with respect to the future. Viewed in isolation, habit is involved in a complex relay with nature. Nature lies on either side of the habitual process which mediates the realisation of nature from Potential to Actual by actualising natural pre-dispositions or inclinations.

In passing from a potential to an actual state or possession, there lies a further double aspect to habit. In processes leading to change, habit appears to be in two places at once. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes habit as a possession which is a *kind* of “actuality”, meaning that habit is Actuality in two senses. The idea resurfaces in *De Anima* where the two senses³¹ of Actuality relate to each other as the possession of knowledge and its exercise.³¹ Through practice, a faculty or capacity can become a settled dispositional state: an aptitude for languages, for example, can lead to bilingualism. The acquired habit may remain dormant; only through full use of the knowledge or skill does it fully become actuality or activity. We may designate the first Actuality, that is, knowledge understood simply as the possession of a capacity to function without doing so, as Form₁. A person may be a French speaker without actually speaking French at this very moment. This power enjoys an existence even when not exercised.³² Habit therefore finds itself in a tensional relationship between Matter and Form₁, a hinge between Potentiality and the First Actuality. The second Actuality, or Form₂, refers to the full exercise and activity of this aptitude, the actual performance of linguistic skill. As a settled state or

³¹ *De Anima*, 412^a9-11.

³² *Metaphysics*, Θ3, 1046^b29.

possession, habit is also located in a disposition of Form₁ to pass to Form₂ given appropriate conditions.

The use of habit as a hinge between potential faculties and their realisation—Matter and Form₁—and the concrete form of history, denotes a widespread device in Rousseau's genetic accounts of human perfectibility. The expedient of habit often ties up discrete and atomic events, providing a matrix for the ethical once the necessity of survival or instinctive desire initiate human relations. Habit characterises the activity of nature in transcendent mode as it accedes to its various forms. Without the mediation of habit, we would be at a loss to conceive the development of sociability or the creation of the family, for instance. If man is a social animal by nature “ou du moins fait pour le devenir” (IV, 1109), this means that he is not inevitably social, that sociability requires the fulfilment of certain conditions. Men first assemble for reasons of mutual protection but habit soon surpasses this initial and potentially self-liquidating necessity and they congregate for no other reason other than that they have done so before (V, 403). Where utilitarian motives first provide the impetus for action, habit then consolidates this into a social arrangement through pleasure. Rousseau deems the preference for one mate over another as derivative of social conventions; habit, meanwhile, accounts for the unthinking but recurring modes of behaviour when partners of different sexes unite to reproduce (V, 406). On the bond between father and son, Rousseau claims “le vrai sentiment de la nature [...] a besoin pour se soutenir au moins durant l'enfance d'être appuyé sur l'habitude” (I, 558). The reinforcement of “blood ties”, where a natural bond between members of a family pass into an actual and durable state, similarly requires habit (IV, 258, 259). While nature alone provides *pre-dispositions*, habit is responsible for their emergence into durable dispositions (Form₁) which may themselves remain inactive or become actualised under appropriate circumstances (Form₂).

The same pivotal role for habit in perfectibility occurs with the actualisation of latent intellectual faculties. The *prudence machinale*, the prototype reflection of the second *Discours*, offers a prime example:

[l']application réitérée des êtres divers à lui-même, et les uns aux autres, dûnt naturellement engendrer dans l'esprit de l'homme les perceptions de certains rapports. Ces relations que nous exprimons par les mots de grand, de petit, de fort, de faible, de vite, de lent, de peureux, de hardi, et d'autres idées pareilles, comparées au besoin, et presque sans y songer, produisirent enfin chez lui

quelque sorte de réflexion, ou plutôt une prudence machinale qui lui indiquait les précautions les plus nécessaires à sa sûreté (III, 165).

Rousseau once again appears to follow the sensualists in allowing reflection to emerge solely from the perception of relations. The function of the soul being merely to receive sensations, Condillac, Helvétius and others explained all mental operations as the effect of some inherent characteristic of sensations themselves. In reality, the Second *Discours* remains consistent with Rousseau's opposition elsewhere to passive representations of mind. The mistake of the sensualist school, in this respect, lies in ignoring that habit can only work with pre-existing possibilities. Thus, while reflection cannot originate in repetition, repetition provides a crucial pivot and catalyst between inactive capacities and their full deployment, triggering self-conscious thought into activity. Habit is the conditional proposition for what Broad called a *supreme disposition* of the mind, an inherent capacity to pronounce judgement on the relations it perceives.³³

Central to the notion of habit and the twin characteristic of nature as a 'having' as well as a becoming' lies the self-transcendent quality of nature which I have been examining. Nature denotes the possession of an essence by virtue of which one "is". However, what one "is" is never a static affair but gives rise to, and is the effect of, a process that incorporates new, ideally superior, forms. Nature is cumulative, a *having* derived from of a process of *becoming*. The category of the natural subsumes that which did not, in an important sense, formerly belong it. Nature represents a continuant as well as originator: it admits change, development, progress which pass into the permanent structure of itself. In transcendent mode, nature constitutes a 'having' capable of receiving and possessing additional forms although, as the imperative of 'conformity' reminds us, the form in question must satisfy a natural principle or end. Permanence appears to represent the general criterion that distinguishes the habits of nature from those of second nature. The source of a habit is not an indifferent to its value. Habits imposed from the exterior or contracted under constraint, like the forced horizontal growth of plants, are unnatural. Whenever habit is dissolved and nature re-asserts herself, we are dealing with a bad

³³ *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 267.

education. By contrast, where the natural and the habitual are one, habits subsist unaltered; nature transforms habit into a permanent and indistinguishable feature of itself.

[3.3] *Natural and Ethical Selves*

Many of the habits contracted by Emile are created by the tutor and although the pupil has yet to acquire an independent will of his own, these habits remain natural despite originating in an external source because they harmonise with nature's endeavour to produce free and robust individuals. The tutor imposes habits from the exterior but these are neither unnatural in themselves nor, for this reason, cast off or lost at the soonest opportunity.

Although, in an ideal sense, nature and habit are not distinct from a single process whereby being ascends to superior forms, an important boundary divides those immanent habits of nature from those that are incompletely immanent. We may distinguish these habits with the help of Aquinas's division between *entitative* or functional habits and *operative* habits.³⁴ Located in the body, entitative habits are directly enacted by nature and affect the disposition (*dispositio*) or 'state' between elements in a thing's nature. The perfection of health, for instance, constitutes one such disposition. Operative habits, by contrast, refer to dispositions located in the soul exercised by the will to dispose and develop powers or capacities. Despite these qualitative differences, one finds an implicit continuity in Rousseau's view of habit that also applies to such categories as *le physique* and *le moral*, and the natural and ethical selves.

Entitative habits illustrate the most obvious way in which nature, by virtue of its relative *plasticity*, is capable of receiving permanent forms by incorporating immediacy into itself through habit. Nature's plasticity allows the body to take the form we give to it through the interventions of education:

Avant que l'habitude du corps soit acquise, on lui donne celle qu'on veut sans danger [...] les fibres [...] molles et flexibles, prennent sans effort le pli qu'on leur donne; celles de l'homme, plus endurcies, ne changent plus qu'avec violence le pli qu'elles ont reçu (IV, 260).

³⁴ *Summa Theologiæ*, 1a2ae, 55, 3-3.

The sum total of past events determines the irreversible structure of *l'économie animale*. In *Emile*, the body eventually acquires a finalised integrity (*la dernière forme* or *consistance*, IV, 778), an integrity that represents the possession of permanent and objective qualities free from further transformation. *L'Habitude du corps*, a consolidation of the general state of the body achieved by avoiding particular habits that ruin its versatility, evokes the neo-medical term *habitus* (*corporis habitudo* or *habitus corporis*), namely, the body considered in its accustomed state as complexion and constitution.³⁵ This habit represents the culmination of an immanent, organic finality of nature, those events presenting themselves in a manner conforming to an order that is consistent for each being in the realisation of its essence.

While always conforming to a natural finality towards well-being and independence, a special category of habits originates indirectly from nature. Gradually, *Emile*'s physical freedom begins to take on a specifically self-determining or properly ethical form as he learns to engage his own will. The passage from biological to moral existence leads from an emancipation negotiated in the face of physical constraints to one based upon a permanent dispositions of the will for the Good (virtue). Operative habit reflects this progression and we pass from naturalist habits rooted in biological demands to those transcendent habits contracted for moral perfectibility.

Having posited the dispositional progress of genetic anthropology as a continuous transition between the natural and the moral, Rousseau later remarks in *Emile* that qualities such as *justice* and moral *goodness* are

de véritables affections de l'âme éclairée par la raison, et qui ne sont qu'un progrès ordonné de nos affections primitives [...] il me suffit de marquer l'ordre et le progrès de nos sentiments et de nos connaissances, relativement à notre constitution (IV, 523; my emphasis).

Elaborating a genetic anthropology in accordance with the fundamental idea of *La Morale sensitive*, ou *le matérialisme du sage*, *Emile* insists that the body is a condition for the development of moral and spiritual beings. Rousseau's meta-ethical naturalism generates a specifically *ethical* materialism. Education works in tandem with nature: "tandis qu'elle forme l'homme physique, nous tâchons de former l'homme moral" (IV, 636). The relation between *le*

³⁵ See the remarks by Jules Lachelier in *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, article 'Habitude', p. 392.

physique and *le moral*, however, signifies more than a process whereby each of these realities emerges in parallel fashion. Rousseau also recommends that we hold back the premature emergence of moral being in order to develop the physical fully in a bid for the greatest possible unity. By advancing the interests of physical vigour and well-being, we invite nature to perform its work and provide reliable instruments for promoting moral order. Rousseau's "system" of education insists on the need *not* to vitiate what is natural in man in making him fit for life in society ("ne pas gâter l'homme de la nature en l'appropriant à la société", II, 612). By means of an ordered progress, education promotes reflexive conscience and moral ideas. Now, education can sponsor the passage between *le physique* and *le moral* because the embodied nature of human existence itself participates in or contains thoroughly moral ends. Conscience and a morally trained will represent the rational and spiritual prolongation of the entitative habits ordained by nature.

The evolving consciousness of the conditions of experience across the passage from physical to moral sensibility reflects a natural outcome. The phenomenology of mind outlined in *Emile*, composed of the three stages in the orientations of the sensibility that reflect the relationship between self and world, illustrate this transition. An aesthetic existence, merely conscious of sensations, instinctively seeks pleasure and avoids pain. The self's awareness of its relation to the external world marks a second stage; attuned to the *effects* of impressions and in conjunction with a growing sense of selfhood, sensibility can discriminate what is proper for its own well-being. Last, and complete with the capacity for judgements mediated by the norms of reason, sensibility gravitates towards persons and objects in a manner consistent with ethical values and the ambitions of personal happiness (IV, 248). The progressive and uninterrupted development of these dispositions into the permanent features of sensibility corresponds to the proper course of human nature. A second nature intervenes to disrupt this progress, producing individuals unaccustomed to heeding reason, dominated by motivations and behaviour inconsistent with their potential. For this reason, *Emile* looks on habit as a "vice" (IV, 421). Illegitimate habits so often interrupt this finality, immobilising the progress of behaviour by placing obstacles to transitions between inferior and superior modes of being. Habit produces a second nature by disrupting the

progress of natural dispositions, limiting individuals either to the elementary imperatives of pain and pleasure or an imperfectly moral condition based on narrow self-interest.

What of Emile's passage from the consolidation and perfection of his material nature to entry into the moral world? The transition pleasure–utility–morality is almost imperceptible because habit once again graduates the passage across successive dispositions or moments of existence. A notable feature of human development, as noted earlier, involves the intervention of habit to bridge the distance between the self's instinctual claims to existence and its participation in social and moral relations. This emerges most clearly in *Emile* where instinctive and automatic modes of behaviour progress to reflexive and moral behaviour over time. For this reason, Rousseau considers habit as one of the three principal inroads of education, positioned at a necessary mid-way stage between *amour de soi* and self-aware moral feeling (IV, 492-93). The confluence of the instinctual with the habitual creates the occasion for a new awareness of moral relations. The infant's inclination towards its nurse is at first "purely mechanical", nothing but the inducement of self-love (*amour de soi*) or the legitimate claim to existence. Attracted to whatever favours its well-being, the child cannot yet perceive others as free and as intention (IV, 492). Later, its affection is borne solely of habit. The child seeks others, not simply because he needs them, but because he is happy when they are there for him: "c'est plutôt connaissance que bienveillance", a matter of simple awareness or perception. Habit engages an active sensibility or a feeling of altruism; the individual acquires a moral relation to others. Without habit, active moral feeling and recognition of others as free and intentional beings cannot emerge from the drive for instinctive self-preservation.

The continuity between naturalist and moral dispositions, physiological state and the will, emerges openly towards the final sections of *Emile*. Conventional education, Rousseau argues, mistakenly considers life to consist of mutually exclusive moments so that, on reaching adulthood, one renounces everything that belonged to childhood. Given that habit's status as the auxiliary of nature, what one "is" is inseparable from what has become. True habits belong to permanent forms, the objective of a successful education, and cannot be lost or cast off, only pooled together with others. Moments of crisis in Emile's life, those major transitional periods marked, for example, by the onset of puberty or the development of reason and entry into

society, represent crucially determining stages during which everything that has been previously learnt, challenged by the potential dangers of a novel situation, risks disintegration. The success or failure of education ultimately rests on negotiating a passage across these delicate transitions:

Bien que nos goûts et nos inclinations changent, ce changement quelquefois assez brusque est adouci par les habitudes. Dans la succession de nos penchants comme dans une bonne dégradation de couleurs l'habile artiste doit rendre les passages imperceptibles, confondre et mêler les teintes [...] l'homme réglé revient toujours à ses anciennes pratiques, et ne perd pas même dans sa vieillesse le goût des plaisirs qu'il aimait enfant (IV, 800).

New habits do not erase older ones. The strategy of acquiring a gradual fund of habits serves to anchor the self. A legitimate education sees life as continuity, a continual building, integration and consolidation of good habits, the armoury against transformation and moral weakness. The ethical life is not a series of so many successive moments *partes extra partes*, decomposed and without unity but a continuum which, thanks to habit, provides a liaison between the events of yesterday, of today and tomorrow.

For Emile, the force of habit and the guarantee of freedom are one and the same thing. The bodily machine, transformed by dint of habit into an instrument of personal freedom, provides a safeguard against immorality and unreason. The unity of personality and moral hegemony depend fundamentally upon a fund of habits acquired in the past, active in the present and potentially at work in the future. These transcend circumstances because they are fully-integrated, natural forms of behaviour and thought, allowing Emile to preserve the stability of his dispositions when faced with new developments in life. The threats posed by Sophie and the lure of *mollesse*, or luxury and artificial living, illustrate the advantages of habituation. Rousseau re-works a theme elaborated in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, namely, that physical weakness and lethargy lead to neurasthenia and others disorders. Nature dictates that the sexes ordinarily live apart and prescribes a sedentary existence for women only; men who shut themselves away in *salons* and accustom themselves to the companionship of the female sex damage their constitutions. Bound by the artificial constraints of fashionable effeminacy, such men prove incapable of remaining still, impelled, in spite of themselves, to ceaseless activity and movement, but able to cope with only the most trivial tasks: "Voyez ces [...] hommes toujours contraints dans ces prisons volontaires, se lever, se rasseoir, aller et venir sans cesse à la cheminée, à la

fenêtre, prendre et poser cent fois un écran, feuilleter des livres, parcourir des tableaux, tourner, pirouetter par la chambre” (*Lettre à d’Alembert*, V, 93). By contrast, Emile avoids enslavement to laxness, indolence and dissipation. A non-sybaritic regimen, characterised by activity, dexterity, manual work and exercise transformed, by dint of habit, into the permanent features of his constitution, cannot now be thrown off at a stroke. Emile adds “l’empire de l’habitude aux douceurs de la liberté” (IV, 801). Secure from immorality and unreason, habit affirms instinct so that Emile avoids self-contradiction. Later, when the disaster of Sophie’s infidelity threatens to enthral him again, he can regain his self-possession and thereafter consolidate psychological equilibrium by returning to manual work, exploiting the habits taught to him by his Mentor.

The permanent physical features of the *économie animale* provide the material foundations for later moral and intellectual faculties, those that facilitate a receptivity to an education by reason and the acquisition of virtue. The hegemony of reason is as natural as reaching a stature of five or six feet for persons of a certain age. The extension of nature’s finality into the realm of ethics, and the continuity between the natural and ethical self, renders the expedients of a second nature and denaturation superfluous. Physical and moral perfection derive equally from a well-ordered, unfettered nature although not in the same way. We cannot, however, minimise the important development that occurs with voluntary consent in *Emile*; the pupil begins an existence as moral agent equipped with a will. The consent the tutor seeks in *Emile* at first calls for an acquiescence to an externalised and orchestrated *force majeure*. The will confronts the inducements of the objective world of “necessity”. Integrating an existence co-ordinated solely by physical sensibility into one based upon reason and judgement, Emile now begins to participate in the world as a newly active, moral entity. Having spontaneously engaged with the carefully-structured freedom set up by the tutor, the adolescent’s will now gives free validation to the educating process: “Reprenez l’autorité que vous voulez déposer au moment qu’il m’importe le plus qu’elle vous reste; vous ne l’aviez jusqu’ici que par ma faiblesse, vous l’aurez maintenant par ma volonté” (IV, 651). Emile replaces the necessary manoeuvres orchestrated from the outside with actions performed under the impetus of his own moral dispositions, the hallmark of freedom and the true end of education.

Despite the continuity between them, the claims to life and moral imperatives belong to separate orders. The demands of the first may be integrated and taken over by the second but, unlike unwilling, spontaneous biological development, the extension of nature into the moral world—where permanent habits are called virtues—requires a self-aware agent conscious of the natural order in which he chooses to participate and further. Equally important, the habits that ensure the hegemony of reason and stable patterns of volition do not become indistinguishable from nature nor are they immune to change in the way that a corporeal *habitus* may be said to constitute a being's essential form. Originating in voluntary self-conquest, the ends of moral habits (virtues) participate in the ends of entitative habits; each promote the individual's independence by emancipating him from the constraints to his existence. However, where the latter are straightforwardly immanent and inseparable from the permanent dispositions of the elements of one's nature, moral habits are so only imperfectly. It is entirely conceivable for a person to lose a moral or operative habit in a way that is not possible with entitative or functional habits. Must we then concede that the proponents of a radical break between naturalism and the properly *spiritualist* aspect of ethics are justified after all?

Rousseau's ethical philosophy insists on an inextricable link between body and soul. The continuity between different orders of habit lies in habit itself or *disposition*, understood as both the permanent arrangement or habitus of the material self and the orientation of the will to which it is linked. The transition to agency denotes a continuity because habits of rational self-determination are founded upon necessary entitative habits that guarantee the ease of biological existence. The morally-disciplined individual remains true to his nature although at an incomparably superior level. Directed to ends foreseen by reason and realised by the will, moral discipline rests on the material virtues or excellence that good bodily habits have fostered. For its part, the will expands nature's repertoire beyond purely biological imperatives. Given the near-identity of education and habituation, a "natural education" begins by fostering habits to bring about the internal development of our faculties and organs (IV 247). Settled dispositions of the body then provide the basis for the aptitudes of sensibility and intellect. Human purpose and intention depend on the consolidation of certain material virtues or aptitudes; the adaptations that habit provides through training and exercise prove useful for eliminating resistance to the

impositions of material necessity in children and the dictates of reason in men (IV, 421). The first prepares the way for the second.

Naturalist habits, conceived as the basis for transcendent habits which integrate the former, illustrate the progression from the physical to the moral more explicitly. During its formative period, the child presents itself in a plastic state physiologically speaking: “Avant que l’habitude du corps soit acquise on lui donne celle qu’on veut sans danger” (IV, 260). Education attempts to favourably influence and maximise what nature destines him to be. The chief concern of early paedology is to develop the resources of the body into a fortunate anatomical structure as preparation for the future moral life:

La seule habitude qu’on doit laisser prendre à l’enfant est de n’en contracter aucune [...] Préparez de loin le règne de sa liberté et l’usage de ses forces en laissant à son corps l’habitude naturelle, en le mettant en état d’être toujours maître de lui-même, et de faire en toute chose sa volonté, sitôt qu’il en aura une (IV, 282).

No habits means no *premature* corporeal habits setting themselves up as so many isolated and independent systems in competition with the will. Freedom consists in the body being capable of obeying the mind and therefore as a servant it must be not be weakened by accustomed practices that strengthen one capacity at the expense of another (IV, 269). There can be no wisdom or virtue without bodily vigour; such is the lesson of *Le Matérialisme du sage*. *Emile* exhorts the tutor to teach the child to learn to sleep in uncomfortable positions, to brave the rigours of the seasons, walk barefoot and so on. Bad habits are a form of tyranny which obstruct the will; good habits liberate.

We are, however, left with two irreducibly different types of habits. Unlike biological or naturalist habits, habits of the will are only relatively permanent dispositions for they could, conceivably, be reversed in a way that the physically-constituted self cannot. The respective degrees of permanence separates these habits and renders them asymmetrical. Moral habits or virtues may only enjoy the relatively permanent dispositions of *consuetudo*, but never the structural rigidity of entitative habits. This key distinction serves to bolster Rousseau’s wider ethical vision. Should moral habits come to acquire the force and permanence of a material *habitus*, this would compromise the capacity for free agency and possibility of ethics. Although

precarious, moral habits do not belong to the realm of second nature. Subject to decline through neglect, dispositions of the will demand the constant support that encourages man to achieve perfection through his own acts.

Yet, Rousseau recommends to the Poles those institutions that “forment le génie, le caractère, les goûts, et les mœurs d’un peuple [...] qui lui inspirent cet ardent amour de la patrie *fondé sur des habitudes impossibles à déraciner*” (*Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, III, 960; my emphasis). How can such habits arise? In a special sense, Rousseau may legitimately suppose that ‘habit’ cannot, by definition, be lost; one cannot fail to be what one *is*, one cannot lose one’s nature. This nature, however, provides only the possibility to anchor the moral habits, of themselves spiritual or volitional dispositions, as much as possible in a material *habitus*. The central ethical questions about the problem of duty, of virtue, the will and the passion are, in Rousseau, always intimately bound up with the embodied character of the self, given the physiological or materialist channel of Cartesianism that flows into his moral thinking. Morality is never an abstract matter but always rooted and defined by the possibilities offered by the body as an instrument of moral perfectibility. Rousseau’s ambition, surfacing in *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*, hopes to trace moral habits of volition as far as possible on the embodied, material self. In time, he envisages that moral habits may come to have all the force and permanence of naturalist habits, thereby fulfilling the supreme injunction of *Emile* to extend the law of necessity into the moral world, rooting the orientations of the moral life in the permanent feature of the physically-constituted self (IV, 820). Rousseau’s aspirations anticipate the thesis set out by Ravaisson, for whom moral ideas acquire a substantive reality through habit.

Transcendent, moral habits conform to nature but are not, strictly speaking, nature, still less a deviation into some corrupted second nature. Habit traces itself upon nature but the habituated self does not resemble the state when it emerged from the hands of nature: “il y a bien de la différence entre ce qu’est l’esprit d’un homme sortant des mains de la nature et ce qu’il peut devenir par l’habitude [et] l’éducation” (*Fragments divers*, II, 1323). However, we would not regard the disciplined and well-regulated individual as in any sense “unnatural” or “denatured”. Nature supersedes itself; a genuine change occurs from potential to actual but the movement is continuous.

Nature lies on either side of habit which it flanks as origin and as outcome. Nature before and after the transition across habit corresponds to the passage between Matter and Form, Potentiality and Actuality. In the material sphere of being, habit converts a natural *tendency* (pre-disposition) into a natural *structure* (*hexis*, *habitus* or *habitudo*). Changes that nature dictates become a permanent and internal acquisition of being. In the ethical sphere, nature and habit also coincide in aspirations towards a moral ideal. Virtue itself is not an endowment of nature but we have a natural tendency to acquire virtue. “Le goût de l’imitation est de la nature bien ordonnée” (IV, 340), writes Rousseau. Given the essence of habit lies in imitation, virtue as a trained discipline of the will enjoys a fundamental link with nature. Through imitation and repetition, Emile’s acts pass from gestures performed from memory and that produce virtue, to those engraved on the heart that *manifest* virtue:

Il faut regarder à l’habitude de l’âme plutôt qu’à celle des mains [...]
[...] nulle bonne action n’est moralement bonne que quand on la fait comme telle et non parce que d’autres la font. Mais dans un âge où le cœur ne sent rien encore, il faut bien faire imiter aux enfants les actes dont on veut leur donner l’habitude en attendant qu’ils les puissent faire par discernement et par amour du bien (IV, 339-40)

Habit gradually transforms virtue from a quality that is incidental to the actions performed to an acquired disposition of the will.

The proper and legitimate interventions of human art precipitate nature into its superior forms until the duality between them disappears. Moral habits require the intervention of an autonomous moral agent and represent the outcome of reason which foresees the future and the will that prepares for it. An initiative precedes the given: beneath *habitus* we find *consuetudo* or the sedimented history of nature. This point proves supremely important for assessing Rousseau’s self-portrait in the *Dialogues* where the dynamics of possession and transformation, of ‘having’ and ‘becoming’, leave no trace. Rousseau’s actual moral behaviour may have its origins in certain primitive inclinations but these remain inoperative and lack a permanent, settled state without the cultivation of habit. Much of what passes for “natural” in the *Dialogues* owes its existence to what Rousseau elsewhere considers the office of habituation and education proper. This masking effect provides the key for understanding nature in the *Dialogues* and has significant implications for Rousseau’s self-revelations: given the possibility of a collaboration

between nature and habit for self-transcendence, reports of the death of the Rousseauian synthesis are greatly exaggerated.

Chapter Four

The Will

Adapting Kantian terminology, we might say that while Rousseauian habit is, in some respect, *constitutive* of nature, nature, in turn, *regulates* habit.¹ In this third and last of the preliminary chapters to my examination of the *Dialogues*, I wish to establish the place of the will in relation to the perfection of nature, unfolding and transcending itself through the history of habit.

The will, especially when considered as *free*, supports metaphysical and cosmological beliefs that allow Rousseau to vindicate morality and the Providential order. Rousseauian theodicy and historical anthropology rely on an idea of the will to account for the unguided and errant forms of human development. Nature does not constitute a strict determinism for this would eliminate the possibility of bad choices, personal responsibility and merit. Through the will, man expresses the fully human contribution to the achievement of his *telos*.

In the perspective in which this thesis has advanced thus far, a consideration of the will represents the culmination of my examination of Rousseauian nature as an aspiration or ideal of moral perfection. This perfection begins with an irreducible, given spontaneity for the good and opens onto a condition achieved through effort which, thereby, proves worthy of merit. While habit represents nature in transcendent mode and mediates between nature and will, the will as the positive agency of perfectibility stands at the origins of habits or *virtues* that pass into nature. Moral progress and the progress of nature unfurl together through the history of willed acts that lead to an integrity; a natural self that is none other than a stable and persisting ethical self. This view of the will becomes indispensable for assessing the status of habit and Rousseau's freedom and responsibility in the *Dialogues*.

¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 221-22, B 268-70.

Before then, I wish to establish the importance of the will in the decisive *Lettres morales* which offer a model for reading the *Dialogues*. The present chapter argues for the centrality of the will by virtue of its less than automatic, uncertain response to the ideal of perfectionism. Usefully re-thinking nature as a deliberately cultivated end of human endeavours as much as an originary given, Burgelin states: “notre destination consiste à acquérir avec peine une nature qui sera notre œuvre, par le droit usage de la raison”.² It is worth emphasising that the exertion to which Rousseau calls us is rendered difficult by an inherent counter-will, the panoply of bad habits that obstruct the use of Right Reason.

Broadly speaking, two moments characterise the ideal of Rousseauian perfection: a reorientation of the will to access moral truth within, and a vocation that sustains this truth as a permanent disposition of the self. In the first, the truth or truths in question concern nature and human nature, the proper insight into which requires more than simple introspective cognition since a withdrawal into self utterly depends on the quality of the will. Once accessed and brought to the fore, the second, complementary step concerns the assimilation of the immanent truths of self-knowledge into the fabric of the self as its *ethos* to sustain the will’s relation to its moral source. This will’s fidelity to this source entails both a private attitude of inwardness and *praxis* in society, two dimensions by which individuals become genuinely moral for Rousseau. The complementariness of these steps prompts a parallel with the two imperatives of classical wisdom to which Foucault has recently drawn attention: ‘know thyself’ and the ‘care of the self’.³ The first creates the impulse for what Gabriel Marcel calls *engagement*, the second, the necessity for a continuing *fidélité*. The care of the self as a commitment of the will requires and consists in renewing the truths of self-knowledge, the moral source of the good that, in turn, sustains its orientation towards that good.

² *Philosophie de l’existence*, p. 327.

³ *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. III, *Le Souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). My articulation of these imperatives aims to distance Rousseau’s *techne* and *cultura animi* from the negative connotations tied to the practices of power and domination in Foucault’s writings on the hermeneutics and ‘technologies’ of the self.

[4.1] *Orientation of the Will*

Although Rousseau gives no formal definition of the will, he does provide an indication of what he means by it in terms of sensibility and its relation to knowledge. The *Dialogues* locate the seat of agency in the central anthropological fact of sensibility or (active) feeling: “La sensibilité est le principe de toute action. Un être, quoiqu’animé, qui ne sentirait rien, n’agirait point: car où serait pour lui le motif d’agir?” (I, 805). A moral variant of this sensibility, a *sensibilité active et morale*, concerns the tenor of the individual’s identification with others and assumes two basic and contrasting orientations. As a positive will, moral sensibility denotes the untrammelled, attractive force of nature which affirms and extends our self-love (*amour de soi*) to others. Its negative counterpart, meanwhile, constricts and impedes our sympathy for others and emanates from corrupted self-awareness and love of self (*amour-propre*, I, 805-06).

In relation to cognition, the Rousseauian will represents a *variable* equally dependent and independent of knowledge. As a dependent variable, the will stands in a reciprocal relationship to knowing which contains and determines its activity. Sensibility is shaped by what it knows; what it knows is, in turn, determined by what it desires to know: “l’entendement humain doit beaucoup aux passions, qui, d’un commun aveu, lui doivent beaucoup aussi” (III, 143). Rousseau deploys this principle for educational purposes in *Emile* to illustrate how the pupil’s progressive, expanding self-representation of the world affects his volition. Cognition of the sensory world offers an opportunity to train and develop what Mark Hulliung calls “a firm will”, fostering good judgement by means of a confrontation with the material world. Emile knows when to will, when not to will and, most important of all, always to will within the knowledge of his possibilities.⁴ The reciprocity of willing and knowing in Rousseau’s moral thought construes right action as the result of right knowledge plus right disposition. Ignorance condemns the will to blindness (and often disorder); knowledge without will remains intransitive. Although an innate feeling, conscience, for instance, contains no specific knowledge of the good. When properly exercised, however, reason acquaints conscience what it already loves naturally. If conscience motivates us to want the good, reason enlightens and enables us to choose it (II,

⁴ *The Autocritique of the Enlightenment: Rousseau and the philosophes* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 191.

383). Together, sensibility and reason equip the moral agent with direction and motivation for action, the means and ends for the good.

Within this context, readers may discover why citizens of *Du Contract social*, for example, fail to want what they know to be the good (III, 380). The “connection” between “possessing a clear understanding of what justice is and having a disposition to be just”, Christopher Kelly observes, is not a necessary one.⁵ However, this does not merely indicate that rational recognition of justice alone exercises no direct control over action. During conflict, the correspondence of willing to knowing subsides, handing a decisive role to the will. As an independent variable, the will asserts its anthropological primacy rooted in the fact of sensibility: “Si c’est la raison qui fait l’homme, c’est le sentiment qui le conduit” (II, 319). Motivation may fail to achieve the *telos* of rationality because willing according to judgements on the basis of what we immediately *feel* commands priority over judgements we formulate on the basis of what we *know*. Arguing against the appeals to natural law as universally self-evident to human reason, Rousseau asks: “de quoi sert que la raison nous éclaire quand la passion nous conduit? *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*” (CC, XXXIII, 239). An individual may recognise and yet still disregard the deliberative activity of the intellect and its calculations concerning his self-interest by yielding to the “penchants du cœur humain” (CC, XXXIII, 240). To put knowledge into ignorant minds, therefore, remains insufficient if the will becomes selfish and falls into error despite what it knows. Overwhelmed by the primacy of sensibility, the vulnerability of unsupported reason and the potential for moral weakness subsists long after the eradication of ignorance. For this reason, the citizen who rejects the good he formerly embraced must be forced to be free (“on le forcera d’être libre”, III, 364).

To make full sense of this controversial idea requires a special insight Rousseau believed essential to addressing the problem of recalcitrant love or desire. Access to this insight, however, proves problematic in our present condition since the obstacles to gaining it are identical to those that prevent us from choosing a course of action consonant with right knowledge. Rousseau identifies us as creatures alienated from our essential good, our ills the result of competing motivations whereby the acquisition of a second nature through decadent society wars with the

⁵ Christopher Kelly, “‘To Persuade without Convincing’: The Language of Rousseau’s Legislator”, in *American Journal of Political Science*, 31 (May 1987), 321-55 (p. 323).

promptings of a residual, natural goodness. The site for self-division and the possibility for spiritual regeneration to end this conflict lie squarely with the will and its destiny. Before considering the prescriptions for rectifying the will through a privileged form of enlightenment, we need to take a closer look at the nature of Rousseauian mental conflict sketched thus far.

Rousseau offers a picture of human motivation grounded in two intelligibilities. First, a metaphysical or ontological dualism derived from Plato in which the soul gravitates between the lower, sensible world and the higher, immaterial realm; second, a psychological dualism, the inheritance of Augustine, composed of the two loves. We speak of these in terms of the ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ will and of the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ will respectively.

According to Rousseau’s Platonic dualism, the affections to which man is exposed simply derive from his share in the material world, the ontological condition of human existence. The degree to which we allow the interests of the body to take precedence over those of the soul determines the extent to which we acquire a disposition for evil: “unie à un corps mortel par des liens non moins puissants qu’incompréhensibles, le soin de la conservation de ce corps excite l’âme à rapporter tout à lui, et lui donne un intérêt contraire à l’ordre général” (IV, 603). Moved in two directions, the soul may choose between withholding and giving assent to spontaneous and irrational impulses inferior to it. Rousseau further represents mental conflict as the competing solicitations of reason and disposition (seeing the better, following the worse), but, equally important, he articulates this as a psychological conflict between the preponderance of one inner voice making us deaf to the demands of another. Perceptual metaphors convey a confusion of sensory awareness that translates into the rival clamourings for the soul’s attention. The antagonism arises from a cacophony of voices: the higher, sovereign voice variously identified as the voice of the soul, reason, conscience or nature, striving to make itself heard over the clamorous, disruptive voice of the body and its passions (IV, 594).

This psychological conflict owes much to Rousseau’s Augustinian vision. The Enlightenment inherits a long-standing debate between Augustinians and Pelagians, revived in seventeenth-century France by Jansenists and their followers against Cartesians and Jesuits.⁶ Rousseau’s

⁶ For an account of this debate as it relates to the polemics over education, see John Passmore, ‘The Malleability of Man in Eighteenth-Century Thought’ in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Earl R. Wassermann (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 21-46.

insistence on man's natural goodness and corresponding rejection of Original Sin, his belief in the value of man's own efforts unassisted by grace, like the view of depravity as the product of bad habits, appear to place him firmly on the Pelagian or Deist side of the debate.⁷ In important respects, however, and as Charles Taylor has argued, Rousseau is profoundly Augustinian.⁸ This additional outlook evolves from the ontological and anthropological premisses of the human condition but also surpasses them. Emotion and irrational compulsion undoubtedly restrict and interfere with rational acts of evaluation and choice, but they, like the handicap of ignorance, ultimately remain inessential to the problem of intention which, Rousseau suggests, concerns the problem of perverse motivation. The Rousseauian will serves to bolster a moral vision informed by the Fall, a *naturalised* Fall to be sure, but one which makes room for a "real notion of depravity".⁹ Man fails to achieve his *telos* because he acquires a second nature which directs his will or love against his better instincts independently of the cognition of the better or the worse, thereby surpassing the Socratic position that no one does wrong or fails on purpose.¹⁰ Defective dispositions and their moral judgements cannot function along Socratic lines prior to their transformation.

In the same perspective, Rousseau's Deist vision transposes man's relation to God into man's relation to nature but in a manner that rebels against the standard Deism and optimism advocated by the eighteenth-century. The God of Revelation becomes the voice of nature or conscience, but "the estrangement which depraves us is one which separates us from it".¹¹ Rousseau expresses this distancing as a progressively decreasing intensity of introspective apperceptions: the faintness of the voice of conscience, for instance, or the illegibility of traces written on the heart which reveal the principles and duties of universal, natural law (IV, 594, 603). Estrangement represents a self-alienation fundamentally tied to a deviation of will, so that "to regain contact with this voice would be to transform our motivation, to have a wholly different quality of will".¹² Here lies Rousseau's challenge to the Encyclopaedists and their "levelling" and "too

⁷ For Rousseau and Pelagius, see Jacques F. Thomas, *Le Pélagianisme de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Nizet, 1976).

⁸ *Sources of the Self*, pp. 355-63.

⁹ *Sources of the Self*, p. 356.

¹⁰ *Protagoras*, 358b-c.

¹¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 357.

¹² *Sources of the Self*, p. 358.

simple view of the human will, intent simply on happiness".¹³ Uni-linear theories of human nature advanced by materialists like La Mettrie, Diderot and d'Holbach promote a vision of man as an entirely physical creature guided solely by the imperatives of self-preservation and physical fulfilment. Sensualists such as Condillac also relegate the importance of the will by articulating it as an effect rather than a cause, a faculty awakened by the desire to re-experience pleasurable sensations and turn away from painful ones. In positing the primacy of desire, Enlightenment naturalism eliminates all qualitative distinctions of the will. By contrast, a philosophy of the will alive to self-alienation also targets the *philosophe* belief in the moral continuity of nature. Grimm, for instance, mused that "tout ce qui arrive à une espèce lui arrive conformément à sa nature, parce qu'elle ne pourrait subsister un instant hors de sa nature."¹⁴ For Rousseau, our present nature represents a false and flawed second nature, a degenerate condition established and sustained by defective motivations.

To describe these competing motivations, Rousseau evokes the well-known polarity of the two loves: natural goodness or *amour de soi* and a perverse *amour-propre*. Rousseau defines the latter condition as an obsessive self-concern or *libido dominandi* that paradoxically enslaves its possessor to the judgement and admiration of others (III, 219). He cites the example of the philosopher who, deaf to the cries of natural pity, covers his ears while his fellow is murdered beneath his window (III, 156). *Amour-propre* stifles good instincts but also overturns justice, freedom and order by putting self at the centre of all that it wants to dominate (IV, 523). It wrongly asking of others what it refuses them but also enslaves the self to the artificial needs of vanity and imaginary demands that neither it nor others can satisfy. These frustrations develop into feelings incompatible with peaceful coexistence with others, creating mutual suspicion and hatred that Rousseau recognises in the Hobbesian vision of the war of all against all (IV, 314). The psychology of *amour-propre* inspires the human personality to gravitate outwardly but, by externalising the individual towards others, this love ultimately concentrates him within the narrow bands of his own selfish interests and renders him indifferent to the welfare of others. What separates this love from legitimate self-love is its wholly *self-enclosed* nature. To heal itself, the will must recover the lost source of its goodness in the self-motivation of reflexive

¹³ *Sources of the Self*, p. 355.

¹⁴ Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, V, 124, quoted Burgelin, *Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 223-24.

inwardness inspired by legitimate self-love. Self-motivation does not entail an arbitrary will. A will so animated receives support from a binding universal moral reality: nature or conscience, Rousseau conflates the two (*Lettres morales*, IV, 1108).

A prominent feature of Augustine's moral psychology, which extends the activity of the good or bad will to other faculties dependent on it, also finds its way into Rousseau. Augustine invokes the trinity of existence (*esse*), cognition (*nosse*) and will (*velle*) to represent the tripartite functions or conditions of the soul.¹⁵ To each of these corresponds a fundamental virtue or vice: *humilitas*, *sapientia* and *caritas* denote the being, knowing and willing of the (good) 'interior' man; *superbia*, *curiositas* and *concupiscentia* those of the (bad) 'outer' man.¹⁶ Rousseau similarly insists that access to moral truth, the truth of self-knowledge for instance, depends on how one seeks it. A correct disposition must supplement the quest for knowledge. For the *Profession de foi* and the *Lettres morales*, the right condition of the will (sincerity) represents a pre-requisite for intellectual insight because "philosophy" generates a desire for outward distinction and an arrogant condition inimical to genuine truth found only in the inward self. What we seek relates entirely to how we seek it: "il faut commencer par rentrer en soi pour apprendre à philosopher" (IV, 1113). The truth of self-knowledge proves elusive for those who routinely exist outside themselves.

Each of the two *Discours* attacks the failure of philosophy to deliver this truth. The First *Discours* begins with admiration for the intellectual enlightenment by which man transcends himself, "et, ce qui est encore plus grand et plus difficile", Rousseau adds "rentrer en soi pour y étudier l'homme et connaître sa nature, ses devoirs et sa fin" (III, 6). But it becomes manifestly clear that the arts and sciences have achieved everything but the interior condition that enables individuals to discover their frame, duty and expectation. The Second *Discours* resumes this thread:

La plus utile et la moins avancée de toutes les connaissances humaines me paraît être celle de l'homme, et j'ose dire que la seule inscription du temple de Delphes contenait un précepte plus important et plus difficile que tous les gros livres des moralistes (III, 122).

¹⁵ *Confessions*, 13.11, *City of God*, 11.26, *On the True Religion*, 39.

¹⁶ Dihle, *The Theory of Will*, p. 233, n.17.

A different method is required. Rousseau endorses Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* on the need for exercising a *sens intérieur* to deliver the insights that distil the essence of human nature from its artificial accretions:

rarement faisons-nous usage de ce sens intérieur qui nous réduit à nos vraies dimensions, et qui sépare de nous tout ce qui n'en est pas. C'est cependant de ce sens dont il faut nous servir, si nous voulons nous connaître; c'est le seul par lequel nous puissions nous juger (III, 196).

Buffon continues to enquire how we may regain the habit for activating this sense and freeing the soul, in which it resides, from the corporeal sensations, passions, errors and prejudices that work against it. These preoccupations Rousseau later addresses in the *Lettres morales*. For the moment, simply accumulating objective knowledge atrophies this faculty: "plus nous accumulons de nouvelles connaissances, et plus nous nous ôtons les moyens d'acquérir la plus importante de toutes, et que c'est en un sens à force d'étudier l'homme que nous nous sommes mis hors d'état de le connaître" (III, 123). How then, asks Rousseau, ought we to proceed to uncover the traces of Natural Man within the present social and intellectual climate? (III, 123-24). Rather than inviting a latter-day Aristotle or Pliny to conduct experimental reconstructions of human origins, Rousseau replies: "je crois en avoir assez médité le sujet, *pour oser répondre d'avance* que les plus grands philosophes *ne seront pas trop bons pour diriger ces expériences*"(III, 124; my emphasis). Why? Because they and their sponsors lack a "bonne volonté"(III, 124), seeking truth with the wrong spirit and in the wrong place.

It appears equally true if not truer, however, to say that his account of corruption and regeneration make of Rousseau a modern Pelagian who, while borrowing the language of Augustine to describe the symptoms of human malaise, disputes their causes and proposes his own remedies. Departing from Augustine's theological diagnosis of the will's deviation and redemption, Rousseau's genealogical account insists that men inherit, not innate or racial corruption, but a society that fosters the worst in them. Human depravity follows a progressive, historical excrescence of *amour-propre* from the thwarting of *amour de soi*, a decline of inborn *justice* and *goodness*, the precepts of natural law deemed the "primitive affections" of the human soul (IV, 522-23). Rousseau's Platonism qualifies his Augustinianism. Instead of radical perversity, we inherit an ontological state from which spring a psychological dualism and the

competing urges for both moral *élévation* and *abaissement*, as the following conjecture on the soul in *Emile* makes clear:

si l'esprit de l'homme fût resté libre et pur, quel mérite aurait-il d'aimer et suivre l'ordre qu'il verrait établi et qu'il n'aurait nul intérêt à troubler? Il serait heureux, il est vrai; mais il manquerait à son bonheur le degré le plus sublime, la gloire de la vertu et le bon témoignage de soi [...] le soin de la conservation de ce corps excite l'âme à rapporter tout à lui, et lui donne un intérêt contraire à l'ordre général qu'elle est pourtant capable de voir et d'aimer; c'est alors que le bon usage de sa liberté devient à la fois le mérite et la récompense, et qu'elle se prépare un bonheur inaltérable en combattant ses passions terrestres et se maintenant dans sa *première volonté* (IV, 603; my emphasis).

At the origins of human nature, the will inclines towards the cosmic design to which it belongs and which it loves spontaneously. As we shall see, the correspondence or alignment of the human will to a greater order from which it emanates defines its superior quality and freedom (IV, 603). The original condition of the first will, bound by the positive constraints of nature, disposes its possessor to everything useful and beneficial to it.¹⁷ Yet, perfectibility and free agency immediately place the potential for acquiring a disruptive, harmful will *against* our better instincts or insights, within our grasp (III, 141). Rousseau holds human infirmity or *faiblesse* responsible for inaugurating moral predicaments (IV, 663), but the enchained will-soul, nevertheless, represents the condition of moral perfection. Its weakness, allied to an enlightened use of freedom, holds out the possibility of meritoriousness and happiness (IV, 817).

Radical depravity, the individual completely bereft of every inclination for the moral good, Rousseau regards as impossible (IV, 601-02). But the account of culpable weakness, acquired by the undetermined will denaturing itself through choice, brings him closer to Pelagius. Depravity ensues when the voice of conscience remains silent, either because of the dominant influence of the passions or because of a social environment inimical to the inner life:

La conscience est timide, elle aime la retraite et la paix; le monde et le bruit l'épouvantent, les préjugés dont on la fait naître sont ses plus cruels ennemis, elle fuit ou se taît devant eux; leur voix bruyante étouffe la sienne et l'empêche de se faire entendre [...] Elle se rebute enfin à force d'être éconduite. Elle ne nous parle plus; elle ne nous répond plus, et après de si longs mépris pour elle il en coûte autant de la rappeler qu'il en coûte pour la bannir (IV, 601).

¹⁷ "La volonté tend toujours au bien de l'être qui veut", quoted by C. E. Vaughan, ed., *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915, repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), vol. I, p. 460.

Moral corruption proceeds by unchecked, repeated bad choices of the will limiting our subsequent capacity to choose well, until one forgets this capacity altogether.¹⁸ Two interrelated factors determine the outcome of the rival clamourings of the soul. The first, the intensity of apperceptions, ensures that we respond to the promptings of the clearest solicitations. The second determines the first: the clearest promptings correspond to those we routinely heed and act on. At bottom, lies the mutually transforming interaction between nature and habit. *Internalisation* or the exchange between action and being over time signifies that my performances contain the power to transform me for better or worse: what I do gradually becomes part of what I am. The distinction between an occasional lapse bearing on a discrete act (*commettre une faute*) and a weakness that has become habitual and implanted in the self over time (*contracter un vice*, IV, 663) spells out how long-standing practices eventually contribute to a permanent quality of the will. One develops an enduring and unswerving disposition for evil through a negative internalisation of past bad acts. An individual thereby acquires the condition of defective motivation and an irresistible pull towards evil out of his own free will which he gradually effaces and for which he remains solely responsible:

la faiblesse dont [les coupables] se plaignent est leur propre ouvrage [...] leur première dépravation vient de leur volonté [...] à force de vouloir céder à leurs tentations ils leur cèdent enfin malgré eux et les rendent irrésistibles[.] Sans doute, il ne dépend plus d'eux de n'être pas méchants et faibles; mais il dépend d'eux de ne pas le devenir (IV, 604).

For his part, Pelagius also regards sin as a long-standing habit not easily eradicated: “there is no other cause of the difficulty we find in doing well, but the long-continued customs of sin, which begin to grow upon us in childhood, and little by little corrupt us”.¹⁹ We might say, therefore, that Rousseau’s Pelagianism revises the effects of Original Sin, replacing a theological doctrine with a psychological diagnosis of enslavement that ensues through *necessitas consuetudinis* and *longus usus peccandi*. Rousseau views the irresistibility to evil as acquired, not inevitable much as, for Pelagius, “man is always able to sin, and always able to be without sin”.²⁰ Subsequently ensconced motivations provisionally occlude the will’s inclination to the good without destroying

¹⁸ “Le sentiment de ma liberté ne s’efface en moi que quand je me déprave et que j’empêche enfin la voix de l’âme de s’élever contre la loi du corps” (IV, 586).

¹⁹ Quoted by Nigel Abercrombie, *The Origins of Jansenism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 22.

²⁰ *The Origins of Jansenism*, p. 21.

it since, like our second nature, these motivations are accidental not essential. Although obscured, even permanently so, our primitive instincts remain sound and unblemished by the depravity of bad education and habits referred to in the *Second Discours* (III, 133).

To rectify the will and restore the statue of Glaucus to its pristine state (III, 122) involves making use of the Pelagian gifts of reason, conscience, freedom. Collectively, these capacities represent Rousseauian grace universally bestowed: “[l’Etre suprême] nous a donné la raison pour connaître ce qui est bien, la conscience pour l’aimer, et la liberté pour le choisir. C’est dans ces dons sublimes que consiste la grâce divine [...] nous les avons tous reçus” (II, 683). Although gifts from God, He does not interfere with their workings since the undetermined human will contains the possibility of its own regeneration and that of conscience and reason. The gifts represents a *chiquenaude*, their destiny lies entirely in the subsequent chain of human choices. Rousseau’s naturalised theology historicises grace as well as sin: human perfectibility and regeneration unfold in empirical time.

The will’s regeneration depends on re-establishing contact with an estranged nature and reversing the diminishing apperception of its voice, so that it may order itself according to a rational design in which everyone finds their “place”.²¹ Spiritual recovery begins with an inward journey, a re-assembly of selfhood that signals the start of a reorientation of the self-enclosed will. In this, Rousseau strikes an unmistakable Augustinian note. Every effort directed at self-knowledge harbours deep significance for this reorientation and the subsequent destiny of the ‘moral agent. In a movement wholly opposed to constricting *amour-propre*, the unselfish self-concern of *amour de soi* strives for an intimate self-presence that reveals Providential order and innate inclinations for good of which they form a part. Individuals must strive to bring the sense of order to explicit and fully conscious articulation. Grimm saw only the constitutive basis of nature, not a regulative source, the embodiment of values to which the will stands in a particular relation and which it may subsequently assimilate as its own as a guide for its behaviour. We establish a relation to the good before making it fully ours as a principle of action. Awareness of the design of things, in turn, provides a moral stimulus to bring moral order into one’s life—Rousseau’s ideal of *sagesse*—and releases a capacity for availability to others through the active

²¹ “Tout concourt au bien commun dans le système universel. Tout homme a sa place assignée dans le meilleur ordre des choses, il s’agit de trouver cette place et de ne pas pervertir cet ordre” (II, 563).

engagement of natural goodness rooted in pity and sympathy. Freed from the enslavement of *amour-propre*, the autonomous self opens itself outwards, advancing the design through the interests of a benevolent and just community that improves the lot of others via the ideal of *bienfaisance*. The inward turn does not, therefore, represent static contemplation but issues into an active, practical relation to society. The representative figures of this ideal are the citizen (*Du Contrat social*), the husband and wife, masters of the *oikos* (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*) and the sage (*Emile*), all of whom benefit their community and advance the general good.

[4.2] *The Will in Time: la volonté constante*

By its very nature, the will intends the future which cannot be the content of any certain knowledge or direct perception. This fact, as Dihle argues, ensures an alternative way to evaluate human freedom. Restricted by its ignorance of future events, the will nonetheless remains responsible for its choices and is judged according to its good or bad intentions.²² Although the quality of the will's intention or orientation and its persistence constitute, in some respects, inseparable features in Rousseau's thought, the interest of this section lies principally in the success or failure of the will to initiate and sustain a state or *volition* favourable to achieving a particular end.

The will intends a future that also threatens to weaken or dissolve it. Self-projection into the future creates a well-known dilemma: we make a resolution that we *feel* certain we shall keep only to discover, later and at a crucial moment when we must act, that the motivation that accompanied our decision has ebbed away, leaving an empty, intellectual recognition of our duty. Worse still, we may discover that motivations contrary to our original purpose now attend us. At stake is Rousseau's project for spiritual regeneration, the destiny of the moral self conceived as an identity imperfectly or intermittently anchored in an enduring and ethically superior will capable of permanently attuning itself to the source of its goodness. In other words,

²² *The Theory of Will*, pp. 69-71.

Rousseau's ethics calls for a perseverance, at once necessary and improbable, to succeed a reorientation of the will.

Intention, perseverance and the predicament of future contingencies eclipsing or reversing resolutions and their motivations receives special attention in the philosophical journal of Gabriel Marcel which articulates solutions that may serve to highlight Rousseau's approach. An existential project, for Marcel, becomes authentic when *engagement* leads to *fidélité*. Commitment proves problematic because the nature of commitment and the essence of beings who make commitments appear incompatible. The basis and value of any commitment lies in its unconditionality or disregard for contingencies. I commit my future which is neither the content of my present knowledge nor, even, at my disposal given the fluctuations that may supervene on my dispositions. Suppose, Marcel says, that under an irresistible wave of pity, I make a promise to visit a dying man in hospital. A few days later, I realise that my compassion gives way to little more than a simulacrum, it no longer pierces me as it did when I stood by the sick bed. The existential situation I face becomes apparent:

Entre celui qui ose dire *je* et qui s'est attribué le pouvoir de *se* lier (de me lier moi-même) et le monde illimité des effets et des causes qui échappe à la fois à la juridiction du moi et à toute prévision rationnelle, il existe donc une sphère intermédiaire où se déroulent des événements qui ne sont conformes ni à mes désirs ni même à mon attente; mais dont je revendique cependant le droit et le pouvoir de faire abstraction de mes actes.²³

The value and essence of the act of commitment entails a refusal to take account of all potential alterations to my psychological states, but here I come up against the Marcellian dilemma:

au moment où je m'engage, ou bien je pose arbitrairement une invariabilité de mon sentir qu'il n'est pas réellement en mon pouvoir d'instituer, ou bien j'accepte par avance d'avoir à accomplir à un moment donné un acte qui ne reflétera nullement mes dispositions intérieures lorsque je l'accomplirai.²⁴

At the moment of my commitment, I either lie to myself or consent in advance to lie to others.

Now, the meta-condition of every commitment, Marcel insists, issues from, and depends on, a distinction between myself and my limited, embodied situation at any given moment. An enduring will surfaces from the momentary, phenomenal being it transcends: "Il n'y a pas

²³ *Etre et avoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1935; repr. Editions universitaires, 1991), p. 42.

²⁴ *Etre et avoir*, p. 43.

d'engagement sans position au moins implicite d'une certaine identité [...] L'identité dont il s'agit ne peut pas être simplement abstraite: c'est celle d'un certain vouloir".²⁵ In binding myself to a promise, I acknowledge the presence of an inner hierarchy whereby a superior ruling principle (ἡγεμονικόν), 'mind' or 'will', pledges to keep the unpredictable and unruly details of my life under its command.²⁶ At the moment of making a commitment, I identify with this executive, non-phenomenal will over the aggregation of elements it proposes to control. The intentionality of fidelity qualifies it as "creative" (*fidélité créatrice*) because it posits "un certain permanent ontologique [...] qui dure et par rapport auquel nous durons, [un] permanent qui implique ou exige une histoire."²⁷ This permanent ontological reality represents the necessary correlative for my fidelity, a reality greater than my self to which I stand in a relation and that raises me above my existential, temporal and intellectual limitations. Marcel enjoins us to a continuous creation to protect this point of contact between the phenomenal and the transcendent from *vacillement*.²⁸ However, a transcendental view of commitment opens onto a structure of human experience that reflects, for Marcel, not only the ambiguities and instabilities of human existence but, ultimately, the need for God. Only God renders meaningful the projection of the impermanent, transient self into the future. Only the support of divine grace makes possible commitments by a self that "cannot depend on itself to feel tomorrow as it does today".²⁹

The problem of the periodic, transient character of human intention in time, turning resolutions into audacious, even presumptuous, undertakings also characterise perennial Rousseauian quandaries. While recognising the continuity that exists between them, I wish to examine the nature of commitment and fidelity and their implication for Rousseau's thought in turn.

We may reiterate the problem of commitment in the following way: since I can neither intellectually grasp the future nor, given the alterations to my psychological states, control it by my will, how can I undertake a commitment without condemning myself, as Marcel says, to falsely promising more than I can deliver? Rousseau's writings reserve a seat of honour to the problem of disunited intentions over time that dislocate decision and accomplishment. Naturally,

²⁵ *Etre et avoir*, p. 38.

²⁶ *Etre et avoir*, p. 42.

²⁷ *Etre et avoir*, p. 84.

²⁸ Marcel, *Du Refus à l'invocation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), p. 225.

²⁹ Marjorie Grene, *Introduction to Existentialism* (London: Chicago University Press, 1948), p. 130.

this preoccupation surfaces in *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* which draws attention to the tendency of objects to interrupt the self's identity. Elsewhere, *Du Contract social* recognises that, despite everything, citizens may fail to will generally and must be forced to be free (III, 364). *La Nouvelle Héloïse* opposes the incompatible demands of constancy with the eternal law of "flux" and its inevitable dissolution of love in time (II, 509). Finally, in *Emile*, the tutor's efforts culminate in devising ways for overcoming disruptive sexual passions that threaten to obliterate the adolescent's pledge to chastity (IV, 648-51).

The *Lettres morales* refer to a privileged state whereby a passion for virtue turns us into moral enthusiasts capable of achieving absolute self-mastery (IV, 1101). These moments tend to inopportunately subside but the *Lettres* provide a significant insight into the problem of intention. The intermittence of volition consists in more than a matter of competing urges, as the metaphysical condition we inherit might suggest. Instead, it concerns, in a rather Cartesian manner, the availability or absence of a passionate impetus accompanying intention, as the distinction drawn in the *Profession de foi*, between the ever-present power to will and the irregularity of the strength to do what one wills, confirms (IV, 586). The weak will, conscious only of the remote, abstract ends of practical reason, represents an etiolated will deprived of the support of sensibility. Wants pertaining to immediate, phenomenological desires outweigh duty. The rational foresight of *philosophie*, complains Saint-Preux, provides a seductive but empty rhetoric: "ce fantôme [...] n'est qu'une ombre, qui nous excite à menacer de loin les passions et nous laisse comme un faux brave à leur approche" (II, 220). Indeed, when lured into a brothel, the fear of exposing himself to the derision of his companions prevents him from leaving (II, 295). By contrast, even the least continent individual, Rousseau imagines, would hesitate to trade his life for a night with Cleopatra were he to see the instruments of his execution (IV, 651-52).

The want of a passionate elan, like the soul poised between movements in opposing directions, provide one set of descriptions for the weak will. Viewed from yet another perspective, this weakness also implies an intermittence. For Rousseau, as for Marcel, the problem of intention or commitment centres on the identity of a certain will conceived as a duration. Like many Lockean-influenced contemporaries, Rousseau holds that memory assures

the self's continuity in time: "L'identité du *moi* ne se prolonge que par la mémoire, et que pour être le même en effet, il faut que je me souvienne d'avoir été" (IV, 590). In addition to this personal identity, the unity and persistence of intention or motivation in time, meanwhile, underwrites a *volitional* self-identity. The alterity diagnosed by *La Morale sensitive* consists in a psychological transformation whose essence is of this kind. Alterations to the self pertain to changes concerning *res volens*, expressed by the metaphor of the diminished strength of dispositions:

la plupart des hommes sont dans le cours de leur vie souvent dissemblables à eux-mêmes et semblent se transformer en des hommes tout différents [...] Un homme tenté résiste une fois parce qu'il est fort, et succombe une autre parce qu'il est faible; s'il eût été le même qu'auparavant il n'aurait pas succombé (I, 408-09).

The short parable referred to as the *Discours sur les richesses* (V, 469-81) describes the conditions and progression for such transformations. Chrysophile, whom the *Discours* addresses, plans to enrich himself in order to act beneficently. However, his sensitivity to the poverty of others rests on his capacity to identify with them; accordingly, his desire to assist others weakens as he gradually acquires the power to do good. Why? In order to acquire great wealth quickly, a poor man must become dishonest and avaricious, hardening his heart and repressing his humanitarian instincts until the moment he can allow himself to be generous. Having acquired dispositions inimical to pity through the necessary self-transformations of material betterment, he no longer looks upon poverty with the same feeling of injustice.

What, then, makes commitment possible? First, Marcel suggests, I must identify with a sovereign will that stands over and transcends my phenomenal being. Second, I must commend myself to the ontological permanence to which I give necessary expression whenever I commit myself to a project that surpasses my finite, temporal being. Rousseau's solutions to the problem of commitment bear only a superficial resemblance to those proposed by Marcel. As philosophers of the will, both naturally uphold the will's capacity for self-creation. Marcel refutes what he calls *l'attitude phénoméniste* that denies this capacity.³⁰ For Rousseau, meanwhile, the phenomenalism of human life inaugurates moral dilemmas, but his ethical

³⁰*Du Refus à l'invocation*, p. 211.

voluntarism, as *La Morale sensitive* demonstrates, counterbalances his sensualism. Although susceptible to alterity, the Rousseauian self represents more than a well-spring of desires and sensations in the present, continually succeeding one another. Beyond this, the similarities end. Rousseau's metaphysics of the will not only repudiates the phenomenism of sensualism but also elevates the moral self by ascribing to it an ontological existence. The Marcellian act of fidelity represents the point of contact between my existence and a transcendence it brings into a concrete relation to me. For Rousseau, however, this transcendence already *belongs* to me, it not only predicates my moral self but is also *mine* to engage. Thus, while the religious philosopher interprets the discontinuity of human existence as a need for God, Rousseau locates this support in the relation the self sustains with itself. Equipped with a superior and essentially enduring will, a permanent core of goodness in relation to which it may estrange or reconcile itself, the self for Rousseau has at its disposal all that it needs to become durably moral.

Drawing a distinction significant for its existential implications, the *Lettres morales* insist on the autonomy of one's *âme*, the inner dispositions of which do not correspond to the destiny of one's *fortune* or the world of external events (IV, 1102). Individuals can recognise in themselves an absolute and persisting moral anchor, unmoved by the momentary states of the phenomenal self it holds up to scrutiny. Rousseau refers to this hegemonic capacity as the *volonté constante*. A sovereign principle, it denotes the rationally-enlightened voice of conscience, which stands over inferior and contingent wills inspired by momentary, disruptive passions, and operates individually and on a collective level as the expression of the general will. In *Emile*, the pupil's constant will requests the continued but free submission to his tutor's authority:

Reprenez l'autorité que vous voulez déposer au moment qu'il m'importe le plus qu'elle vous reste; vous ne l'aviez jusqu'ici que par ma faiblesse, vous l'aurez maintenant par ma volonté [...] Je veux obéir à vos lois, je le veux toujours, c'est ma volonté constante [...] rendez-moi libre en me protégeant contre mes passions qui me font violence (IV, 651-52).

In politics, the constant will makes moral freedom and citizenship possible: "La volonté constante de tous les membres de l'état est la volonté générale: c'est par elle qu'ils sont citoyens et libres" (III, 440).

A counterweight to *faiblesse*, the constant will is *constant* in the sense that it recovers the ‘gaps’ that invade the moral life over a stretch of time. An underlying, permanent substratum or metaphysical reality persisting in time, the constant will need not depend on being operative for its existence. The general will, for instance, always survives “inaltérable et pure” (III, 438). Rousseau even claims it is “indestructible”, in other words, it simply ‘exists’ ontologically, whether or not it receives actual or embodied expression. Less abstractly, citizens continue to possess a constant will even when they do not or cannot exercise it since they “wish they were law-abiding even when in fact they are not”.³¹ Across the intermittences that arise from emotional stress, caused by competing classes of wants that manifest themselves as immediate sensations to consciousness, the deliberated, long-term ends of practical reason, founded on the constant voice of conscience, subsist in the experienced of *remorse*. The pangs of conscience indicate the re-affirmation and continuity of the moral will against depravity. “Coupable et non dépravée”, exclaims Julie, “je ne pus échapper aux remords qui m’attendaient; l’honnêteté me fut chère, même après l’avoir perdue” (II, 344). Across discontinuous states, the Savoyard Vicar admits: “mon pire tourment, quand je succombe, est de sentir que j’ai pu résister” (IV, 583). The constant will remains conscious of bad choices and, therefore, exists apart from the will that capitulates to desires recognised and judged as inferior. Like the relation of morality to history, the dispositions of the constant will exist relatively independently of experienced vicissitudes. Although temporarily subdued or eclipsed, the constant will underwrites our original inclination for goodness and ensures an important moral continuity. Rousseau’s ethics could not otherwise account for depravity or confidently promote the possibility of spiritual regeneration.

How one might access and draw on the support of the constant will on a permanent basis brings us to the problem of fidelity. Given that the order of fidelity requires a persistence at odds with my mutable nature, how can I possibly ensure that my actions not only reflect my intentions, but that my dispositions also reflect the spirit in which these intentions were originally conceived? Rousseau’s political writings echo the existential dilemmas of Marcel. The incompatibility between the absolute nature of commitments and the essence of beings who

³¹ John Plamenatz, “Ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu’on le forcera d’être libre”, in *Hobbes and Rousseau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters (New York: Anchor, 1972), pp. 318-32 (p. 332).

undertake them underlies the invitation to individuals to abstract all contingencies and variables as the basis for entering the social contract. Like the Marcellian promise, the citizen who unconditionally binds himself to his commitment makes an implicit claim about the consistency of his future will in the name of present dispositions. However, this proves problematic given that the will cannot will itself:

il est contre la nature de la volonté qui n'a point d'empire sur elle-même de s'engager pour l'avenir, on peut bien s'obliger à faire, mais non pas à vouloir; et il y a bien de la différence entre exécuter ce qu'on a promis, à cause que l'on a promis, et le vouloir encore (*Du Contrat social, 1ère version, III, 315-16*).

The initial act of will leaves the destiny of its future disposition undetermined. Anthropology conspires to render entirely Utopian the theory of political obligation it confronts.

Formalism provides little in the way of a solution. Merely *willing* to keep my word because I am bound to do so, creating for myself a motive for fulfilling a promise by the very act of making it, denotes what Marcel calls *constance*, a bare obstinacy, irreproachable in itself, but always vulnerable to foundering.³² Rousseau would agree that neither abstract, intellectual support for a particular end nor sheer effort provide the true foundations for acting on a decision. Resolutions conceived as formal duties rarely motivate the self confronted with morally inferior impulses. We may argue for Rousseau's scepticism or even hostility to formalism on the basis of the emphasis he places on the necessity for correct dispositions to enrich the utility of the will when he writes: "Toute la moralité de la vie humaine est dans l'intention de l'homme. S'il est vrai que le bien soit bien, il doit l'être *au fond de nos cœurs* comme dans nos œuvres" (IV, 1106; my emphasis). Formalism proves unrealistic because it ignores human weakness and the inescapable role of contrary inclinations. Moreover, since it is characterised as self-obligation ("exécuter ce qu'on a promis, à cause que l'on a promis"), it also runs contrary to the mood of the social contract whose spirit must find a place in the 'heart' of its citizens. Self-obligation implies a self-division at odds with the integrating act of generalised *willing* which denotes an alignment of wants and a properly enlightened and fully-motivated, unified self.

To go beyond self-obligation towards a true fidelity, the harmony of acts and dispositions, Rousseau recognises the need for appropriately structuring the conditions of willing while also

³² *Du Refus à l'invocation*, pp. 200, 203.

adopting a strategy that exploits the forces of dissolution in the will's favour. *Du Contrat social* recommends three measures for promoting resolutions and infusing apt dispositions in individuals:

1. continually exercising the will's legislative capacity;
2. enlisting the supporting environment of the community of citizens;
3. drawing on the power of habit.

In the first of these measures, Rousseau strikingly reduces the need for self-obligation by finding support for the self in the very discontinuity that dissolves human intention, much as *La Morale sensitive* turns to materialism to re-invent the forces of moral dissolution as means to sustain moral order. "La loi d'hier n'oblige pas aujourd'hui" (III, 424), but constantly renewed acts of the general will, meanwhile, reduce the distance between decision and act, providing a solution to intermittence by drawing on the very phenomenalism which upholding the general will is designed to address. To insulate motive and act from any intermediate realm that would insinuate itself between them, every commitment must correspond to a present resolution: "la loi d'aujourd'hui ne doit pas être un acte de la volonté générale d'hier mais celle d'aujourd'hui, et nous nous sommes engagés à faire, non ce que tous ont voulu mais ce que tous veulent" (III, 316). The general's will's objectives exist by virtue of a moral duration in need of constant and concrete recreation through renewed acts of freedom, thereby avoiding commitments to projects that exceed the limited capacity of will. The body politic persists and operates thanks to a secular *création continuée* that saves it from political annihilation.³³

This constant support for the ethico-political will leads to a second measure that replaces what, for the religious philosopher, constitutes the horizons of *religio* or the bond that ties man to God through faith and to which he unconditionally delivers himself to transcend his prior limits. For Marcel, fidelity intends an ontological permanence that, in turn, informs and takes hold of me: "la fidélité est ontologique en son principe, parce qu'elle prolonge une présence qui elle-même correspond à une certaine prise de l'être sur nous".³⁴ A similar emancipation of the self

³³ "Que Dieu ne veuille plus qu'il y ait du monde: le voilà donc anéanti [...] Si le monde subsiste, c'est donc que Dieu continue de vouloir que le monde soit. La conservation des créatures n'est donc, de la part de Dieu, que leur création continuée", *Œuvres de Malebranche*, 2 vols, edited by Jules Simon (Paris: Charpentier, 1842), vol. II, p. 203.

³⁴ *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique* (Paris: Vrin, 1949), p. 79.

represents the goal of Rousseauian politics except that the religious tenor of a transcendent 'presence' gives way to an alignment of particular wills to the general will, to express an analogous 'lever' (*prise*) that legitimises my being forced to be free (III, 364). As the embodiment of a permanent, overarching general will, the community of equal citizens provides a substantive guarantee for the constant will of every individual member, a fact made evident for those who weaken and no longer will generally. Being forced to be free not only represents the condition of possibility for the total, unconditional commitment into which I enter the moment I contract with others, it also represents the continuous act of will on the part of others to whom I offer myself. This apparent compulsion stands as the recognition of real, future contingencies that eclipse my constant will and which consequently requires assistance from others. Although a fact of moral liberty obtained by obedience to a self-prescribed law (III, 365), being forced to be free does not, in my view, simply concern a "relation of the individual to himself".³⁵ Rousseau substitutes a vertical relation with a horizontal one. An important intersubjective nexus explains how the dictates of my constant will, now inoperative and subordinated by error, continue to find unencumbered expression in the will of a supporting community which remains binding on me. Even when I no longer will generally, my will remains constant as the expression of a greater, collective will with which I identify.

Rousseau's final innovation appeals to habit. In *Emile*, a successful education draws on a fund of acquired habits that create a unity across the self's development (IV, 800). Guaranteeing the integrity of the will's identity in time through the continuity of past determinations prolonged into the present which, in turn, anticipate and shape the future, habit establishes a solidarity between the past, the present and the future, between what I was, what I am and what I will be. The supreme law, renewing and supporting all other laws and holding the body politic together, depends upon the effect of habit working through morals, customs and public opinion. Written in the hearts of citizens, habit insensibly substitutes its own "force" for that of authority (III, 394). A political community that has fully internalised "l'esprit de son institution" presumably no longer needs to be forced to be free. As citizens with unified, integrated wills for whom inclination and duty, sensibility and reason coincide, individuals no longer need to undergo self-

³⁵ Plamenatz, "Ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu'on le forcera d'être libre", p. 324.

obligation or the conflicts of self-division. Habit replaces intellectual or formal assent to authority with full internalisation of the moral law leading, theoretically at least, to a unity of volition that permanently engages the constant will.³⁶ Just as *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* appropriates the sensualist and materialist categories of existence for moral self-determination, habit represents the positive influence of time working in the will's favour through our material, embodied being. Habit provides support for the moral self by creating, from the viewpoint of the present, an effective determinism for the good in the future, thereby offering an additional *prise*, this time as an internal, psychological lever, to prolong dispositions against dissolution in time. The advantages of habit become clear for a will incapable of directly willing itself. In acquiring a habit, I liberate in myself a spontaneous development that presents my will with the means with which to will the good. More than simply sheer habit, habits of the will constitute dispositions acquired by the will to regulate its own behaviour. As a disposition of the will contracted through willed choices—strenuously wanting the good, repeatedly keeping to my resolutions and so on—habit assumes a genuinely *ethical* quality since it results from a practice in which every act “has to be intentional and thus subject to moral judgement”.³⁷ A naturalist substitute for the grace of perseverance, habit entails a moral progress that overcomes the restrictions of the will, a ladder that the will climbs and then kicks away.

[4.3] *Spiritual Progress*

The temporal and material factors that erode human intention may also serve as resources to sustain it. Correctly exploited, both may promote rather than impede the designs of the constant will.

³⁶ I am, however, aware that my speculations about such perfectibility, although in accordance with Rousseau's belief in the ethical finalism of human beings, contrast with the pessimism he frequently expresses in *Du Contrat social*. This proves especially true in relation to the fundamental limitations he places on every state, particularly with regards to its longevity since the condition of the state's very existence lies an inherent and inevitable tendency to degenerate (III, 421-22, 424).

³⁷ Dihle, *The Theory of Will*, p. 56.

In this final section, I want to examine these means as they are outlined in a series of letters Rousseau composed shortly after he abandoned *La Morale sensitive*. Addressed to Sophie (Elisabeth-Sophie-Françoise Lalive de Bellegarde, comtesse d'Houdetot), the “lettres morales”, as Rousseau calls them (CC, V, 21), were probably never sent. They do, however, contain Rousseau’s “principes de morale” (CC, IV, 384) or “règles” setting out a vision of wisdom intended to encourage spiritual “progress” towards *félicité*, the proper end of all human activity (IV, 1081, 1086). Sophie, we learn, already possesses a favourably inclined nature and a love or appreciation of the design of things, but these propitious circumstances prove inadequate. Sophie lacks knowledge of moral truth, but the search and access to this truth depends on her will: “Ce qui vous manque encore ne dépend plus que de votre volonté” (IV, 1082-83). The first office of the will lies in assuming the correct spirit for conducting the search after an intellectual “guide” (IV, 1112) that sweeps away the errors and absurdities of philosophy to establish contact with the constant will or “la voix intérieure” (IV, 1104). The second, achieved through training and exercise, delivers “l’art d’être heureux” (IV, 1115) as a settled disposition uniting personal happiness and virtue.

Rousseau’s idea of spiritual progress, therefore, involves two key moments in which the will figures centrally. The first demands a reorientation of the will as the condition for moral truth delivered by self-knowledge. Thereafter, Rousseau calls on us to sustain and preserve the awareness of this truth as a new identity or motivation of the will. The mood and practices for the progress recommended by the *Lettres morales* prompt comparison with the stoic principle of *askesis* which modern French thinkers interpret in one of two ways. For Marcel, *acèse* involves a purification which vouchsafes knowledge only when fully deserved. The detached attitude of purely speculative thought, which considers knowledge a merely technical operation leaving the knower wholly unaffected, cannot hope to seize it.³⁸ The act of knowing binds knowledge to a mode of participation.³⁹ What we seek, in other words, is indistinguishable from that which enables us to seek it. Foucault, meanwhile, highlights the aspect of *askesis* concerned with exercise or drill, the self-discipline achieved by progressively assimilating learnt truths into

³⁸ *Etre et avoir*, p. 138.

³⁹ *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, p. 57.

permanent principles of action. *Aletheia* becomes *ethos*, truth a motive for the will.⁴⁰ I shall have more to say about the manner in which the regulative becomes constitutive of being in relation to Rousseau's 'care of the self' later. For the moment, and before crossing into the positive recommendations of the *Lettres morales*, I would like to explore further its twin *askesis*, starting with the methods by which individuals gain self-knowledge and achieve contact with their moral source.

The Rousseauian search after truth or the infallible guide of conscience demands a propaedeutics propelled by intense self-involvement. Far from simple introspection, access to the self and conscience represents a privileged mode of apprehending. We must deserve this knowledge prior to attaining it. Much depends on the quality or intensity of apperceptions: the clarity of the voice of conscience, the distinctiveness of the traces written on the heart. The receptivity and response of the will decides the destiny of that stimulus; we may lend an ear or turn a deaf ear to the 'voice', turn our gaze toward or away from the 'mirror' of the soul. The inward journey by which self-knowledge begins proves, for the most part, too difficult without support for the will that re-directs the soul's attention away from its fascination with outward things. Self-knowledge requires and represents a reorientation of the will purified of *amour-propre*. An act of will renders value available to consciousness by placing the self in a condition for receiving moral illumination. Marcel would say that a formerly self-enclosed, alienated consciousness renders itself *disponible*.⁴¹ Following his master, Ricœur describes the reception of consciousness as a form of "hospitality", a special propensity of the "I" which, as *foyer*, plays host to values received in a private space qualified by itself.⁴²

Having established contact with the truth of conscience, the self gradually assimilates the value it encountered and hosted, eventually making it fully its own. The dynamic principle operating between nature and habit discussed in Chapter 3 allows the will to internalise, as *actual* or operative, a value previously only latent or potential to it. Nature lies on either side of habit as origin and as superior outcome (Nature₁ → Habit → Nature₂). Through habit, the values or truths

⁴⁰ 'Les Techniques de soi', in *Dits et Ecrits, 1954-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. IV (1980-1988), pp. 783-813 (p. 800).

⁴¹ Marcel, *Réflexion et mystère* (Paris: Aubier, 1951), p. 178; *Etre et avoir*, p. 48.

⁴² "L'accueil est toujours l'autre face d'une générosité qui irradie et embrasse l'être reçu", *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 76.

encountered and received by the will become fused with it, passing into the *permanent* features of the agent as its future dispositions. An internalisation by which the self and its truth cohere surpasses the intentionality of sensory metaphors, transforming a perceived value into a motive for the will, thereby eliminating the distance posed by the act of judgement and the dichotomies of subject and object, knower and known.⁴³

We stand at the juncture of two great moral systems which the *Lettres morales* combine. In Platonic *anamnesis*, the soul rediscovers its original nature, uncovering and disclosing the truth within itself and making itself, in turn, the place where that truth may reside. For stoicism, truth belongs not in oneself but in the *logoi*, the true discourses or teachings of the master that impart it, which the pupil subjectivises as abiding principles of action.⁴⁴ Rousseau transposes this pedagogical relationship into the Platonic relation of the soul to itself. The soul appropriates a truth from itself that it internalises as consubstantial with itself. Unity gives way to a relation that yields to a new unity. A synthesis of both, the Rousseauian self is *causa sui*, master and pupil, an apprentice of itself, able to become fully in act what it was merely potentially. The uniqueness of Rousseauian moral perfectibility lies in this interior relationship: a vague, pre-existing truth or value emerges from within to re-assimilate and embed itself in dispositions for future action. The development from a condition in which the will remains separate from its perceived values to one characterised by their internalisation calls on techniques tied to *La Morale sensitive*, ou *le matérialisme du sage* to provide initial support for the will's initiative for enlarging its own dispositions through habit. Set in the context of the *Lettres morales*, Sophie must first alleviate the tension between a residual good will and the counter-will of *amour-propre* fostered by life in society, and then annul the distance between knowledge and action by contracting a disposition for virtue through habit.

The first task, a unifying of the will, requires *askesis* to provide the correct mood and spirit for inwardness. To know the self signifies, for Rousseau, discovering its moral source in conscience. Through introspection, and by progressively recovering an authentic selfhood from

⁴³ "Le voir reste spectaculaire; ce que je regarde reste devant moi; ce que j'adopte pénètre chez moi; le vouloir et la valeur sont confondus et unis. C'est cette union qui fait d'une valeur un motif de..." , *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 77.

⁴⁴ 'L'Herméneutique du sujet', in *Dits et Ecrits, 1954-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. IV (1980-1988), pp. 353-65 (pp. 359-60); 'Les Techniques de soi', p. 799.

routine dissipation and projection into the external world of people and objects, Sophie must strive for an awareness that acquaints her with the “voice” or “principles” of conscience. To bring this voice within audible range, Rousseau urges a circumscription that detaches the self from everything artificial or non-essential to it. One achieves a concentration of self by performing an “art” of divestment, considered forbidding only from the viewpoint of the will not knowledge:

Cet art n’est pas si difficile qu’on pourrait croire, ou du moins la difficulté n’est pas où on la croit, il dépend plus de la volonté que des lumières, il ne faut point un appareil d’études et de recherches pour y parvenir. Le jour nous éclaire, et le miroir est devant nous; mais pour le voir il faut jeter les yeux et le moyen de les y fixer est d’écarter les objets qui nous en détournent (IV, 1113).

The metaphor of the *mirror* in the *Lettres* proves instructive. For Rousseau, as for Plato, the mirror relation of the soul to itself creates the possibility of dialogue and self-knowledge.⁴⁵ Unlike the *miroir intellectuel* or reliable epistemological tool denied to me as a fallible creature of sense (IV, 1093), a mirror for self-cognition and the ability to look into myself already lies at my disposal. I possess, moreover, sufficient light for my soul to contemplate the divine part of itself connected to wisdom and knowledge but, Rousseau suggests, this does not mean that I automatically behold myself. Obstacles turn my gaze away so that I cannot attend to my inner self and discern my nature, my legitimate aspirations and duties unless I remove these. How, then, do I obtain an untrammelled vision for self-cognition?

In his *Republic*, Plato invokes an “art of conversion” acquired through education to turn the soul round and make it behold the immaterial, eternal truth. There is no need to implant vision into the instrument of sight, says Socrates, it is already there, but turned in the wrong direction and not looking where it ought to.⁴⁶ Although not feeble, “encumbrances” that stand in its way force the soul’s vision to serve evil.⁴⁷ All this chimes with Rousseau’s view of regeneration but, unlike the Platonic account, that view unambiguously accepts a correlation between virtues belonging to the soul and those of the body implanted by habit and exercise.⁴⁸ Closer in its

⁴⁵ *Alcibiades I*, 132^b-133^b.

⁴⁶ *Republic*, 518.

⁴⁷ *Republic*, 519.

⁴⁸ In the *Republic*, however, physical education forms part of true education and music is rejected for its deleterious effects on the soul; elsewhere, Plato considers faulty bodily habits and upbringing responsible for evil in the soul. Cf. *Timaeus*, 86^{d7-e3}.

conception of moral virtue to Aristotle and Pelagius, Rousseau's account adds to the soul's inclination toward the lower, sensible world a further obstacle to the direction of the gaze. This comes in the shape of a defective will promoted by the determinations and conditions of the material self and its defective habits. Thus, while the concentration of the self consists in nothing more dramatic than solitary retirement ("Recueillez-vous, cherchez la solitude, voilà d'abord tout le secret", IV, 1113), retreat proves difficult to accomplish. Disclosing the truth within depends on overcoming a long-standing propensity resistant to any such initiative. "Ce n'est pas l'affaire d'un jour", observes Rousseau, "de savoir être seule au milieu du monde [...] après une si longue habitude d'exister dans tout ce qui vous entouré" (IV, 1113). Dominated by *amour-propre*, we flee from ourselves and perceive everything through the eyes of others. The environment and the invisible resistance posed by existing psychological and vital habits represent further encumbrances to self-presence.

The dispositions of the Rousseauian will originate in and exist through an accustomed sensibility. The self inclines towards what it routinely desires. The tenor of sensibility, meanwhile, rests with the immediate sensations present to consciousness, either directly as perception or indirectly as memory and imagination, through cues provided by the environment. Modify the environment and one consequently begins to modify the tenor of sensibility and the dispositions of the will. A *composito locus*, the design of *La Morale sensitive*, becomes all-important for reversing and supplanting existing habits of the will and creating and prolonging new dispositions as future ineradicable states (*hexis*) for a progressive mastery of self.

Targeting sensibility through a discrimination of sensations represents the start of a progressive divestment to favourably incline the will to turn inwardly. Sophie's spiritual recollection begins by reining in the senses: "le recueillement de votre cœur doit commencer par celui de vos sens" (IV, 1113). The voice of conscience will not speak unless freed from the disruption of passionate arousal such that one might obtain by shutting one's eyes and ears—as well as one's door—to society. Withdrawing in one's room, however, does little to contain the imagination and eradicate a symbolic presence that generates the very social pressures that render withdrawal from the crowd difficult. In towns, Rousseau tells us, one experiences solitude as an oppressive isolation, the human presence striking the imagination all the more for its absence.

For this reason, Rousseau does not intend to shut Sophie away within the confines of four walls: “je n’ai pas dessein de vous reléguer dans un cloître et d’imposer à une femme du monde une vie d’anachorète” (IV, 1113). Sophie’s retirement belongs not to the anchorite but to the *anakhoresis* of stoicism, the spiritualised principle of retreat that consists in a general attitude and regular practice for remembering rules of action and behaviour.⁴⁹ This retreat forms part of a larger mood of *askesis*, both as a progressive consideration of self and a *dépouillement* achieved through exercise or drill. For *anakhoresis*, a rural retreat is of some importance because nature helps put one in contact with oneself by supplying impressions of freedom and expansion, not personal sequestration from others. Moving among objects, a continual renewal of sensory stimuli dissipates residual feelings of melancholy (IV, 1114) to foster self-communion.

A well-arranged environment assists the task of regathering the dispersed stands of the self but a residual resistance exercised by psychological and vital habits persists. In prescribing solitude, Rousseau further asks Sophie to progressively overcome a sense of *ennui* (IV 1113), the unease deriving from existing dispositions that resist unaccustomed practices with which we attempt to oppose them. *La Morale sensitive* underlines that a person’s perceptual intake and the fortunes of the *économie animale* often hinder, but may and ought to assist, *l’ordre moral* (I, 409). Rousseau understands that a particular tenor of living increases the receptivity of the mind to inward values and truths, and therefore seeks to modify both the outward manifestations of personality associated with an inauspicious moral psychology. Such are the trappings of an elevated social status and the superficial acts that sustain personal and intellectual vanity, for instance, which Sophie would do well to renounce every so often; as well as the organic habits of sleep and diet, to create a regimen conducive to the solitary, contemplative life.⁵⁰

If the first task of *askesis* requires modifying the direction of the will’s gaze, the second consists in training this gaze and accustoming it in its new direction. The objective of “l’exercice de ces courtes retraites” (I, 1113) concerns the capacity to disengage the soul and retire into one’s self whatever the environment: “Eloignez les objets qui doivent vous distraire, jusqu’à ce que leur présence ne vous distraise plus” (IV, 1113). The Sixth *Lettre* culminates with considerations

⁴⁹ Foucault, ‘Les Techniques de soi’, p. 799.

⁵⁰ “Couchez-vous de bonne heure, levez-vous matin, suivez à peu près la marche du soleil et de la nature; point de toilette, point de lecture, prenez des repas simples aux heures du peuple” (IV, 1117).

tioned to the habits at the fore of Sophie's spiritual progress. The design of habit in the *Lettres morales* extends beyond simply contracting a disposition for retreating into self, representing an initiation that opens the way to Rousseauian *caritas* or a proper relation to others. The inner guide of conscience impels us outwards to embrace *l'art d'être heureux* (IV, 1115) for which there is no happiness without virtue, no virtue without happiness. Individuals accustomed to a self-enclosed and alienating *amour-propre* experience the prospect of dedicating or committing themselves to others with a deep-seated unease. The will cannot will itself. Merleau-Ponty also reminds us: "on n'agit pas avec l'esprit seul".⁵¹ Merely to will proves insufficient. To discharge its intentions, the will must have recourse to a material substrate which shares a vital interest in the will's enterprises. Through habit, will forges a lever for itself to achieve stable and uniform patterns of activity or, as Chevalier puts it, *la volonté de vouloir le bien*.⁵² The will cannot will itself but it can and must expose itself to the beneficial and efficient influence of habit.

At the outset of a progressive self-perfectioning over time, a categorical, self-imposed restriction or duty to oneself proves valid until this yields to a new moral spontaneity. Rousseau thus encourages Sophie to suspend her normal routine for two to three days at monthly intervals during which she will make it a condition ("faites-vous une loi", IV, 1114) to live by herself. Equally categorical is the need to overcome the sense of resistance and distaste communicated by *ennui* by providing relief and assistance to the sick, the poor and the oppressed: "imposez-vous cette fonction si noble de faire qu'il existe quelques maux de moins" (IV, 1117); "faites-vous un devoir de porter partout avec une assistance réelle l'intérêt et les consolations" (IV, 1118). A tenacity for the good eventually yields to a moral disposition:

Songez que se plaire à bien faire est le prix d'avoir bien fait, et qu'on ne l'obtient pas avant de l'avoir mérité. Rien n'est plus aimable que la vertu mais elle ne se montre ainsi qu'à ceux qui la possèdent; quand on la veut embrasser, semblable au Protée de la fable elle prend d'abord mille formes effrayantes et ne se montre enfin sous la sienne qu'à ceux qui n'ont point lâché prise (IV, 1117-18).

Virtue stands in a fundamental relationship to the will or sensibility as a love or, more often than not, an aversion. Introduced through effort and exercise, virtue becomes pleasurable, attractive

⁵¹ *La Structure du comportement*, p. 196.

⁵² Chevalier, *L'Habitude*, p. 226.

and then truly perceived and not as a redoubtably hideous Proteus. For Rousseau, habit does not create the capacity for virtue, but facilitates a disposition of the will by continually lowering the threshold at which antagonistic forces operate against a moral reorientation. More than simple continuity and repetition rendering moral activity easier and more secure, the merit of habit lies in its vestigial ethical quality. By a strategy that continues to exclude formalism, *Emile* proposes that the ethical will initially resort to *imitation* until an apparent virtue evolves into a genuine *habitude de l'âme* (IV, 340). Where virtue was once incidental to the act performed, repeated virtuous acts, Rousseau implies following Aristotle, eventually produce virtue as a condition or *habitus* of the will, a permanent feature of the will's choice (*proairesis hexis*).⁵³ Acts that produce virtue lead to acts that manifest virtue.⁵⁴

A basic paradox grounds the moral progress of the *Lettres morales*. While Sophie becomes virtuous by doing virtuous actions, she must, in a sense, already be virtuous in order to perform virtuous actions. This self-intensifying *circulus sanus* rests on the creative forces of exercise, not instruction.⁵⁵ The circularity at the heart of Rousseau's social and moral vision contains three aspects:

1. a disposition for inwardness creates and is created by habitual self-reflexion that re-acquaints the self with the moral sources it has 'forgotten' (*anamnesis*);
2. a disposition for action both engenders and is engendered by repeated acts of virtue;
3. a relay between dispositions of the first kind (one's being) and those of the second (one's actions).

One might express this last circularity in the following way: the performance of good acts facilitates or disposes an inward retreat to appreciate and enjoy the private satisfactions that these bring. Meanwhile, a desire to increase this happiness, in turn, prompts further acts of benevolence in order that one may earn what the *Profession de foi* calls "la suprême jouissance [...] dans le contentement de soi-même" (IV, 587). The *Lettres morales* thus revisit a theme familiar to stoicism: do good and a good examination of conscience follows.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113^a10-11.

⁵⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105^a17-21.

⁵⁵ The paradox of *circulus sanus* in Aristotle is examined by Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Les Vertus et l'amour*, new edn, 2 vols (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), vol. I, pp. 51-53.

⁵⁶ Seneca, *De ira*, III, §36.

The attitude and practice of inwardness harmonises two central imperatives: morality or commitment to others and personal happiness or commitment to oneself. Dependent on the condition of retiring into self, the mutually inclusive demands of altruism and a *jouissance de soi*, Rousseau implies, nourish each other. Echoing the neo-Platonic view of the soul as essentially drawn to moral beauty, Rousseau writes:

dans quelque état qu'une âme puisse être il reste un sentiment de plaisir à bien faire qui ne s'efface jamais et qui sert de première prise à toutes les autres vertus, c'est par ce sentiment cultivé qu'on parvient à s'aimer et à se plaire avec soi (IV, 1116).

One of the pivots of Rousseauian morality lies in the *contentement intérieur* (IV, 1115), a residual attraction to the good which depends on re-animating conscience ("veiller en nous le sentiment intérieur", IV, 1115) by recalling good acts in the past. Rousseau asks Sophie to cultivate this memory because it encourages the start of a reorientation that slowly accustoms her to retreating within to acquire self-knowledge and all other virtues: "Voilà les moyens de travailler dans le monde à vous plaire dans la retraite en vous y ménageant des souvenirs agréables [...] Parez-vous pour vous présenter à votre miroir, vous vous en regarderez plus volontiers" (IV, 1116). Through self-reflexion, Sophie can recall and take stock of the good she has performed but Rousseau equally invites her to add to the storehouse of treasures deposited within her soul in order to render this self-reflexion habitual.

A fundamental unity binds together self-concern and concern about the community. One must first establish a proper relationship to oneself before one can establish a just and ordered relationship to others. Only the self-possessed and fully autonomous individual, prompted by *amour de soi* and conscious of her genuine needs, satisfied through cooperation rather than disruption to others, proves herself a useful member of the community. Under existing conditions of corrupt social arrangements, the recommendations of the *Lettres morales* offer an alternative vision to *Du Contrat social* by grounding Rousseau's social ethic rather more obviously in nature than in convention. This ethic owes much to the Deist idea about self-love as the basis for universal benevolence found in Alexander Pope, who likens the extent of its

influence to the ripples of an ever-widening circle.⁵⁷ Its roots probably lie in the stoic principle of *oikeiosis* in which self-love progressively extends from an instinctive attachment operating towards oneself to a love for the entire human race (*philantropia*).⁵⁸ The *Lettres morales* involve more than the simple access to nature and conscience. A state of inwardness and self-knowledge do not, in themselves, go far enough. The disciplined, inward gaze must turn back and re-enter the world. Self-communion impels us outwardly to the benefit of the community. Virtue—of being and actions—constantly rounds on itself in an oscillation between self and other, existential concentration and expansion, solitude and participation. Although Rousseau proclaims the self-sufficiency of the individual in the sense that her personal happiness derives from her own efforts rather than public opinion, the *Lettres morales* also insist that there exists no genuine self-fulfilment or morality outside the community and its system of mutual obligation and assistance. Herein lies the problem of “Jean-Jacques” that awaits us in the *Dialogues*.

⁵⁷ *An Essay on Man*, IV, 363-70; “Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace, / His country next, and next all human race” (IV, 367-68).

⁵⁸ Cicero, *De finibus*, III, v, 16; xix, 62-63; v. 65.

Chapter Five

Truth and Method:

Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques, Dialogues

The modalities of nature and the will investigated thus far fit into the following broad categories of central importance to my evaluations of Rousseau's intellectual synthesis: the *given*, and, thanks to the interventions of habit, the *acquired*. My examination of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, aims to prolong this schema by applying the two fundamental notions of nature as static and dynamic as criteria for the examination of key terms and concepts such as *le naturel*, *caractère*, *tempérament*, *constitution* and *habitude* which Rousseau employs in his autobiography. Before concentrating on these distinctions, however, I must first elaborate further on the place and import of the *Dialogues*.

The *Dialogues*, as I mentioned in the Introduction, are a complex work and this for one specific reason, highly relevant to problems of interpretation and the question of selfhood that I wish to highlight in advance. In a rare book-length study of the work, James F. Jones Jr. individuates three dialogic structures operative in the text: a macrostructural or *extratextual* dialogue between Rousseau (as author) and the implied reader of the work; the *intratextual* dialogue between the interlocutors themselves; and, finally, the *metatextual* dialogue of the author as "editor" who comments on the statements of the interlocutors.¹ The phenomenon on which I wish to focus concerns the extratextual level, in evidence in the preamble of the work, 'Du Sujet et de la forme de cet écrit', and its relationship to, in effect its remove from, the intratextual and even metatextual levels. The manifold, uneven perspectives of these dialogic levels of the text have significant consequences for the autobiographic revelation of

¹ *Rousseau's Dialogues: An Interpretative Essay*, p. 90.

self. Such consequences derive, in particular, from the neo-scientific, objective approach of the *Dialogues* which compound the already considerable vexatious undertaking of autobiography as a communication concerning the truth about the self. Georges Gusdorf, echoing a Marcellian position on the irreducibly phenomenological nature of the self, insists that any naturalist or analytic method inevitably misconstrues self-knowledge:

La structure même de la conscience humaine empêche une analyse [...] de ne jamais aboutir. L'analyse fausse la vie personnelle en l'objectivant [...] elle dénature intrinsèquement ce qu'elle exprime [...] En me racontant, je me mets devant les autres, je fais de moi-même un objet pour les autres et pour moi-même, je me mets sous le regard de tous, je me transforme en problème. Alors que je suis d'abord, et de moi à moi, un mystère.²

The problem of combining the perspective of a particular self situated within the world with an objective view of the same world that includes that self and its viewpoint, a “view from nowhere”, has lately received attention from the philosopher Thomas Nagel.³ I refer to Nagel’s valuable insights in this chapter. This problem is perhaps nowhere more acutely posed than in a work of autobiography such as *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, a work that not only feels compelled to structure itself around an indirect, third-person perspective, but also draws a *portrait* that approaches the scientific status of ethology. To this end, the early phenomenology of Ricœur serves to identify transgressions of the will and its intentions when these are confronted by necessity in the form of character or temperament (*caractère*), and habit, the central premisses from which Rousseau elaborates a defence of himself in the *Second Dialogue*. The necessity and validity of this framework, like the need to perform a sort of ‘hermeneutics’ for the *Dialogues* to recover agency and value, will, I hope, become clear from this chapter.

The present and following chapters seek to demonstrate how the synthesis emerges by reconfiguring the intractabilities I have summarised into methodological problems attendant on third-person, scientific discourse. My departure from Starobinski’s reading will take two principal routes. The first is in a direction away from the interpretative grid of pathology which, although attenuated, nevertheless places Starobinski in a tradition of commentators,

² *La Découverte de soi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. 313.

³ *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

from Jean-François La Harpe in Rousseau's day to Lester Crocker and Philippe Lejeune in our own, who reject the *Dialogues* as a demented work.⁴ The main thrust of my argument in this chapter aims to establish the view that "Jean-Jacques" embodies the Rousseauian synthesis and that while this proposition can be verified *textually*, it also proves *necessarily* true as a deduction of Rousseau's autobiographical method and its conditions. A second argument, which will receive more detailed consideration in the following chapter, looks to recover moral agency by re-evaluating the involuntary as the product of the voluntary, reformulating the passive features of the *vie immédiate* as expressions of a spontaneous moral conscience beyond the *vie réflexive*. The phenomenon of habit, so central to the Second *Dialogue*, represents an alternative expression of the spontaneous moral conscience in *Emile*. My reply to Starobinski's proto-deconstructive reading, meanwhile, establishes a non-equivalence in the key terms used by "Rousseau" by highlighting textual nuances to demonstrate that the lexis of immobility and stasis (*nature, caractère, nécessité*) harbour moral outcomes not regressions. Along similar lines, my task consists recuperating a positive form of reflexivity, the inward spiritual recollection of self-love, from that associated with *amour-propre* and which the *Dialogues* condemn.

[5.1] *The Problem of the Dialogues: Starobinski's Critique*

For Starobinski, the regressive turn taken by *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* marks a moment of crisis which destroys Rousseau's conceptual synthesis. The scope of Starobinski's argument moves between the inherently contradictory and phenomenologically unintelligible status of the *Dialogues* and a more global view of Rousseau's system which the autobiography allegedly condemns to failure.

⁴ See Jones, *Rousseau's Dialogues*, pp. 39-45, although Jones himself does not include Starobinski among such detractors of the *Dialogues* (p. 44). For Lejeune, "Rousseau a tenté pour de bon l'impossible, il a poussé aussi loin que possible ce que les autres font sans trop y croire". Unlike Gide, Leiris or Barthes, Rousseau's attempt to situate himself both within a perspective that would allow him to understand others from the 'inside' and external perspective to view himself objectively represents a "double folie", *Je est un autre*, p. 56.

In a move designed to make them deliver a retrospective judgement on the previous works of reconstruction, Starobinski compares the *Dialogues* with *Emile*. The synthetic progression blueprinted in *Emile*, he argues, aims to subsume and transcend the antinomies of natural immediacy and reflexive self-division towards a richer, moral spontaneity. The *Dialogues*, by contrast, stall this dialectical progression beyond the antithesis of nature and reason or reflexivity; the conflict subsists unresolved, each immobilised in fundamental opposition to the other.⁵ Consciously or not, Rousseau chooses to retreat from the dialectical progress of his own philosophy, preferring henceforth to side wholly with a passive and instinctive self (“Jean-Jacques”). By implication, Rousseau stops short of the discovery in *Emile* of what Starobinski calls *le sentiment moral*, placed beyond sensation and reflexivity, and which engenders “une synthèse supérieure unissant l’immédiat de l’instinct et l’exigence spirituelle éveillée par la réflexion”.⁶ Heading in a direction contrary to this synthesis, Rousseau maintains throughout that “Jean-Jacques” is immune to and uncontaminated by reflexivity, a state and activity now wholly anathema and associated solely with evil, culpability and corruption. The *Dialogues* radically alter the emphasis of Rousseau’s ideas by evacuating the former ambiguities of reflexivity—simultaneously the occasion for corruption and inequality (*Discours sur l’inégalité*) and a condition for the emergence of conscience (*Emile*)—in favour of an irreconcilable, “manichean” opposition, accentuated to the highest possible degree, between the instinctive and the reflexive life.⁷ This polarity, Starobinski holds, represents the final metamorphosis of key Rousseauian ideas and the end-term of Rousseau’s experience.⁸

Rousseau’s intransigent inflexibility, particularly his eradication of the ambivalence of his own philosophical and historical anthropology, also provoke a series of internal reversals within the *Dialogues*. Starobinski offers an explanation of the overarching motivations that underpin the work and its problematic status by tying Rousseau’s identification with the natural spontaneity of sensation against reflexion to his bid for *innocence* whose effect steadily eliminates voluntarism from the later autobiographies. These offer an account of

⁵ “La vie immédiate et la pensée réfléchie s’opposent sans espoir de réconciliation: aucune voie ne conduit de l’une à l’autre” (p. 251).

⁶ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 246.

⁷ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 248.

⁸ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, pp. 245, 248.

personality minus all *amour-propre* and end with a self-dispossession that completely evacuates agency in favour of a supreme passivity, the plaything of both its own “nature” and influences external to it, and to which no acts, and therefore, no responsibility or culpability may be attributed.⁹ Thus, Starobinski summons the paradox that the insistent efforts to secure innocence for himself, even at the cost of all personal freedom, lead Rousseau to declare that his behaviour derives solely from involuntary and necessary impulses (I, 849), even though he had earlier reproached materialists for dissolving human initiative in blind and predetermined causation (I, 842).¹⁰

Penetrating further into the heart of the *Dialogues*, beneath the superficial negotiations of *apologia pro vita sua*, Starobinski uncovers a profound intractability in the efforts of the *Dialogues* to privilege a return to a condition anterior to the synthesis and the situation of *l’homme naturel*. This intractability centres on the text’s formal expression of the stalled dialectic, the author’s division of the “I” into “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques”, a reflexive self and a spontaneous, non-reflexive self respectively.¹¹ The hypostatizing of these polar identities and their impossible coincidence which Rousseau attempts during the course of the work imprecate the *Dialogues* to error and failure. Starobinski arrives at this conclusion thanks to a combination of two structural approaches, the perspective of pathology and that of existential phenomenology, which I will summarise briefly.

As befits a critic able to draw from the insights of his medical training, Starobinski naturally inquires about the extent to which Rousseau’s work is either a product of, or a response to, mental instability. At the outset, the question appears unclear for the *Dialogues*, like the *Rêveries*, may both conceivably express neurosis or constitute the struggle against it. The flight into solitude, fantasy and the protection afforded by automatic modes of behaviour may equally articulate the effects of illness or constitute a strategy for addressing and

⁹ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 289-90.

¹⁰ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 291.

¹¹ In all, the *Dialogues* feature three characters in its *dramatis personæ*: a Frenchman, “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques”. The sum of Rousseau’s perceived fears and rationalised hypotheses are conferred to that speculative and impersonal entity, “Le Français”. “Rousseau” is the author projecting himself as yet another, an Everyman who conforms to universal and timeless norms of generosity, equity and the disinterested search for truth. Lastly, there is “Jean-Jacques” or rather, as Michel Foucault points out, two “Jean-Jacques”: the perpetrator of various crimes or “Jean-Jacques”-for-“Le Français”, (which the author hopes to eliminate through the exchanges) and the author of various works or “Jean-Jacques”-for-“Rousseau”, *Les Dialogues*, ed. by Michel Foucault (Paris: Colin, 1962), p. xii.

overcoming it.¹² Starobinski keeps his options open, his approach qualified by the difficulties and ambivalences involved in interpreting the autobiographies as either an expression of mental illness or the resilience of genius in the face of exacting pressures, but this indeterminacy cannot hold the psychiatrist in doubt for long as he dispels the ambiguities in favour of an interpretation of Rousseau's work based upon the intelligibility of *la maladie*.

Pathology plays a central interpretative function for estimating the *Dialogues* both in themselves and in relation to Rousseau's system. To take the second of these considerations first, pathology offers a structural unity for Rousseau's thought and personality whose coherence it re-organises into an oscillation between two extremes or temptations in the *Dialogues*, namely, a self-representation characterised, in turn, by marginality, victimhood, and a passivity that barely raises itself above animal instinct, and the adoption of a contrasting stance predicated by egocentricity and omnipotence. Rousseau's thought and the source of his "madness", Starobinski argues, share a common root in primary aspects of his behaviour. The vocation for singularity, for instance, originally derives its source from the objectives of willed individualism at the time of the *réforme personnelle* announced by the *Confessions* (I, 362). As the fears of persecution grow, the erstwhile disposition for spiritual recollection (*resserrement*) and renunciation (*dépouillement*) prolongs itself as a liquidation of voluntarism until Rousseau's relation to people and objects rests primarily on the necessity to submit with resignation to the external imposition of conditions by those who persecute him.¹³ Thus, according to Starobinski, the later autobiographical works bring no innovations but, expressing Rousseau's neurosis, merely alter the structural organisation of his *system*, displacing the relation between ideas that comprise it as well as their meaning.¹⁴

Nowhere, according to Starobinski, does the expression of Rousseau's self-alienation and self-contradiction, both experiential and representational, more faithfully transcribe itself than in "Rousseau"'s judgement of "Jean-Jacques" and the author's failure to register the paradox of adopting a reflexive, detached stance to denounce reflexion:

¹² *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 241.

¹³ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 242-43, 285.

¹⁴ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 244. An illustration of displaced meaning lies in Rousseau's caricature of himself as the child Emile guided exclusively by the tutor: "au milieu de cette liberté feinte", explains "Le Français", "il ne [peut] ni dire un mot, ni faire un pas, ni mouvoir un doigt qu'ils ne le sachent et ne le veuillent" (I, 710), quoted by Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 258-59.

les *Dialogues* sont essentiellement une réflexion dirigée contre la réflexion. C'est là que réside le non-sens, l'erreur capitale des *Dialogues*, autant et peut-être plus encore que dans le caractère délirant des idées de persécution.¹⁵

This paradox ensures that the demonstration of the *Dialogues*, the adequation of Rousseau and "Jean-Jacques", remains an impossibility. A phenomenological transcription of consciousness and the formal structure of the *Dialogues* reveal a dual and contradictory awareness, two experiences of being, two identities so at variance with themselves that neither can coincide with the other:

Le Rousseau qui juge et le Jean-Jacques inapte à l'effort du jugement ne peuvent pas être le même homme [...]

Le Rousseau qui nous parle est absolument *étranger* à l'image qu'il construit de lui-même. Là réside la véritable aliénation, au sens psychiatrique du terme. Car Rousseau subit lui-même la division qui, coupant le monde en deux, oppose irréductiblement le mal de la réflexion et l'innocence de l'immédiat; nous voyons cette division passer en Rousseau lui-même et dresser à l'intérieur de sa conscience l'hostilité de deux mondes qu'aucun chemin ne réunit.¹⁶

The reflexive Rousseau and the spontaneous "Jean-Jacques" cannot inhabit the same world. A portrait stamped with inauthenticity emerges. Worse still, each of these identities disables or "deconstructs" the other. The paradoxes of the *Dialogues* leap from the page as Starobinski, anticipating Derrida's critique of Foucault, uncovers the untenable status of Rousseau's pronouncements about "Jean-Jacques" from the contradiction generated between Rousseau's defence of "Jean-Jacques" and the optic through which he expresses it.¹⁷ Rousseau cannot advance a single proposition against reflexion without rejoining the evils he associates with it. Persisting in this contradiction, and the dialectical breakdown of sensation and reflection, the *Dialogues* bring all possibility of a synthesis to a conclusive end.

Before examining the validity of Starobinski's interpretation, a few preliminary remarks about Rousseau's work ought to be made. Setting *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* within the larger context of Rousseau's writings is entirely proper but for reasons other than that it

¹⁵ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 252.

¹⁶ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 253.

¹⁷ 'Cogito et histoire de la folie', in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 51-97. Starobinski quotes the preamble to *Dialogues*: "il fallait nécessairement que je disse de quel œil, *si j'étais un autre*, je verrais un homme tel que je suis" (I, 665, italics added; *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 252).

offers the last word on the synthesis. The *Dialogues* constitute neither the culmination of a reaction against the synthesis proposed by the doctrinal works, nor even a discontinuity in this progression, when seen against the backdrop of *Les Confessions* and *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. On the contrary, the *Dialogues* express the synthesis of nature and reflexivity, sensibility and ethics, but readers can only arrive at this conclusion once they correctly identify and overcome a set of problems other than those that emerge from Starobinski's reading.

The objections submitted by that reading are impressive enough but if we choose to endorse the view that the *Dialogues* are rent with self-contradiction, and I do not, it becomes apparent that this must hold for more than merely the structural reasons of self-division or any failure on Rousseau's part to register the categorical mistake of employing reflexive methods to denounce reflexion. The errors would seem more elemental than even the staunchest critic might suppose them to be. For instance, towards the end of the exchanges in the Second *Dialogue*, and having read "Jean-Jacques"'s works, the Frenchman remarks on the former's insistence about the unqualified impossibility of regressing to a Golden Age of natural innocence (I, 935) only to declare shortly after in the same exchange that without "Jean-Jacques" he might have doubted whether Natural Man could still exist (I, 936). Certainly, one can't consider this a casual or incidental remark confined to the margins of the text. Of course, Starobinski might regard this example as adding to the now numerous oversights that would, indeed, make complete nonsense of the work. Yet, I believe there lies a significant and valuable intimation here of the difficulties one encounters in identifying "Jean-Jacques" as the representative of *l'homme naturel*. I shall return to this crucial parallel but for the moment it is sufficient to register the fact that such overt, contiguous denials and affirmations by the text should generate rather than confirm our critical suspicions about the origins of Rousseau's 'errors'.

Such uncertainties similarly arise with the supposedly 'demented' nature of the *Dialogues*. Are they really a flawed work after all? Are there no attenuations? The contradictions which seemingly consign them to failure remain more apparent than real. Allegations of madness overlook Rousseau's critical detachment which rationalises his fears as the inordinate but

unsurprising outcome of personal tribulation and an over-active, traumatised imagination.¹⁸ So too, as Robert Osmond argues in his critical introduction, the ability to evoke and judge the “plot” as absurd, like *dédoublement* that serves the interests of clarity and truth, indicate a fulcrum to confront and *test* the neurotic response not a surrender to it (I, lvi-vii). Starobinski insists on the absence of anything new in the later autobiographies and that they merely re-organise themes and preoccupations from previous works.¹⁹ This need not lead to the conclusion that they are, therefore, a neurotic re-working of the past; in actual fact, the anomaly and significance of the *Dialogues* lie, on the contrary and as we shall see, in what they overshadow or, for the sake of intellectual consistency, choose to leave out. As Huntingdon Williams reminds us, Rousseau’s “system” is a self-referential, autonomous one.²⁰ The self-referentiality of the *Dialogues* may, on the contrary, point to evidence of continuity and consistency of the kind that might allow us to demonstrate that Rousseau sought to apply the insights and wisdom of the doctrinal works to himself.

These arguments do not, however, tackle other difficulties thrown up by Starobinski’s phenomenological objections. The bisection of “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques” provides incontrovertible proof of the author’s very real self-division. The legitimacy of the thesis which pits an active, reflexive “Rousseau” against a passive and spontaneous “Jean-Jacques” appears sponsored by the very structure of the work. The paradoxes generated by this self-representation demand attention, not least because subsequent interpretations of the *Dialogues*, either because they reveal the clear and direct influence of Starobinski’s approach or because they too isolate hermeneutic disruptions through deconstructive strategies which he inaugurated in Rousseau scholarship, bring to the fore the continuing and ever-pressing relevance of the problems attendant on reading the *Dialogues*.²¹ I will have more to say about

¹⁸ Rousseau speaks of “des conjectures chimériques, fruits assez naturels d’une imagination frappée par tant de mystères et de malheurs” (I, 782).

¹⁹ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 244.

²⁰ Rousseau, says Williams, “attempts to construct his personal identity primarily in his own writings”. In the theoretical writings in particular—the *Discours sur l’inégalité*, *Emile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*—“Rousseau constructs an image of himself, literally invents himself in these pre-autobiographical texts. They are sources of certainty and value, important points of reference whereby he interprets his past experience”, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography*, p. 3.

²¹ On the central paradox of the *Dialogues*, Grimsley agrees with Starobinski: “As M. Starobinski well points out, the whole effort to demonstrate his reality as an unreflective being depends on a persistent effort of reflection”, *A Study in self-awareness*, p. 243. O’Neal’s work applies Starobinski’s categories of transparency and obstacle to uncover a duality of perception in Rousseauian autobiography which generates a literary object in opposition to the existential self. In Freudian terms, Rousseau’s “self-examination” is a “self-analysis”

the phenomenology of the *Dialogues*, particularly as it relates to *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*, in the following chapter. For the moment, the nature of this division and the various implications that follow from it are open to a different interpretation. “Rousseau”, writes Starobinski, “est exclu de Jean-Jacques, et c’est pourtant à partir de cette étrange exclusion que se construit le portrait de Jean-Jacques.”²² But the exclusion may represent other, altogether more legitimate and consistently objective reasons of which the framework of the *Dialogues* positively demands and, as I hope to show, admirably upholds.

The three-way split of the “I” represents a necessary, polemical bifurcation of self, a pretext for bringing into existence conditions that will permit certain truths to be co-ordinated and proclaimed, rather than the creation of two estranged identities each of whose existence undermines the other. Contradictions undoubtedly arise if, like some critics, we increase to an intolerable degree the distance between “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques”, turning the rhetorical boundary between them into an index of schizophrenia. Treating this division as absolute misunderstands the function of *dédoublement*, a device that allows Rousseau to question his enemies and give, otherwise unsolicited, replies. Rather than reinforcing the supposedly glaring contradictions of the *Dialogues*, Rousseau’s self-detachment allows him to adopt the ‘view from nowhere’, drawing on the capacity to view himself as others would see him in order to gain reliable knowledge about the *complot*.²³ Alterity serves a deliberate end, to pass a series of judgements presented from as impartial a position as possible. This impartiality underwrites the discursive process and the validity of its conclusions. As such,

vowed to failure given the impossibility of transference in the absence of an actual analyst-analysand relationship, *Seeing and Observing*, pp. 106-07. Instead of a full and perfect adequation of consciousness to the autobiographical self, Rousseau must choose between them: “Rousseau must assume the role of both patient and analyst or he must attempt total introspection. He must either entirely rationally observe or “lucidly” see himself. The one form of perception yields a pure object; the other a pure subject to oneself”, *Seeing and Observing*, p. 107. Williams also argues for the impossible coincidence of the actual and virtual selves that writing creates: “the strategy is plainly paradoxical, since the author becomes an advocate for himself only to abolish the very notion of a ‘personne interposée’ [...] ‘J.-J.’ is placed ‘on hold’, as it were, made to wait out the duration of ‘Rousseau’'s argumentation, while the connection with ‘autrui’ goes through the imaginary circularity of the *Dialogues*. By the time they are over, of course, the problem to which they are a response will have changed complexion”, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography*, p. 203. Christine V. McDonald adopts a more openly Derridean approach to demonstrate the aporetic quality of the *Dialogues* as the “interference of writing with reading” which prevents, or effectively postpones indefinitely, the possibility of authenticating the dialogue between “Rousseau” and “Le Français. ‘The Model of Reading in Rousseau’s *Dialogues*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 93 n° 4 (1978), 723-32 (p. 731).

²² *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, pp. 253-54.

²³ “Il fallait bien supposer”, writes Rousseau in the preamble to the *Dialogues*, “des raisons dans le parti approuvé et suivi par tout le monde” (I, 662).

dédoublement not only owes much to rhetorical and polemical strategy, but also looks to emulate the methodology by which Enlightenment philosophy itself sought to establish truth. Rather than a symptom of insanity, the true motivations of *dédoublement* lie with the parameters set out by the opening lines of the work: “J’ai souvent dit que si l’on m’eût donné d’un autre homme les idées qu’on a données de moi à mes contemporains, je ne me serais pas conduit avec lui comme ils font avec moi” (I, 661). “Rousseau” represents an exemplary figure in two ways. First, and in the manner of the *Confessions*, his equity leads the way for others to judge “Jean-Jacques”. The values expressed by this exemplar also belong to the very credo of Enlightenment thought, namely, that facts ought to be verified by oneself rather than relying on malicious propaganda, hearsay, rumour, or superstition. The only way to defeat the apparently impenetrable and mysterious plot is by way of direct inspection and observation of the facts.

But still, arguments that play down Rousseau’s psychological instability in order to seek benefits in the method of *dédoublement* leave untouched his problematic self-projection into “Jean-Jacques” and, consequently, the discontinuity of the dialectic and the failure of the synthesis to materialise. In “Jean-Jacques” and his preference for what Starobinski calls *activités irréfléchies et intransitives*, Rousseau appears to insist on his personal innocence, accepts a radical moral weakness and turns his back on the ethical stage that issues from the self-division of reflexivity. He chooses instead to embrace an aesthetic existence in which a complete submission to immediacy eliminates the volitional and intentional character of every act.²⁴ Indeed, given the lifestyle and values vaunted and assumed, “Jean-Jacques” appears to endorse all the anti-intellectual, anti-progressive prejudices against culture so reminiscent of the *Discours sur l’inégalité* and its attacks on human moral perfectibility through art, technology and instrumental reason. The *Dialogues* persistently characterise “Jean-Jacques” by virtue of his immediacy, spontaneous feeling and automatism, by a passive submission to people and things, and defined as an individual given only to the present feeling of existence minus all projections of selfhood outside of the present. The Second *Dialogue*, in particular, insists on the need to attribute correctly his behaviour neither to effort nor to reason but

²⁴ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 277.

purely and simply the mechanical and transitive actions of physiology, sensibility and necessity. Never “virtuous” (I, 864), the merit of this conduct consists in merely yielding to natural proclivities without resistance. On occasions, he appears even to surpass the Primitive of the *Discours sur l’inégalité*, endowed with a spiritual soul and considered sufficiently aware of his freedom to acquiesce or resist instinct and natural promptings in a manner beyond the capacity of animals. “Jean-Jacques” can’t choose the good; if he does so, it is virtually in spite of himself and wholly without effort or intention on his part (I, 849). Here at least, one feels, lies conclusive evidence that the ideal remains unfulfilled and that the long-heralded synthesis has failed to materialise.

As I suggested earlier, the *Dialogues* offer not one, but two complex and problematic representations. Rousseau provides, first, a parallel between “Jean-Jacques” and Natural Man; and second, a parallel between himself and “Jean-Jacques”. Although legitimate, the comparisons require careful clarification. Admission of the true status of natural man and the significance of the comparison with the author is reserved for Chapter 6. The present chapter aims to concentrate on the representation of Rousseau as “Jean-Jacques”.

Assigning the ascription “Jean-Jacques” to Rousseau is not wrong but readers mustn’t take the *Dialogues* at face value because the comparison Jean-Jacques–Natural Man cannot subsist without the qualifications that make good the omissions refuting Starobinski’s conclusions. The figure of the *Dialogues* which chiefly interests us concerns the individual who claims to have ceased writing and now preoccupies himself solely with the business of day to day living. Identification of Rousseau with the textual representation of this “Jean-Jacques” must take into account the fact that the latter’s identity contains much that is hidden or withheld from view. By broadening the portrait of “Jean-Jacques” that emerges from a selective reading of the text as an irreconcilable opposition between “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques”, the contradictions deemed to follow from this hypothesis begin to unravel. At the risk of anticipating some of my arguments in the following chapter, I wish to turn to some of these complexities and the emergence of a series of problematic facts in the pivotal description of “Jean-Jacques”.

As with all autobiographies, the reader's optic largely rests with the author's negotiation of the problem concerning the reciprocal delimiting of method or "design" and truth.²⁵ This condition applies to Rousseau's writings although the *Dialogues* intensify that problem, introducing an additional framework or perspective that takes us beyond inquiring into any discrepancies surrounding the parallel "Jean-Jacques"/*Natural Man* and towards the possibility of any such identification in the manner overtly claimed by the *Dialogues* themselves. Students of the *Dialogues* are not always ably assisted by their guides: we join the over-worked readers of Flaubertian narratives, forced to contend with characters that represent their author's mouthpieces only to prove themselves what Jonathan Culler calls "weak vessels" of information, protagonists enlisted to create the effect of elusiveness by a refusal to reflect meaning or act as centres of consciousness.²⁶ Both "Rousseau" and "Jean-Jacques" equally conspire against readers of the *Dialogues*. "Rousseau" especially disappoints. Pressed into service to untangle the truth, he benefits from a privileged position of first-hand observation but remains, from the reader's perspective, a truly weak vessel concerned only with the demonstrable qualities of the behaviour and personality of "Jean-Jacques" in view of an apologetic QED. His description of a uniform and simple life, routine but not distasteful for being so, is designed to prove the point that the contented, self-fulfilled, tranquil nature of "Jean-Jacques"'s soul needs no harmful diversions and above all incapable of the machinations and the malign passions of wicked men. If this lifestyle were a deliberately self-imposed but unfit regimen for the benefit of ostentation, the effects would soon begin to show in the decline of his health, in his physiognomy and so on (I, 865). "Rousseau" assures us of the very opposite. In this instance, as with many others, the corollaries prove facile, the account, as we will see, significant for what it omits.

It is a feature of Rousseau's moral philosophy that the efforts directed at self-mastery must themselves follow on from earlier efforts to create the preconditions that initially make necessary self-knowledge possible. Such is the lesson that emerges from the *Lettres morales*. The ethical regeneration of the individual starts with a fundamental re-orientation of the will,

²⁵ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 88.

²⁶ *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca NY): Cornell University Press, 1985), Chapter 3, 'Weak Vessels'.

enabling him to turn inward, regain self-presence and, thereafter, contact with nature and conscience. The chief omission of the *Dialogues* lies precisely in the absence of these key movements of spiritual progress. The facts conveyed by the exploration of self themselves derive from a progressive moral evolution, but these are simply given and *abstracted* from the evolved process that gave rise to them. Translated into autobiographical terms, this means that the focus is not on how I came to be what I am, but rather that I simply am what I am, effortlessly and immutably so. The *Dialogues* are content to portray self-exploration without either the self-mastery that made the inward turn possible and thereafter sustainable, or a clear indication of the ends that this self-conquest ultimately aspires to achieve.

Upon closer inspection, other foundations erect the discontinuities of the *Dialogues* and with wholly different implications for the destiny of the synthesis. These discontinuities are distinct from the apparent contradictions uncovered by critics like Starobinski. As a 'natural man', "Jean-Jacques" actually exemplifies the synthesis but if we try to look for an overt account or indication of a dialectical progression that has passed beyond reflection and has acceded to moral consciousness, we shall not immediately find it. The 'contradictions' of the *Dialogues* are attributable neither to Rousseau's insanity, nor to false consciousness, nor even the impossible merging together of two radically distinct modes of being. Simply put, Rousseau's representation of "Jean-Jacques" simply hides as much as it reveals. The source of these discontinuities stems principally from the optic through which the author reveals our man. Readers face a series of discrepancies and lacunae totalling specifically in the absence of a historical self. Before readmitting and piecing together those indispensable facts that the *Dialogues* occlude, we must first account for this exclusion at the level of methodology and explore its necessary or logical conditions before calling on textual support to endorse a positive verification of the synthesis.

As a prolegomena to the synthesis, I shall first clear the ground by looking at the conditions of Rousseau's autobiography in the next two sections. The following section argues that the *Dialogues* are not a demented work: the lucidity which knows how to keep to its own self-imposed limits dispels what Starobinski regards as the inattentive intellectual error that resorts to reflexion to denounce it. The final section will contribute to uncovering a

reflexive, self-creating agent buried beneath its overt representation as a passive object moved by necessity and the material conditions of existence. This, I hope to show, derives largely from the obstacles posed by the methodology and conditions of self-disclosure and the criteria of ethology and the inexorable categories of causation.

[5.2] 'Du Sujet et de la forme de cet écrit'

The *Dialogues* simultaneously improve on the *Confessions* and problematise the autobiographical project, namely, the communication of truth about the self. My reading of the *Dialogues* seeks to bring forth the conditions to which they are inextricably tied and, within that *a priori* framework, demonstrate both their consistency and coherence at a macrostructural level, as well as their rhetorical and philosophical limitations. I will attempt to extrapolate from Rousseau's explanation of the necessity for adopting an ostensible cloak of objectivity, and try to uncover the reality that lies hidden beneath it. The manner in which this bears on the revelation and identity of "Jean-Jacques" will become apparent by beginning with a detour that takes us back to the *Confessions*.

As they approach the immediate present, readers of the *Confessions* increasingly find themselves called upon to provide the vital missing information that will make sense of the circumstances and events that Rousseau must but cannot fully portray. Throughout, the *Confessions* locate the self in an intelligibility of causation, disclosed by narrative, in which hidden external and internal events of the past imply the future. Experience, feelings and events are continually linked with others, one thing almost inevitably leads to another: Rousseau's masochism derives from the *fessée*, his remorse from the events following the *ruban volé*, his defiance and petty thieving from being harshly treated as an apprentice, and so on. As a history of the soul suggests, Rousseau possesses the links between past and present, being, in the words of the *Morale sensitive*, "en état d'y remonter" (I, 409). He need only turn inward in order to seize and develop the liaison between first causes and their

consequent effects (I, 175, 278). The *Confessions* had set out to discover these causes. By Book Twelve however, a crisis develops; the interconnection between present facts is missing. The agencies behind the plot elude Rousseau who can only register their effects (I, 589-90).

Rousseau now asks for the reader's assistance but the appeal is hazardous. In offering to collaborate with others to ascertain the facts, Rousseau makes himself a hostage to his reader, to whom he hands too much scope for re-appropriating and misconstruing the story as he sees it. What begins as a coup of transparency leads to a high-risk rhetorical strategy that fails to pay off in so far as others persist in their erroneous view of Rousseau. Rousseau's public readings, as the last lines of Book Twelve report, result in no more than a shudder followed by silence (I, 656).

Now, transmitting the truth by correctly established, essential relations between premisses and their consequences represents a serious business. The *Dialogues* profit from the lesson that merely putting the facts before readers doesn't ensure that they will arrive at the desired conclusions. Rousseau now re-doubles his efforts to achieve the effect the *Confessions* had failed to deliver by effectively eliminating the escape routes for the reticent or uncooperative reader into unintelligibility and, therefore, the possibility of doubting the veracity of events which the author of the *Confessions* inadvertently placed at crucial junctures of his narrative. With these imperatives in mind, the *Dialogues* attempt to rectify the dilemmas of their predecessor and make good the lack of vital explanations by adopting a rhetorical strategy that takes the recalcitrant reader on board, internalising him into the ordering and persuasive structure of this new *apologia pro vita sua*.

The *Confessions* had thrown up intractabilities which Rousseau intended to address but the *Dialogues*, almost completely and symmetrically opposed to the *Confessions*, create problems of their own. What I understand as the discontinuities of the *Dialogues* with respect to the *Confessions* and other occasional autobiographies are the direct consequences of the new method outlined in the preamble to *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, 'Du Sujet et de la forme de cet écrit'. The significant methodological passages can be highlighted as follows:

En voulant exécuter cette entreprise [i.e., the *Dialogues*] je me suis vu dans un bien singulier embarras! Ce n'était pas de trouver des raisons en faveur de mon sentiment, c'était d'en imaginer de contraires, c'était d'établir sur quelque apparence d'équité des procédés où je n'en apercevais aucune [...] Livré pour toute lumière à mes conjectures, je n'en ai su former aucune qui pût expliquer ce qui m'arrive de manière à pouvoir croire avoir démêlé la vérité [...]

Cependant pour ne pas combattre une chimère, pour ne pas outrager toute une génération, il fallait bien supposer des raisons dans le parti approuvé et suivi par tout le monde [...] j'ai pris le seul parti qui me restait à prendre pour m'expliquer: c'était, ne pouvant raisonner sur des motifs particuliers qui m'étaient inconnus et incompréhensibles, de raisonner sur une hypothèse générale qui pût tous les rassembler [...] d'examiner quelle conduite de leur part eût été la plus raisonnable et la plus juste [...]

La forme du dialogue m'ayant paru la propre à discuter le pour et le contre, je l'ai choisie pour cette raison. J'ai pris la liberté de reprendre dans ces entretiens mon nom de famille [...] et je me suis désigné en tiers [...] en prenant un Français pour mon autre interlocuteur [...]

[...] il fallait nécessairement que je disse de quel œil, si j'étais un autre, je verrais un homme tel que je suis [...] en expliquant simplement ce que j'aurais déduit d'une constitution semblable à la mienne étudiée avec soin dans un autre homme (I, 662-65).

While the deployment of dialogic objectivity, deduction and dialectic all bring notable rhetorical improvements to the arguments Rousseau marshals, significant and inevitable drawbacks for autobiographical self-representation reverse this gains. The methods of the *Dialogues* pose insurmountable obstacles to a direct identification of Rousseau with “Jean-Jacques”. The preamble announces an extreme form of objectification; it is not simply the self-as-an-object but, in effect, the self-as-an-object-as-other. In this vertiginous *dédoublement*—Rousseau as other perceiving himself as yet another—we cannot expect to identify the author with “Jean-Jacques”, an objectified subject twice removed, without distorting the author in turn. While this applies to all of the participants represented in the *Dialogues*, it proves especially true of “Jean-Jacques” since he appears a partial and incompletely represented self, the most distant and the least directly given of the three figures of the *Dialogues*.

Despite this distanced optic, the *Dialogues* make several important innovations. The objective format of the dialogue ensures that conflicting opinions can meet on equal terms and means Rousseau need not address his public directly, a dispensation that immediately represents a major improvement on the problematic solicitations of the *Confessions*. Countering the silence and indifference towards the *Confessions*, the objective, centreless

view adopted by “Rousseau” proves a highly useful strategy for creating anew the convergence and discursive exchange that every autobiography requires and seeks. “There is”, notes Nagel, “a close connection between objectivity and intersubjectivity”.²⁷ The *Dialogues* deliberately place “Jean-Jacques” in an intersubjective world where others may join “Rousseau” and share his point of view.

The adoption of a deductive logic marks another development and suits Rousseau’s purpose admirably. Deduction yields certainty rather than probability. Rousseau’s deductive method consists in positing unquestionable premises from which necessary and conclusive corollaries are inferred on a logical basis that are also demonstrated as factually true. Thus, while “Le Français” has mere opinions about “Jean-Jacques” based upon contingency, the knowledge possessed by “Rousseau” represents not only a deductive necessity but based upon first-hand, publicly verifiable observation. Rousseau has his premisses rest upon principles to which his materialist enemies could not object since they combine the prestige and seeming legitimacy of a positivist and experimental approach. The Second *Dialogue* in particular persistently draws on terms belonging to experimental science: “étudier” (I, 783), “résultats” (I, 785), “observations” (I, 791), “méthode” (I, 794), “examen” (I, 794). It is as if by his choice of *constitution* and *temperament*, Rousseau signalled his dissatisfaction with the account of the *enchaînement d’affections secrètes* in the *Confessions* (I, 1149). That work had given rise to the plurality of selves, a “bizarre et singulier assemblage” (I, 1153) unified only by its history. Now, he had to search for deeper and more intimate reasons that would explain him in the eyes of others.²⁸ Possibly also, given the intellectual climate and with an eye to the proponents of the thesis he now made his own, the category to which these reasons belong might serve to endorse his account (or even disculpate him) in the eyes of his most redoubtable antagonists. One cannot hold an individual responsible, their thesis runs, for the outcome of organisation or personal *idiosyncrasies*.²⁹ We can only speculate about

²⁷ *The View from Nowhere*, p. 63.

²⁸ This is not to say that physiological references are absent in the *Confessions*; see for instance I, 53 & 113. The key difference is that such physiological insights are rarely, and even then never exclusively, provide the sole basis from which Rousseau derives specific moral consequences concerning his personality.

²⁹ La Mettrie’s thesis in the *Discours sur le bonheur*, later taken up by D’Holbach in his *Système de la nature* and others, recasts the moral question as a problem of physical configuration; vice and virtue is a matter of individual *organisation* derived from Nature.

such re-appropriations of enemy tactics, but what seems plausible after the fiasco of the *Confessions* is that Rousseau deems the sum of congenitally somatic and psychological qualities primordial in that they provide a further opportunity for him to account for the highly public singularities of his behaviour.

The choice of the dialogic form of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* is also telling from the viewpoint of the Socratic method based upon drawing distinctions. Deployed in the Platonic dialogues, which Rousseau knew well and admired, its chief virtue lies in promoting logical consistency. The object of the dialogue thus understood centres not on discovering new facts but, in accordance with the doctrine of *reminiscence*, eliciting knowledge one already possesses. The amount of knowledge possessed is sufficient (Rousseau claimed to have said everything in the *Confessions*); only the right conclusion is lacking. This may derive from confusion of thought or an absence of proper analysis which fails to make the best logical use of what is already known. Sections of the *Dialogues* show “Rousseau” employing rigorous, almost mathematical reasoning, defining his terms, stating his principles and their consequences, and determining what constitutes the proper criteria of proof and demonstration. The attempt to arrive at precise notions about the nature of *sensibility* and *sensuality* in the second *Dialogue*, for instance, admirably illustrates this procedure (I, 805-11).

But much in Rousseau’s work which surpasses the dialogue in its purely Socratic or Platonic forms. The Socratic dialogue typically ends in *aporia*; the objections of philosophy have led to puzzlement without any solutions being proffered, yet the interlocutor’s admission of ignorance is itself conveyed as an improvement on a former state of erroneous belief. For a work of personal apology, such doubtful conclusions are clearly unacceptable. Rousseau’s method overtakes both the Socratic dialectic with its exclusive concern with discrimination, and the method evidenced in Platonic dialogues which inductively pursue linguistic definitions compatible with their usage. While extending the debate to factual as well as conceptual truth, the *dialectic* of the *Dialogues* operates in a fashion that approximates our own modern understanding of the term. Rousseau achieves a *dédoublement* of the interlocutor or *respondent* of the Socratic dialogue. The opinions held by “Le Français” are,

taken in themselves, perfectly consistent; juxtaposed alongside those of “Rousseau”, however, they become untenable. At least one body of assertions must, therefore, be false: “l’auteur des livres et celui des crimes ne sont pas le même homme” (I, 690). Simultaneously, “Rousseau” also stands in as the Socratic figure who interrogates “Le Français” but, instead of proceeding to argue from the answers he receives, he posits principles based upon observations he has personally made in the interval between the First and Second *Dialogue*. These first-hand observations confront the hypotheses advanced by “Le Français” to force a dialectical resolution of the contradiction. The dialectical method guarantees that the latter will not be left with any other option than the one desired by Rousseau and which he must adopt once he follows the due processes of distinction and definition.

The rhetorical design of the *Dialogues* draws in the indifferent or hostile reader and then directs him through necessary persuasion much like *La Nouvelle Héloïse* captivates its readers by meeting them on their own terms (II, 17). The *Dialogues* argue in more militant fashion, eradicating any vacuum that the reader tends to fill with his own conclusions through logical, systematic distinction and definition. But, in trying to make good the missing links of the *Confessions*, what kind of explanation do the *Dialogues* offer in return? Having established the reason and necessity of deduction and objectivity, what are their bearing on the revelation and identity of “Jean-Jacques”? Deductive argumentation and the objective perspective, both tied to the method of speculative rationalism (*philosophie*), represent problematic procedures for the representation of self. The *Dialogues* simultaneously improve and problematise access to truth; their deductive and objective criteria cannot fully perform the assignment Rousseau asks of them and this for two reasons. First, an objective, third-person perspective tends to eliminate freedom and the awareness of the agent associated with a first-person optic. The function of *dédoublement* and self-division serves the interests of impartiality and objectivity, but there arises the danger of *double vision* or “false”, mis-applied objectification.³⁰ Nagel explains: “the success of a particular form of objectivity in expanding our grasp of some aspects of reality may tempt us to apply the same methods in

³⁰ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, p. 86.

areas where they will not work [...] because they are in some respect irreducibly subjective.”³¹ Inherent to all the human sciences, “double vision” produces a conflict within ourselves as both subjects and objects of understanding. This dilemma raises difficulties when we try to account for agency. For the moment, I wish to pursue a second problem, namely, that rational deduction tends to decrease the degree of certainty concerning the truths reached.

The shift in apologetic design from the *Confessions* to the *Dialogues* is accompanied by equally significant changes in what Rousseau allows to submit or dispense from reasoned scrutiny. The focus of *Dialogues* alternates between two accounts: Rousseau’s self or “Jean-Jacques” and the series of events known as the “plot”. Neither inhabits the same world but of the two, the plot appears the primary object of intellectual investigation. Given this ascendancy, the *Dialogues* deduce the character of the plot and “Jean-Jacques” in a way that proves costly to the latter: Rousseau is forced to make “Jean-Jacques” fit into the deductive framework applied to the plot, at the expense of his own self-revelation. According to the *Discours sur l’inégalité*, one may reconstruct unknown, intermediary events or facts which separate known facts belonging to the past and present by employing one of two methods. The first belongs to empiricism and constitutes the business of the historian; the second calls upon rationalism to produce a logical, causal chain of events in the absence of historical evidence:

sur ce que deux faits étant donnés comme réels à lier par une suite de faits intermédiaires, inconnus ou regardés comme tels, c’est à l’*histoire*, quand on l’a, de donner les faits qui les lient; c’est à la *philosophie* à son défaut, de déterminer les faits semblables qui peuvent les lier (III, 162-63; my emphasis).

The progression from the *Confessions* to the *Dialogues* takes us from what Rousseau regarded as the “history” of his soul (I, 278) to the “philosophy” of the plot which started with his first, true fault, the abandonment of his children (I, 701). This philosophical task remains unfinished; the *Confessions* end in impenetrability and mystery. Frustrated with this

³¹ *The View from Nowhere*, p. 87.

failure and with no one prepared to lift the veil over the plot, Rousseau has to take to understanding it himself.

A new tack is evidently needed. During the Second *Dialogue*, “Rousseau” offers a compressed biographical sketch of “Jean-Jacques”, outlining the salient historical causes of the latter’s unique turn of mind—a life-long predilection and need for idealised virtue, both Roman (the mythic heroes of Plutarch) and Romanesque (the *honnête amitié* of D’Urfé’s *Astrée*)—which finds an outlet only in imagination and places him at such a disadvantage in society. This sketch serves to introduce a series of deductions from which “Rousseau” hopes to establish the superior coherence of his own account:

Ces causes tirées des événements de sa vie auraient pu *seules* lui faire fuir la foule et rechercher la solitude. Les causes naturelles tirées de sa constitution auraient dû *seules* produire aussi le même effet. Jugez s’il pouvait échapper au concours de ces différentes causes pour le rendre ce qu’il est aujourd’hui. Pour mieux sentir cette nécessité, écartons un moment tous les faits, ne supposons connu que le tempérament que je vous ai décrit, et voyons ce qui devrait naturellement en résulter dans un être *fictif* dont nous n’aurions aucune idée (I, 820; my emphasis).

In this step lies both the logical continuity and discontinuity between the *Confessions* and the *Dialogues*. Speculating on ostensibly unknown intermediary facts and their interconnection ought, but in fact does not, distinguish the account of the plot from that of “Jean-Jacques”. The sequential narrative in the form of a causal chain is now constructed for the benefit of elucidating the plot but the exercise of the *Dialogues* is qualitatively different to the introspective but empirical psychology employed to connect the historical facts of the self in the *Confessions*. Rousseau can only hypothesise on the reasons that might establish the causes of the plot but the new and apparently necessary intermediate facts which he posits may have no more validity than the usual rationalist claims to truth. Reasoning proceeds from the knowable to the previously unknown, but the relation between the two only requires intellectual coherence to satisfy the criteria of rational truth. Rousseau’s own critique in the *Lettres morales* stresses how rationalists erect shaky systems from unfounded or contingent propositions which empiricists then simply restrict or undo completely (IV, 1090-91). The foundation of the plot erected by “philosophy” may, therefore, be no less secure.

So much, then, for the discovery of the origins and progress of the plot. What of “Jean-Jacques”? The single most prejudicial move of the *Dialogues* belongs to the act of entangling the representation of “Jean-Jacques” in a deductive framework characterised by a third-person perspective that prefers philosophical rationalism over an empirical and phenomenological history. The preponderance of philosophy over history represents a backward step: those directly known, secure facts to explain Rousseau’s personality and revealed by the *Confessions* must henceforth be hypothesised via an indirect and probabilistic picture of the self that appears well founded or reliably, rather than necessarily, inferred from external observation. An inductive threat equally applies to the deduction of “Jean-Jacques” as that of the plot. The objective and scientific third-person view, like the deductive method, comes at a further price of significant restrictions. Compelled to focus solely on the visible, observable effects of self, “Rousseau” effectively adopts a behaviourist stance that draws support from an exclusively materialist account of physiology or ‘constitution’ at odds with Rousseau’s Spiritualist position. The ensuing tension causes him to draw back from a full scientific account of personality which principles like constitution or behaviour might provide. As we shall observe, “Rousseau” remains content to assure himself of the reality rather than the scientific plausibility of the contradictory physiological characteristics he deduces in “Jean-Jacques”. This is more than a reluctance, as I hope to show, for the supervening presence of inner convictions held by “Rousseau” undermines the central materialist premisses of the Second *Dialogue*. Indeed, the cleavage between specular observation and being—“il fallait nécessairement que je disse de quel œil, si j’étais un autre, je verrais un homme tel que je suis”—barely manages to survive, threatening the very basis of the stated deduction of truth. “Rousseau” is never fully objective but alternates between impartial observation and a perspective that betrays a clear residue of the author’s own autobiographical desire. This conflict surfaces in two ways: first, a prior inclination sympathetic to “Jean-Jacques” potentially interferes with the outcome of his observations, and second, “Rousseau”’s too intimate acquaintance with “Jean-Jacques”, incompatible with an impersonal perspective, represents the intrusion into the *Dialogues* of a stance redolent of the *Confessions*.

Let me address the conflict of inclination and objectivity first. Jones rightly contextualises the deliberations of the *Dialogues* within the most central issue of Western philosophy and religion, namely, the nature of, and access to, truth.³² What I wish to bring out are two roads to truth: the arrival at objective truth, largely a matter of calculating reason; and an inclination to truth, a supremely subjective reception of that truth. Before discussing if and how they contradict one another, these modes of apprehending truth serve to highlight the restrictions posed by the *Dialogues* and which, I believe, Rousseau would have preferred, if he could, to forgo completely.

Echoing a significant passage of the *Rêveries* that describes Rousseau's intellectual and moral search for certainty against the sceptical, atheistic philosophy of the day (I, 1015-18), the first *Dialogue* depicts "Rousseau" falling prey to doubts about "Jean-Jacques" thanks to the evidence reported by "Le Français". The latter's story commands intellectual conviction and is, for this reason, deeply unsettling even though it falls short of being truly *persuasive*, that is, able to summon the feelings that bid full, inner assent.³³ "Rousseau" still wants to believe the contrary and is wary of being the dupe of his own deep-rooted wishes:

Après vous [i.e., to "Le Français"] avoir dit pourquoi vos preuves, toutes évidentes qu'elles vous paraissent ne sauraient être convaincantes pour moi qui n'ai ni ne puis avoir les instructions nécessaires pour juger à quel point ces preuves peuvent être illusoires et m'en imposer par une fausse apparence de vérité, je vous avoue pourtant derechef que sans me convaincre elle m'inquiètent, m'ébranlent [...] Je désirerais sans doute, et de tout mon cœur, qu'elles fussent fausses, et que l'homme dont elles me font un monstre n'en fut pas un: mais je désire beaucoup d'avantage encore de ne pas m'égarer dans cette recherche et de ne pas me laisser séduire par mon penchant" (I, 769).

How, in such circumstances, can one establish truth? The response to this intractability lies, as Jones indicates, in "seeing for oneself"³⁴:

Que puis-je faire dans une pareille situation pour parvenir, s'il est possible, à démêler la vérité? C'est de rejeter dans cette affaire toute autorité humaine, toute preuve qui dépend du témoignage d'autrui, et de me déterminer

³² *Rousseau's Dialogues*, p. 142.

³³ Rousseau upholds a distinction between persuasion which targets sensibility in all its forms (passions, imagination, affective memory) by the communication of feelings, and conviction which satisfies reason through abstract, intellectual clarity. See Christopher Kelly, "'To Persuade without Convincing': The Language of Rousseau's Legislator", pp. 326-28.

³⁴ *Rousseau's Dialogues*, p. 146.

uniquement sur ce que je puis voir de mes yeux et connaître par moi-même (I, 769).

This preferred method remains, however, thoroughly ambivalent once we tease out two separate intelligibilities that it combines. Set within the framework of eighteenth-century thought, the text's rejection of authority and prizing of first-hand, direct experience conflates two epistemologies that we may distinguish as belonging to:

1. the direct, experiential acquaintance with truth hostile to all formalism and authority;
2. the call for observation and experiment made by Baconian science against the type of philosophy it considered typical of Scholasticism, namely, reasoning at once logically consistent and entirely bogus.

"Rousseau" appears to promote two contiguous but, in effect, very different theories of truth: romantic or *revealed* truth and positivist or *observed* truth.

The revelation of truth through intimate first-person experience belongs primarily to the *Confessions*. There, Rousseau seeks to provide an exemplary but universally coherent model of self-revelation by appealing to the subjective intuition of felt truths in order to assist others in similarly achieving self-knowledge for themselves ("un ouvrage unique et utile , lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes", I, 3). The reception of such truths depends on a certain, hospitable condition of the will, a disposition favourable to an impartial and sympathetic judgement of Rousseau made in the light of the reader's own full and sincere self-examination. The *Dialogues* ostensibly draw away from the communication of revealed truths perceived from a privileged standpoint, in favour of a neo-scientific enterprise that calls upon the validity of explanations that all may arrive at by themselves. The attempt to reach others and communicate on the level of subjectivity having failed in the *Confessions* ("Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes", I, 5), Rousseau now gives prominence to what Nagel terms the "objective self" in the form of "Jean-Jacques", and "the subject of a perspectiveless conception of reality" who is none other than the reader's own optic, that is, "Rousseau".³⁵

³⁵ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, p. 64.

During the course of the exchanges, a tension between the rival epistemologies of revelation and observation rises to the surface. Behind the presupposition of the *Dialogues*—only a centreless view of “Jean-Jacques” can discover and promote truth—lies the notion that anyone apprehending the facts with fair-mindedness and a sense of justice will arrive at the same conclusions reached by “Rousseau”. But will they? The objectification of knower (“Rousseau”) and known (“Jean-Jacques”) undoubtedly advances the interests of convergence but a fundamental paradox clings to the optic of the knower, an optic that simultaneously belongs to the author’s privileged standpoint and a representation of himself as “objective self”. The neutral quality of the data presented cannot easily coexist with the exclusive interpretation of it aimed at by autobiography. Put another way, Rousseau must transmit a truth that derives its certainty from subjective intuition and a first-person perspective via the centreless view of “Rousseau” who cannot lean one way or the other in advance of observation and verification.

A sum of perspectives belonging to views on an equal footing contrasts with the privileged perspective of “Rousseau”. But a further significant ingredient finds its way into the *Dialogues*, demonstrating the persistence of the approach of the *Confessions* which their successor cannot or refuses to give up. The neutrality of the objectified self, “Jean-Jacques” lies in the absence of every perspective; “Rousseau”, by contrast, is a privileged observer because he alone, among all men, enjoys access to the truth. Why? The answer to this question lies in the notion of the will; it alone explains why “Jean-Jacques” is perceived in the manner that he is. Let us recall that Rousseau often talks of those who orchestrate the league against him as victims dominated by inexplicable drives (“étranges dispositions”, I, 662) who blind others to the truth (“[l’]aveuglement du public”, I, 665). The task of the *Dialogues* appears less a *demonstration* of the truth, rather a *conversion* to it. Perception of the truth depends on the property of what we perceive and our own moral psychological make-up. As one of the initiated of the ideal world (“les initiés se reconnaissent entre eux”, I, 672), “Rousseau” is favourably disposed in advance towards “Jean-Jacques” in a way that the author of the *Confessions* hoped its readers would be towards him. It is here that vestiges of the *Confessions* persist. Although their authorship remains disputed by both interlocutors,

the works “Rousseau” has read have, nevertheless, touched him, providing him with prior proofs of the heart, as he declares towards the end of the first *Dialogue*: “J’ai dans le cœur des témoignages plus fortes que toutes vos preuves que l’homme que vous m’avez peint n’existe point” (I, 768). Even though such feelings ought to find no place in a neutral, centreless perspective, powerful emotional proofs buttress this view in advance. At this point, a question mark naturally arises over the usefulness of objectivity. If truth and knowledge are profoundly subjective affairs bound up with the will, objective insights and observation are insufficient. Indeed, the text hints at the superiority of a sudden conversion through revelation over prolonged, discursive ratiocination during an exchange when “Rousseau” wishes to render “Jean-Jacques” immediately transparent to “Le Français” by means of a simple but all-encompassing insight (I, 799).

I have said the text *hints* because the *Dialogues* must, above all else, tread carefully. They harbour revealed knowledge that they cannot reveal. The standpoint of the *Confessions* also persists in an additional and far more problematic manner, tied to the function “Rousseau” performs as vessel or intermediary for the reader when the intratextual dialogue between “Rousseau” and the Frenchman replaces the extratextual dialogue between Rousseau-as-author and his readers. “Rousseau”’s position simultaneously enables him to observe and report the truth about “Jean-Jacques” and yet this leaves him strangely unable to reveal fully that truth in a way that might vindicate “Jean-Jacques”. His position is both privileged and yet, one might almost say, wholly useless for being so. He is best placed to report on what he has seen and yet strangely incapable of doing so. Yes, he has emotional proofs and yet, at the beginning of the Second *Dialogue*, he admits that first-hand observations cannot corroborate what he already intuitively feels about the subject in question: “Il est malheureux pour J. J. que Rousseau ne puisse dire tout ce qu’il sait de lui” (I, 797). “Rousseau” bears inward witness to truths he cannot exploit for the sake of truth. As he narrates the details about “Jean-Jacques”, he acknowledges his inability to report all that he has seen: “Ils vous intéresseraient davantage encore, j’en suis très sûr, s’il m’était possible ou permis ici de tout dire” (I, 835). Jones’ interrogations about the optic on which the reader must depend point to the problem I wish to highlight, one that goes beyond the simple inequality Rousseau

routinely erects between the persuasive superiority of immediate, visualised perception and abstract and metonymic discourse about the object.³⁶ Why is it that, in the words of Jones, ““Rousseau” [...] will never be able to reveal all that he has come to understand about “Jean-Jacques””? Why does “Rousseau” “tellingly admit that the words he has been using to describe “Jean-Jacques” cannot adequately do justice to the issue and that it is better to see “Jean-Jacques” rather than to try vainly to speak about him”? Why is it, finally, that “Rousseau” can only reveal to the Frenchman “a spate of consequences which in the main are themselves clues to the truth”?³⁷ Jones advances the thesis that “all representation is by definition capable of being misrepresented”.³⁸ A little earlier, he explains:

The reader cannot know “Jean-Jacques” as did “Rousseau” because the reader cannot conceivably see “Jean-Jacques” for himself. But truth [...] can never be directly seen in Western philosophical and religious traditions. Truth can at best be perceived only through an intermediary.³⁹

With this I am in full agreement but “Rousseau”’s ambivalent and even strange reticence nevertheless prompts us to ask: what kind of intermediary *is* he? What are the status and value of his observations? To answer these question requires that we bear in mind that there are two intermediaries in the *Dialogues* and that even “Rousseau” can only *see* “Jean-Jacques” *indirectly*.

“Rousseau”’s silence is pivotal. The coherence and intellectual consistency of the *Dialogues*, as well as their chief deficiency in representing “Jean-Jacques”, equally flow from it. The *Dialogues* argue consistently within self-imposed restrictions by making necessary adjustments to faithfully deliver the intentions of the Preamble, but they pay the price of this coherence in terms of the account and, consequently, the identity of “Jean-Jacques” perceived by the reader.

The Preamble declares that the *Dialogues* will deduce all truths from the axiom of *constitution* but to show how constitution might explain the behaviour and character of “Jean-Jacques” is not enough. Those to whom Rousseau must communicate these truths regard

³⁶ We find this inequality in *Emile* (IV, 645, 647-48) and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (V, 376).

³⁷ *Rousseau's Dialogues*, pp. 151, 125, 126.

³⁸ *Rousseau's Dialogues*, p. 151.

³⁹ *Rousseau's Dialogues*, p. 150.

them with the utmost indifference; the *Confessions*, we recall, merely evoked a shudder and silence. In order to create a situation for the truth to emerge anew, Rousseau must operate under the constraints imposed by the universal silence of the plot, and is forced into a conflict between the need to avoid speaking overtly on his own behalf while bringing into existence conditions favourable to an objective assessment of the truth by all. Under these restrictions, the facts of physiology, held from a first-person viewpoint, must be delivered out of the mouth of another who will state impartially and equitably what one ought necessarily deduce from them. Rousseau must delegate himself as another *and* divulge, from this external perspective, knowledge about the effects of a constitution that he himself could only come by indirectly and through mediated perception.

Having demonstrated that temperament has given shape to the moral being of “Jean-Jacques,” Rousseau concludes:

Voilà le précis des observations d'où j'ai tiré la connaissance de sa constitution physique, et par des conséquences nécessaires, confirmées par sa conduite en toute chose, celle de son vrai caractère. Ces observations et les autres qui s'y rapportent offrent pour résultat un tempérament mixte formé d'éléments qui paraissent contraires: un cœur sensible, ardent ou très inflammable; un cerveau compacte et lourd, dont les parties solides et massives ne peuvent être ébranlées que par une agitation du sang vive et prolongée. Je ne cherche point à lever en physicien ces apparentes contradictions, et que m'importe? Ce qui m'importait, était de m'assurer de leur réalité, et c'est aussi tout ce que j'ai fait (I, 804).

Though unique and most singular, the humoural composition of temperament is real enough, and such pneumatological anomalies reflect and, in effect, resolve the paradoxes concerning the personality of “Jean-Jacques”. I do not wish here to concentrate on ascertaining the plausibility or otherwise of the complex material reality of “Jean-Jacques” that “Rousseau” infers and which I concede; instead, I wish to question how facts about one’s own constitution, let alone another individual’s physiological make-up, can ever constitute objects of knowledge. Rather than an unproblematic possession of such facts, I may only enjoy a phenomenological awareness of the *effects* of my embodied self never the embodied being in itself. Perception alters and removes me from the reality of my own embodiment. Constitution is, therefore, only partially accessible to the individual himself, never transparent. By this token, “Rousseau” stands twice removed for he perceives these effects

as another self. Strictly placed within the confines of an external observer, “Rousseau” can’t verify the facts of anatomy (the proper observation of which might have scuppered those Cartesian notions of “fermentation” and “spirits” to which “Rousseau” appeals); he can only infer these from observed behaviour. But the central point is this: the Preamble had, on the contrary, promised to deduce behaviour from “constitution” and this leads to a difficulty. What is supposed to be the axiom from which all other deducible propositions derived itself emerges as *a deduction not a first premiss*. The Second *Dialogue* has, almost imperceptibly, modified the aims of the Preamble.

By means of a transposition of perspectives, Rousseau conveys as deductions made in the third-person facts he comes by in the first, and this he successfully accomplishes. However, the Preamble and the Second *Dialogue* constitute two different perspectives on either side of Rousseau’s *dédoublement*. In the Preamble, Rousseau, a unified entity, enjoys phenomenological possession of all the behavioural and psychological facts of personality as the effects of his embodied being. He chooses “constitution” as the criterion that will elucidate his true being. Appeals to behaviour (“Jean-Jacques” as the reluctant and inept public figure) support those theories about the workings and structure of the *économie animale*. The necessary consequences of such an ‘œconomy’ are confirmed, or more properly speaking, *deduced* by the observed uniformity of behaviour which, in turn, will provide insights into the truths of a personality known as “Jean-Jacques”. Once underway, *dédoublement* automatically confines “Rousseau” to the margins, placing the facts of constitution beyond his direct experience. The discipline of these restrictions explains the apparent discrepancies in approach between the avowed aims and methodology of the Preamble and the actual performance of the Second *Dialogue*, between truth and method. Inferences about physiology may only be drawn from the observable facts of behaviour and this brings changes to the structure of the deduction. The position of the term “Jean-Jacques” in the syllogistic movements of the Preamble and the main body of the text remains invariable; in both, it belongs to the conclusion of a deductive chain. The modifications lie in the means by which we arrive at the personality of “Jean-Jacques”. The Second *Dialogue* infers this unknown term, not from behaviour, but from a first set of inferences about

constitution. Behaviour, on the other hand, has progressed from being an inference of constitution in the Preamble to a premiss in its own right. Behaviour is now the observable and known fact from which both constitution and personality are deduced. The passage from the Preamble to the Second *Dialogue* may be represented in the following diagrammatic form:

Term	Logical status	
	Preamble	2 ^e 'Dialogue'
"CONSTITUTION"	premiss..... } }	} ...inference #1
BEHAVIOUR	inference #1... } }	} ...premiss
"JEAN-JACQUES" ["CARACTÈRE"]	inference #2... } }	} ...inference #2

Far from suggesting the *Dialogues* are a fraught and contradictory work, these adjustments represent, on the contrary, Rousseau's efforts to remain intellectually consistent within the self-imposed restrictions of the Preamble.

The rhetorical illusion Rousseau wishes to maintain involves making necessary modifications to his deductive chain of reasoning. An invisible threshold demarcates the passage from the Preamble to the First *Dialogue*, a boundary Rousseau knew full well he could not cross without transgression. To do so involves allowing the intelligibility of one perceptual stance to intrude into another. This untenable position, introducing into the Second *Dialogue* knowledge that could only belong to the Preamble, constitutes a *metalepsis*. Although hidden and unknown to others, the constitution of "Jean-Jacques" is known to Rousseau, aware that he had to translate knowledge apprehended in the first-person, the view from the "inside", into that acquired by himself in the third person, the view from the "outside". The loss of direct self-knowledge requires adjustments to the syllogistic order. The significance of this adjustment should, by now, be clear: far from allowing any pathology to render him completely oblivious to mutually exclusive perceptual standpoints, as Starobinski alleges, Only too aware of them, Rousseau lucidly realigns his perspective accordingly.

[5.3] *Objectivity, Freedom and Agency*

The intellectual consistency of the *Dialogues* comes at the price of unwittingly leading the reader astray. Erroneous readings of the *Dialogues* stem principally from the optic through which Rousseau decides to reveal himself. How is this so? The objective and experimental approach for penetrating an inner self by deducing the bent of mind, tendencies, emotions and so on, from the observable behaviour of another individual contains undoubted attractions from a polemical and ideological point of view. The principle of *constitution*, like the necessary adoption of the dialogue format, represents a way of engaging with others. It also ably redirects the imputation of responsibility away from a perverse personality towards science, putting what the *Confessions* conceive as nature's broken "mould" (I, 5) onto a scientific footing and thereby evacuating *amour-propre* as an explanation for the paradoxes between "Jean-Jacques" the man and "Jean-Jacques" the writer.

The travestied "Jean-Jacques" peddled by *les messieurs* conflicts with the true "Jean-Jacques" and an entire series of oppositions serve to bring this out (I, 797-98). An eliminative confrontation seeks to eradicate one of the theses by positing in its place a better, rival explanation, judged by its degree of internal unity and coherence:

vous pourrez [...] juger lequel de deux est le plus lié dans ses parties et paraît former le mieux un seul tout, lequel explique le plus naturellement et le plus clairement la conduite de celui qu'il représente, ses goûts, ses habitudes et tout ce qu'on connaît de lui (I, 799).

The thesis that contains the greater logical consistency eliminates the libellous conclusions of the other. An instance of such confrontation arises in the rival accounts that seek to explain the contradictions between the observable behaviour of the public figure and the exalted and undeserved reputation of the writer. In conversation, for example, "Jean-Jacques" appears flat and commonplace; his words are ill chosen, he lacks wit, vehemence, energy, is slow to understand and incapable of making appropriate replies. The picture of the innovative and expressive writer, the oracle of the century that overturns received wisdom, sits ill with this visibly timid, rebarbative, socially inept and awkward inferior. Now, if a subject of conversation in which "Jean-Jacques" takes an interest arises, the lethargy immediately gives

way to animation. From this first observation, “Rousseau” deduces that “Jean-Jacques” is more proficient as a writer than a conversationalist. Not that this observational analysis stands unsupported by supplementary evidence. “Rousseau”, the behaviourist *malgré lui*, appeals to further explanations grounded in physiological modifications so beloved of materialist and mechanist accounts of passionate arousal. The fermenting of the blood, for instance, causes the outward signs of physiognomy (the enlivened expressions, the flashing eyes, and so on) plus the unrestrained gestures and the raised voice, all of which offers a true index of what takes place ‘inside’ the mind of “Jean-Jacques”. In conversation, such behavioural phenomena seem to announce the promise of genius but do not fulfil it except when the effects of a first “explosion” have already transpired. These conditions make for an inspired author rather than a *beau diseur*. His writings, then, simply represent reverberations of the prolonged effect of these passionate explosions: “cette émotion prolongée agissant avec plus de règle semblait agir avec plus de force et lui suggérait des expressions vigoureuses, pleines du sentiment dont il était encore agité” (I, 801-02). The physiological explanation performs a triple service: it solves the anomaly between the intellectually inept public figure and the inspired, private writer, and does so in a manner that naturally commends itself to Rousseau’s antagonists, partisans of the materialist school. Having presented a coherent argument based upon scientific materialism, that is, upon the grounds acceptable to his very antagonists, “Rousseau”, furthermore, removes any need for resorting to the rival theory of self-regard to account for the discrepancy.⁴⁰ Simply put, emotional stress eventually yields to coherent and penetrative intellectual insight.

Yet, Rousseau’s dialogue format and *dédoublement* fail to provide an adequate picture of “Jean-Jacques”. The view from the outside and the focus on constitution and temperament further restrict what “Rousseau” and the reader can know. This optic of self-revelation, its methodology and deductive logic, hides as much as it reveals when we take a special cluster of facts about “Jean-Jacques” into consideration. At the beginning of Book Seven of his *Confessions*, Rousseau writes:

⁴⁰ Likewise, the handicap of “inconsequent” or paradoxical behaviour elsewhere derives from a dislocation between the immediate and automatic responses of nature and the low-gearred procedures of reflexion and reason trailing far behind (I, 811).

L'objet propre de mes confessions est de faire connaître exactement mon intérieur dans toutes les situations de ma vie. C'est l'histoire de mon âme que j'ai promise, et pour l'écrire fidèlement [...] il me suffit, comme j'ai fait jusqu'ici, de rentrer au dedans de moi (I, 278).

Uniquely amongst Rousseau's autobiographical writings, the *Dialogues* omit an *histoire de l'âme*, presenting "Jean-Jacques" as the end product of a "nature" without a history. The problem of the *Dialogues* concerns the omission of phenomenology and acts of self-transcendence tied to *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*. The third-person perspective and its inevitable omissions suppress the 'I' by eradicating from view the history of the agent.

As a typical statement of this tendency, we might note the following declaration made by "Rousseau": "De tous les hommes que j'ai connus celui dont le caractère dérive le plus pleinement de son seul tempérament est J.-J. Il est ce que l'a fait la nature: l'éducation ne l'a que bien peu modifié" (I, 799). Observation of sensibility shows that, more than in any other individual, this character, with its unique and most singular complexion in which highly volatile emotions are at variance with a slow, lethargic mind, derives most fully from physiological determinants and the singularities of anatomy. There is, one feels, something tailor-made and tautological about such statements. A singular physiology has given rise to "Jean-Jacques" and that is all. The *Dialogues* do not question assumptions concerning the materialist foundation of character and the legitimacy of "temperament". But the true problem of the *Dialogues* is not an inductive problem concerning unproved or unknown premisses, rather a transcendental problem which must logically determine conditions of possibility in relation to Rousseau's system. Only Rousseau's system renders the given facts of the *Dialogues* conceivable. As readers, we must align the intellectual coherence of that work with the experience and history of its subject.

Rousseau's materialist picture deprives the self of one of its most central features. The self of the *Dialogues* represents an ahistorical, immanent, virtually preformed and eternally actual self. Nothing that has its source outside "Jean-Jacques" assimilates itself into the permanent features of selfhood. There are fleeting discontinuities, never any incorporation of change

leading to what we might characterise as a *habitus*. Any modifications are merely incidental and involve no duration or persistence. But this *cannot* be true for several reasons.

That “Jean-Jacques” is predominantly the product of his material being cannot stand unqualified because, taken solely by itself, materialism offers a necessary but insufficient factor in any explanation of persons. Rousseau’s spiritualist ethos demands the necessity of an ethical will for initiative. Similarly, Rousseau consistently upholds the irreducibility of the moral to the physical and the incommensurability between the given and the acquired or perfected. The (mechanical) promptings of physiology, sensibility, instinct and necessity alone cannot wholly account for the adequation of behaviour to circumstances. Our man surpasses the Primitive of the *Discours sur l’inégalité*. His happiness goes beyond a simply organic and physiological well-being circumscribed and determined by the twin co-ordinates of environment and the physical laws of nature, an existence uncorrupted by the disruption of intellect and reflexion. “Jean-Jacques” foresees, plans, desires, fears, imposes meaning on the world; he is forced to reason, imagine and make use of his capacity for free choices. “Moral being” undoubtedly coalesces with the purely material but cannot be solely reduced to it. The “Jean-Jacques” put before the reader constitutes merely a surface phenomenon for something that exceeds the sum of physical conditions or the circumstances in which it finds itself.

The ambivalent criteria of temperament and constitution ought, in any case, to point *towards* as well as away from history. *Tempérament* is often but not always synonymous with the given or “nature”; like *constitution*, it may signal an historical development. Nature, as the *Confessions* and the phenomenon of habit demonstrate, progresses through history. These points will receive closer attention in Chapter Six. For the moment, I wish to return to considering the elimination of an historical dimension in terms of an elimination of agency which I evoked in relation to the problem of the third-person perspective in the previous section.

The change of perspective from the *Confessions* to the *Dialogues* represents a decreasing reliance on aspects of Rousseau’s point of view and a corresponding increase in a reality that is not actually his, as the Preamble intimates: “En voulant exécuter cette entreprise je me suis

vu dans un bien singulier embarras! Ce n'était pas de trouver des raisons *en faveur de mon sentiment*, c'était d'en imaginer *des contraires*" (I, 662; my emphasis). Moreover, the quality or direction of Rousseau's syllogistic reasoning compounds an ahistorical status of self. Both the *Confessions* and the *Dialogues* offer demonstrations by deduction but the latter introduce a clear change of emphasis. Where the *Confessions* progress towards the origins, and therefore the causes, of a modified self, the *Dialogues* follow an equally necessary causal sequence but in *reverse*. The approach announced by the Preamble sees a transference of the empirical history so evident in the sequential chains of narrative in the *Confessions* with their preoccupation with secret, hidden *causes* of action with which the self is intimately acquainted, set out in genetic and logical order and whereby each choice informs the next, a transference in favour of a more positivist and experimental method that seeks to validate publicly-observable *effects*. This not to say that the *Dialogues* provide no causes or that rationalism is absent; "Rousseau" provides an array of causes, while "Le Français" represents the *general hypothesis* Rousseau generates, though not without reference to personal experience, to explain the strange drama unfolding around himself (I, 663). No such causes, however, nor any ascriptions generally fully belong to "Jean-Jacques" in the sense that they were at some point in time occasioned or *willed* by him. Instead they merely belong to inferences deduced according to impersonal criteria imposed from without. With *dédoublement*, Rousseau has performed an artificial separation between the self and its initiative for first causes described by the *Profession de foi* and which defines the minimal qualities of a free agent.⁴¹ Removing such causes results in obscuring the agency responsible for them by transforming it into a mere object of science.

Rousseau effectively deprives himself of the most valuable source of certainty in the *Confessions*, namely, a direct link to the intimate, private but also irrefutable evidence of subjective feeling and the empirical perspective of an individual life. It comes as no surprise that its absence in the *Dialogues* is concomitant with the absence of a properly inner history of "Jean-Jacques". How is this so? Before a naturalistic, external perspective, vital features

⁴¹ "Nul être matériel n'est actif par lui-même, mais moi je le suis" (IV, 585).

of action disappear from view.⁴² Causal determination, either locally through criteria such as physiology, or globally in terms of *nature* considered as the totality of objects subject to laws, prevents us from assigning actions to agents as their sources. There seems no room for agency in a world of impulses, sensations, feelings; only physical events. Actions and choices that belong and present themselves from an internal perspective become, from an external viewpoint, mere appearances. Beyond accounting for the circumstances of actions presenting themselves to the agent, an external perspective also takes into account “the complete nature of the agent himself”.⁴³ As the account of the conditions to which the agent is subject increases in complexity and range, the agent contributes increasingly less to the outcome until it ceases to stand over the world and becomes enmeshed in the series of antecedent conditions that are part of it.⁴⁴ Acts quickly turn to events in which we can identify no agent.

The optical transposition between the Preamble and the second *Dialogue*, between phenomenological and naturalist perspectives, loses an indispensable *intentional explanation*. While particular motivations may explain every choice, the antecedent actions and the conditions of our actions remain undetermined; it is we who, through our choices as autonomous beings, determine these. Internal and external conditions may well be fixed beyond my control, but I face a number of open possibilities. The final explanation when I make one of them actual, according to Nagel,

is given by the intentional explanation of my action, which is comprehensible only through my point of view. My reason for doing it is the *whole* reason why it happened, and no further explanation is either necessary or possible.⁴⁵

The view from outside eliminates autonomy because it only admits causal explanations. The absence of a cause signifies a corresponding absence of explanation. The logic of the “view from nowhere” directly implicates the anxiety for explanation in the *Dialogues*. In attempting to redress the causal deficiencies on which the *Confessions* end, Rousseau plots the downfall

⁴² For the subsequent development of my argument, I am indebted to Nagel’s exposition of the problems objectivity poses for freedom, particularly Chapter Seven: “Freedom”, pp. 110-137.

⁴³ *The View from Nowhere*, p. 113.

⁴⁴ *The View from Nowhere*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ *The View from Nowhere*, p. 115.

of his own faithful self-revelation as agent. The account of the *Dialogues* wishes itself superior in relation to its predecessor because it is more complete. Because they have adopted the objective approach, the *Dialogues* must, bearing in mind the apologetic principle of telling all at the risk of subverting itself, render the external perspective and causal explanations as thorough-going and complete as possible. The probabilistic nature of such explanations is not enough; Rousseau needs to say that actions were necessitated by prior conditions and events. And yet, in subordinating itself to objectivity, the work introduces a sense of inevitability that wipes out autonomy.

Complementing Nagel's analysis of objectivity is Ricœur's critique of ethology in *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, which brings out further the conflicts between the specific science of character and the metaphysics of freedom. Commentators have noted in Rousseauian self-revelation a preference for the *portrait*, or the "static or constant aspects" of selfhood which "suspends time towards an eternal present moment", over *histoire*.⁴⁶ This significant choice is consonant with the naturalistic and objective, third-person perspective of the *Dialogues* and their anxiety for a *principle of plenitude* at the level of explanation which we can directly trace to another central feature of the work, namely, the focal criterion of *caractère* which anchors "Rousseau"'s demonstrations in the Second *Dialogue*. In this perspective, the *Dialogues* emerge as a proto-ethological study which further absorbs the subject and the will into a vigorous explicative framework. Ricœur explains:

Caractère et liberté sont atteints de deux points de vue incomparables: d'un côté le moi appréhende son propre empire subjectif et en pressent les limites et les conditions, mais *sans pouvoir les traiter comme un spectacle ou un portrait*; de l'autre le psychologue nous offre un tableau de tendances dressé du dehors et élaboré selon les postulats de la physique de l'esprit.⁴⁷

To conceive character as an object of science, Ricœur holds, risks creating a limitless horizon of explanation and an inexorability impossible to adapt to the existential freedom of the subject.⁴⁸ The *Dialogues* do not take the full step into ethology for they hover between two

⁴⁶ Juliet Flowers MacCannell, 'History and Self-Portrait in Rousseau's Autobiography', *Studies in Romanticism*, 13 (1974), 279-98 (282-83).

⁴⁷ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, pp. 337-38 (my emphasis).

⁴⁸ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 329.

ambiguous meanings of *character*: 1° a set of external traits which identify and typify my behaviour for others; 2° the irreducibly secret, intimate condition of my existence which unfolds in the ever-present *style* of my acts. The first, Ricœur describes as “un portrait arrêté et figé”, the second he calls “nature” as experienced by the subject himself.⁴⁹ Empirical ethology eradicates the ambiguity, retaining the first at the cost of the second, by positing descriptive character types which it regards as real, embodied, objective necessities that determine behaviour. Of course, the self-portrait of the *Dialogues*, composed of distinctive features as an *external* observer would view them, remains some way off from the systematic psychographs of ethnology, although the representation of “Jean-Jacques” similarly suspends itself from the activity of inner life which, Ricœur argues, subsumes habits, aptitudes, passions, virtues, vices, bodily dispositions and so on as the background of its initiatives.⁵⁰ The pressure of scientific classification and the systematisation required for formulating character types converts ethology into a “mental physics”, so that the laws that determine the interplay of tendencies along the lines of material movement apply even to the will:

La volonté est prise elle-même dans le réseau des corrélations caractéristiques d'un type: ainsi nous apprenons que le nerveux est le plus impulsif, le moins circonspect, a le moins d'accord entre ses pensées et ses actes, le sens le plus faible des buts lointains dans son action, que son action est entraînée successivement en des directions contradictoires, qu'il est le plus porté à différer, à se décourager, etc.⁵¹

Dispensing with voluntary action in favour of the primacy of automatism, positing a simple inhibitive action in each impulse is sufficient to hold other tendencies in check.⁵² We may note an analogous tendency at work in the *Dialogues* which, by a process of logical elimination, rule out the possibility of certain psychological tendencies as if they were mechanical forces subject to equilibrium, and which, “Rousseau” deduces, cannot, by virtue of a statical law, operative in “Jean-Jacques”.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 333.

⁵⁰ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, pp. 335, 336.

⁵¹ *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 340.

⁵² *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 337.

⁵³ The Frenchman concludes, for instance, “L'empire de l'habitude et le goût du travail manuel sont [...] à mes yeux des choses inaliénables avec les noires et fougueuses passions des méchants (I, 875).”

The implications of the mistake of reducing Rousseau the man to the fiction “Jean-Jacques” begins to emerge. Considered simply as a representation which hides from view as much as it offers up for inspection, Rousseau’s self-representation, in the words of the Sixth ‘Promenade’, truly sins by omission (I, 1059). The portrait of an immutable personality, the necessary outcome of a handful of given principles, inevitably entangles apologetic anxieties with the truth of selfhood, to the detriment of the latter. What appears as an improved apologetic strategy to deprive readers of all means of evasion and to secure their consent to correct conclusions must be paid for at the cost of distortion and lacunae in the account of “Jean-Jacques”. The author of the *Dialogues* has indeed succeeded in giving an estimation of himself as if he were another, as “un homme tel que je suis”, not *un homme tel que je suis devenu*. If the *Dialogues* elucidate the origins, course and destiny of the plot, they correspondingly obfuscate those of the self. We pass from a causally unintelligible plot (*Confessions*) to an externally, causally modified and, from the perspective of agency, unintelligible “Jean-Jacques” (*Dialogues*).

This may, I repeat, entail nothing more than a change of emphasis, just as in the *Confessions* the dominant cause is nature’s broken mould which stands over the entire history of the self and determines its evolution through a chain of occasional causes. Nevertheless, nature on the one hand, and history, in the form of habit and the will on the other, remain equal contributors to selfhood. Neither dominates to the exclusion of the other. Sequestration by the world of causation automatically alters the intelligibility of self in the *Dialogues*. Located entirely within the bounds of objective causality, “Jean-Jacques” lies beyond the scope that would restore to the self the history of its intermediary facts. Construed in the manner of the *Dialogues*, the personal apology inevitably reflects a squeeze on these explanations and causes and reveals why “Rousseau” would seek to forgo them altogether and render “Jean-Jacques” immediately transparent to “Le Français” by means of a single, all-encompassing insight (I, 799). In being subject to natural causality and deprived of moral agency, “Jean-Jacques” inhabits the worst of both worlds.

“Jean-Jacques” represents a fragment detached from a greater whole and from which he derives intelligibility. A reading of the *Dialogues* must unpack such problematic statements as

the insistence that “Jean-Jacques” as the unmodified product of nature not education (I, 800). “Rousseau”, of course, omits to tell us that the direction and force of *natural* education and habit, the sum total of efforts, techniques and procedures which have been made to intervene and allow “Jean-Jacques” to evolve *in his very nature*, lies elsewhere. Commentators have also failed to probe properly Rousseau’s choice of nature (*le naturel*) and habit as determinants for assessing personality, wrongly estimating their value and function as a nostalgic celebration of instinct and passivity. Habit, in particular, is reduced in this way to an exhibition of little more than a set of meaningless automatic gestures.⁵⁴ The *Dialogues* give the impression of a spontaneous, *natural* “Jean-Jacques”, but beneath him exists another self, a substrate for the exhibited personality, a self which has learnt to resist further, unwelcome modifications to the sum of its incorporated transformations and to whom other, very different, qualities belong.

The emergence of the epiphenomenal “Jean-Jacques” and the failure of the synthesis to surface visibly are related problems linked to the specific optic and brief of the *Dialogues*. The combined choice of first premiss and objective perspective, foregrounding *le physique* at the expense of *le moral*, frustrates what the reader can learn directly from the text. Unlike the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries*, we advance inevitably towards superficial effects not intimate causes, towards retrospectively-imposed objective causes not such as a free agent might initiate. “Jean-Jacques” represents the premiss with which we start, posited as the sum of stable and permanent attributes deduced necessarily from innate and unchanging somatic and psychological factors. But appeals to humoral temperament, physiology and the fundamental and dominant emotional orientations that ensue from these cannot exhaust the account of personality and behaviour. There are, in fact, other non-material causes besides the material ones they give rise to, causes that remain, *of necessity*, obscured from “Rousseau”’s view, and that have *become the effects we then perceive as first causes*. In other words, while the *Dialogues* insist on the fixity and stasis of “Jean-Jacques”, there exists, by contrast, a constant and dynamic underlying causal relay whereby hidden efficient

⁵⁴ Starobinski cites Rousseau’s *rêverie* (I, 845) as an instance of action bereft of finality whereby the body discharges its energies without its action transforming the world in any way, *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, pp. 277-78.

causes have given rise to effects that become further causes in turn. These may be verified by analysis not deduction, by working from a given consequence back to its principle or origin.

The turn taken by the autobiographies, and the self-portrait of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* in particular, does not represent the destruction of the synthesis any more than the alleged discrepancy between the writer and the values his writings proclaim reveal an insane or inauthentic Rousseau incapable of facing the problems of civilisation head on. The dialectical progression beyond the fundamental opposition of nature and artifice has, on the contrary, taken place. The intellectual synthesis not only survives into the autobiographies, but receives highly personalised and exemplary expression in the *Dialogues*. The objective method responsible for withholding from view important aspects of selfhood, those that await further deduction from the textual evidence provided, proves the true source of disruption to interpretations of the *Dialogues*. “Jean-Jacques” is an abstraction, a static entity or construction whose attributes are severed from their origins and development. He represents a self without the history of its vicissitudes, changes and transformations, a self perennially actual, never potential. The *Dialogues* also perpetuate a significant ambivalence: we cannot seize the moral status of notions like “nature” nor gauge the value of descriptions telling us of the spontaneity and immediacy of “Jean-Jacques” unless we probe their origins and reconstruct their history. The possibility of “Jean-Jacques” rests on the existence of what I term the *infra-textual* “Jean-Jacques”, the absent agent who creates and is created by history, and which will emerge once we explore further the premises of constitution, temperament and nature, and their implications.

Chapter Six “Jean-Jacques” or Natural Man

The *Dialogues* confront the reader with two problematic representations. I explored the first of these, the assignation of the author as “Jean-Jacques”, in the previous chapter. The second, the focus of this chapter, concerns the convergence of “Jean-Jacques” and Natural Man. In both instances, positing a relation of identity between the subject and its textual predicates risks defining the first by the problematic status of the second. My present task aims to show, principally through an analysis of nature and habit, that the textual “Jean-Jacques” necessarily embodies more than *l’homme naturel* anterior to the synthesis as Starobinski construes it. He embodies Natural Man as an exemplary expression of that synthesis. Here too, it will be necessary to unravel Rousseau’s problematic self-projection into “Jean-Jacques”. Thereafter, it will be possible to put aside several related views concerning Rousseau’s motivations, in particular, that they represent the nostalgic desire for a passively innocent, aesthetic existence stripped of reflexivity.

In the acquisition of moral dispositions through *La Morale sensitive* and habit, the *Dialogues* reveal evidence of the instrumental, reflexive stage to bring about a new unity *beyond* reflexion and the opposition of the empirical (‘is’) to the ideal (‘ought’), not a condition prior to it. In direct contrast to a tradition of commentaries which variously opt for a view of Rousseau as a thinker seduced by the prospects of a regressive primitivism, nature constitutes neither what is, still less what was, but rather what *ought* to be, a return as progress not regress. This view, in turn, allows me to argue that Rousseau confronts rather than accepts moral weakness (*faiblesse*). He neither abandons an ideal moral destiny nor, as a consequence, does he destroy his own system by altering the relation between elements within it. Without the grid of *faiblesse*, a central

moral characteristic informing Rousseauian moral psychology and strategically vital in the defence “Rousseau” mounts in favour of “Jean-Jacques”, the representation of selfhood in the *Dialogues* disintegrates. Only a recognition of weakness allows the intentionality and freedom of the “I” to emerge from the otherwise strangely passive and ethically incoherent positions “Jean-Jacques” assumes.

The *Dialogues* are not discontinuous with the body of Rousseau’s work but depend on the system that precedes them and to which they give renewed expression. The synthesis of the *Dialogues* re-emerges thanks to the perspective of *faiblesse* which, I believe, offers a better account of Rousseau’s motivations and the direction of his ethical thinking than Starobinski’s interpretations based on *pathology* and *nostalgia*. Pathology imposes its own coherence, a unity in morbidity, which supplants or obscures the synthesis by misconstruing it as a neurotic re-organisation and re-statement of the past. A travesty of the intertextuality of Rousseau’s writings, pathology also lends itself too easily to the idea of regression and breakdown. For this reason, it complements a diagnosis based on nostalgia which also serves to locate a unity within Rousseau’s system but as a condition of return not progress. Distorting the self-referentiality of Rousseau’s works, the perspective of pathology merely opens onto the absence of innovation and a series of caricatured positions or nightmarish reversals into the negative—“Jean-Jacques” as the vulnerable Emile, for instance—unable to accommodate the possibility that the originator of a system internalises his own ethical construct. The intelligibility of nostalgia, meanwhile, precludes Rousseau’s dialectical progression towards synthesis much as it prevents Starobinski from identifying the moral causes his presuppositions abstract and which give rise to the isolated effects he subsequently diagnoses as belonging to Rousseau’s text. Rather unsurprisingly, he concludes, the need to surpass the self-division of conscious thought along the way to a superior synthesis yields, instead, to unreconstituted, immediate and passive sensation, and the abandonment of all responsibility. Rousseau’s internalisation, whereby the ethical construct and the person are one, supersedes pathology; his dialectical strategy to elaborate a third synthetic way, meanwhile, overtakes nostalgia.

Rousseau’s new, practical ethic will receive detailed attention in Chapter 7. For the moment, I want to start delineating its contours by briefly returning to the conditions of the *Dialogues* and

their inescapable methodological framework, explored in the preceding chapter, to attenuate Starobinski's accentuation between immediacy and reflexivity.

[6.1] *Reflexivity or Weakness?*

The opposition between reflexion and spontaneity serves to demonstrate objectively the basic thesis that “Jean-Jacques” is not what others say he is. The advantage of “constitution” as the proof of this demonstration lies in its revealing visibility. Those who wish to ascertain the will and intention of “Jean-Jacques” can simply read these off the expressive features he publicly exhibits. Consequently, the observational method recommended by Rousseau's autobiography proves hostile—necessarily so—to everything that frustrates or undermines full transparency, ruling out whatever may accompany the possibility of dissimulation. Reflexivity acquires a stigma as potential dissemblance, as do prudence and foresight, since these threaten the very essence of the project: its truth-value and integrity.

Like the drastic reduction of “reason” into (self-)interest (I, 818), Rousseau's critique of reflexion targets a restricted use of this capacity. This becomes apparent when the all-important *motive* for the reflexive, inward turn is taken into consideration. Simply put, “Jean-Jacques” and his enemies do not withdraw for the same reasons. The reflexion denounced by the *Dialogues* denotes a talent for dissimulation based upon the dichotomy of the public and the private. The same applies to *prudence*, which the *Dialogues* similar restrict to “dissimulation” or “foresight” (*prévoyance*), indicating narrow self-interest and the onerous cares of the competitive life in society which the contemplative “Jean-Jacques” has renounced.¹ The *Dialogues* prize immediate natural impulses (“les premiers mouvements de la nature,” I, 668) not because they rule out the capacity for self-monitoring or a reflexive instrumental view of self *per se*, but because they preclude all forms of *disguise* and, as such, underwrite the sincerity of Rousseau's apologetics.

¹ “Le premier art de tous les méchants est la prudence, c'est-à-dire la dissimulation” (I, 861); “Ce vif intérêt prévoyant et pourvoyant, qui les jette toujours loin du présent et qui n'est rien pour l'homme de la nature” (I, 851); “la prévoyance, mère des soucis et des peines” (I, 822).

Let me express it more positively. “Rousseau” is *compelled* to describe the behaviour he observes in “Jean-Jacques” as immediate and spontaneous. Even the slightest interstice between action and intention created by premeditation and calculation would entail the collapse of the behaviourist experiment, making “Rousseau”’s visit between the First and Second *Dialogues* an entirely useless exercise. The *Dialogues* do not polarise the elements of Rousseau’s thought but merely seek to observe the limits of their own self-imposed remit.

Anxious to “tout dire” in the *Confessions* (I, 175) lest the reader insinuate his own explanations, Rousseau must again, of necessity and as fully as possible, play down any hint of motivation beyond the publicly verifiable behaviour exhibited by “Jean-Jacques”. Not unexpectedly, therefore, “Rousseau” declares: “tous ses premiers mouvements seront vifs et purs; les seconds auront sur lui peu d’empire” (I, 824). But “Rousseau” must tread carefully as he approaches the problematic metaleptic zone: “Jamais il ne fera volontairement ce qui est mal [...] toutes ses fautes, mêmes les plus graves, ne seront que des péchés d’omission” (I, 824-25). How could we ascertain by observation errors whose essence lies in their very absence or non-existence? Neither we nor “Rousseau”, strictly speaking, can verify whether or not the will of “Jean-Jacques” harbours the purest of intentions. In order to judge and reach conclusions consonant with the autobiographic design, “Rousseau” must of necessity tell us this is so even though he himself could neither fully prove nor judge the quality of such intentions. As “Rousseau” himself acknowledges, only God could corroborate such statements (I, 733).

As we shall see, both “Rousseau” and the reader, must inevitably rely on their goodwill and faith but the appeal to errors (*fautes*) indicates where the main preoccupations of the *Dialogues* lie. Rather than attempt to expel reflexivity, the *Dialogues*, like Rousseauian autobiography generally, focus on the *fautes* deriving from *faiblesse* and the problem of the will or *sensibilité morale*. The start of the First *Dialogue* reworks in miniature, commingled form different versions of Rousseau’s naturalised Fall set out in two previous works: the conjectural history of the *Discours sur l’inégalité* and a personal, empirical *historia calamitatum* or Part Two of the *Confessions*. Speaking of the inhabitants of an idealised world, of which “Jean-Jacques” is a member, “Rousseau” says:

Tous les premiers mouvements de la nature sont bons et droits. Ils tendent le plus directement qu'il est possible à notre conservation et à notre bonheur: mais bientôt manquant de force pour suivre à travers tant de résistance leur première direction, il se laissent défléchir par milles obstacles qui les détournant du vrai but leur font prendre des routes obliques où l'homme oublie sa première destination. L'erreur du jugement, la force des préjugés aident beaucoup à nous faire prendre ainsi le change; mais *cet effet vient principalement de la faiblesse de l'âme* qui, suivant mollement l'impulsion de la nature, se détourne au choc d'un obstacle comme une boule prend l'angle de réflexion; au lieu que celle qui suit plus vigoureusement sa course ne se détourne point, mais comme un boulet de canon, force l'obstacle ou s'amortit et tombe à sa rencontre (I, 668-69; my emphasis).

According to Starobinski, this passage construes reflexion as “une *déflexion* de l'énergie primitive de l'âme”, adding: “la réflexion nous fait *dévier* de notre vrai but [...] réfléchir est une “faiblesse de l'âme””.² These commentaries raise some doubts. While the text chiefly targets human weakness and its effects, it only mentions *réflexion* indirectly and by analogy. Rousseau blames *faiblesse* rather than reflexion for interfering with man's moral destiny.

By over-accentuating the opposition between immediacy and reflexivity, Starobinski loses sight of the local restrictions of methodology and misinterprets the role assigned to reason. The *Dialogues* appear to accommodate rather than dislocate spontaneity and reflexivity, to diminish rather than exaggerate the interval between them. “Jean-Jacques” is not so much *l'homme de la nature* as *l'homme de la nature éclairé par la raison* (I, 864), at once exemplifying and qualifying that designation. If it is possible to uncover moral initiatives which Starobinski's analysis of nostalgia abstracts, it also possible that, at the representational level, the text depicts the *outcomes* of reason and the will. To avoid asking the wrong questions, the terms of our enquiry into reflexivity require a reformulation.

When critics insist that Rousseau simultaneously stigmatises and exploits reflexion, do they refer to the same thing? Rousseau's use of *réflexion*, like explanations for his solitude, is never absolute but entirely context-dependent.³ Stigma attaches itself to a particular form of reflexivity

² *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 248.

³ At any one time, Rousseau attributes his solitude to a love of imaginary objects (I, 41), a natural liability whose impetus intensifies through a growing disillusionment as he comes to understand others (I, 1133); his illness (I, 1125); the inability of others to perceive him as he truly is (I, 116); the fear of others (I, 787); his dominant passion for inactivity made legitimate by the pretext of personal tribulations, and even a willed and long-sought aspiration that expresses his moral autonomy (I, 640).

much as it does to a certain expression of foresight.⁴ A neutral definition of ‘reflexion’ would convey the sense of thought being turned back on itself, transforming a spontaneous intellectual event into an object of inner perception. The mind performs an act of judgement to analyse, understand or calculate the effects of experience, to evaluate advantages and disadvantages. Nothing wrong here for, as Starobinski rightly claims, Rousseau holds that *intelligence*, the faculty by which human beings predicate the world and establish relations between phenomena relative to themselves, provides evidence of their spiritual nature (IV, 571-72). When we look at the specific motivations behind the reflexive act, differences begin to emerge. Reflexion covers many acts of self-consciousness but not all such acts draw their motivation from the same quality or orientation of the will. Negative reflexivity connotes an attitude of mind and behaviour governed by delegated norms lived vicariously: the reflexive individual corresponds, by this token, to the man of “opinion” (I, 808). But the critique of reflexion entails an attack on a certain direction of the will and a class of psychological states integral to it. Reflexion is anathema in so far as it instigates a *particular* will, a *libido dominandi* that cultivates and sustains a *particular* class of passions, the *passions secondaires* (rancour, hate, vengeance) that grow ever stronger over time (I, 861).

However, the attacks on disordered willing should not camouflage Rousseau’s more positive view of reflexion, understood as the outcome of a spiritual and moral dimension of the will. Legitimate reflexion also introduces judgement as posterior to action when prompted by conscience, constituting the moral basis of human action (IV, 595). Elsewhere, reflexion approximates “meditation” or *recueillement*, a self-examination hosted by self-love performed, the *Rêveries* tell us, exclusively in a composed, private environment away from the tumult of human affairs (I, 1075). Nor should the habits and existence of “Jean-Jacques”, into which “Rousseau” invites the reader to see spontaneous marks of authenticity and moral discipline, conceal rational and willed initiatives that preserve and advance them. Reflexion endures in the *Dialogues* as a set of lasting moral dispositions that the will first brought to full, conscious awareness and whose fitness reason confirmed. By a development that is the opposite of the *amour-propre* that provides support for and rehearses (*re-sentir*) “secondary passions”, reflexion

⁴ As Burgelin notes in his commentary of *Emile*, Rousseau also distinguishes between an “active” foresight which contributes to wisdom from a “passive” foresight that brings ruin through the imagination (IV, 444; 1425).

may also invent strategies to protect the moral self from dissolution by sustaining a passion for the good.

Instead of looking for evidence of continuous rational activity, as Starobinski does, and condemning the *Dialogues* when we fail to find it, we ought to view reason as fit only for rationalising the acquired-now-as-given. The *Dialogues*, like the *Rêveries*, ask of reason that it encase itself like a series of Russian dolls: reason finds reasonable to uphold in the present that which it found reasonable to formulate or consent to in the past. Although “Rousseau” need only deduce motives, inclinations and dispositions based upon the behaviour and physical conditions that enhouse them, the text affirms a rationalism alongside the natural inclination it coincides with:

[Jean-Jacques] deviendrait donc indolent, paresseux par goût, *par raison même*, quand il ne le serait pas par tempérament [...]
[...] loin de cultiver sa raison pour apprendre à se conduire prudemment parmi les hommes, il n’y chercherait en effet que *de nouveaux motifs* de vivre éloigné d’eux et de se livrer tout entier à ses fictions (I, 822; my emphasis).

The text leaves open the possibility of rational self-determination despite the remit of the *Dialogues* working to reduce reason to little more than a virtual factor. The moral dispositions of “Jean-Jacques” are already established but, as we will see, an important task of preservation remains. For the moment, no further rational search for the good is required. Instead, reason must simply consolidate its own prior efforts, undertaken in a spirit of a once-and-for-all search for truth, and invent methods of preserving from erosion the privileged or marked dispositions it gave rise to.

In order to seize these dispositions, we must first probe their origins and establish, with the assistance of Rousseau’s system, the conditions of possibility for several key statements in the *Dialogues* which cannot stand unsupported. These statements reveal their historical depth when set against the background of Rousseau’s genetic anthropology and the ideal progress of the self outlined thus far, from nature as source to nature as outcome via habits instituted by the ethical will. The key distinction between source and outcome, the given and the acquired, provide means to analyse the ambivalent first premisses of Rousseau’s deduction, *le naturel* and *habitude*, into their logical and historical constituents which the optic of the *Dialogues* obscure.

After completing the anatomy of nature and habit along essentially logical but speculative lines based on Rousseau's philosophical anthropology, my arguments will attempt to establish the empirical history of "Jean-Jacques" prior to the *Dialogues*. The legacy of this history will be shown to motivate the strategies and techniques of self-management "Jean-Jacques" adopts in the *Second Dialogue*.

[6.2] *The Conditions of Possibility*

To assign the category of Natural Man to "Jean-Jacques" requires that we address the ambivalences uncovered so far. In important respects, the *Dialogues* put a personality before their readers in much the same way as if they were shown a work of art without the artist who logically and genetically precedes it. "Jean-Jacques" represents a pre-formed self, its attributes severed from their origins and lacking a history of change or transformation. Of course, this *cannot* be true for a variety of reasons, as we shall soon see. "Jean-Jacques" is the product of Rousseau's synthesis but the processes that lead to this outcome are kept from view. For these reasons, we require an infra-textual "Jean-Jacques" located both prior and beyond the problematic "Jean-Jacques" of the text and which renders the latter intelligible.

The vehement, sweeping statements of the *Dialogues* reveal the necessity of positing this logically anterior self. Let us take the following declaration concerning the inclinations of "Jean-Jacques". "Rousseau" asks "Le Français":

Voulez-vous donc connaître à fond sa conduite et ses mœurs? Etudiez bien ses inclinations et ses goûts; cette connaissance vous donnera l'autre parfaitement; car jamais homme ne se conduisit moins sur des principes et des règles, et ne suivit plus aveuglément ses penchants.

Prudence, raison, précaution, prévoyance; tout cela ne sont pour lui que des mots sans effet (I, 811-12).

Reflexive, practical reason apparently plays no part here. "Rousseau" so closely enmeshes moral behaviour (*mœurs*) with basic inclinations as to make the former derive from the latter. The conclusion seems rather inevitable, tautological even, given the closed circularity of character and

behaviour, but it prompts several questions about the origins and survival of what are, ultimately, recognised normative dispositions. A *penchant* refers to a native and durable bent of mind, opposed to the periodic and discontinuous needs of organic *appetites* and *passions* not considered primitive to the self.⁵ *Inclinations*, meanwhile, merely refer to psychic tendencies that suggest the ends we should seek, not the means by which we may arrive at these. A desire for well-being alone, for instance, does not indicate how it may reach fulfilment.⁶ Inclination distinguishes itself from instinct which, by contrast, provides immediate means without an awareness of their ends. Now, Rousseau recognises the open-ended quality of given, instinctual tendencies in *Emile*: “Le penchant de l’instinct est indéterminé [...] Le choix, les préférences, l’attachement personnel sont l’ouvrage des lumières, des préjugés, de l’habitude” (IV, 493). While the text provides the end and means of action, it dispenses with whatever might coordinate them.

In a later exchange, “Rousseau” affirms that the natural inclinations of “Jean-Jacques” not only coincide with the imperatives of practical reason but surpass them as more effective means to secure the ends of those same imperatives:

La bonté, la commisération, la générosité, ces premières inclinations de la nature, qui ne sont que des émanations de l’amour de soi, ne s’érigeront point dans sa tête en d’austères devoirs; mais elles seront des besoins de son cœur qu’il satisfera plus pour son propre bonheur que par un principe d’humanité qu’il ne songera guère à réduire en règles. L’instinct de la nature est moins pur peut-être, mais certainement plus sûr que la loi de la vertu: car on se met souvent en contradiction avec son devoir, jamais avec son penchant, pour mal faire (I, 864).

Unguided, spontaneous development, as the *Discours sur l’inégalité* and *Emile* warn, issues into distortion and imbalance. If, as Rousseau constantly affirms, external factors liable to pervert their natural inclinations incessantly assail individuals, how has “Jean-Jacques” managed to salvage the integrity of his own from corruption? The harmony of spiritual existence resembles a precarious equilibrium won from perennial threats to its dissolution rather than a given condition of existence. What the *Dialogues* construe as given actually corresponds to a search, a discovery and a survival. Established moral inclinations presuppose two related and necessary conditions.

⁵ *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, pp. 751-52.

⁶ *Vocabulaire*, pp. 484-85.

First, a reflexive self-awareness which recognises and appropriates them as a legitimate and normative guide, the outcome of a coincidence of knowledge and will to which habit is central. Second, a protection of their integrity from dissolution within the larger framework of a vocation for moral self-identity.

Acquiescing to the promptings of nature also presupposes privileged knowledge and a disciplined will. The uninitiated majority, for instance, do not yield to their natural inclinations for want of an inner life. From the reports of the Second *Dialogue*, “Jean-Jacques” presses into service those same conditions, described by the *Lettres morales*, which establish and affirm the moral life. In a revealing moment, the Third *Dialogue* finally confirms this intuition when “Le Français” deduces the system that underpins the works of “Jean-Jacques” with the following necessary conditions that have made it possible: “Une vie retirée et solitaire, un goût vif de la rêverie et de contemplation, l’habitude de rentrer en soi et d’y rechercher dans le calme des passions ces premiers traits [de la nature] disparus chez la multitude” (I, 936). Where in the *Dialogues* are the prior orchestrations necessary for this cultured state of inwardness? “Rousseau” describes his withdrawal into solitude as an *inclination* (“cette inclination pour la vie retirée et solitaire”, I, 812) and a *need* (“il avait quelquefois besoin de se recueillir”, I, 812), already hinting that the author and the regeneration his writings proclaim coincide. However, the progress from an inclination to a need for spiritual recollection and a settled condition of existence requires the interval of time for habit to take root, the result, as the *Lettres morales* suggest, of a coherent, unified will that has successfully negotiated its conflicting determinations. The same applies to the *sentiment intime* (I, 671) and to the temporary lapses or *fautes* to which Rousseau confesses. Only by nurturing a prior moral disposition can the voice of soul-nature penetrate the conscious mind. To commit misdeeds without inherent depravity or *vice*, meanwhile, Rousseau must appeal to moral weakness, itself dependent on the existence of a constant will capable of reflexive self-reproach. No accounts of the prior orchestrations or the emergence of conscience, however, appear in the *Dialogues*.

Although they seem adequate, *constitution*, *temperament* and natural *inclination* constitute ineligible criteria for assessing the moral credentials of “Jean-Jacques”. The central preoccupation with temperament and constitution fundamentally implicates a moral dimension because

Rousseau never considers morality an abstract, disembodied question. Constitution, the total panoply of the body's senses and organs, represents the material conditions of health and vigour through which the ethical life affirms itself. As an index of moral progress or degeneration, constitution may be described as *saine* and *bien constituée* when in accordance with a finality which unfolds through its perfectibility (II, 369; IV, 274, 370). Only meta-ethical naturalism and the perfectionism that accompanies it allows Rousseau to generate an evaluative position about "Jean-Jacques" from facts about constitution or inclination. And yet, the text never articulates this important grounding, or the history by which nature comes to represent the realisation of values brought to full self-consciousness and received by a proper disposition of the will. The *Dialogues* seem intent on generating conclusions in terms of the moral, Providential and normative aspects of nature, the source of freedom, independence and law-like uniformity for all living beings, from purely naturalist statements. Naturalism, like materialism, is mediated; it possesses a relative not an absolute value, that is, relative to something else judged good and which it helps to bring about. Material and psychological facts about the self reflect little without a framework of values, in this case, a vision of nature as regulative rather than merely constitutive and dependent on insight into the cosmic design of the kind possessed by the inhabitants of the *monde idéal*:

La nature y est la même que sur notre terre, mais *l'économie* en est plus sensible, *l'ordre* en est plus marqué, le spectacle plus admirable [...] Toute la nature y est si belle que sa contemplation enflammant les âmes d'amour pour un si touchant tableau leur inspire avec le désir de *concourir à ce beau système* la crainte d'en troubler *l'harmonie* (I, 668; my emphasis)

This normative view requires a special awareness of the interlocking, Providential order that *includes* the self's inclinations thanks to a prior *dépouillement* that deprives basic drives of everything that distorts them: "Les passions y sont [...] plus simples et plus pures, elles prennent par cela seul un caractère tout différent" (I, 668). It presupposes the ultimate reflexive inward search described in the *Lettres morales*, the sensibility of the mind to perceive the ordered cosmos and one's relation to it, matched by a response of the will in terms of love. A desire for convergence, consonant with the principle of plenitude in which all can and must find their place, follows on from a receptive will.

Such, then, are the conditions of possibility for the statements “Rousseau” makes, resting on texts beyond the confines of the *Dialogues* that demonstrate the continuity of Rousseau’s *œuvre*. A closer look at the *Dialogues* reveals coherence rather than a series of accentuated oppositions, but this crucially depends on maintaining a distinction with regards to the concept of nature. Rousseau thinks nature as a given or source and the realisation of an ‘ought’, the outcome of a discovery determined by the will that brings a moral potential into the open and which is also subsequently entrusted with the survival of its integrity. To negotiate the ambiguities of the *Dialogues* with the assistance of this distinction, I wish to identify two moments of *nature* on either side of the interventions of reason and the will: a *pre-reflexive* nature (N₁) and a *post-reflexive* nature (N₂) that accommodates the immediacy and spontaneity of the former as a settled state posterior to, and the product of, practical reason and the ethical will.⁷ The usefulness of this distinction becomes apparent when analysing the premisses and conclusions of Rousseau’s deduction. What Rousseau terms *le naturel* of “Jean-Jacques”, a basic condition characterised by self-unity, may be interpreted as a regression, but it might also point to a higher synthesis. The distinction offers a means to correctly identify the apparently involuntary determinations of ‘temperament’, ‘character’, ‘habit’ and ‘constitution’ by highlighting their voluntary and reflexive origins and aspects.

[6.3] Philosophie: le naturel *and* habitude

The optic of the *Dialogues* is predicated exclusively by the views they want to rebut. The replies “Rousseau” gives depend on the questions the formal qualities of his exposition entitle him to ask. There appears something deeply tautological about the demonstration of the *Dialogues*. Constitution and behaviour reveal the character of “Jean-Jacques” but behaviour is also *in character*, so to speak, and determined by it. The apologetic and dialectical form of the *Dialogues* compound this problem because “Rousseau” concerns himself with the internal consistency of

⁷ I have adapted the terms “pre-reflexive” and “post-reflexive” from Timothy O’Hagan, ‘La Morale sensitive de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’, *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 125 (1993), 342-57 (p. 354).

“Jean-Jacques”, with the unity of correlation not origins. The *Dialogues* serve the ends of demolition, to demonstrate what “Jean-Jacques” *is not* nor could be.⁸

In the previous chapter, I drew attention to two methods for establishing the facts of autobiography. To reconstruct a logical causal chain between known facts in the past and the present, one may either rely on an available empirical history (*histoire*) or resort to speculative rationalism (*philosophie*) in the absence of historical evidence (III, 162-63). With the methodology and conditions under which the *Dialogues* operate in mind, and temporarily ‘setting aside all the (empirical) facts’, I shall attempt to work backwards from the representation of “Jean-Jacques” to a rationally-deduced infra-textual self, to uncover a post-reflexive synthesis and establish in theory, at least for the moment, that this self constitutes a temporal and ethical construct. In so doing, I adopt a method of decomposition Rousseau himself regards as necessary to establish the truth about ‘character’ in an earlier version of the *Confessions*:

Pour bien connaître un caractère il y faudrait distinguer l’aquis d’avec la nature, voir comment il s’est formé, quelles occasions l’ont développé [...] Ce qui se voit n’est que la moindre partie de ce qui est; c’est l’effet apparent dont la cause interne est cachée et souvent très compliquée (I, 1149).

The original title page of the *Dialogues* reveals where a similar analytical task awaits us. The contents of the Second *Dialogue*, consisting in the two premisses from which “Rousseau” deduces the moral status of “Jean-Jacques”, reads: “Du naturel de J.-J. et de ses habitudes” (I, 1615). A decomposition of nature and habit into their pre- and post-reflexive constituents signals our mode of enquiry.

The meanings of *le naturel*, *caractère*, *tempérament* and *constitution* overlap in important respects for Rousseau and others who help to illuminate his thought. Fundamental to these notions is the idea of *nature* understood as a force that provides and imposes cohesion on mutability by receiving into itself and within a limited, permitted range of possibilities, the multiple aspects of being. Nature accommodates these aspects into a permanent dimension of itself through habit. To uncover the historical traces of reflexive and volitional activity firmly in mind, I hope to show that an analysis of *habitude* provides the history of *le naturel*. *Consuetudo*

⁸ Philippe Lejeune rightly remarks, “il ne s’agit [pas] de construire un point de vue sur soi, mais d’en ^{-r}déqu_λire un”, *Je est un autre*, p. 55.

extends to *habitus*. An analysis of settled habits, meanwhile, reveals their origins in the ethical will. Thus, a decomposition of *le naturel* by means of habit, like an analysis of *habitude* by means of the ethical will, discloses the activity of practical reason and the reflexive will that have passed into an instinctive and intuitive will (N₂). This analysis must pay special attention to *causation* or the relation between *le physique* and *le moral*, and to *time* or the dialectic of permanence and change. For instance, the criteria of *le naturel* and *habitude* merely provide a *physical* account of habit as a permanent disposition of *tempérament*. The emphasis on “constitution”, meanwhile, provides an elliptical ‘snapshot’ or behavioural situation of the subject here and now.

When, in the Preamble, Rousseau intends to set out what may be deduced from *constitution*, he employs a term that refers to a composition dependent on a progressive, often teleological development over time. The behaviour and personality of “Jean-Jacques” may have their categorical basis in physical constitution but, elsewhere, this apparently given datum constitutes itself through history. In *Emile*, the body eventually acquires a stable set of attributes, a finalised *consistance* (IV, 778) or *habitus* (“l’habitude du corps”, IV, 260) representing the possession of permanent and objective qualities free from further transformation or accidents. Rousseau’s thinking owes something to Descartes and the physiological dimension of habit whereby statements about constitution imply statements about past, and even willed, experience. Anatomical structures does not, therefore, arise *ex nihilo*; the physical self constitutes itself through its history. In *Emile*, past contingencies, ideally organised by the principles of education, put the *économie animale* irreversibly into place.

Although tangential to my present discussion, I mention ‘constitution’ because, as a phenomenon expressing a progressive composition that brings into play the collaborative forces of nature and human art, it prevents us from assuming that the self is either eternally punctual or entirely given. Much would remain lost below the threshold of description if we were to do so. This leads me to my main point and the principal source for misreadings of the *Dialogues*. Unlike constitution, whose origins and characteristics we can only ascribe to the self of the *Dialogues* by analogy, *le naturel* proves more directly relevant because it represents a construct which the autobiographies themselves help to assemble. It is here that the central problem of the self, its

deceptive, limited visibility, takes on the fullest significance, one that emerges only after we have identified an important superimposition and transposition that the *Dialogues* obscure.

The grounds for this superimposition, as the sub-heading of the Second *Dialogue* suggests, concerns the dynamic of habit and nature. Nature or *le naturel* assimilates the spontaneous and the singular into itself as a unified and unifying structure or integrity that expands over time. The picture of the *Dialogues* is complex because Rousseau uses *le naturel* interchangeably with *tempérament* and *caractère* whose fundamental ambivalence demands fuller elucidation. Superficially at least, both character and habit serve, in the limited optic of the *Dialogues*, to indicate the regularity and uniformity of acts and intention. We need, however, a far more explicit articulation than the *Dialogues* are able to provide of the constituents and origins of both nature-character and habit, whose significance extends beyond the index of uniform behaviour to embrace a full commitment to an ethical ideal.

The demonstration of the Second *Dialogue* implies two related but separate perspectives on character and habit. Both denote what freedom chooses, either as preformed instinct or as the means to which the will itself has contributed in acquiring stable, habitual dispositions.

In the first of these perspectives, *character* represents the core repository of personality viewed as an immutable, inflexible necessity (I, 804). Anticipating the arguments that follow, we might say that character points to an irreducible and invariable essence that, elsewhere in Rousseau's writings, human art brings to full realisation so that it may place itself at the service of the ethical will. The background for the notion of an invariable essence determining each individual belongs to *La Nouvelle Héloïse* where the meanings of *caractère*, *tempérament* and *le naturel* follow one another in close attendance. *Caractère* conveys the sense of one's 'turn of mind', an initial given fact or individual 'genius' (*ingenium*).⁹ This propensity, in turn, depends on a material *tempérament*, whose invariable and innate 'liabilities' or pre-dispositions elude the shaping effect of education (II, 566). While immune to external influence in its essence, Rousseau nevertheless regards *caractère* as perfectible and, therefore, able to receive an ideal form.¹⁰ Although the innate heritage of each individual can neither be created nor removed, as Wolmar insists, human

⁹ See Bernard Guyon's accompanying notes to *Julie* (II, 1673-74).

¹⁰ "Chacun apporte en naissant un tempérament particulier qui détermine son génie et son caractère, et qu'il ne s'agit ni de changer ni de contraindre, mais de former et de perfectionner" (II, 563).

intervention may yet protect and advance this heritage to its full potential: “il ne s’agit point de changer le caractère et de plier le naturel, mais au contraire de le pousser aussi loin qu’il peut aller [...] car c’est ainsi qu’un homme devient tout ce qu’il peut être et que l’ouvrage de la nature s’achève en lui par l’éducation” (II, 566). The counterpoint between the determinist, materialist conditions of selfhood and its destiny at the hands of enlightened reason, between a given “organisation intérieure” that announces itself at birth (II, 565-66) and the development of this supreme, inalienable disposition to its fullest excellence by education to serve an ethical end, brings us back to the central preoccupations of *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage*. In its polemic against the sensualists, the novel invokes *caractère* to indicate the unique style or ‘nature’ which accompany each individual’s acts. For Rousseau, as for Ricœur, character determines how I do things rather than what I do. The involuntary of character, Ricœur argues, offers the conditions in which my will operates but is not itself determined by them, leaving the possibilities of my intentions open.¹¹ For “Jean-Jacques”, *tempérament* similarly provides a “forme morale” (I, 800), a pre-disposition or liability that offers the will its means not its ends. The will may appropriate the involuntary of character or temperament when, illuminated by reason, as we will see, it exploits such immutable conditions as a moral necessity.

A second perspective allows us to register the temporality of character, as it widens in view of the dynamism between nature and habit or the continuity of nature and will. Philosophy defines character as one’s “normal pattern of thought and action [...] most especially in relation to moral choices”.¹² This perspective is inscribed in the etymological proximity of character (*êthos*) and habit (*éthos*) that Aristotle exploits in Book Two of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and which a reading of the *Dialogues* cannot afford to do without. For the *Dialogues*, the history of character belongs to the acts of the ethical will that it embodies. Character establishes a continuum between habit and nature, situating itself in both camps as a potential nature or habit in the process of formation, and as the permanent core of nature which the contribution of acquired habits enlarges. The fluidity of habit and nature depends entirely on the double notion of character as a disposition: a disposition in the process of being contracted and a fully-contracted disposition. Character, like habit, may derive from an act of will leading, in turn, to the permanent expression

¹¹ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 346.

¹² Joel J. Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 17.

of the ethical will as a durable disposition. The near identity of habit and character within the category of *le naturel* impels us to recognise a capital *masking effect* which, as Ricœur notes, generates the appearance of self-identity or sameness (*idem*) in a changing self (*ipse*).¹³ Change becomes sameness by its incorporation into permanence.

This phenomenon emerges in detail from the viewpoint of habit which, for Rousseau, underwrites the authenticity of his character. Habit reveals the invariable core of personality, its regular and ordered dispositions or *constante manière d'être*, “seule règle infaillible de bien juger du vrai caractère d'un homme et des passions qu'il peut cacher au fond de son cœur” (I, 784). Ricœur, echoing Ravaisson, formulates habit and character as levers that the ethical will creates for itself to discharge its intentions.¹⁴ *Emile* takes a similar phenomenological stance on habit which it considers as the means to remove the obstacles to effective willing that prepares the child for freedom.¹⁵ Applying the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary of *Emile*, habit and character in the *Dialogues* represent the organs for the will, familiar patterns of action that free the will from preoccupations with means by enabling it to focus solely on ends. Statements about habit imply statements about the dialectic activity of the will which initiates a habit in order to operate through it. Once contracted, habit represents the enduring vestige of willed activity, as Bergson says, “le résidu fossilisé d'une activité spirituelle”, now an obscured and slumbering will.¹⁶ The ethical unity of the individual in time rests on habit. The present involuntary content of an action does not eliminate its moral value or freedom. A premeditated habit represents the most profound mark of autonomy since we ourselves furnish the cause that predetermines our actions, our will prepares for the future.

The naturalisation of willed innovation at the heart of character unfolds at the level of habit and an analysis of the essence of habit invites us to investigate the status of character or *le naturel* as a willed, progressive outcome not a regression. The phenomenon of naturalisation explains a

¹³ *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 146.

¹⁴ “L'habitude humaine est pour une grande part [...] du vouloir qui retombe dans la nature: mais en retour elle est de la nature qui se subordonne au vouloir comme son organe”, Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 310. Ravaisson had written: “La volonté se porte aux fins, la nature suggère et fournit les moyens”, *De L'Habitude*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵ “Préparez de loin le règne de sa liberté et l'usage de ses forces en laissant à son corps l'habitude naturelle, en le mettant en état d'être toujours maître de lui-même, et de faire en toute chose sa volonté, sitôt qu'il en aura une” (IV, 282).

¹⁶ ‘Notice Sur La Vie et les ouvrages de Félix Ravaisson-Mollien’ in *Séances et travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, vol. 61 (Paris: Picard, 1904), 673-711 (p. 686).

transposition in the *Dialogues* whereby appeals to character as a given serve to indicate the implicit moral quality of the agent who possesses it and the freedom he practices through it. In one respect, this elision is justified by its impeccably classical derivation, since *le naturel* and *habitude* evoke the Greek *ethos* which connotes a way of being and of behaviour both for the self and, visibly, for others. The *ethos* of “Jean-Jacques” consists in a particular orientation of the will that publicly embraces an exemplary demeanour and response to external events. Statements about character imply not only the history of nature’s enlargement through acquired dispositions but, crucially, the immanently ethical quality of these dispositions. *Character announces ethics*. Again, the etymology proximity of these terms proves instructive since, as Alasdair MacIntyre notes, *êthikos* (Latin: *moralis*) means “‘pertaining to character’ where a man’s character is nothing other than his set of dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead one particular kind of life”.¹⁷ Such are precisely the demands the *Dialogues* makes of “Jean-Jacques”’s *naturel* or *caractère*, designed to reveal a certain quality of the will subsisting in time and permanently oriented towards the good. Rousseau demands of character that it reveals his moral core which, like Augustine, he locates in the quality of the will and its intentions. Discussions of character, in effect, become a discussion about the will’s orientation. “Jean-Jacques”, the reader repeatedly hears, is moved by *amour de soi* not *amour-propre*.

A problematic transposition, created by Rousseau’s use of *le naturel* and *habitude* and the tendency of habit to abolish its own innovation, nevertheless subsists. Phenomenologically, character or temperament have no meaning outside the freedom that considers them. And yet, Rousseau draws conclusions from these forms of necessity as if they enjoyed a meaning of their own, allocating the effects of his character, understood as the outcome of the ethical will and its initiatives, to a conception of character simply as a material given. Throughout the Second *Dialogue*, character, temperament, constitution and even sensibility appear to determine the motives and choices of the will. A failure to identify and clarify a naturalisation of the ethical will results in an inconsistency of causation that embarrasses Rousseau’s routinely-adopted position whereby the involuntary represents conditions for the voluntary. I will examine this aspect of character more fully in the next section.

¹⁷ *After Virtue*, p. 38.

In the meantime, I propose to explain this discrepancy as the discontinuity that emerges from the limitations peculiar to immediate self-awareness, unable to register its habits whose essence consists in effacing the history of their own innovative performances with a new spontaneity. Throughout the *Dialogues*, “Rousseau” shows us the effects of his *ethos*, whose ease he attributes to habit and character, but not the *acts*, the initiatives which belong to the creative freedom of the will.¹⁸ This is no oversight; the behaviourist optic forces “Rousseau” to register and report only those actions that appear to the observer as spontaneous and unreflexive. What we are not shown, what the demands of methodology must exclude, are these same actions in their origins as moments of predeliberation, a series of initiatives needed for the creation and establishment of habits before their transformation into a natural spontaneity.

Yet, the problems of method only partly contribute to the restrictions in force. The ethical will is rendered invisible and therefore subject to misrecognition due to the inherent process by which *ethos* develops. Ricœur, after Ravaissan, insists on the tendency of habit to efface the traces of its own history and dissolve itself in nature which absorbs the will into itself.¹⁹ For Ravaissan, will, freedom, reflexion and morality all *return* to nature.²⁰ The will that once dominated nature now reverts back to it, the acquired swells the array of the preformed. The spontaneity of habit and the uncanny air of improvisation that accompanies our intentions and their responses brings into existence an involuntary that masks its own willed origins. Rousseau’s self-awareness, unchallenged by Starobinski whose view of habit as an automatic gesture neglects the will and the enterprise it initiates, misconstrues the origins and significance of its own (nurtured) spontaneity now masked by the unreflexive totality that enhouses it.

My arguments so far offer only a speculative attempt to go behind the statements of the *Dialogues*. According to the premiss of the *Dialogues*, a knowledge of an individual’s dominant feelings and interests represented by his *ethos* (character and habits) makes a reasonable estimate of the way in which he will respond to specific demands and circumstances possible. Now, Rousseau may write an informative testimonial for “Jean-Jacques” but he does not provide us with the complete picture. “Jean-Jacques” is really the *terminus ad quem* which presupposes a

¹⁸ The separation of *act* and *effect* is made by Chevalier, *L’Habitude*, p. 233.

¹⁹ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 273.

²⁰ Ravaissan, *De L’Habitude*, p. 62.

progress Rousseau elsewhere usually refers to as his 'reformation'. Although I have based my arguments on a range of illustrations from Rousseau's texts, I now need to re-trace the pre-history of the *Dialogues* both to reflect the invisible weight of the past that accompanies Rousseau's representation of selfhood and to allow a 'care of the self' to emerge.

[6.4] Histoire: *Rousseau's Reformation*

Adopting a rationalist approach to get at the facts about "Jean-Jacques" risks repeating Rousseau's gesture for understanding the plot by theorising on causes useful only for their logical coherence. A way beyond the merely probable lies in reaffirming, as the empirical basis for my inferences about "Jean-Jacques", the history that Rousseau provides elsewhere and by which a self comes to embody its truth. I intend to show, first, that Rousseau's writings regard temperament as the condition in which the ethical will operates and, second, that the dispositions of character expand through repetition over time, eventually abolishing willed innovation as nature superimposes itself on habit.

The history in question concerns the moral progress Rousseau calls his *réforme personnelle* (I, 362), a series of attempts beginning twenty-five years prior to the *Dialogues* to rid himself of contradiction and achieve equanimity in accordance with the ideal of living according to nature. The reform establishes a continuity between the discovery and promotion of truth in the critical and doctrinal works, and the self of the autobiographies which those works inform. The history of the reform represents the history of the moral identity "Jean-Jacques" assumes in the *Dialogues*. Accounts of the reform, prior to and following the *Dialogues*, routinely insist that Rousseau *is* what he has *become*. What the *Dialogues* attribute to effortless spontaneity may, in fact, reflect an intensification of the good will over time, as Rousseau claims in the *Confessions*: "L'un des avantages des bonnes actions est d'élever l'âme et de la disposer à en faire des meilleures" (I, 260). Repetition forms habits which provide a disposition to will the good. To talk of 'being' as a result of 'becoming', like the idea of the self as the embodiment of its own

truth, is not without difficulties. For the moment, however, I simply want to stress that, contrary to the insistence of the *Dialogues*, the unity of duty and inclination is not given but achieved through dint of rational deliberation and willed choice over time.

Except for an incidental reference to the decision to do without his watch (I, 846), mention of the reform is wholly absent from the *Dialogues* and uniquely so among the autobiographical writings. The four letters to the Director of Publications, Lamoignon de Malesherbes (I, 1130-47), similarly written to convey Rousseau's true character and intentions, but lacking systematic explanations to account for the antinomies of personality provide, nevertheless, "une espèce d'historique qui peut servir à la concevoir" (*Lettres à Malesherbes*, I, 1134). In the *Dialogues*, the absence of a *histoire de l'âme* and the collective landmark events of the reform constitute disappearances of the same order. Rousseau offers a unified, coherent "Jean-Jacques" who follows nature in all things, but the condition of *l'homme naturel* is one into which Rousseau has had to *emerge* thanks to the steady and progressive elimination of all that opposes the ethic of living according to nature, a project which, judging by the atmosphere of increased vigilance in the *Rêveries*, remains incomplete.

Although disconcerting for their readers, who pass from high-minded resolutions to trials of the soul by little more than picaresque incidents, the *Confessions* nevertheless provide some account of the reform and the formulation of the principles supporting Rousseau's self-mastery. These principles may be traced back to Book 6 when, during a bout of illness and fears of an immanent death, the young Rousseau begins a self-examination and a search for intellectual and moral truth in preparation for the afterlife (I, 233, 237). At the idyll of Les Charmettes and in a state of almost total disengagement from the passions, Rousseau assesses his condition closest to his ideal of wisdom (I, 244). Fidelity to this ideal is soon tested when, like Xenophon's Hercules, Rousseau finds himself a crossroads: one road leads to the Bourg Saint-Andiol and to Mme de Larnage, but also the risk that he may fall in love with the good lady's daughter, "corrupting" her and bringing scandal and dishonour to the house; the other, back home to Chambéry and M^{me} de Warens. Confronting his desires, Rousseau returns to M^{me} de Warens, describing his choice in the following terms:

Je l'exécutai [...] avec cette satisfaction intérieure, que je goûtais pour la première fois de ma vie, de me dire: je mérite ma propre estime, je sais préférer mon devoir à mon plaisir [...] après les règles de sagesse et de vertu que je m'étais faites et que je m'étais senti si fier de suivre[,] la honte d'être si peu conséquent à moi-même, de démentir si tôt et si haut mes propres maximes l'emporta sur la volupté (I, 260).

Further opportunities for self-mastery arrive when news reaches him of his inheritance (I, 339) and during his dealing with the alluring M^{me} de Chenonceaux (I, 359-60). Rousseau distills his "rules" into a central practical imperative that also encapsulates his diagnosis of human corruption. This maxim, first suggested to him, he says, by the waning parental zeal of his ageing and impoverished father who stood to inherit his wife's property in the absence of his sons, teaches him to avoid situations in which duty and self-interest conflict:

J'en ai tiré cette grande maxime de morale, la seule peut-être d'usage dans la pratique, d'éviter les situations qui mettent nos devoirs en opposition avec nos intérêts, et qui nous montrent notre bien dans le mal d'autrui: sûr que dans de telles situations, quelque sincère amour de la vertu qu'on y porte, on faiblit tôt ou tard sans s'en appercevoir, et l'on devient injuste et méchant dans le fait, sans avoir cessé d'être juste et bon dans l'âme (I, 56).

The famous illumination of Vincennes marks a particularly significant step in Rousseau's personal reformation, providing the most extensive opportunity for applying this maxim to himself. The truth fully pierces through that Rousseau's profound inability to settle into stable and coherent patterns of feeling, thought and action stems primarily from corrupt society, not from an inherently defective constitution or personal weakness. The causes of vice and unhappiness are identical for all: an enslavement to opinion and artificial needs that opposes self-love to natural sympathy, dividing thought from feeling and leading to disordered social relations:

mécontent de moi-même et des autres je cherchais inutilement à rompre les liens qui me tenaient attaché à cette société que j'estimais si peu, et qui m'enchaînaient aux occupations le moins de mon goût par des besoins que j'estimais ceux de la nature, et qui n'étaient que ceux de l'opinion. Tout à coup un heureux hasard vint m'éclairer sur ce que j'avais à faire pour moi-même, et à penser de mes semblables sur lesquels mon cœur était sans cesse en contradiction avec mon esprit, et que je me sentais encore porté à aimer avec tant de raisons de les haïr (I, 1135).

In his own estimation, Rousseau's resignation from the post of secretary and treasurer to Dupin de Francueil, Receiver-General of Finances, completes the reform, replacing dependency with autonomy, contradiction with a conformity between life and principles. At the height of an illness induced by the anxieties of being entrusted with huge sums of money, and perhaps urged also by his maxim to avoid the corrupting effects of material ambition, Rousseau asks himself:

comment accorder les sévères principes que je venais d'adopter avec un état qui s'y rapportait si peu, et n'aurais-je pas bonne grâce, caissier d'un receveur général des finances, à prêcher le désintéressement et la pauvreté? [...] durant ma convalescence je me confirmai de sens froid dans les résolutions que j'avais prises dans mon délire. Je renonçai pour jamais à tout projet de fortune et d'avancement (I, 361-62).

Close affinities exist between the targets of his reform and the directions of the *Lettres morales*. Existing dispositions that hinder a new direction of the will, spawned by those outward manifestations of personality that encourage self-conceit, indicate to Rousseau the need to begin his reform by modifying his appearance: "Je commençai ma réforme par ma parure; je quittais la dorure et les bas blancs, je pris une perruque ronde, je posais l'épée, je vendis ma montre" (I, 363). Renouncing advancement and riches, Rousseau settles himself in humble quarters in Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Honoré, supporting himself by copying music, an activity designed to silence his pride and consolidate his independence (I, 363).

The *Confessions* also recall the exertion of maintaining a fidelity to these principles:

Déterminé à passer dans l'indépendance et la pauvreté [...] j'appliquai toutes les forces de mon âme à briser les fers de l'opinion, et à faire avec courage tout ce qui me paraissait bien, sans m'embarasser aucunement du jugement des hommes. Les obstacles que j'eus à combattre et les efforts que je fis pour en triompher sont incroyables (I, 362).

To live without self-contradiction requires a "courageous" decision sustained, he tells Malesherbes, "avec une fermeté dont moi seul peux sentir le prix, parce qu'il n'y a que moi seul qui sache quels obstacles j'ai eus et j'ai encore tous les jours à combattre pour me maintenir sans cesse contre le courant" (I, 1136). "J'eus dès lors la volonté décidée", declares Rousseau, and although embarrassment and fear of ridicule prevent an immediate break with society, his will exploits the uneasiness of self-contradiction to urge him into successful action (I, 356). Once he achieves European-wide fame, Rousseau takes his leave of Paris and the *philosophes*, setting an

example of how to live the truth (*vitam impendere vero*): “ne tenant qu’à mes principes et à mes devoirs, je suivais avec intrépidité les routes de la droiture” (I, 492).

Some argue, however, that Rousseau’s reform represents nothing of the sort. Jean Guéhenno makes this point when he writes: “Il ne se réformait pas à proprement parler. Il acceptait seulement enfin d’être lui-même. Davantage, il décidait d’être lui-même avec fierté.”²¹ Rousseau’s autobiographies, argues Hülling, point to a fixed nature whose original goodness remains unaltered by the circumstances in which vice has entered into the human heart.²² By implication, Rousseau rules out the need and, indeed, the possibility for any reformation of personality. Both of these objections problematise Rousseau’s injunction to be oneself: “Il faut être soi”.²³ The validity and congruity of this imperative depends on the following two points, equally connected to the double-aspect view of character to which I referred earlier: first, a distinction between ‘being’ and deciding to be or ‘becoming’; second, an idea of nature as both fixed and perfectible.

In the first instance, being oneself represents an act of self-emancipation. One chooses the impulses received from within over the solicitations imposed from without. This capacity rests on a more fundamental insight. One is oneself by recognising one’s nature or character as the necessary expression or embodied form that freedom takes. The exercise of such a freedom is underway in the letters to Malesherbes. The dispositions that Rousseau qualifies as ‘natural’, grounded in the mere facts of temperament, assume ethical significance when, taken over by the will and directed by reason, they give freedom the form of an *ethos*. The first letter begins with a motif familiar to the *Dialogues*: Rousseau’s withdrawal from society results not from the constancy of his own endeavours but from assenting to the promptings of a “caractère naturel” (I, 1133), whose love of solitude, allied to a dominant passion for sloth (*paresse*), recognises opportunities for retirement in personal tribulation. Yet, a disposition for solitude need not mean that Rousseau actually withdraws from society. Such a break, the attempts to overcome antithetical impulses of sympathy and aversion towards others, requires a resolute will to exploit the conditions in which it must operate. The second letter confirms this voluntarism: “l’état où je

²¹ *Jean-Jacques: histoire d’une conscience*, 2 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1962), vol. I, p. 243.

²² Hülling, *The Autocritique of the Enlightenment*, p. 232.

²³ In Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *La Vie et les ouvrages de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. by Maurice Souriau (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1907), p. 98.

me suis mis est le seul où l'homme puisse vivre bon et heureux, puisqu'il est le plus indépendant de tous, et le seul où on ne se trouve jamais pour son propre avantage dans la nécessité de nuire à autrui" (I, 1137). Rousseau places himself in circumstances of his choosing, striving to observe his maxim by avoiding the conflicts of self-interest and duty. The ensuing happiness, asserts the penultimate letter, derives from the deliberate efforts of wisdom operating within the restrictions imposed by a delicate physical constitution and corrupt social arrangements:

mon bonheur est le mien. Quoi qu'on en puisse dire j'ai été sage, puisque j'ai été heureux autant que ma nature m'a permis de l'être; je n'ai point été chercher ma félicité au loin, je l'ai cherchée auprès de moi et l'y ai trouvée (I, 1138).

By the final letter, Rousseau completes the evolution from the given to the acquired: "Il dépendait de moi, non de me faire un autre tempérament ni un autre caractère, mais de tirer parti du mien, pour me rendre bon à moi-même et nullement méchant aux autres" (I, 1142). Self-contentment accompanies a sense of moral autonomy; Rousseau feels deserving of merit for being *bien ordonné*. The constituents of temperament and its liabilities elude human control but room for manoeuvre exists for those whose self-knowledge exploits immutable conditions for the practice of freedom.

A second view of the reform, outlined in the Third 'Promenade' of the *Rêveries*, rests on a view of character as the embodiment of moral truth assembled by the acquisition of dispositions through habit. This *ethos* arises from the distinction between simply being oneself and being oneself as a result of becoming so. But how, we might ask, can one become what one already was beforehand? "En réalité", replies Jankélévitch, "on l'était sans l'être. L'homme était et n'était pas juste, sincère ou fidèle. Il sera donc *intensément* ce qu'il était *un peu*, il sera en acte ce qu'il était en puissance".²⁴ One fully becomes what one was previously only imperfectly or inconsistently. The phenomenon of moral self-realisation operates by circular causation. If exercise produces virtue, a prior capacity for virtue renders exercise efficacious. We return to the fundamental relationship between man and his nature: nature provides the source and inspiration for an ethical project realised by the will.

²⁴ Jankélévitch, *Les Vertus et l'amour*, vol. I, p. 53.

The Third ‘Promenade’ illustrates the acquisition of truth followed by its transformation and assimilation into principles of thought and action. The reform of living (*réforme externe et matérielle*) described by the *Confessions* requires a more essential reform of opinions and judgements (*réforme intellectuelle et morale*, I, 1016) since “ce qu’on doit faire dépend beaucoup de ce qu’on doit croire et [...] nos opinions sont la règle de nos actions” (I, 1013). To achieve coherence requires conducting a profound self-examination of moral and intellectual beliefs, “afin d’avoir”, writes Rousseau, “une règle fixe de conduite pour le reste de mes jours” (I, 1016). He continues: “Fixons une bonne fois mes opinions, mes principes, et soyons pour le reste de ma vie ce que j’aurais trouvé devoir être après y avoir bien pensé” (I, 1016). This review establishes the existence of Providence that underwrites morality in this life and guarantees immortality in the next, tenets later incorporated into the *Profession de foi*.

Moral progress for the *Lettres morales*, we recall, requires that the mind reach sufficient sensitivity to receive moral truth before subjectivising it as a motive for the will through habit. As the model for the *Lettres morales*, the reform entails two analogous moments. The first consists in a divestment that liberates sought truth into its conscious articulation. As he proceeds in search of his system, Rousseau’s self-examination rehearses the recommendations of the *Lettres morales* in a manner that also corresponds to the conditions “Le Français” judges necessary for the insights he finds in the works by “Jean-Jacques”, namely, a disposition for retirement, solitude and the inward contemplation of nature untrammelled by the social passions (I, 936). The Third ‘Promenade’ identifies the steady progress by which Rousseau liberates the focus of his soul’s attention, hosting in himself the privileged conditions that allow moral truth to emerge:

L’ouvrage que j’entreprenais ne pouvait s’exécuter que dans une retraite absolue; il demandait de longues et paisibles méditations que le tumulte de la société ne souffre pas. Cela me força de prendre pour un temps une autre manière de vivre dont ensuite je me trouvai si bien que, ne l’ayant interrompue depuis lors que par force et pour peu d’instant, je l’ai reprise de tout mon cœur et m’y suis borné sans peine aussitôt que je l’ai pu (I, 1015; my emphasis).

Like a plant that resumes its vertical extension when no longer thwarted, the capacity for withdrawal subsequently becomes a firmly established disposition. The soul uncovers the truth within itself but this is re-subjectivised as the guiding principle of right thought and action. Illumination leads to imitation. Rousseau strives to make the values he introspects fully his,

approximating his life to the ideal of his writings, making the self and its truth one: “tranquille dans les principes que j’avais adoptés après une méditation si longue et si réfléchie, j’en ai fait la règle immuable de ma conduite” (I, 1018). The obscured parabola of the reform in the *Dialogues* re-surfaces in the *Rêveries* as a merging of the self and its truth.

[6.5] ‘Un Soin que je me dois’: *the Care of the Self*

“Ayant ainsi complété ma réforme”, Rousseau recalls in the *Confessions*, “je ne songeais plus qu’à la rendre solide et durable, en travaillant à déraciner de mon cœur tout ce qui tenait encore au jugement des hommes” (I, 364). The reform advances the moral perfectibility of Natural Man in two ways: first, a critical function eliminates the vestiges of *amour-propre*; second, the reform consolidates itself by prolonging its gains as a new will or moral identity that replaces one ethos with another over time. Unlike the *Rêveries*, which revive the critical function of the reform and thereby pose the question of self-knowledge anew, the *Dialogues* proclaim the elimination of the corrupt will fully accomplished. However, the equanimity of “Jean-Jacques” lacks the stability of an established condition. Intermittent dissolution or even potential debasement continue to threaten his moral identity. Worse still, the “art” at the disposal of the *directeur de conscience* in the *Lettres morales* is no longer fully available to the solitary “Jean-Jacques”.

The *Dialogues* inherit the legacy of the reform and its imperatives but within the context of demands and challenges that depart significantly from the recommendations outlined for Sophie’s progress. Rousseau’s withdrawal from the embroilment of social relations theoretically removes the competitive antagonism that provides the source of *amour-propre* and, in practice, the onset of unforgiving dispositions hardened by the spectacle of human foibles and iniquities.²⁵ But unlike Sophie, however, the sequestered “Jean-Jacques” accepts a final renunciation of society that also denies his moral self the opportunities for expression that constitute it. The existential rhythm described by the *Lettres morales*, between spiritual recollection and participation with

²⁵ “Quand je ne vis plus les hommes, je cessai de les mépriser: quand je ne vis plus les méchants je cessai de les haïr” (I, 417).

others who multiply our happiness, between the practice of good acts and the interior satisfactions of a good conscience that recalls them, finds no parallel in the *Dialogues*. Access to self-knowledge, the very basis for the reformation of personality, depends on this rhythm.²⁶ In relinquishing “les douceurs de la société humaine” (I, 813), “Jean-Jacques” forfeits the possibility of genuine happiness and access to an identity inextricably linked to a community of selves, as “Rousseau” explicitly states:

Notre plus douce existence est relative et collective, et notre vrai *moi* n'est pas tout entier en nous. Enfin telle est la constitution de l'homme en cette vie qu'on n'y parvient jamais à bien jouir de soi sans le concours d'autrui (I, 813).

Without issue into the world of human interaction, introspection finds no reciprocal action beyond itself. Virtuous dispositions can't test their progress by open deeds; Rousseau can't bring their potential into reality. He thereby loses a decisive means by which the moral self constitutes and renews itself, opening the way to its dissolution. The crucial dialectic of exercise and disposition signifies that actions have the power to transform us for better or worse. “Like activities produce like dispositions”, says Aristotle, and we must attend to the quality of our activities for “it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions”.²⁷ However, since “no human action is morally indifferent”, disuse destroys the moral habits we possess.²⁸ Dispositions that regulate external acts and passions are self-intensifying: whenever we do not produce good acts, we build up bad ones through neglect. The challenge faced by the *Dialogues* lies in responding to these restrictions and risks by finding alternative methods to protect and renew the moral self without the conditions that normally allow it to persist.

How they do so provides an articulation for the continuity of the *Dialogues* in the history of the reform. The self-knowledge that prompts the reform demands, in turn, a *care of the self*. The self that “Jean-Jacques” must care for concerns a moral core or well-spring, a virtual self considered as will, intention, disposition, ‘moral sensibility’ or what the Second *Dialogue* frequently designates as *le cœur*. This rich Rousseauian term signifies, among other things, the repository for one’s authentic, natural identity (I, 5), the organ of moral intuition (*sixième sens*,

²⁶ “S’il existait un homme assez misérable pour n’avoir rien fait en toute sa vie dont le souvenir le rendit content de lui-même et bien aise d’avoir vécu, cet homme serait incapable de jamais se connaître” (IV, 601).

²⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103^b19-25.

²⁸ Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, 4 vols (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938-1941), vol. II, p. 169.

sens moral, I, 547), the constant will (IV, 632), conscience (I, 972) and the agency that engages with the world through emotional attachments and which the efforts of self-mastery must address when these exceed the natural boundaries of one's "condition" into unfreedom. Appropriately enough, the 'heart' metaphor oscillates between reciprocal systolic and diastolic states or movements, reflecting the existential rhythm of the moral self: "Tantôt le cœur est un espace fermé, livre clos, sanctuaire, réceptacle, tantôt il est bondissement, suprême expansion et "effusion"".29 The consolidation of the reform, the care of the self, represents the central intention of the *Dialogues* to "disposer l'âme à la bienveillance" (I, 806) and express a state of mind wholly opposed to competitive, disordered, disruptive and self-enclosed *amour-propre*.

The emphasis on right being rather than right doing, on intention (*bienveillance*) rather than external acts (*bienfaisance*), attracts criticism from Starobinski who argues that Rousseau seeks only to secure a *revendication d'innocence* at the cost of an absolute passivity that eliminates the ethical will and personal freedom.³⁰ "Jean-Jacques", Starobinski claims, prefers a safe, inconsequential discharge of his energies and the freedom of immediate self-presence because every action becomes misconstrued by others and turned to unintended and unwilling consequences.³¹ These postures and others, I believe, derive ethical significance in the perspective of the reform and the creative acts of the ethical will, overturning a view of Rousseau as vowed solely to inaction, his acts deprived of moral intentionality. Readers may begin to note a coherence of intention and aims beyond simple inactivity in the remark that "Jean-Jacques" is "livré *par système* à sa douce oisiveté" (I, 822, my emphasis). The condition of the *oisif* is neither vain nor sterile; the life of leisure (*otium*) represents a chosen condition devoted to self-ministering. Equally, the object of the will for self-presence consists in the drive for freedom as self-possession and unity, an important desideratum for the late Rousseau plagued by the anxieties of persecution. Such is the role of *inertia* for "Jean-Jacques": "Cette molle inertie n'influe pas seulement sur ses actions indifférentes mais sur toute sa conduite, sur les affections mêmes de son cœur" (I, 847). Again, what appears an unqualified passivity represents, on the contrary, a strategic choice of existence, an intentional quietude to secure immovability and

²⁹ *Le Vocabulaire du sentiment dans l'œuvre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980), ed. by M. Gilot and Jean Sgard, article 'Cœur', p. 16.

³⁰ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 289.

³¹ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 274-78, 286, 291.

uniformity of self. Corrupt individuals are eminently *remuants* (I, 671) and given to ceaseless movement and subterfuge, their incessant curiosity and failure to attend to themselves arousing comparisons and the negative accessory passions (*passions secondaires*, I, 847) of self-conceit, envy and hatred. Inertia, by contrast, represents a preventative virtue that protects marked dispositions from degeneration, fostering an immunity to *amour-propre*. Rousseau's fear of personal guilt is fully compatible with the possibility of action since his diffidence focuses, not to action as such, but on the alterity attendant on exposure to the novel and the unforeseen and, consequently, on contracting dispositions alien to his supreme intentions. As Dunne remarks: "through what I do now, I [...] expose myself (through the opportunities and risks of new experiences which I do not know how I shall respond to or integrate) to becoming *different*."³² The *Dialogues* articulate a preoccupation which emerges fully in the soteriological framework of the *Rêveries*, namely, that fortuitous actions and encounters in the present may adversely transform the will, instigating needs, habits and relations to others in a manner that limits one's freedom and, in the case of "Jean-Jacques", brings personal misfortune: "Une rencontre fortuite, l'occasion, le besoin du moment, l'habitude trop rapidement prise, ont déterminé tous ses attachements et par eux toute sa destinée [...] il se trouva toujours subjugué avant d'avoir eu le temps de choisir" (I, 847). Present actions have a force and influence on who I might become equally as much as the history of past actions have contributed to my habits and character. Rousseau's intention is not to set these forces at loggerheads.

The intentionality of inertia lies in appropriating an instinctive propensity of our primitive nature ("tous les hommes sont naturellement paresseux", I, 846) for moral ends. A similar use-value may be deduced from the effort that turns the given of habit and necessity to account as levers for the ethical will. "Rousseau" sets much store on the habits of "Jean-Jacques" and his *constante manière d'être* (I, 784, 791). Neither implies a simple desire for stasis. Minimally, it represents an accustomed tenor of being judged morally useful, but also a telling and infallible index of a disciplined personality not subject to a capricious, disordered will. Rather than an independent or isolated form of the involuntary, habit also constitutes the organ for the ethical will and is interchangeable with it. What of experienced necessity? The inconsistent capitulation

³² 'Beyond sovereignty and deconstruction: the storied self', in *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. by Richard Kearney (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 137-57 (p. 146).

of “Jean-Jacques” to a morally indifferent necessity, as Starobinski sees it, appears to exclude this voluntarism:

après avoir lancé contre les philosophes matérialistes le reproche de croire que “tout [...] est l’ouvrage d’une aveugle nécessité” [I, 842], il affirme à quelques pages de distance que sa propre conduite est une “simple impulsion du tempérament déterminé par la nécessité”. Il se réfugie dans l’innocence d’une “vie machinale” et “presque automate” [I, 849], alors que qu’il vient de s’emporter contre le déterminisme des philosophes, qui réduit la conduite humaine à un automatisme et abolit la distinction du bien et du mal.³³

I will return to the use-value of automatic acts later in connection with Rousseau’s approach to imagination. As with reflexion, recognising the fundamentally ambivalent status of necessity as both the immersion and the possibility of freedom eliminates such inconsistencies and permits a reading of the *Dialogues* as a continuing expression of the practice of freedom exemplified by the reform. Like habitual acts, the ethical value of necessity must be looked for in its vestigially chosen origins. Although invariable in its essence, I can change necessity for myself by transforming my relation to it and thereby begin to use it in my service. *Consent* to necessity, says Ricœur, brings it under the aegis of the will that discharges its intentions through it, converting a prior limitation or restriction into a new effectiveness.³⁴ Unlike the blind necessity advanced by materialists, Rousseau’s recognition of necessity belongs to a Providential horizon (“O providence! [...] celui qui connaît vos saintes lois et s’y confie”, I, 813) that offers a positive constraint and insight to serve the ends of wisdom in the hostile world of *les messieurs*. Necessity thus understood constitutes the outcome of the synthesis of nature and freedom at the level of morality urged by *Emile* (IV, 820), not the sacrifice of freedom for the sake of innocence.

To be precise, the *Dialogues* accomplish a double synthesis, grounding the freedom of “Jean-Jacques” in an *ethos* the text refers to as the *vie simple et laborieuse* (I, 849). The first of these consists in the acceptance and appropriation of a singular essence (*ingenium*) that transforms the ‘fate’ of character ($\delta\alpha\iota\mu\omega\nu$) into freedom’s mode of being. The second, meanwhile, results from insight of events as Providentially-ordered and acting accordingly: “jamais mortel ait mieux et plus sincèrement dit à Dieu: *que ta volonté soit faite*” (I, 857). Thus, when “Rousseau” claims

³³ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 291.

³⁴ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 323.

that the simple but productive life for “Jean-Jacques” “n’est que naturelle, parce qu’elle n’est l’ouvrage d’aucun effort ni celui de la raison, mais une simple impulsion du tempérament déterminée par la nécessité” (I, 849), we may deduce two incoercible frameworks in which the will operates for the practice of freedom, the internal necessity of selfhood and the external necessity of events. Each provides the means to embrace an existence advantageous to the ends of the reform and recognised as such.

The description of the simple productive life corresponds to the contribution of physical sensibility to moral sensibility. Along with the direct management of the soul and its ‘affections’ through the imagination, it represents the first of two attempts, integral to the care of the self, which extend the self-knowledge of the reform into the ethos that the *Rêveries* portray from the perspective of a completed evolution. In a capital passage, Rousseau outlines the protection of the moral self from dissolution which demonstrates the central objective of the *Dialogues*, namely, the elaboration of an art of living that avoids a negative transformation of the good will. Defending his day-to-day existence, “Jean-Jacques” explains:

en me faisant copiste de musique je n’ai point prétendu prendre un état austère et de mortification, mais choisir au contraire une occupation de mon goût [...] qui pût me fournir les commodités de la vie [...] En renonçant et de grand cœur à tout ce qui est de luxe et de vanité je n’ai point renoncé aux plaisirs réels, et c’est même pour les goûter dans toute leur pureté que j’en ai détaché tout ce qui ne tient qu’à l’opinion. Les dissolutions ni les excès n’ont jamais été de mon goût; mais sans avoir jamais été riche j’ai toujours vécu commodément [...] Pourquoi voulez-vous que sur mes vieux jours je fasse sans nécessité le dur apprentissage d’une vie plus que frugale à laquelle mon corps n’est point accoutumé; tandis qu’un travail qui n’est pour moi qu’un plaisir me procure la continuation de ces mêmes commodités dont l’habitude m’a fait un besoin, et qui de toute autre manière seraient moins à ma portée ou me coûteraient beaucoup plus cher? [...] moi qui trouve une jouissance très douce dans le passage alternatif du travail à la récréation, par une occupation de mon goût que je mesure à ma volonté [...] je jouis des douceurs d’une vie égale et simple autant qu’il dépend de moi. Un désœuvrement absolu m’assujettirait à l’ennui, me forcerait peut-être à chercher des amusements toujours coûteux, souvent pénibles, rarement innocents, au lieu qu’après le travail le simple repos a son charme, et suffit avec la promenade pour l’amusement dont j’ai besoin. Enfin c’est peut-être *un soin que je me dois* dans une situation aussi triste d’y jeter du moins tous les agréments qui restent à ma portée pour tâcher d’en adoucir l’amertume, de peur que le sentiment de mes peines aigri par une vie austère ne fermentât dans mon âme et n’y produisît des dispositions haineuses et vindicatives, propres à me rendre méchant et plus malheureux. Je me suis toujours bien trouvé d’armer mon cœur contre la haine par toutes les jouissances que j’ai pu me procurer. Le succès de cette méthode me la rendra toujours chère, et plus ma destinée est déplorable, plus je m’efforce à la parsemer de douceurs, pour me maintenir toujours bon (I, 838-39; my emphasis).

These prescriptions, continuing and consolidating the project for reform, draw on a self-referential, ethical construct of living according to nature and illustrate to perfection the intertextuality of the *Dialogues*. Being Natural Man means being oneself (*être soi*), enjoying peace of mind and peace with others and, most importantly, pursuing these ends by means appropriate to a wisdom that the text illustrates in four ways.

1. Dependency and moral weakness, insist the *Dialogues*, corrupt us and engender vice. By contrast, “Jean-Jacques” chooses the *condition naturelle* of *Emile*, a plenitude of existing independently within the *sphere* that nature and reason delimit and in which *désir* is commensurate with *pouvoir* (IV, 304-05). As the agent of his own satisfactions, “Jean-Jacques” eliminates every rift between desire and gratification: “désirer et jouir ne sont pour lui qu’une même chose” (I, 857). He thereby achieves an equilibrium between established needs and his capacity to fulfil them, equally avoiding the superfluities and deprivations that disturb it. By concentrating on genuine needs and rejecting imaginary ones based on vanity which neither he himself nor others can satisfy, “Jean-Jacques” avoids the inevitable frustrations of being thwarted by others and the fall into socially disruptive *amour-propre*.
2. Closely related to this self-sufficiency arises the issue examined by Epicurean and Stoic thinkers as to the most appropriate means by which the sage ought to provide himself with the necessities of life.³⁵ The *Dialogues* propose the ideal of *mediocritas*. An artisan music-copier, “Jean-Jacques” belongs to *l’état médiocre* (CC, V, 242) which affords relative immunity from the corruption that afflicts both rich (too much wealth) and poor (too little). Wary of the dangers described in the *Discours sur les richesses*, he guarantees himself the satisfaction of simple but necessary needs by acquiring the means for happiness without destroying his aptitude for it.
3. *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* reminds us that dispositions depend on a judicious material regimen. Since “tout agit sur notre machine et sur notre âme par conséquent”, each of us has at his disposal the means to “mettre ou maintenir l’âme dans l’état le plus favorable à la vertu” (I, 409). “Jean-Jacques” exploits a natural dialectic of work and recreation, “cette alternative de peine et de jouissance” *La Nouvelle Héloïse*

³⁵ André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 55-57.

considers “notre véritable vocation” (II, 470), as a mental hygiene to minimise passionate arousal. While complete inactivity creates the moral pain of *ennui* and an uneasiness that engenders demands the will cannot dominate, the physical exertion of work tempers its own relief by stimulating a desire for simple, moderate pleasures.

4. The ethical value of pleasure and the corresponding rejection of asceticism similarly provide means of favourably inclining dispositions. *Emile* argues that excessive practices of self-denial debilitate the body and replicate the effects of intemperance by an opposite cause, aggravating the passions and generating resistance to rational self-discipline (IV, 269). The Cartesian overtones of the passage, consonant with the intelligibility of *Le Matérialisme du sage*, allude to a strategy that anticipates and reverses the adverse volatility of the spirits. Appreciating the advantages of bodily comforts and external goods (*commoda*) for the ethical life, “Jean-Jacques” assembles his pleasures as antidotes to present ills.³⁶

The *vie simple et laborieuse*, like the recognition of necessity, results from a prior wisdom founded on the awareness of one’s relation to oneself and to others. Here lies the second aspect of the care of the self in the *Dialogues*. At stake for “Jean-Jacques” is the survival and *rassemblement* of the moral self. “Rousseau” spells out the dual power of imagination to advance or disable it:

d’elle naissent non seulement les vertus et les vices, mais les biens et les maux de la vie humaine, et [...] c’est principalement la manière dont on s’y livre qui rend les hommes bons ou méchants, heureux ou malheureux ici bas (I, 815-16).

The destiny of moral sensibility, deprived of contact with the sources of its identity and its renewal, and the success or failure of the drive for self-possession, unity and self-mastery all depend on governing the imagination. A positive outcome in each case rests on the extent to which the imagination is subjected to the ideal of *la sagesse humaine* outlined in *Emile*. There, Rousseau advances two principles and their practical significance:

³⁶ Seneca, *Seneca ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, 74.17

1. Sentir les vrais rapports de l'homme tant dans l'espèce que dans l'individu.
 2. Ordonner toutes les affections de l'âme selon ces rapports.
- Mais l'homme est-il maître d'ordonner ses affections selon tels ou tels rapports? Sans doute, s'il est maître de diriger son imagination sur tel ou tel objet, ou de lui donner telle ou telle habitude (IV, 501).

Applied to the *Dialogues*, the first principle points to the insights of the reform which establishes “Jean-Jacques” as a Natural Man excluded from corrupt society. The second principle requires the conformity of sensibility or will to the first. In practice, this involves directing the imagination towards fitting objects and providing it with an accustomed state. In other words, the perceived framework of relations receives a concrete fixity and duration, the truth of self-knowledge an ethos. A significant limitation of the *Dialogues* shapes the practical expression of this wisdom: “Jean-Jacques” must generate and sustain the sensibility or will appropriate to Natural Man in a moral space deprived of relations with a community.

For Rousseau, as for Plato, the care of the self signifies the care of a spiritual activity or principle. Subject to decline by interference, the *Dialogues* imply that this moral well-spring also begins to wane when not actively engaged. “Jean-Jacques” ensures this source emanates unobstructed in two ways: positively, by directing the imagination towards the source that supports and sustains the moral life; negatively, via a moral hygiene that steers its attention away from a detrimental empirical reality.

The “heureuses fictions” of the imagination that compensate for real happiness (I, 814) are neither a mere consolation for the loss of human contact nor simply “simulacra” of the external world.³⁷ Their importance for the moral life lies in drawing on the positive function of illusion. In *Emile*, for instance, the tutor repeatedly projects the pupil's imaginative gaze towards a *sylphide* to nurture and instil a love of virtue in advance of circumstances that will demand it (IV, 745). In the case of “Jean-Jacques”, the imagination sustains pre-existing dispositions which the *Dialogues* describe with metaphors of nourishment: providing sustenance for good dispositions while denying it for bad ones.³⁸ The images of the interlocking order and beauty of the universe

³⁷ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 273.

³⁸ “L'amitié ne peut guère se former et se nourrir que dans la retraite” (I, 813); “les sentiments affectueux nourrissent l'âme” (I, 813); “l'amour-propre [...] s'avive et s'exalte dans la société qui l'a fait naître [...] il languit et meurt faute d'aliment dans la solitude” (I, 788-89).

beheld in contemplation 'nourish' the heart.³⁹ For up to six hours a day, "Jean-Jacques" attends to the ideal society of his dreams, modelled on the ancient virtues of the First *Discours* and his own, subsequent creations (Emile, Sophie, Saint-Preux, Julie and Wolmar); a community beneficial to all, composed of members mutually inspired for the good:

des sociétés délicieuses, composées d'hommes justes, vrais, gais, aimables, simples avec de grandes lumières, doux avec de grandes vertus; de femmes charmantes et sages [...] n'usant de l'ascendant de leur sexe et de l'empire de leur charmes que pour nourrir entre les hommes l'émulation des grandes choses et le zèle de la vertu (I, 814).

"Rousseau" then rhetorically asks: "Le souvenir toujours présent d'une si douce vie et l'espoir assuré de son prochain retour n'adoucirait-il pas bien encore l'amertume[?]" (I, 814). Imagination, as *Emile* claims, "excite et nourrit les désirs par l'espoir de les satisfaire" (IV, 304). In so channelling his imagination to feed on itself, "Jean-Jacques" inclines the self powerfully in the direction of a desire for moral order, itself nurtured by the hope of its future rehabilitation.

Of equal importance to sustaining and revivifying moral dispositions is the mnemotechnic end of imagination (*le souvenir toujours présent*) and its capacity for usefully anchoring abstract moral ideas to concrete scenarios rehearsed in the mind. Imagination performs for wisdom the office of reinstating in immediate consciousness the absent or lost source of moral dispositions in sensible form. It performs, in other words, a *morale sensitive* whereby *imaginatio* turns into a sensuous mode of *percipere*. Like the antidote of pleasure, one might liken the mnemonic "ressource" of imaginative reverie to a preventative hygiene that immunises the soul against those *passions haineuses et vindicatives* and which allow "Jean-Jacques" to remain *bon* (I, 814, 827). Much as Emile's carefully-nurtured imagination equips him with a necessary, protective illusion that out-manoeuvres the harmful effects of his immediate environment, the imagination of "Jean-Jacques" transcends 'real' experience and effaces a world hostile to his values and ethos. By extending the confines of his experience, he draws from a source of moral truth not reflected in empirical reality to renew and sustain his dispositions.

Within this framework, the distinction between *loving* and *practising*, or *inclination* and *action* assumes prime significance. Consonant with the ideal world in which "on y sait mieux aimer la

³⁹ "Ordre, harmonie, beauté, perfection sont les objets de ses plus douces méditations [...] toutes ces images chéries qui remplissent son âme [...] repaissent son cœur" (I, 824).

vertu” (I, 670), “Jean-Jacques” is capable only of loving not practising virtue: “cette vertu à laquelle il ne peut atteindre qui est-ce qui l’admira, le chérira, l’adorera plus que lui?” (I, 824). To love virtue or to possess a “zeal” for virtue (I, 814) attests to a condition of the will attuned to the good. To separate the intention or motivation of the will from action properly speaking neither confirms a strategy of inactivity nor represents a piece of “casuistry” on Rousseau’s part.⁴⁰ It may, on the contrary, represent the creative response, within the restrictions imposed on “Jean-Jacques”, to exercise the self’s dispositions and thereby sustain the integrity of moral sensibility.

The second practical principle of ‘human wisdom’, that of inuring the imagination, prolongs the first. For the *Dialogues*, this means more than simply accustoming the imagination to turn its gaze consistently in one direction; it also involves self-mastery through familiarisation. The ambivalence of the *faculté consolatrice* renders this necessary (I, 815). By enabling us to stray beyond the boundaries of immediate experience, imagination likewise multiplies our ills and increases our sensitivity to them (IV, 307, 308), threatening to disperse and alienate the self, to intensify rather than allay its afflictions (I, 815). Imagination jeopardises self-possession as much as it promotes it. Inuring or adapting the imagination is closely tied to the mechanical analogies which abound in the Second *Dialogue*.⁴¹ Descriptions of the existence of “Jean-Jacques” as “presque machinale” and “presque automate” (I, 849) relate to Rousseau’s provocative but characteristic apology for the simple, uncorrupted life.⁴² Essential to this condition is the absence of *le mal moral* or the self-inflicted ills deriving from the abuse of our reflexive faculties, especially imagination, causing unhappiness and evil (IV, 587). To habituate the imagination means re-adapting the self to its original unity. Natural Man cannot be at odds with himself, terrorised or distressed by imaginary suffering and anxiety. For the *Dialogues*, the unreflexive state serves to reduce suffering or self-alienation. Routine and habit anaesthetise the imagination and the passions, inhibiting uncontrolled emotional responses by eliminating

⁴⁰ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 292.

⁴¹ See for instance, “automate” (I, 849); “impulsion” (I, 794, 849, 851, 854, 861, 892); “machinal(e)” (I, 849, 850, 861); “machinalement” (I, 846, 849, 875); and “ressort” (I, 794, 857, 869, 888, 892, 900).

⁴² Rousseau writes to Voltaire, of all people: “J’ose poser en fait qu’il n’y a peut-être dans le Haut-Valais un seul montagnard mécontent de sa vie presque automate, et qui n’acceptât volontiers, au lieu même du paradis le marché de renaître sans cesse pour végéter ainsi perpétuellement” (*Lettre de J.-J. Rousseau à Monsieur de Voltaire*, IV, 1063).

novelty: “En toute chose l’habitude tue l’imagination, il n’y a que les objets nouveaux qui la reveillent [...] *ab assuetis non fit passio*” (IV, 384). In the face of genuine persecution fears, habituation arrests thought and deprives the mind of opportunities for being drawn towards fear and agitation magnified by a traumatised imagination (“frappée par tant de misères et de malheurs”, I, 782).

The intelligibility of *faiblesse* or moral weakness, to which the care of the self responds, renders intelligible the superficially passive attitude “Jean-Jacques” adopts. Implicit in the wisdom that confronts the social, moral and psychological ills diagnosed by the *Dialogues* lies a highly significant peril. Rousseau may well boast that he represents the one person still worthy of calling himself Natural Man (I, 939), but he does not, for that reason, *exclude* himself from the dynamics that adversely transform the will. There is no automatic immunity to *amour-propre*. Instead, the *Dialogues* suggest, this propensity exists in the human personality as an ever-present, internal disposition summoned by external obstacles but which remains virtual for as long as due circumstances fail to materialise, or for as long as the individual actively avoids placing himself in the conditions or relations that give rise to it. From this datum, it is possible to deduce that the *Dialogues* present the reader with a choice. When “Rousseau” claims of “Jean-Jacques”: “loin de cultiver sa raison pour apprendre à se conduire prudemment parmi les hommes, il n’y chercherait en effet que de nouveaux motifs de vivre éloigné d’eux et de se livrer tout entier à ses fictions” (I, 822), he appears to judge the care of the moral self, protected by retreat and bolstered by contemplation, as superior to the unending stresses and strains of moral dilemmas in society that inevitably expose one’s weakness. He similarly ranks the imaginary *jouissances* of “Jean-Jacques” above those “prétendues devoirs que la sagesse humaine prescrit comme indispensables” (I, 822). The *Dialogues* gradually generalise on the particular case and choice of “Jean-Jacques” to reach conclusions about the possibility of the ethical life in universal terms that implicate us all in a fundamental decision.

Chapter Seven

System and Synthesis

We have already noted how Rousseau looks to a desire-sided view of self-management, that is, resorting to techniques that call on habit and imagination to address directly and rein in the self's spontaneous needs and desires. A second technique central to the ethic of "abstention" elaborated in the Second *Dialogue*, meanwhile, elaborates a complementary moral hygiene that starts with a discrimination of encompassing situations to promote or avoid those needs and desires. Before investigating this alternative, I would like to make two general points about the perspective of my reading and its significance for interpreting Rousseau's ethics.

The rhetorical strategy of the Second *Dialogues*, as I aim to show, depends on the consequences drawn from the moral capacity of individuals in the light of two central ideas: innate goodness and human frailty. As arguments, they defend of what I consider represents the true Rousseauian revolution in ethics. It is a feature of the errant, unguided development of human beings that a second nature insinuates itself between a telos and its intended good. In this instance, Rousseau holds, new relations between the self and its environment give rise to a new set of duties. If, as Rousseau also maintains, natural inclinations are good and normative, we cannot but award them priority when the dilemmas created by external circumstances pose anew the problem of the unity of inclination and duty. In other words, we are not called to sacrifice our inclinations through some accelerated process of denaturation but, rather, to avoid or modify the external pressures responsible for self-division. Thus, if external pressures create demands for *virtue*, a strategy such as *La Morale sensitive* constitutes a reply in kind.

Above all else, the *Dialogues* argue that "Jean-Jacques" is the author of his works, and that he and his works coincide. "Comme j'ai trouvé dans ses livres l'homme de la nature", declares

“Rousseau”, “j’ai trouvé dans lui l’homme de ses livres (I, 886). By the Third *Dialogues*, “Le Français” freely admits this: “Le rapport frappant de celui que vous m’avez peint avec l’auteur dont j’ai lu les livres ne me laisserait pas douter que l’un ne fût l’autre” (I, 936). This correspondence signifies a coherence and unity of purpose other than the ones highlighted by Rousseau’s critics. In effect, this unity ought to demonstrate how the *Dialogues* re-state the principles of Rousseau’s doctrinal works as an internalised ethical construct. “Jean-Jacques” represents the condition of possibility for the system, the system, in turn, is fully internalised back into its source. For this to be possible, a synthesis needs to have taken place. This chapter will attempt to show how the text supports this correspondence.

The Third *Dialogue* particularly insists on the coherence of Rousseau’s work. In stark contrast to the regression or overthrow described by Starobinski, Rousseau invokes his *système* four times in as many pages (I, 932-35). For their part, Kelly and Masters maintain that the *Dialogues* stand outside Rousseau’s system much like a preliminary exposition or precondition to favourably incline readers towards accepting it.¹ The system holds that nature made man happy and good but that society depraves him and makes him miserable (I, 934). It adds that human nature, meanwhile, *cannot* regress back to a state of primitive innocence and equality (I, 934). According to their editors, the *Dialogues* appear to uphold a view of the author’s personality that contradicts this second fundamental principle.² Kelly and Masters thereby drive a wedge between Rousseau’s defence of his personality and the system but this becomes untenable when we discover that Rousseau never ceases to uphold this principle. The *Dialogues* undoubtedly represent a work of persuasion but, equally, they and “Jean-Jacques” make sense only in the light of the system they exemplify. “Jean-Jacques” constitutes a return to nature in a prospective sense, illustrating how the *Dialogues* draw from the system and extend it.

Since there exists no other empirical basis for the portrait of Natural Man, this model can only derive from “Jean-Jacques” himself (I, 936). The system of natural goodness and its author are consubstantial: “Son système peut être faux; mais en le développant il s’est peint lui-même au vrai” (I, 934). For empirical reasons³ too, the identity of Natural Man must assume a particular form, choosing between two complementary strands of the system. The first, animated primarily

¹ *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, pp. xxi-xxii.

² “Il est ce que l’a fait la nature: l’éducation ne l’a que bien peu modifié” (I, 800).

by political considerations, investigates what society might be, taking men as they are and educating them in a sympathetic environment that would not corrupt them. The second, following the principles of natural education, seeks to foster the progress that each individual might accomplish if shielded from the actual deleterious moral and political influence of society. While *de facto* psychological, moral and political realities empirically ground the political and educational projects, normative *de jure* principles integral to the moral horizons of Rousseauian nature also hold them up to scrutiny.

The strand taken up and elaborated by the *Dialogues* and the autobiographies belongs to the second, educational framework which explores how Natural Man can survive while excluding himself from a corrupt society. Rousseau's system is here doubly self-referential. The obvious intertextual quality of his writings also represents the sources for a personal philosophy of existence. Having abandoned his literary productions, only *Emile* and its sequel, which he wished Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to finish, continued to preoccupy Rousseau in later life.³ It is not difficult to see why since Rousseau's position mirrors the fate of Emile for whom the disappointments and failures of the present offer the chance of a new beginning:

Quel mal ai-je reçu dans ma personne? Quel crime ai-je commis? Qu'ai-je perdu de moi? Si dans cet instant, tel que je suis, je tombais des nues pour commencer d'exister, serais-je un être malheureux? (*Emile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*, IV, 892)

Tous mes attachements étaient rompus ou altérés, tous mes devoirs étaient changés [...] Je regardai le passé comme étranger à moi, je me supposai commencer de naître [...] tirant de mon état présent les règles de ma conduite (IV, 899).

The author turns to his creation in the *Histoire du précédent écrit*, adopting a new outlook that diffuses the calamity of the *Dialogues*:

Un passage de l'*Emile* que je me rappelai me fit rentrer en moi-même et m'y fit trouver ce que j'avais cherché vainement au dehors. Quel mal t'a fait ce complot? Que t'a-t-il ôté de toi? Que membre t'a-t-il mutilé? Quel crime t'a-t-il fait commettre? [...] en quoi pourront-ils altérer, changer, détériorer mon être? Ils auront beau faire un J.-J. à leur mode, Rousseau restera toujours le même en dépit d'eux (I, 985).

³ *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Launay, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1967-1971), vol. I, p. 39.

Having anticipated his own condition in *Emile*, Rousseau adopts him as his model. “Jean-Jacques”, like *Emile*, is stateless but nonetheless a ‘good’ Man, a sage who must live apart from his fellows but, in so doing, remains a useful member of society if only as a model for others to follow (IV, 859). He can hope for little more than this. I will explore the developments of this theme in the last section of this chapter.

Along with *Emile*, valuable inferences drawn from *La Morale sensitive, ou le matérialisme du sage* also provide a framework of interpretation capable of establishing the coherence of the *Dialogues*. The need to re-examine *La Morale sensitive* arises for reasons vital to uncovering the synthesis operating in the *Dialogues*. In the previous chapter, I attempted to analyse the given of the *Dialogues* into the sum of its acquisitions in order to uncover the role of instrumental reason in protecting moral dispositions. I want to extend this analysis to highlight further the kind of synthesis I believe takes place in the *Dialogues* with regards to the will and its destiny in habit. With the methodological conditions of the *Dialogues* ever present, my reading of the text works back from outcomes to origins. Rousseauian reflexion inaugurates an instrumentality that alienates man from nature but also heralds the possibility of his reconciliation with nature. By the same token, to establish an instrumental ethical will in “Jean-Jacques” is to uncover the traces and corresponding progression beyond reflexive acts towards a resolution of the conflict between nature and reflexion. I hope to show that an account of the genesis and development of habit, assisted by considerations about *La Morale sensitive*, provide the best illustration of such traces.

[7.1] *Ethics and Phenomenology of La Morale sensitive*

In Chapter 5, I mentioned an apparent phenomenological clash between two conflicting identities, “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques”, and their relation to *La Morale sensitive*. Just as Rousseau is fully aware of the dangers of metalepsis, equally, *La Morale sensitive* does not rest on a phenomenological mistake. At stake in the viability of Rousseau’s project for self-transformation is the possibility of re-interpreting certain important statements of the *Dialogues* to

reveal the traces that allow us to deduce a self-creating agent. Since Starobinski ties the destiny of the *Dialogues* to the problematic status of *La Morale sensitive*, the coherence of *La Morale sensitive* might, in turn, contribute to that of the *Dialogues*. Starobinski ignores or abstracts essentially the same thing in both the *Morale sensitive* and the self exhibited by the *Dialogues*, namely, the coming into being of a structure by which moral causes and initiatives precede their effects. The antecedent, moral acts of the will put the structure into place, expressing a dialectical effort towards synthesis. Remove these and one evacuates the synthetic effort of self-creation to surpass the conflict of immediacy and reflexion.

Like habit, *La Morale sensitive* is of absolutely fundamental importance for eliminating the bifurcated self Starobinski assesses as pathological. It also proves crucial for analysing and uncovering the origins of moral outcomes in “Jean-Jacques” and the passage across reflexion towards synthesis. There are two issues at stake in Rousseau’s idea and text: the question of *ends* and that of *means* determined by the adoption of those ends. We might characterise these schematically as follows: 1° the moral ends foreseen by reason, whose initiatives create the conditions that foster new dispositions of the will to best promote and maintain resolutions and commitments; 2° these same ends subsequently realised and adopted by the will. Put differently, a creative *act* of will incorporates itself, via habit, into the *structure* of routine willing. The voluntarist or self-creating aspect of Rousseau’s project thereby meshes with the acquisition of settled patterns of willing or habits by instituting conditions that allow the ends of practical reason to pass into or join inclinations. The ethical self draws on the resources of the natural self. *La Morale sensitive* ought, therefore, to be understood as a paradigmatic drive towards the third, moral stage of Rousseau’s philosophical anthropology, not a regression from it. A product of instrumental reason, it organises the material or the aesthetic (sensation) to transcend the disunity of the reflexive and to bring about the sensibility *Emile* describes as a moral disposition that *equally* fulfils demands for personal happiness as those of reason and morality (IV, 248). Habit also provides a privileged insight into Rousseau’s synthesis, representing the interface between spontaneous freedom and reflexive, morally-sanctioned activity. Like nature, habit overflows in both temporal directions, bridging the emergence of sensation and reflexion on one hand, and the assimilation of reflexion by moral intuition on the other. A phenomenon that equally belongs to

the full lucidity and penumbra of consciousness, habit provides the missing link for Starobinski's analysis by accounting for a spontaneity that I can launch but not fully create, to produce a state of grace by which reflexion returns to nature.

These points are best developed by taking a closer look at Starobinski's twin critique of *La Morale sensitive*. Prefiguring the intractabilities of the *Dialogues*, the abandoned project allegedly turns away from an intended synthesis outlined in the doctrinal works; it marks not an emancipation but a return to the situation of *l'homme naturel* and a rehabilitation of passivity tied, Starobinski submits, to the too powerful pull of regressive, instinctual tendencies in Rousseau for the lost Arcadian innocence described in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*.⁴ Starobinski's *ethical* critique argues that appeals to the sensitive, non-rational faculties invalidate the morality of the *Morale sensitive*. The Genevan critic joins his predecessors for whom the *Morale sensitive* expresses *le rousseauisme* or a deliberate subordination of ethics to sensibility and instinct, the abdication of effort, moral responsibility and reason in the face of dominant aesthetic preoccupations.⁵ Equally problematic for *La Morale sensitive*, from a *phenomenological* perspective, is the division of the "I" into reflexive and immediate selves and their inherently impossible coincidence. As with the *Dialogues*, where he discovers an active, reflexive "Rousseau" and a passive, spontaneous "Jean-Jacques", Starobinski's phenomenological transcription of *La Morale sensitive* considered as a form of *self-management* reveals a dual and contradictory awareness of the environment, two experiences of being, two identities so at variance with themselves that each disables the other. The ambition of *La Morale sensitive* for self-transcendence appears, by this account, simply impossible. The individual spontaneously exposed to a beneficial discrimination of sensations cannot be the one to engineer and contrive their spontaneity in the first place. To undergo the influence of the environment is one thing; to analyse the moral effect of sensory experience and orchestrate the objects that surround us in such a way that their influence works for our advantage is quite another. Artifice and authenticity, reflexion and spontaneity cannot, in this sense, mix.⁶ In the self's disengaged perception of itself, Starobinski notes a major discontinuity with respect to *Emile*. There, a

⁴ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 246.

⁵ Étienne Gilson 'La Méthode de Wolmar', in *Les Idées et les lettres* (Paris: Vrin, 1932), pp. 275-98, (pp. 277-78); Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, pp. 132-35.

⁶ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 254.

pedagogical relation between tutor and pupil avoids the conflicting phenomenologies. An instrumental view of *oneself*, Starobinski holds, makes no sense in *La Morale sensitive*. It merely becomes a pathological aspiration. The Classical and Enlightenment self, for whom reason provides an instrumental view of the world including itself, succumbs, in Starobinski's analysis, to a neo-Hegelian outlook that considers this self-detachment a feature of alienated, false consciousness. *La Morale sensitive*, Starobinski concludes, provides an interesting precedent for the mutually exclusive identities of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* and the latent madness that fully emerges in that work to reverse the synthesis.

Starobinski rejects *La Morale sensitive* because it creates false consciousness on phenomenological and ethical grounds. The ethical objection is best viewed as deriving from the phenomenological critique which I shall address first.

I have already argued that Rousseau's *dédoublement* represents a rhetorical device for the confluence of private views into an objective view. A disengaged perception interrogates the foundations of the plot, its division rhetorical not schizophrenic. As to the phenomenological critique of *La Morale sensitive*, two replies may be offered. The first, a counter-claim to Starobinski's, that of O'Neal and Williams, reverses their charge of intellectual error and turns their phenomenological critique into a phenomenological *deliverance* from the point of view of a formal, transcendental will. An act of disengaged judgement breaks the spell of determinism that enthrals the Cogito.⁷ A second reply, drawing on a Marcellian phenomenology of fidelity, posits two unequal wills, a hegemonic will distinct from a phenomenal will, both of which Starobinski admits even as he dismisses Rousseau's project. Self-creation and self-transcendence necessitate the separation of myself into a reflexive and unreflexive self. The reflexive self in Rousseau identifies with a non-phenomenal or constant will whose imperative is to uphold nature as the principle of non-self-contradiction. In so doing, it confronts the propensity of the phenomenal self to fall victim to contingent psychological states. The intervention of the will, whereby the hegemonic "I" stands over the phenomenal "I", is fundamental to the *La Morale sensitive* as the first step to a re-orientation of the will and the acquisition of moral habits (virtue). Starobinski's view of the relation of the self to itself is something he simultaneously rules out as incoherent and

⁷ "Penser jusqu'au bout mon caractère comme objet, c'est déjà m'en délivrer comme sujet: c'est moi qui le pense, c'est moi qui veux qu'il soit objet compris sous la loi"; Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 342.

abstract, *and* a factor that he ushers back in to make this point. “Dans la “morale sensitive””, he writes, “le conditionnement vient du dehors, les décisions sont prises ou forcées par les objets extérieurs (une fois convenablement *aménagés*); Rousseau *n’a plus* [my emphasis] d’initiatives à prendre, puisque c’est l’affaire du monde sensible”.⁸ Starobinski simultaneously negates and affirms the possibility of willed self-creation in order to deem impossible the coincidence of the two selves or wills.

In one respect, the phenomenological and ethical critiques merge together in the seemingly paradoxical attempt to engineer spontaneity in deliberate fashion. In an endeavour to pursue self-transcendence, can one delegate responsibility to objects and external sensory conditions, Starobinski asks, and still retain one’s status as a free, moral agent? Unsurprisingly, perhaps, not. Any attempt to do so reveals a measure of bad faith:

la morale sensitive est destinée à libérer l’esprit de l’effort de la réflexion; son but est de monter des automatismes qui feront de la vie immédiate une vie selon la vertu. La réussite parfaite serait de pouvoir se livrer naïvement à la sensation en oubliant qu’elle est un moyen mis en œuvre par la réflexion.⁹

[Rousseau] se persuade qu’il n’y a plus qu’à laisser faire les choses. Le bien *a lieu*, l’ordre moral *se réalise* automatiquement.¹⁰

Starobinski immobilises the terms of the synthesis into a permanent and irreconcilable opposition, evacuating the temporal dimension indispensable to self-transformation. But the intelligibility of *La Morale sensitive* depends on its succession into habit. Sensation and the manifold determinations of the body (*l’économie animale*) serve the ends of practical reason. This reversal of dependency and passivity is later enthroned by habit; sensation and reflexion give way to settled states and intuition. The institution of habits signifies that reflexivity ‘forgets’ itself and yields, as we shall see, to a superior unity. Without a continuity between sensation, reflection and intuition, there is neither an instrumental use of sensation to bring about the synthesis, nor a corresponding transformative power of habit through time. In misconstruing habit as degenerative automatism, Starobinski fails to apply his phenomenological method, acquiescing instead to a naturalist assessment in which intentionality belongs to the deep

⁸ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 256.

⁹ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 254.

¹⁰ *La Transparence et l’obstacle*, p. 256.

structures of Rousseau's mental pathology. But there is more to the charge of false consciousness made from the ethical viewpoint of bad faith.

Starobinski's writings argue consistently for what they regard as Rousseau's dominant attitude towards reflexion. *La Transparence et l'obstacle* argues that Rousseau's fascination lies squarely in "la nostalgie de l'irréfléchi".¹¹ *La Morale sensitive*, furthermore, requires that one be, simultaneously, "un démiurge et un animal". The clear, concerted attempt of the *Dialogues*, meanwhile, consists in an escape from reflexivity into innocence.¹² In a later essay, 'Le Pêril de la réflexion', the interpretation remains rooted in a polarity that continues to see in Rousseau the adoption, in turn, of one of two impossible "extremes" or "temptations" to secure a state of *grace*. Starobinski concludes, however, that "la grâce ne peut exister qu'en deçà ou au-delà de la réflexion, dans la marionnette (dans l'animal) ou dans le Dieu".¹³ Closely linked to this analysis is an understanding of *La Morale sensitive* through the intelligibility of *la magie*. A further constant of Rousseau's personality, observes Starobinski, concerns a fascination for acts of self-mystification:

On peut parler ici de comportement magique parce que la magie consiste précisément à provoquer des forces que l'on laisse ensuite agir sur soi; ces forces opèrent par elle-mêmes, elles échappent à notre contrôle; une fois suscitées, elles nous délivrent de la nécessité de vouloir et de diriger nos actes. Il suffit alors de consentir à ce qui nous arrive.¹⁴

This is why, in uncovering the bad faith he regards as integral to the two selves of *La Morale sensitive*, Starobinski speaks of a *dédoublement* of "mystificateur" and "mystifié".¹⁵ Both Marcel Raymond and Timothy O'Hagan have offered alternative assessments of this phenomenon.¹⁶ In my own reply to the charge of bad faith I hope to take their arguments further.

¹¹ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 252.

¹² *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 255.

¹³ 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le péril de la réflexion', in *L'Œil vivant: essai* (Paris, Gallimard, 1961), pp. 91-190 (p. 188).

¹⁴ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 79. Raymond, from whom Starobinski draws, also identifies Rousseau's tendency for self-mystification, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la quête de soi et la rêverie* (Paris: Corti, 1962), p. 21.

¹⁵ *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, p. 255.

¹⁶ In his commentary on the *Confessions*, Raymond underlines the necessary temporal dimension which separates mystifier from mystified (I, 1470). Arguing within an Aristotelian framework of moral perfectibility, O'Hagan likens the progression from one state to another to the training and discipline required for acquiring technical skills or aptitudes, 'La Morale sensitive de Jean-Jacques Rousseau', p. 354.

An initial reply begins by examining the rational and creative *act* that re-establishes moral order, and the irreducible spontaneity of habit. The orchestrations of *La Morale sensitive* seek to enthrone new habits to prolong the ends of practical reason into a fully exercised, permanent condition of the will. Most importantly, *La Morale sensitive* serves to identify the moment Chevalier calls *l'acte* of habit, which belongs to the creative freedom of the mind and is *sui generis*; and its *effet*, rendered easeful by habit which gives rise to settled dispositions.¹⁷ This involves two types of will: the first initiates action based on rational choice; the second is a constant pattern or habit of willing that prolongs this choice. Strictly speaking, however, it would be inaccurate to claim that the effect of decision or choice bears directly on the will's capacity or desire for self-improvement. While *La Morale sensitive* attempts to create the conditions for established, irreflexive virtue, the act of converting spontaneity into virtue requires qualification. Rousseau remains thoroughly traditional from the perspective of the history of moral philosophy. From Aristotle onwards, habit transforms willed actions into spontaneous virtue, turning conscious and deliberate effort into unreflexive action. Without the structure of habit-acquisition, the undertaking of *La Morale sensitive* indeed remains an obscure and unintelligible alchemical operation. In this respect, the acquisitions can never be fully automatic as they can never fully be the work of the will. On the one hand, the individual takes the "initiative" to acquire virtue via habit. Virtuous activity derives from deliberate effort before it becomes habitual and unreflexive. But habit-acquisition retains a mysterious aspect which may account for the apparent difficulties Starobinski uncovers. We already know from *Du Contrat social*, that "la volonté [...] n'a point d'empire sur elle-même" (III, 315). This means that I can only imperfectly will a habit since it depends on a spontaneity at once efficient and *not mine* although dependent, in part, on my prior efforts to contract it. Against the charge of bad faith, habit makes intelligible the magical effect of self-transformation whose working, akin to Molinist grace, depends on a concurrence of volition and an efficacious gift or power of assistance that is not wholly ours. *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis*.

Starobinski provides us with an important insight when he notes that the task of regaining what he regards as an impossible unreflexive state of grace belongs to Rousseau's

¹⁷ *L'Habitude*, p. 233.

“rationalism”.¹⁸ Rousseau, we recall, places grace within the reach of all because all have received the gifts of reason to distinguish the good, conscience to love it, and freedom to choose it (II, 683). Rousseau’s rationalism stands as the basis of the organising power of *La Morale sensitive* to institute new habits of the will: “La raison est la faculté d’ordonner toutes les facultés de notre âme convenablement à la nature des choses et à leurs rapports avec nous” (IV, 1090). Viewed as a naturalised theology of sufficient grace, this rationalism, in effect a voluntarism, conceives of a mediating *composito loci* through which the self prepares to enter a new condition.¹⁹ Rousseauian grace draws from the unalterable, positive energy of nature to complete or heal *itself*. In *Du Contrat social*, this power goes by the name of “la force de l’habitude” (III, 394) and renders moral progress of the deviated will which unfolds in empirical time possible. The success of the general will relies heavily on the exercised will of habituated citizens. Habit not only involves an initiative that, for a significant part, escapes my conscious desire, but also performs a conversion of the will that unifies it with what I know to be the good. Only then can the impermanent, transient self depend on itself to feel tomorrow as it does today. Habits of the will, an internalisation of routine choices for the good, promote a unity of volition and guarantee the self’s moral continuity in time. Habit represents the living demonstration that the present and the past are not divided by an abyss but cohere as a unified permanence over time.

Reflexive efforts to transcend the reflexive state into intuition demonstrate how Rousseau’s habit-cum-grace, which calls on the restorative activity of nature itself, stands on either side of reflexion and self-division. Habit achieves neither a descent into automatism nor some impossible supernatural condition or vantage point beyond the human. Contrary to reductive automatism, *La Morale sensitive* attests the willed, moral origins of habit; habit, in turn, constitutes the continuing reality of the effects of transformation. Rousseau’s dream is to extend the ease and power of entitative or functional habits into the realm of operative habits of choice, to produce an irreflexivity for the good which nothing could overturn. The synthesis between nature and morals, which *La Morale sensitive* and the structure of habit-acquisition render explicit, assumes great importance for the coherence of two apparently irretrievable but central

¹⁸ ‘Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le péril de la réflexion’, p. 185.

¹⁹ The analogy between *La Morale sensitive* and Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* belongs to Marcel Raymond, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la quête de soi et la rêverie* (Paris: Corti, 1962), p. 45.

and interconnected determinations of “Jean-Jacques” that point in an opposite direction to automatism. The first involves the status of a natural inclination for the good; the second, the indolence of the will that derives from character (*le naturel*).

The first of these descriptions brings into play the phenomenon that William Earle calls the *autobiographical consciousness* and the impossibility of the pre-reflexive Cogito to be the object of its own consciousness.²⁰ In an important passage, “Rousseau” claims of “Jean-Jacques” that “jamais homme ne se conduisit moins sur des principes et des règles, et ne suivit plus aveuglément ses penchants. Prudence, raison, précaution, prévoyance; tout cela ne sont pour lui que des mots sans effet” (I, 812). The self-reflexive autobiographical consciousness is as much an obstacle as a guide, for it interposes itself between the mind and its perception of the truth of the subject’s unreflexive being. This results in the confusion of the object or symbols of the “I” provided by consciousness, with the facts of being itself. Consciousness, rooted in being as its source, cannot apprehend its being anymore than the eye can see itself. As Barrett J. Mandel explains, “since the mind is the only part of us that is conscious and conscious of itself, we mistakenly assume that this consciousness is conterminous with who we are”.²¹ Here lies the fundamental ambiguity of *ethos*. The relationship between habit and selfhood or character, mutability and cohesion entails, as Ricœur recently argues, that the self manifests itself as an appearance of sameness, “le recouvrement de *l’ipse* par *l’idem*”.²²

The discontinuity between self (unreflexive ego) and self-consciousness (reflexive ego), between what we are and what we think we are also occurs on a practical level in the relation between self-consciousness and the body as a practical organ that exceeds the frontiers of consciousness. Echoing Ravaisson, for whom freedom reverts to nature, Ricœur argues that habit extends the primitive relation to our body prior to all knowledge and willing into non-willed coordination, widening the body’s *irreflexive* usage: “ce caractère primitif de tout pouvoir sur le corps de n’être ni su ni voulu”.²³ Viewed as an extension of irreflexive usage, habit introduces no radically new facts: “ce qui fut un jour analysé, pensé et voulu, glisse peu à peu dans le règne

²⁰ *The Autobiographical Consciousness: A Philosophical Inquiry into Existence* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972).

²¹ ‘Full of Life Now’, in *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, pp. 49-72 (p. 50).

²² *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 146.

²³ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l’involontaire*, p. 269.

de ce que je n'ai jamais su ni voulu".²⁴ The movements of habit are directed neither by some alien guide nor a mechanical force but what Ravaissou calls *une unité supérieure*, whose origins lie in reflexive freedom.²⁵ Perhaps the key to the central problem of the *Dialogues*, as Starobinski sees it, lies in the unreflexive enlargement that habit operates on the self and the inability of the unreflexive autobiographical consciousness to *represent* its being as the subject of autobiography. Given that an act of will leads to the creation of a *penchant* and the abolition of *reflexive* knowing and willing, Rousseau can legitimately claim that his acts are spontaneous and deprived of guidance from reason and will. The involuntary being the work of the voluntary, Rousseau 'forgets' he has willed but not for reasons of bad faith.

The ontological hiatus between the writing self and the written self brings me to the second determination about "Jean-Jacques". This relates to the pervading psychological effects of habit, the economy of effort and the pleasure and satisfaction with which successful acts are performed. Ricœur, after Ravaissou, draws attention to the tendency of habit to efface the traces of its own history.²⁶ Such loss of innovation once again engenders a lack of full self-awareness, the influence of a habit tending to obscure and obliterate its cause for consciousness. These points enable us to understand the significance of what "Rousseau" diagnoses as a *paresse de vouloir* in "Jean-Jacques" (I, 846). Like *La Morale sensitive*, this absence of will finds coherence in the voluntarism that precedes it and the economy of effort that succeeds it. The *paresse de vouloir* must be viewed from the perspective of weakness, the moral condition on which I insisted in Chapter 6. Internalised by habit, the orchestrations of the *Morale sensitive* represent a practical solution to weakening of the will, a support for the individual who cannot count on the transitive power of his intentions. Habit, like *La Morale sensitive*, responds to the needs of those who adopt a diffident attitude towards their weakness by encompassing themselves within morally supervised conditions, eliminating the need for renewed, reflexive *acts* of will. In the *Dialogues*, the will is captured in *Emile*-like fashion as a *liberté bien réglée* (IV, 321), remaining firmly ensconced in a stable framework of restricted action, pre-determined and morally sanctioned by

²⁴ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 269.

²⁵ Ravaissou, *De L'Habitude*, p. 38.

²⁶ Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 273.

reflexivity. Routine absorbs the imperatives of practical reason and overtakes conscious, rule-guided living to liberate the will from the need for further choice.

Undoubted apologetic motives impel “Rousseau”’s affirmation about the indolence of the will. Explicitly, it serves to distinguish “Jean-Jacques” by indicating not the absence of will *per se*, but of a particular quality of will, one animated exclusively by irascible passions themselves governed by the imperatives of *amour-propre*. “J’ose même dire”, declares “Rousseau”, “qu’il n’y a point de constitution plus éloignée que la sienne de la méchanceté [...] Paresseux et voluptueux, comment serait-il haineux et vindicatif?” (I, 852). Negatively, it stigmatises in a manner redolent of Pascalian *divertissement* those of his contemporaries whom Rousseau deems irreversibly *remuants* (I, 671), that is, impelled to incessant activity in spite of themselves and prompted by *amour-propre* in everything they undertake. The apologetic logic of the Second *Dialogue* gradually unfolds to elaborate a new ethic of *abstention*. Rousseau’s *paresse de vouloir* prepares the way for this ethic.

The indolent will appears thoroughly ambiguous. When considered from the perspective of habit, it indicates the presence of a particular will, the effect of which an economy of willed choice renders possible. The principle of economy here illustrates a ‘technique’ of the ethical self that links habit and the will and which, as Jankélévitch explains, is precisely “ce moyen d’épargne qui, nous dispensant de recréer à chaque fois un acte intellectuel, nous permet de gagner du temps et d’extraire sans fatigue le maximum du minimum”.²⁷ Turning to *Emile*, Rousseau’s sloth assumes a logic. *Emile* decisively links moral strength to physical vigour: “Il faut que le corps ait de la vigueur pour obéir à l’âme [...] Plus le corps est faible, plus il commande; plus il est fort, plus il obéit [...] Un corps débile affaiblit l’âme” (IV, 269). The valetudinarian Rousseau can count on no such strength for the unity between the ‘voice’ of the soul and the ‘law’ of the body (IV, 586). The obstacles posed to the soul by a recalcitrant body may, however, be reduced and eliminated through habit in which:

on fait plus aisément ce qu’on a déjà fait, la route étant frayée en devient plus facile à suivre. Aussi peut-on remarquer que l’empire de l’habitude est très grand sur les vieillards et sur les gens indolents, très petit sur la jeunesse et sur les gens vifs. Ce régime n’est bon qu’aux âmes faibles (IV, 421).

²⁷ Vladimir Jankélévitch, ‘Signification spirituelle du principe d’économie’, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger*, 105-106 (1928), 88-126 (p. 92).

A regimen particularly suited to the weak, habit proves particularly apt for “Jean-Jacques”:

il trouve si fatigant même de vouloir, qu’il aime mieux dans le courant de la vie suivre une impression purement machinale qui l’entraîne sans qu’il ait la peine de la diriger. Jamais homme ne porta plus pleinement et dès sa jeunesse le joug propre des âmes faibles et des vieillards, savoir celui de l’habitude (I, 846).

The *Dialogues* claim that the tenor of this existence is (now) completely uniform. “Jean-Jacques” rises, goes to bed, eats, works, goes out and returns, all at the same time. Every day is cast in the same mould but habit unifies these disparate details: “sa routine lui tient lieu de toute autre règle” (I, 847). As such, this tenor of existence addresses the problem of *faiblesse*, and renders a minimum of effort sufficient for the realisation of goals now and in the future. Once produced, the quantity of energy required to renew an effect lessens and it is thus that habit derives from the first act. By facilitating the effects of the act, habit, according to Chevalier, facilitates the act itself.²⁸ Habit thereby provides the basis for the further pursuit of ideals. A *paresse de vouloir* represents a reduced intensity of *reflexive* willing, an overtaking of initiative by moral necessity thanks to the prior consent of the will to a framework of action which assists the self to transcend its prior limits. It represents easeful or effortless willing synonymous with virtue itself.

[7.2] *After Reflexion: Moral Sensibility*

The *Dialogues* offer further, direct textual evidence of a transcendent development beyond rationalism to an irreflexive, intuitive state by way of *l’instinct moral*, *le sentiment intime*, moral sensibility and *l’art de jouir*.

Moral instinct in the *Dialogues* consists of “la haine de l’injustice et de la méchanceté [...] sans qu’il se mêle à cette aversion rien de personnel qui tient à l’amour-propre” (I, 810). As spontaneous and goal-directed action that has absorbed and subsequently effaced reason, it indicates a synthesis that Starobinski claims the *Dialogues* fail to reach. Moral instinct significantly juxtaposes the given and morality, recalling the famous comparison of the voice of

²⁸ *L’Habitude*, p. 233.

conscience in the *Profession de foi* as the instinct of the soul, active and capable of judgement. Instinct provides a spontaneous know-how pertaining solely to means without awareness of ends. A *moral* instinct, by contrast, as Burgelin notes, implies knowledge of ends: “conscience et qualification de la fin” (IV, 1553). Since it unites immediate, non-reflexive means and reflexive ends, the outcome of a movement that has integrated and surpassed reflection which it effaces to become spontaneous, moral conscience itself, the moral instinct resembles *le sentiment intime* (I, 671). The latter, a practical imperative and superior unity, equals the *sentiment moral* (conscience) that Starobinski claims exclusively for *Emile*. Rousseau’s inward feeling draws meaning from the hegemony of moral sensibility which the *Dialogues* locate beyond mere aesthetic reception of the world as an additional synthetical progression. Since inward feeling depends on the modalities of moral sensibility, I will examine the characteristics of this sensibility before showing how both bring the rationalism of *l’art de jouir* to the fore.

It is useful to recall that Rousseauian sensibility involves two mutually transforming facets. It is both receptivity and conatus, reflecting the dual nature of the self as a passivity or *tabula rasa* on which the environment imprints its influence, and a centre of creative agency. Within this context, moral sensibility elevates sensation to produce what the *Essai sur l’origine des langues* terms *impressions morales*.²⁹ These impressions cannot be solely deduced from the intake of sense experience but arise, on the contrary, in a complex, compound form that unites passive sensibility and cognition or reflexivity. Consistent with these views, the *Dialogues* argue for a moral property generated in tandem with, but not solely attributable to, sensation. The full effect of sensation lies in a collaboration with feeling which precedes and attends sense perception. Thus, a sensation only registers a significant effect to modify “Jean-Jacques” if a pre-existing feeling belonging to *sensibilité active et morale* also attends it:

De beaux sons, un beau ciel, un beau paysage, un beau lac, des fleurs, des parfums, de beaux yeux, un doux regard; tout cela ne réagit si fort sur ses sens qu’après avoir percé par quelque côté *jusqu’à son cœur* (I, 807; my emphasis)

J.-J. esclave de ses sens ne s’affecte pas néanmoins de toutes les sensations, et pour qu’un objet lui fasse impression il faut qu’à la simple sensation *se joigne un sentiment distinct de plaisir ou de peine qui l’attire ou le repousse* (I, 808; my emphasis).

²⁹ *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, Chapter 15: ‘Que nos plus vives sensations agissent souvent par des impressions morales’ (V, 417-19).

The positive or adverse effects of physical sensibility strictly depend on the collaboration between physiological sensation and moral feeling. Sensuality is not divorced from moral sensibility. A receptive sensibility has its correlative in the finesse of sensory experience; the sensual subordinates itself, in turn, to the rational. The finesse or cultured reception of sensation is tied to the quality of inward feeling and points irresistibly to *l'art de jouir*. Before exploring this 'art', I want to establish further the status and function of moral sensibility in the *Dialogues*.

Viewed from the genetic development of *Emile*, an active "sensibilité morale" implicates a relationship between the self and others and represents a synthetical progression not aesthetic regression. In *Emile*, as we have noted, Rousseau identifies three stages of sensibility in a progressive evolution from pre-moral "dispositions" to moral consciousness (IV, 248). The *Dialogues* simplify these into a *sensibilité physique et organique*, the totality of the body's instinctual responses designed for self-preservation coordinated by pleasure and pain; and a *sensibilité active et morale*, predicated by identification with the other, mediated through *amour de soi* or *amour-propre*. Of itself, physical sensibility has no moral status for *Emile*. In the *Dialogues*, by contrast, it becomes ethically ennobled via its participation in the moral life which prolongs the mere facts of bodily sensation into moral impressions. The reverberation of sensation well beyond its own confines points, not to a hiatus between the physical and the moral, but an important continuity and integration that spontaneously restrains and regulates physical sensibility:

J.-J. m'a paru doué de la sensibilité physique à un assez haut degré. Il dépend beaucoup de ses sens et il en dépendrait bien davantage si la sensibilité morale n'y faisait souvent diversion; *et c'est même encore souvent par celle-ci que l'autre l'affecte si vivement* [...] Ce qu'il y a de mixte dans la plupart de ses sensations *les tempère*, et ôtant à celles qui sont purement matérielles l'attrait séducteur des autres fait que toutes agissent sur lui *plus modérément* (I, 807; my emphasis).

The text wholly encompasses the essence of physical sensibility within the boundary of moral experience, signifying that the former derives ethical significance thanks to, rather than independently of, the latter. Contrary to Starobinski's purely aesthetic interpretation, the ethical holds the sensual firmly under its hegemony.

We can further appreciate this relation of dependency in the significance of the “sentiment intime” and the receptivity of sensibility and finesse of sensory experience integrated into the moral life which summon *l’art de jouir*. The input and effacement of reflexivity, we realise, is evident from the start of the First *Dialogue* which describes “Jean-Jacques” as an inhabitant of an idealised community that recognises and participates in the design of the universe because it locates the source of its happiness in a good conscience. Consistent with Rousseau’s anthropology, reason awakens conscience before surpassing reason in turn:

Comme ils ne cherchent pas leur bonheur dans l’apparence mais dans le *sentiment intime*, en quelque rang que les ait placés la fortune, il s’agitent peu pour en sortir; ils ne cherchent guère à s’élever, et descendraient sans répugnance à des relations plus de leur goût, sachant bien que l’état le plus heureux n’est pas le plus honoré de la foule, mais celui qui rend le cœur plus content [...]

Quoique sensuels et voluptueux ils font peu de cas de l’opulence, et ne font rien pour y parvenir, connaissant trop bien l’art de jouir pour ignorer que ce n’est pas à prix d’argent que le vrai plaisir s’achète [...] D’ailleurs aimant encore plus leur liberté que leur aises, ils craindraient de les acheter par la fortune, ne fût-ce qu’à cause de la dépendance et des embarras attachés au soin de la conserver. Le cortège inséparable de l’opulence leur serait cent fois plus à charge que les biens qu’elle procure ne leur serait doux. Le tourment de la possession empoisonnerait pour eux tout le plaisir de la jouissance (I, 671-72).

This passage evokes a number of interrelated themes, including the polarities of opinion and inward happiness, of enslavement to ambition and freedom based on simplicity, as well as the significance and place of sensuality and *volupté* in the moral life.

The “sentiment intime” corresponds, in *Emile*, to the voice of conscience. Rousseau maintains that conscience acts by way of *feelings* which reason then deciphers into duties, and by which we judge ourselves and our actions (IV, 599). This inward feeling represents an irrefutable, intimate and immediate moral awareness, the source of self-sufficient, inalienable happiness that begins to describe the moral superiority of “Jean-Jacques”. As Rousseau constantly affirms, there no genuine happiness exists at a distance from oneself. As moral conscience, the *sentiment intime* is the soul’s review of the past and the inward satisfaction that derives from acting well. Independent of the vicissitudes of *fortune*, this spiritual contentment is inalienable. For this reason, the *sentiment intime* belongs to *l’art de jouir*. Like other inhabitants of the idealised world, “Jean-Jacques” is a connoisseur and beneficiary of *l’art de jouir*, a philosophy of the genuinely prosperous life (ευδαίμονια) successfully lived according to nature. Rousseau never

divorces a meditation on happiness from the indispensable material, emotional and psychological conditions that bring it within our grasp. Concerned with the material and psychological substratum of happiness, *l'art de jouir* adopts an instrumental view to the embodied, material conditions of existence through reason, which seeks to regulate and thereby incorporate them into the moral life. For this reason, it positions itself alongside *La Morale sensitive*, ou *le matérialisme du sage*.³⁰ Sketched in the *Discours sur les richesses* and, with the possible exclusion of *Du Contrat social*, all the mature works, it betokens the reflexive contribution to the aesthetic aspects of the good life.

As I implied in Chapter 6, Rousseau subordinates *jouissance*, in Aristotelian fashion, to a rational ideal of *mediocritas*, an equilibrium achieved by assigning a place in the moral life to the ensemble of physical desires and needs subordinated anew to normative nature. This serves to demonstrate the rationally-driven and rationally-legitimised synthesis I wish to highlight in the *Dialogues*, one that overturns the double curse of the *Discours sur l'inégalité* which dissociates reflexivity and man's physical and moral excellence. In *L'Œil vivant*, Starobinski extends the thesis of *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, developing the accentuated but localised opposition between immediacy and reflexivity of the *Dialogues* into a deeper confrontation between an evolutionary anthropology of unfolding human perfectionism and a theology of the Fall.³¹ Progress and degeneration traverse and inform every Rousseauian position on reflexion. The notorious declaration of the Second *Discours*, "Si [la nature] nous a destinés à être sains, j'ose presque assurer, que l'état de réflexion est un état contre nature, et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé" (III, 138), records the double loss of Natural Man's inheritance. Forfeiting a material excellence founded on *health*, reflexion also costs Natural Man his moral excellence and condemns him to *depravity*. Unable to reconcile the two conflicting narratives of progress and fall, Rousseau's work "nous offre le spectacle d'une incessante oscillation".³² To negotiate this opposition requires the synthesis *by* reason in addition to the synthesis *of* reason.

³⁰ G. A. Roggerone, *Controilluminismo, saggio su la Mettrie ed Helvétius*, 2 vols (Lecce: Milella, 1975); Denise Leduc-Fayette, "Le Matérialisme du sage" et "l'Art de jouir", *Revue de philosophie de la France et de l'étranger*, 168 (1978), 327-42.

³¹ 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le péril de la réflexion', pp. 160-61.

³² 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le péril de la réflexion', p. 161.

Positing regulated, self-restraint in place of needless self-expenditure and dissipation, *l'art de jouir* illustrates how perfected art, through the reflexive, intelligent cultivation of the senses, reunites man with nature. How? By returning him to a condition defined by the boundaries and implicit laws that formerly ensured physical and spiritual well-being. The history of human freedom has been one of unguided development exceeding these limits, of unconstrained needs and desires spawned by the unchecked expansion of reflexion and imagination. Artificial, intellectual pleasures continue to solicit the undisciplined will long after natural wants cease to make themselves felt (III, 141). To overturn this history, progress must unfold within the norms nature spontaneously imposes on living beings. These may either receive confirmation or be sponsored anew by instrumental reason. A rehabilitated, discriminating rationality, enlightened by the moral horizons of nature, restores insight to the human *telos* to recuperate those constraints that man has failed to respect.

A premise of Rousseauian ethical thinking, the basis for the destiny of reason as a force for regeneration, holds to a nature or “condition” appropriate to man whose scope reason must discover or recover for happiness.³³ The intelligibility of this human reality is furthered through the idea of a first principle or *law*, which simultaneously restrains and liberates those who respect it. The good use of reason, whether in the sphere of individual morality or politics, for instance, consists in recognising and accepting appropriate laws as beneficial yokes. Nature as a legislating force provides, as ever, a model. To this, Rousseau introduces the idea of harmony between potentially antagonistic forces. Our condition as beings subject to inherent restrictions must inform the use of freedom through imagination and the will. “La sagesse humaine ou la route du vrai bonheur”, declares *Emile*,

[...] c'est à diminuer l'excès des désirs sur les facultés, et à mettre en égalité parfaite la puissance et la volonté. C'est alors seulement [...] que l'homme se trouvera bien ordonné.

^ C'est ainsi que la nature qui fait tout pour le mieux l'a d'abord institué (IV, 304).

The inherent inequality of the infinite elasticity of desires and the inelastic, given and finite capacities to meet them necessitates a direction of the first by a principle of *economy*. This

³³ “Sois homme; retire ton cœur dans les bornes de ta condition [...] quelques étroites qu'elles soient, on n'est point malheureux tant qu'on s'y renferme” (IV, 819).

principle emerges in Rousseau's writings when reason promotes a natural finality that orders and controls everything for the highest good. "Λ'οικονομία", writes Jankélévitch, "se rapporte à l'aspect conservateur, féminin et nourricier de l'existence [...] la loi d'économie strictement observée doit nous assurer une existence stable et routinière à l'intérieur du cycle jalonné par nos besoins périodiques".³⁴ Rousseauian economics attempts to re-establish the protective, legislative regularity and independence that nature bestows on all sentient creatures (III, 138). Tied to individual morality, the rational principle for measure, order and equilibrium corresponding to *mediocritas* is nothing other than *cura sui* that collaborates with nature.

The rational principles that equally support an attitude of self-awareness or attention and an *economics* of happiness implying an intelligibility of human reality based on law, are set out in detail in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. "Le nécessaire a sa mesure naturelle, et [...] les vrais besoins n'ont jamais d'excès [...] l'opinion est illimitée, au lieu que la nature nous arrête de tous côtés" (II, 550-51). Revisiting Xenophon's *Œconomicus*, the opening letters in Part Five of the novel feature the economics of *l'art de jouir* as part of a wider, comprehensive art of living. *L'Art de jouir* consists in a self-discipline that exploits and derives from sensibility the fullest satisfactions it can possibly offer. For M^{me} de Wolmar, "l'art de jouir est [...] celui des [...] privations passagères et modérées, qui conservent à la raison son empire, et servant d'assaisonnement au plaisir en préviennent le dégoût et l'abus" (II, 541). To respond to every desire without consulting the extent of one's faculties results in depriving oneself of pleasure. A disciplined regimen, by contrast, renews rather than jades sensibility. The principle of economy supports the rational insights that seek self-sufficiency and a *mise en valeur* of the resources of human sensibility. As Bernard Guyon remarks in his commentary, the text is strewn with terms like *maximes*, *préceptes*, *principes*, referring to a body of knowledge (II, 1648-49). One might also add others like *sagesse*, *règles* (II, 530) and *système* (II, 544). "C'est", observes a character, "l'épicurisme de la raison" (II, 662). The rational concern for genuine sensual enjoyment emerges from the imperatives of *jouissance* itself. Hence why M^{me} de Wolmar's "tempérance" is paradoxically motivated by the same reasons that otherwise "jettent les voluptueux dans l'excès" (II, 542). Reason furthers pleasure because it understands it, but *volupté* does not confine itself

³⁴ Jankélévitch, 'Signification spirituelle du principe d'économie', p. 88.

to material *jouissance*. Indeed, both the first draft and the author's personal copy of the novel refer to "l'épicurisme de la vertu" (II, 1759). As ever in Rousseau, the physical and the moral are continuous and, as such, *l'art de jouir* extends beyond the sensual to the moral.³⁵

Endorsing the views proposed by *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, "Jean-Jacques" rejects the ethos of public opinion and its excessive, artificial demands harmful to moral freedom, in favour of an *art de jouir* that embraces measured, genuine satisfactions, underwritten by nature and ratified by reason. The *Dialogues* recover both sensuality and reason, the aesthetic and the reflexive, as necessary components in the ethical life of Natural Man, targeting those who fail to respect natural limits in terms that echo the Second *Discours*: "il faut borner ce mot de sensualité à l'acceptation que je lui donne, et de ne pas l'étendre à ces voluptueux de parade qui [...] pour vouloir passer les limites du plaisir tombent dans la dépravation" (I, 808). "Jean-Jacques" and the initiates of the ideal world, by contrast, willingly restrict themselves to a happiness which nature, through self-aware reason, renders appropriate to human aspirations. The complementary norms of nature *and* reason are binding on the members of this community, "bornés de toutes parts par la nature et par la raison, ils s'arrêtent, et passent leur vie à en jouir" (I, 671). They withdraw because their *art de jouir* is inseparable from the concerns of the 'materialism of the sage' and *cura sui* anxious to avoid contracting negative dispositions. Actions have the power to transform me: what I do, through disposition, gradually becomes part of what I am. "Jean-Jacques" therefore accepts the advice of the *Discours sur les richesses*, opting for neither austerity nor riches:

sa situation présente est du côté de l'aisance telle précisément qu'il la faut à son humeur. Libre des chaînes de la fortune, il jouit avec modération de tous les biens réels qu'elle donne; il a retranché ceux de l'opinion, qui ne sont qu'apparents et qui sont les plus coûteux. Plus pauvre il sentirait des privations, des souffrances; plus riche il aurait l'embarras des richesses, des soucis, des affaires, il faudrait renoncer à l'incurie, pour lui la plus douce des voluptés: en possédant davantage il jouirait beaucoup moins (I, 848).

Only tranquillity and security allow a true *jouissance*.

³⁵ Saint-Preux provocatively writes: "Julie a l'âme et le corps également sensibles. La même délicatesse règne dans ses sentiments et dans ses organes. Elle était faite pour connaître et goûter tous les plaisirs, longtemps elle n'aima si chèrement la vertu même que comme la plus douce des voluptés" (IV, 541).

The synthesis is complete towards the end of the Third *Dialogue* when “Le Français” identifies “Jean-Jacques” as an archetypal Natural Man, “cet homme de la nature qui vit vraiment de la vie humaine, qui comptant pour rien l’opinion d’autrui se conduit uniquement d’après *ses penchants et sa raison*, sans égard à ce que le public approuve ou blâme” (I, 936; my emphasis). Natural Man does not confuse fact and symbol. Nor does he reject the benefits of rational enlightenment and perfectionism to which he must attribute his no less ‘natural’ but more evolved wants: “L’homme de la nature *éclairé par la raison* a des appétits plus délicats mais non moins simples que dans sa première grossièreté” (I, 864; my emphasis). When the *Dialogues* declare that “L’homme sensuel est l’homme de la nature; l’homme réfléchi est celui de l’opinion” (I, 808), reflexion refers to a propensity to enthrallment by the symbols of imagination and unlimited desires, contrary to the reflexive intelligence of *l’art de jouir* and beyond what nature permits. Rousseau overturns the curse of the First as well as the Second *Discourses*. An equilibrium supported by rational insight renders the refinement of sensibility legitimate. Instead of repudiating the advantages of progress, Natural Man’s vocation is to incorporate them into the good life by subordinating them to the preservation of natural goodness *and* the demands of the community, ensuring that these genuine values are not mistaken for their metonymic, contingent, false and disordered expressions:

L’esprit, les talents ne sont pour lui que des ornements du mérite et ne le constituent pas. Ils sont des développements nécessaires dans le progrès des choses et qui ont leur avantages pour les agréments de la vie mais subordonnés aux facultés plus précieuses qui rendent l’homme vraiment sociable et bon et qui lui font priser l’ordre, la justice, la droiture et l’innocence au-dessus de tous les autres biens (I, 864).

Like fully internalised habits, the development of Natural Man in society conforms to nature by maintaining an equilibrium that successively integrates perfectibility into the framework of a greater inheritance.

My representation of “Jean-Jacques” as it emerges so far describes a representative Natural Man who achieves harmony of self and environment, and legitimate material fulfilment integrated into the soul’s love of order that eliminates the self-division of competing desires. Now, in the light of Rousseauian ethics, the absence of such self-division characterises natural goodness (*bonté*). Yet, my account has omitted that other, equally significant strand, Rousseau’s stoic

conception of virtue (*vertu*), which appears the very opposite of this full and complete *adhérence à soi-même*. Virtue is equally distant from both *faiblesse* and *bonté* since Rousseau defines virtue as the meritorious, and therefore superior, moral energy to wage and bring to a successful end the civil war in the soul.³⁶ We might say that both goodness and virtue equally aim for unity, but a unity of different sorts arrived at by different means. Whatever they might share in common, however, “Jean-Jacques” weakness renders him incapable of virtue: “Notre homme ne sera pas vertueux parce qu’il sera faible et que la vertu n’appartient qu’aux âmes fortes” (I, 824). And yet, having read the works of “Jean-Jacques”, “Le Français” concludes: “Je crois J.-J. innocent et vertueux” (I, 945). How can Rousseau arrive at this point?

The Frenchman’s statement represents the culmination of a dialectical movement that combines the twin strands of personal apology and the synthesis of goodness, virtue and wisdom which the Second *Dialogue* weaves together. The *Dialogues*, as I hope to show, overturn the initial assessment that “Jean-Jacques” is not virtuous by replacing this with arguments about the incapacity and superfluosity of virtue (“Notre homme ne sera donc pas vertueux, parce qu’il n’aura pas besoin de l’être”, I, 824) which turns into a possession of virtue. As with *Emile*, where the solution to an almost forgotten dilemma adumbrated in the initial pages finally unfolds before the reader’s eyes, the *Dialogues* implicitly argue that the very act of “abstention” qualifies as a triumph over a natural inclination for expansion. The efforts that enlist inclination and sensibility through habit, meanwhile, reduces the scope for moral weakness. I want to pursue the fortunes of the dialectic in conjunction with two fundamental, psychological moods that Starobinski identifies as the profile of Rousseau’s thinking at any one time:

Rousseau, devant un même problème, recourt tour à tour à une *rhétorique de l’antithèse*, ou à une *dialectique du dépassement*. Tantôt tout se fige dans un système d’opposition sans issue, de type manichéen. Tantôt les conflits trouvent leur solution sur un plan supérieur.³⁷

If we re-interpret these oscillations as belonging to a typical Rousseauian *rhetorical* strategy in which an antithesis constitutes a preliminary movement of a synthesis which comprehends and

³⁶ “Ne savez-vous pas que la vertu est un état de guerre, et que pour y vivre on a toujours quelque combat à rendre contre soi?” (II, 682); “Le mot de *vertu* vient de *force*; la force est la base de tout vertu. La vertu n’appartient qu’un être faible par sa nature et fort par la volonté; c’est en cela que consiste le mérite de l’homme juste” (IV, 817).

³⁷ ‘Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le péril de la réflexion’, p. 165 (my emphasis).

overcomes the dilemma, we isolate the process that perfectly describes the dialectical movement underway in the *Dialogues*. This movement liquidates practical reason into spontaneous habit to resolve the antinomies of *bonté* and *vertu* and provide a new ethic for Natural Man in corrupt society.

[7.3] *Bonté and vertu*

The debate concerning natural goodness and virtue, and the subsequent tension of Rousseau's "duality of ideals" (Groethuysen), emerges as a major theme in the commentaries of Burgelin and Derathé. Before examining their respective positions, I would like to set out briefly Rousseau's approach and solution to this problem prior to the *Dialogues*.

The elaboration of wisdom (*sagesse*) heralds an important innovation in Rousseau's ethical thought, arising, as we will see, from scepticism about the empirical possibility of virtue and the rejection of denaturation. Wisdom, Rousseau tells Carondelet, consists not in any supreme effort of will, but in removing the obstacles that render duty difficult (CC, XIX, 13). Throughout Part One of the *Confessions*, Rousseau envisages *sagesse* as a protection against the dissolution of the will illustrated, for instance, in the *Discours sur les richesses*. The only maxim of any practical use, says Rousseau, consists in avoiding situations that create a discontinuity between the psychological and the practical, forcing us to choose between our duty and inclinations or self-interest. Forestalling danger by an evasive strategy of foresight, the individual learns to avoid circumstances where the likelihood of capitulating to urges and inclinations against duty outweighs the capacity to resist them (I, 56). The need for virtue follows an absence of wisdom. If I am called to act virtuously, this is no one's fault but mine: "La vertu ne nous coûte que par notre faute, et si nous voulions être toujours sages, rarement aurions-nous besoin d'être vertueux" (I, 64). From the start, Rousseau's 'proto'-reform (c. 1738) also eliminates desire eliminating the situations that give rise to it. Were it not for his maxim of practical wisdom, Rousseau reveals in the *Confessions*, he fears he might have continued to yield to deep

kleptomaniac urges: “c’est moins pour avoir appris à vaincre mes tentations que pour en avoir coupé la racine” (I, 268). As Rousseau stands at the crossroads between the Bourg Saint-Andiol and Chambéry, he imagines that the worst will not happen if he so wills it, he will not seduce M^{me} Larnarge’s daughter: “je pris bien la ferme résolution de me combattre et de me vaincre si ce malheureux penchant venait à se déclarer”. Immediately, and consonant with his maxim, he asks, “mais pourquoi m’exposer à ce combat?” (I, 259). An inability to observe it consistently (“cette opposition continuelle entre ma situation et mes inclinations”, I, 277) induces all the “faults” in Part Two of the *Confessions*. Rousseau’s wisdom eliminates the situations that provoke conflicting desires rather than combating the desires themselves. “Il est”, *La Morale sensitive* reminds us, “sans contredit plus pénible à l’honnête homme de résister à des désirs déjà tout formés qu’il doit vaincre, que de prévenir, changer ou modifier ces mêmes désirs dans leur source, s’il était en état d’y remonter” (I, 408-09).

Why are virtue and duty so difficult? The eighteenth-century’s Cartesian inheritance in moral psychology locates the problem in what the *Profession de foi* calls “la loi du corps” (IV, 586). The intelligibility of Rousseau’s vision of *sagesse* also belongs to physiologically-grounded Cartesian ethics for which the inevitable course of the *esprits animaux* only leaves room for manoeuvre between instances of passionate arousal. Descartes’ spirits have long since become a relic of history, although the classical and pre-modern motifs of an unequal struggle, between appetites or desires belonging to animal wants and the “voice” of conscience/nature/reason, continues to carry favour in reconceptualised form. The antagonism plays itself out as sensations present to consciousness seeking immediate satisfaction, and volitional dispositions created by the long-term deliberated ends of practical reason not always present to consciousness.³⁸ Rousseau perennially claims that a willing that operates in favour of those judgements we make on the basis of what we *feel* always triumphs over judgements based on what we *know*. In addition, human frailty (*faiblesse*) signifies that external, socially-generated pressures create a disequilibrium by calling on individuals to act beyond their powers. To his cost, Rousseau realises that society increases the opportunities for self-contradiction and the difficulty of self-identity. The Parisian years (1750-1756) represent a personal allegory of Rousseau’s

³⁸ Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 36, 46.

philosophical anthropology, according to which, the necessity for virtue supervenes on nature to provoke devastating inner conflicts. Society and the *amour-propre* that accompanies the profession of *auteur* necessitate the personal reform and the immunisation of *vertu* (“jusque-là j’avais été bon; dès lors je devins vertueux”, I, 416). Indeed, the conflict between a moral awareness of duty and the will to impose coherence on life intensifies when, renewing his ties with Diderot, Condillac and Grimm, Rousseau returns to those literary circles he thought he had renounced forever. To his increased awareness of the social and intellectual bankruptcy of the age corresponds an increase in Rousseau’s personal responsibility as its critic which, in turn, creates greater demands for consistency: “pour me faire écouter, il fallait mettre ma conduite d’accord avec mes principes” (I, 416). The decision to leave Paris marks the end of the struggle engendered by society to raise himself above nature (I, 417). The return to the simplicity and good conscience he advises Sophie to seek represents a withdrawal into the limits delineated by self-knowledge. Conforming to these avoids courting the disasters of moral weakness.³⁹

Virtue, as Robert Osmont rightly notes, draws its source from the will not nature (I, 1620-21). Withdrawal from society eliminates the uncertainties of virtue rendered precarious by weakness of the will and circumstances in which we risk internalising a *faute* as a *vice*. Wisdom rescues natural goodness when, thwarted by the frustrations society operates on nature’s finality by provoking conflicts between itself and duty, that goodness faces annihilation by the voice of reason that overrides it. Rousseau’s reform takes a new direction when he decides to leave Paris for the countryside to adopt anew the ethos of *sagesse* and a *return* to a previous state of inner unity. Rousseau might have continued to live in a perpetual state of self-division, his virtue constantly overriding and ‘denaturing’ inclination, forever risking a transformation of the positive dispositions of identification with the other into their opposite.⁴⁰ Life in society

³⁹“L’homme est très fort quand il se contente d’être ce qu’il est, il est très faible quand il veut s’élever au-dessus de l’humanité [...] Mesurons le rayon de notre sphère et restons au centre comme l’insecte au milieu de sa toile, nous nous suffirons toujours à nous-mêmes et nous n’aurons point à nous plaindre de notre faiblesse; car nous ne la sentirons jamais” (IV, 305).

⁴⁰“Quand je ne vis plus les hommes, je cessai de les mépriser: quand je ne vis plus les méchants, je cessai de les haïr. Mon cœur peu fait pour la haine, ne fit plus que déplorer leur misère et n’en distinguait pas leur méchanceté” (I, 417).

introduces a relativity where there was once absolute goodness. Even our natural inclinations, as the *Rêveries* bitterly complain, may turn against us.⁴¹

In assessing the ethical status of Rousseau's withdrawal from society, Burgelin and Derathé fail to address the paradox their commentaries generate. Despite what Rousseau may say, they imply, living according to nature does not, in fact, constitute the highest human fulfilment. Burgelin conceives the possibility of the moral life within the self-contained parameters of natural goodness alone but this is not without its problems. By natural goodness, Burgelin understands three things: first, the spontaneous equilibrium of human life deduced from Providentially-ordered creation (*la bonté originelle*); second, the goodness of each element of our nature (feeling, reason, passions) taken in themselves and prior to the social disruption which fragments them and causes them to develop independently and in opposition to one another (*la bonté de notre nature actuelle*); last, a properly moral vocation by which humans seek to attain, through their good, primitive dispositions, the unity and order manifested in conscience or *la bonté convenable à notre nouvelle existence*.⁴² However, Burgelin's analysis forces us to choose between a good life located entirely within natural goodness that cannot qualify as *meritorious* or, therefore, ethical; and, as we have noted, a "second nature" or properly moral life advanced by a denaturation which Rousseau's system rejects.⁴³

For his part, Derathé, accepts the incompatible "duality of ideals", concluding that we cannot reconcile a defence of practical reason with nature, deontology with eudaimonism. The fissure between goodness and virtue leads Derathé to declare that there are two ethics in Rousseau: an instinctive morality and the triumph of reason over instinct, reflecting the condition of the state of nature and the demands of the civil state respectively.⁴⁴ Derathé attenuates this division by drawing attention to the continuity that appears in Rousseau's education theory. There, virtue adds itself to goodness as a counterweight to the adolescent's burgeoning passions.⁴⁵ A Derridean interpretation would point out, and with good reason, that this supplementarity also makes up for an anterior deficiency and here lies the essence of the unsatisfactory options

⁴¹ "Tous les penchants de la nature [...] portés ou suivis dans la société sans prudence et sans choix changent de nature et deviennent souvent aussi nuisibles qu'ils étaient utiles dans leur première direction" (I, 1052).

⁴² *La Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 326-27.

⁴³ *La Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 222, 484.

⁴⁴ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau*, pp. 116-117.

Derathé offers. Like the opposition between sensation and reflexion, neither goodness nor virtue provide a viable solution to the moral problem because the feebleness of the first and the distant ideality of the second undermine themselves:

la bonté est fragile, et ne résiste pas au choc des passions humaines. La vertu qui doit suppléer est sans doute une force invincible [...] mais, de l'aveu même de Rousseau, il n'y a pour ainsi dire point d'homme capable de l'acquérir. N'est-ce donc pas finalement reconnaître qu'en bien des cas l'homme va se trouver désarmé aux prises avec ses passions?⁴⁶

If virtue represents an ideal, Rousseau does not, Derathé thinks, found the moral life entirely on reason but also summons "l'instinct de la nature" or a natural inclination for the good that lies within the immediate reach of all:

Rousseau n'a donc pas réussi à ramener la vie morale à un principe unique: il fait tour à tour appel à l'instinct et à la raison. En réalité, il s'est contenté de juxtaposer à une morale de l'instinct une autre morale d'inspiration rationaliste, qu'il juge plus sublime, mais moins conforme à la vraie nature de l'homme. A ses yeux, ces deux morales ne s'excluent pas et il n'a pas senti le besoin de choisir entre elles.⁴⁷

Derathé is right when he says that Rousseau does not force us to choose between them. However, by claiming that Rousseau formulates an instinctual morality insufficient for the purposes of living in society and a *loi de la vertu* by which he does not deem man strong enough to abide, we are clearly left with an unresolved dilemma.⁴⁸

Seen as a refusal of denaturation and self-division, *sagesse* allies itself to *bonté* but thereby opposes or excludes itself from the meritoriousness of *vertu*. The appeal to wisdom in the *Dialogues* appears to suffer from this inferiority. If, as they also claim, "Jean-Jacques" is truly innocent and virtuous (I, 943), then the *Dialogues* do more than merely re-state the ideal of the *Confessions*. Indeed, to transform *sagesse* into *vertu* is in fact what Rousseau attempts. For this reason, Burgelin and Derathé reach conclusions which fail to take into account the innovation of the *Dialogues* which confront and seek to overcome the dilemma they uncover.

The predicament of individuals who become vulnerable to incontinence because they feel unable to call upon sufficient moral strength, either from their own natural resources or from

⁴⁶ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau*, p. 120. See also Burgelin, *La Philosophie de l'existence*, pp. 340-48.

⁴⁷ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau*, p. 119.

⁴⁸ *Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau*, p. 187.

those of practical reason, represents a point of departure for Rousseau's interrogations not a final impasse. The *Dialogues* deploy a rhetorical method first evidenced in *Emile*. Despite the seemingly absolute, trenchant opposition in its opening pages between man and citizen, private and public education, *Emile* endeavours to demonstrate how men can, in fact, become citizens. By a synthesis of apparently opposing ideals, it demonstrates how education may give rise to precisely the "prodigy" about whom Rousseau first appears so sceptical but who provides a way out of present intractabilities (IV, 250).⁴⁹ A dialectical strategy is similarly under way with regards to the opposition of goodness and virtue in the Second *Dialogue* which posits, reiterates and intensifies the antitheses it then proceeds to resolve.

The problem of natural goodness that challenges "Jean-Jacques" and the inhabitants of the ideal world corresponds to the weak, intransitive will:

la faiblesse de l'âme [...] suivant mollement l'impulsion de la nature, se détourne au choc d'un obstacle comme une boule prend l'angle de réflexion; au lieu que celle qui suit plus vigoureusement sa course ne se détourne point, mais comme un boulet de canon, force l'obstacle [...]
 [...] la vertu parmi nous oblige souvent à combattre et vaincre la nature, et rarement sont-ils capables de pareils efforts (I, 669-70).

In the previous chapter I described how reason addresses moral weakness by protecting disposition and consolidating prior rational efforts. Reason rationalises its own limitations and the choice of alternative methods. Reflexivity intervenes to dislocate self and world, but it also responds to this dislocation by inventing a wisdom that rescues a natural goodness unable to draw sufficient assistance from the categorical imperatives of *vertu*. Wisdom *becomes* virtue by a fusion of knowledge and disposition via the strategies of *La Morale sensitive* and habit. This vision of wisdom prompts comparison with Thomist conceptions of virtue as an exercised state combining *cognitio* and *inclinatio*. Rousseauian wisdom achieves a virtuosity which avoids situations that compromise the moral unity of the self. But this facility alone is insufficient; Rousseau's virtue derives from an additional, internal determination which ensures that he discriminates the right or just manner for avoiding such circumstances that renders the possessor of this wisdom and his activity *equally* virtuous.⁵⁰ How Rousseau achieves this belongs to the

⁴⁹ Peter Jimack, *La Genèse et la rédaction de l'Emile de J.-J. Rousseau: étude sur l'histoire de l'ouvrage jusqu'à sa parution* (Geneva: Voltaire Institute, 1960), p. 125.

⁵⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae.Quest. 56, Art. 3.

synthesis of natural goodness and virtue, of instinctual and rationalist ethics realised by *La Morale sensitive* and habit.

The *Dialogues* innovate an alternative outcome, a third way. In a passage which examines the characteristics of virtue, Rousseau appears to situate the scope for *sagesse* within the context of virtue itself. He writes: “Il ne dépend pas de nous d’avoir ou de n’avoir pas de passions; mais il dépend de nous de régner sur elles” (IV, 819). Although non-specific, the aims of *La Morale sensitive*, conceived to “mettre ou maintenir l’âme dans l’état le plus favorable à la vertu” (I, 409), clearly have a direct bearing on this self-mastery. From this perspective, the Second *Dialogue* invites us to see *sagesse* as prompting a self-awareness critical of *faiblesse* into resorting to the *ends* of virtue without adopting its divisive *means*. The successful outcome of this strategy both avoids denaturation *and* qualifies as meritorious.

Throughout the Second *Dialogue*, a dialectical synthesis and personal apology intertwine. As natural goodness-cum-wisdom progressively qualifies as virtuous, the ascendant status of “Jean-Jacques” increases. Personal apologetics clear the way for a recuperation of merit. “Rousseau” begins at point zero in order to establish, at the cost of all merit to “Jean-Jacques” that, above all else, the latter is not impelled by bad motives. Thereafter, Rousseau steadily reclaims the territory he concedes.

Virtue for “Jean-Jacques” equally represents an impossible and a superfluous aspiration. Its demands, like self-division and inner conflict, appear alien to him:

s’il s’agissait de combattre ses plus chers désirs et de déchirer son cœur pour remplir son devoir, le ferait-il aussi? J’en doute. La loi de la nature, sa voix du moins ne s’étend pas jusque-là. Il en faut une autre alors qui commande, et que la nature se taise (I, 823).

“Jean-Jacques” is consistently and effortlessly good but not virtuous. The impersonal, objective perspective and the need to prove himself a reliable observer lead “Rousseau” to overstate this passivity in order to direct readers to conclusions about intentions they cannot assess for themselves. “Rousseau” sacrifices everything for the sake of his goodness in order to extricate “Jean-Jacques” from any willed intention or capacity to harm others: “Notre homme ne sera donc pas vertueux, parce qu’il n’aura pas besoin de l’être, et par la même raison il ne sera ni vicieux ni méchant” (I, 824). Since it underwrites the authenticity of “Jean-Jacques”, “Rousseau”

emphasises temperament at the cost of relinquishing every initiative and merit when defending himself against the charge that his is merely a *morale de parade*, a form of ostentatious eccentricity, or a deep-rooted desire for distinction and originality that masquerades as a model of private morality:

La cause des faux jugements portés sur J.-J. est qu'on suppose toujours qu'il lui a fallu de grands efforts pour être autrement que les autres hommes, au lieu que, constitué comme il est, il lui en eût fallu de très grands pour être comme eux [...] impatient, emporté, sujet aux plus vives colères, il ne connaît pas néanmoins la haine, et [...] jamais désir de vengeance n'entra dans son cœur [...] on lui donnerait aussitôt pour cause un effort sublime, la pénible victoire sur l'amour-propre, la grande mais difficile vertu du pardon des ennemis, et c'est simplement un effet naturel du tempérament que je vous ai décrit (I, 851).

The text even goes so far as to deny what the Letters to Malesherbes and the *Confessions* affirm about the difficult struggle against love of self. "Jean-Jacques" is said to be unable to choose the good; if he does so, it is virtually in spite of himself and wholly without effort or intention on his part:

n'apprécions pas cette conduite au-dessus de sa valeur. Dès que cette vie simple et laborieuse n'est pas jouée, elle serait sublime dans un célèbre écrivain qui pourrait s'y réduire. Dans J.-J. elle n'est que naturelle, parce qu'elle n'est l'ouvrage d'aucun effort ni celui de la raison, mais une simple impulsion du tempérament déterminée par la nécessité (I, 849).

And yet, a modicum of merit, even if stated negatively, begins to enter the frame. In a veiled reference to the personal reform, "Rousseau" alludes to the overcoming of public opinion and vanity: "Le seul mérite de celui qui s'y livre est d'avoir cédé sans résistance au penchant de la nature, et de ne s'être pas laissé détourner par une mauvaise honte ni par une sottise vanité" (I, 849). Whatever merit lies in his conduct, "Rousseau" tells us, merely belongs to yielding to natural proclivities without resistance. Merit implies actions that are neither automatic nor given. In any case, wisdom removes the need for virtue since "Jean-Jacques" abides by other maxims: "il se trouve naturellement soumis à ce grand précepte de morale [...] de ne se mettre jamais en situation à pouvoir trouver son avantage dans le mal d'autrui" (I, 824). The naturally good, unified self avoids and retires from the society that renders such demands necessary.

Rousseau's rhetoric involves a constant negotiation between the secure means of wisdom, within the reach of "Jean-Jacques" and, by implication, everyone else, and the desirability of

ethical ends beyond human endeavour (*vertu*). There is negotiation between like terms, however, since both wisdom and virtue represent two ways by which reason may or, often enough, may not issue into action. A distinction Rousseau draws in the *Lettres morales* between *reasoning* and *reason* further elucidates the nature of virtue and wisdom: “L’art de raisonner n’est point la raison, souvent il en est l’abus. La raison est la faculté d’ordonner toutes les facultés de notre âme convenablement à la nature des choses et à leurs rapports avec nous” (IV, 1090). The abstract and universal principles of reasoning and virtue have in common the tendency to overlook important “vérités primitives” (IV, 1090) when generalising systems unsupported by correct insights into human nature. The virtue of stoic intellectualism holds, erroneously for Rousseau, that denuded, rational discernment provides effective liberation from moral enslavement. The Fourth Book of *Emile* continually stresses the futility of such reasoning. “Jugez si quand les sens enflammés aliènent l’entendement et tyrannisent la volonté”, asks Rousseau, “c’est le temps d’écouter les graves leçons de la sagesse” (IV, 643). Wisdom, by contrast, derives from the proper study of man: “celui qui sait mieux en quoi consiste le moi humain est le plus près de la sagesse” (IV, 1112-13). Wisdom and a genuine philosophy are, for Rousseau, interchangeable since they seek a discernment based on self-knowledge, and prudential, indirect strategies recalling Descartes’ own definition of wisdom as an “invention”.⁵¹ This creative approach, drawing on the fundamental truths about human nature, features centrally in the moral psychology of education. Ascendancy over the passions, for instance, comes with opposing them to each other: “On n’a de prise sur les passions que par les passions; c’est par leur empire qu’il faut combattre leur tyrannie” (IV, 640). The tutor resorts to *amour-propre* to reverse its ordinarily harmful and undesired effects to produce virtues (IV, 547), thereby converting the energy and petulance of youth, the chief obstacles to education, into levers that promote it.

For the *Dialogues*, the idealisation of virtue, which a realistic human ethics can only approach but never attain, soon turns polemical. An acceptance of the dilemma of virtue, which calls us to something beyond us, and a rejection of the formalism I described in Chapter 4 combine to eliminate the *means* of virtue to leave only its *ends*. Once “Rousseau” establishes that the moral performances of “Jean-Jacques” derive exclusively from undistorted natural drives (“pures

⁵¹ *Œuvres et lettres*, p. 557.

impulsions de [la] nature”, I, 851), he further establishes his status as lying at a median point between baseness and heroism, sanction and merit. A further promotion, in turn, elevates “Jean-Jacques” to the condition of the virtuous individual understood, not in an impossibly ideal way, but only in the limited, empirically viable form it would be possible for him to assume.

The first move towards recapturing this virtue consists in stating that the natural dispositions of “Jean-Jacques” and the ends of virtue not only coincide, but that these unfailing dispositions are far more reliable than the imperatives of practical reason:

Le plus sublime des vertus, celle qui demande le plus de grandeur, de courage et de force d'âme est le pardon des injures et l'amour de ses ennemies. Le faible J.-J., qui n'atteint pas même aux vertus médiocres, irait-il jusqu'à celle-là? Je suis aussi loin de le croire que de l'affirmer. Mais qu'importe, si son naturel aimant et paisible le mène où l'aurait mené la vertu? (I, 859).

[Jean-Jacques] ne sera pas vertueux, puisqu'il ne vaincra pas ses penchants, mais en les suivant il ne fera rien de contraire à ce que ferait en surmontant les siens celui qui n'écoute que la vertu (I, 864).

An important levelling process begins. “Jean-Jacques” and the virtuous individual arrive at the same point although the latter's success is, at best, merely theoretical given the severe test of strength virtue demands. The clear implication is that only in one such as “Jean-Jacques”, who submits to natural inclination, does nature achieve the ends of virtue.

The choice between variable means to arrive at an invariable (moral) end shares analogies with the care of privileged dispositions of moral sensibility I spoke about in the previous chapter. In a paradoxical exercise of loss and retrieval, of affirmation through deliberate self-effacement, reason excludes itself in resorting to habit and imagination, which engulf and absorb it, as means to attain its own ends.

For the moment, a strategy based on instinct may not yet qualify as virtuous or meritorious but, given the problematic demands of virtue, it cannot be said to be *ineffective* either:

Ce choix si raisonnable n'est pourtant fait ni par la raison ni par la volonté; il est l'ouvrage d'un pur instinct. Il n'a pas le mérite de la vertu, sans doute, mais il n'en a pas non plus l'instabilité. Celui qui durant soixante ans s'est livré aux seuls impulsions de la nature, est bien sûr de n'y résister jamais (I, 854).

Instinct faithfully serves a master it does not know. Thus, Rousseau simultaneously diminishes the status of instinct from the perspective of virtue and elevates its stability and constancy as the truly efficacious means with which to approximate the ethic of virtue. Consistent with a phenomenological interpretation of the *Dialogues* that endorses the reciprocity of the involuntary and the voluntary, we could argue that *instinct*, lacking any meaning of its own, acquires complete significance only in relation to an ethical will that it solicits, disposes and affects. The will, in turn, determines the significance of instinct by its choice and consent.⁵² The rationally-enlightened will retrieves instinct as the organ by which it hopes permanently to orient itself toward the good.

Rousseau has yet to win back the substantial territory he conceded before he can, in effect, dissolve the boundary between natural goodness and virtue and raise “Jean-Jacques” from an intermediate position to superior moral ground. “Rousseau” advances on apologetic grounds by turning the tables on “Jean-Jacques”’s detractors. He frames the possibility of virtue as belonging exclusively to the classical republics with the consequence that virtue, thus properly understood, now lies beyond human reach:

Celui qui sait régner sur son propre cœur, tenir toutes ses passions sous le joug; sur qui l'intérêt personnel et les désirs sensuels n'ont aucune puissance, et qui, soit en public, soit tout seul et sans témoin ne fait en toute occasion que ce qui est juste et honnête, sans égard aux vœux secrets de son cœur: celui-là seul est homme vertueux. *S'il existe*, je m'en réjouis pour l'honneur de l'espèce humaine (I, 863; my emphasis).

Those who profess virtue merely practice a *morale hypocrite* that renders them neither virtuous nor good. As for “Jean-Jacques”, though he may not be virtuous, *at least he is good*. By now, it becomes clear that only “Jean-Jacques” achieves, through the enlightened resources of his natural goodness, the otherwise impossible ends of virtue.

Rousseau alights on a new natural ethic of *abstention* that re-introduces rationally-supported maxims he judges the equal to virtue in elevation and strenuousness:

Sa morale est moins une morale d'action que d'abstinence: sa paresse la lui a donnée, et *sa raison l'y a souvent confirmé*: ne jamais faire de mal lui paraît une maxime plus utile, *plus sublime et beaucoup plus difficile que celle même de faire du bien*: car souvent le bien qu'on fait sous un rapport devient un mal

⁵² Ricœur, *Le Volontaire et l'involontaire*, pp. 8-9.

sous mille autres [...] Souvent il n'y a d'autre moyen de s'abstenir de nuire que de s'abstenir tout à fait d'agir, et selon lui, le meilleur régime, tant moral que physique, est un régime purement négatif [...] Cette maxime de ne point faire de mal tient de bien près à une autre qu'il doit encore à sa paresse, mais qui *se change en vertu pour quiconque s'en fait un devoir*. C'est de ne se mettre jamais dans une situation qui lui fasse trouver son avantage dans le préjudice d'autrui. Nul homme ne redoute une situation pareille. Ils sont tous trop forts, trop vertueux pour craindre jamais que leur intérêt ne les tente contre leur devoir, et dans leur fière confiance il provoquent sans crainte les tentations auxquelles ils se sentent si supérieurs. Félicitons-les de leur force, mais ne blâmons pas le faible J.-J. de n'oser se fier à la sienne et d'aimer mieux fuir les tentations que d'avoir à les vaincre, trop peu sûr du succès d'un pareil combat (I, 855; my emphasis).

The apologetic mode of the rhetorical strategy, piercing through as an ironic congratulation, serves to identify and undermine the purely fictional moral strength of those who misguidedly believe they are capable of overcoming their self-regarding passions. From a position of humble self-distrust born of self-knowledge and the acceptance of his limitations, Rousseau promotes himself above those whose unassisted self-reliance inevitably proves disastrous. However, this passage does more than state Rousseau's position in the negative. 'Abstention' (Latin: *absternere*), that is, *voluntarily* keeping one's distance rather than "inaction" completes the apotheosis of Rousseau's reflexive 'maxim' of wisdom—a prudential avoidance of circumstances which confront our feeble sense of duty with powerful counter-inclinations to act against it—into virtue. How is this possible? Attributed to *paresse*, the ethic of abstention transmutes into virtue because it is founded on a categorical observation of the maxim for avoiding conflicts of interest and duty. A strategy of wisdom also transforms itself into virtue because "il y a de la vertu à vaincre ses penchants pour faire son devoir" (I, 851); Rousseau's inclinations prompted by moral sensibility urge him *not* to abstain but he *must* and in fact *does*.⁵³

The moral elevation of "Jean-Jacques" continues in a second capital passage. Its significance rests on the basic themes of Rousseau's moral philosophy, namely, the principle of innate natural goodness, the fact of human frailty and a critique of the human capacity for virtue:

La bonté, la considération, la générosité, ces premières inclinations de la nature, qui ne sont que des émanations de l'amour de soi, ne s'érigeront point dans sa tête en d'austères devoirs; mais elles seront des besoins de son cœur qu'il satisfera plus pour son propre bonheur que par un principe d'humanité qu'il ne songera guère à réduire en règles. L'instinct de la nature est moins pur

⁵³ This theme emerges openly in the *Rêveries*, where Rousseau restrains these inclinations, making a corresponding need for spiritual hygiene to protect disposition all the more important.

peut-être, mais certainement plus sûr que la loi de la vertu: car on se met souvent en contradiction avec son devoir, jamais avec son penchant, pour mal faire (I, 864).

The superiority of Rousseau's ethic lies in the coincidence of virtue and the *needs* of the heart. Intrinsic to the moral psychology he describes is the idea that only the method adopted by "Jean-Jacques" can overcome the *faiblesse* that disrupts our vocation as beings moved by morality. By devaluing the motivational claims of reason for virtue, Rousseau denies that we can reach the ends of virtue by heeding only and constantly the voice of virtue. And yet, "Jean-Jacques" does so by a paradoxical *route contraire* that fosters virtue as its opposite.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the virtues are not formal duties or imperatives—wholly useless in practical terms for being so—but emotional needs tied to fundamental pursuit of happiness which, Rousseau consistently maintains, represents the natural and irresistible end of every rational being. This outcome repays further analysis. A significant difference separates inclination from need ("besoin du cœur"), a propensity instituted by habit. And so ought it, if I understand Rousseau's anthropology rightly. "Austere duty" and "rules" are not only inferior, uncertain products of reason, since they acquaint us with the good but do not enable us to love or will it; they also prove *unnecessary*.

We are in a position to understand the full import of the view according to which wisdom renders virtue superfluous for Natural Man. An immanent moral capacity already belongs to the self. In Chapter 2, I highlighted the progressive development in *Emile* whereby the child's instinctual claim to existence assumes the features of an ethical will as this moral capacity unfolds according to a naturally-ordered development. While nature provides the inclinations to which the *Dialogues* refer, these primitive experiences ("premiers mouvements du cœur", IV, 522) constitute merely the roots of our development according to a natural sequence of dispositions (IV, 248). Ethical notions such as justice and moral goodness, for instance, constitute "de véritables affections de l'âme éclairée par la raison, et qui ne sont qu'un progrès ordonné de nos affections primitives" (IV, 523). As fully actualised dispositions through self-aware reason, these spontaneous feelings may later mature into *conscience*. Penchants, inclinations and instinct, or natural tendencies, ends and means, of themselves, determine nothing without the

⁵⁴ For Rousseau's use of paradox and the *route contraire*, see Felicity Baker's 'La Route contraire', in *Reappraisals of Rousseau: Studies in honour of R. A. Leigh*, ed. by Simon Harvey *et al* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 132-62.

coordination of reason and the stability of habit. Habit is central in bridging into a continuity the transition from instinct to morality, allowing a will guided solely by innate *amour de soi* to evolve into operative dispositions impelled by the moral sensibility that *emanates* from it (IV, 492-93).

Habit reproduces a moral necessity far more efficacious than abstract rules or principles of conduct observed inconsistently. For this reason, moral duty and natural inclination are not two *laws* with radically different moral origins. Virtue entails self-division and therefore potential capitulation to urges stronger than the will to resist them. Instinct, by contrast, fulfils precisely the demands the *law* of virtue does not and can never meet, because we may act against our duty and will something completely contrary to what that law entreats us to do. “C’est la seule tiédeur de notre volonté qui fait toute notre faiblesse, et l’on est toujours fort pour faire ce qu’on veut fortement: *Volenti nihil difficile*” (IV, 651). Thanks to a harmony of volition which joins appetite and reason, inclination and duty, Rousseau can thus speak of fostering in the young Poles “des habitudes impossibles à déraciner” (III, 960) because one cannot fail to be what one *is*, or lose one’s nature anymore than one cannot fail to enact what one wills most strongly. The classical problem of incontinence prompted by irrational impulses (ακρατεία) has no place here. Rousseau reiterates the prescriptions of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Emile* and, of course, *La Morale sensitive*, when he suggests that reason must draw on the unalterable energies of nature when circumstances put our inclinations at odds with duty. He denies that reason can ever constitute a motive for the will because action requires sensibility (I, 805). In the manner of post-Cartesian ethics prevalent in the Enlightenment, where physiology conspires to render the will incapable of resistance, he conceives virtue as a passion that summons the animal functions (*économie animale*, I, 409) to will the good.⁵⁵ If Rousseauian anthropology holds that abstract, formal duties often have no effect on the will, a natural inclination fully integrated into one’s *ethos* (*caractère, naturel* or *habitude*), by contrast, already directs the will and represents a cultivated state in which motive and willing are one. “Austere duty” or “rules”, like reflexivity, represent merely intermediate moments along the way to fully internalised, emotional assent, a synthesis that eliminates *faiblesse*.

⁵⁵ “L’usage de toutes les passions”, writes Descartes, “consiste en cela seul qu’elles disposent l’âme à vouloir”, *Œuvres et lettres*, p. 723.

Chapter Eight

The *Dialogues* Re-assessed

It has been my primary objective throughout this thesis to argue that a coherent interpretation of Rousseau's self-representation in the *Dialogues* strictly depends on distinguishing and upholding two intelligibilities of nature. These I have identified with the help of the Aristotelian notions of substance and predicate, potentiality and actuality. I have also implicitly drawn from the Hegelian concepts of *mediation* and *immediacy*.¹ My view of Rousseauian nature has attempted to bring out the dialectic of the given, timeless inheritance whose possibilities human history and freedom bring into the open. I have also tried to establish the place of nature understood as the ontological and moral grounding for Rousseau's ideas of goodness and human regeneration in relation to habit and the will. Habit provides a unique interface between nature and freedom. The will, meanwhile, sponsors the Form that nature takes as it transcends itself. In my concluding remarks, I wish to highlight aspects of the unique synthesis, emerging from the much criticised *Dialogues*, that reconciles nature and morality, feeling and reason, individualism and community, *bonté* and *vertu*, supposedly conflicting elements of Rousseau's thought.

A critical elimination of denaturation and second nature was required to allow the synthesis to emerge. Denaturation can have no logical place in the perspective of a philosophy founded on the natural goodness of man. The concept of second nature proves similarly unacceptable. For Rousseau, habit constitutes a 'first' nature but not because he believes, like Locke and the sensualists, that humans possess no fixed, determinate nature. The possibilities of education, as *La Nouvelle Héloïse* shows, are not as boundless as the sensualists would like to think. Rather, legitimate habits correspond to nature properly developed and advanced according to the

¹ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface, §§20-21.

unfolding of a human *telos*. The consistency of Rousseau's move to encompass habits within nature itself, to which habits must conform, owes something to the Greek view of nature ($\Phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$) as a self-moving spontaneity in relation to which humans may freely act either for or against. Habits share the spontaneity of nature since in willingly contracting a habit, the will merely channels or liberates, for better or worse, a spontaneity which it cannot invent.

From the dynamic relation between nature and its habits, we discover Rousseau's dream, pursued in the projects for education and politics, to make of morality a disposition that involves our whole being. In order to achieve this ideal, the synthesis of nature and ethics, Rousseau advises us to extend the law of natural necessity into the moral world (IV, 820). By transforming nature into morality, individuals can count on their ethical behaviour with the certainty of natural laws, firmly willing the good without hesitation or second thoughts. Rousseau wishes to achieve for the soul or will that which nature achieves for the body, to arrive at a finalised state, a condition (*habitus*) of the moral life free from vicissitudes and transformation. Only when the ethical self approximates the stability and permanence of the natural self can the ethical self eliminate intermittences to its moral identity and weakness of the will.

Rousseau extends necessity into morality through the habits fostered by the will. Habit (*éthos*) gives ethics, and therefore freedom, the settled form of character (*éthos*) by drawing on the implicit principle at the heart of Rousseau's educational theory that practice and imitation lead to embodiment. Habits or virtues correspond to the existence of reason inside ourselves. We have automatic recourse to injunctions and imperatives when necessary. Through the internalisation of habit, principles or rules of conduct tell us spontaneously how to behave. They lie at our immediate disposal. Reason functions through the immediate *dictamen* of conscience (I, 1028) without any active intervention on the part of the self. The self becomes reason, reason has become the self. Thinkers after Rousseau develop the idea that nature absorbs the ethical will back into itself through habit. For Ravaisson, habit performs a naturalisation of the will, rendering internal what was previously external.² André Burloud, meanwhile, maintains that habit expands the totality of our pre-existing instincts by what he terms an *assimilation*

² Operating between the twin poles of will and nature, habit redescends the line of the upward movement of life depicted by Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, transforming the voluntary and spontaneous into the instinctive and necessary, and returning the will, morality and reflexive consciousness to nature: "L'histoire de l'Habitude représente le retour de la Liberté à la Nature", *De L'Habitude*, p. 62.

subjective.³ Of crucial importance to assessing the significance of will-turned-nature in Rousseau is the view, underlined by Lemoine's post-Aristotelian accounts of the virtues, that habit does not constitute an inevitable power in which the will that creates it is itself annihilated: "La vertu n'est [...] pas l'abolition de la volonté dans un ravissement irrésistible; c'est la perpétuité de la bonne volonté".⁴ Habit is the disposition or will, an identity that perpetuates itself across successive moments in time to bring action round to a durable cause.

The significance of the relation between nature, habit and the will lies in the continuity of the natural and ethical selves. Rousseau does not deny the incomparably higher status signalled by man's moral state in relation to his natural state (III, 364). The emergence of self-awareness and the capacity of the will to reflect on itself signal a new and decisive moment in the development of human beings. Nevertheless, there remains an important continuity. A natural education facilitates the creation of intellectual and moral dispositions which become actualised later and at the time appointed by nature: "Elle [i.e., "l'éducation négative"] dispose l'enfant à tout ce qui peut le mener au vrai quand il est en état de l'entendre, et au bien quand il est en état de l'aimer" (*Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, IV, 945). *Emile* shows how the orientations of the moral life ideally take root in the permanent features of the physically-constituted self. The imperative of chastity in *Emile* illustrates this continuity:

Jusqu'à vingt ans le corps croît; il a besoin de toute sa substance; la continence est alors dans l'ordre de la nature, et l'on n'y manque guère qu'aux dépens de sa constitution. Depuis vingt ans la continence est un devoir de morale; elle importe pour apprendre à régner sur soi-même, à rester le maître de ses appétits (IV, 663).

The law of nature tapers into the moral duty for self-mastery. The wisdom of the body in its naturally accustomed state (*corporis habitudo*) paves the way for the ethical will.

Yet, the philosophies of nature, habit and will, and their relations as we find them in Rousseau's system, seem to disappear from view in the *Dialogues*, a work caught between method and truth. From the necessity to articulate everything from the viewpoint of the subject in the *Confessions* (I, 59-60), we pass to the need to "tout voir" (I, 792) or, in the case of "Le Français", to *tout lire*. Neither of these media, as "Rousseau" laments, may be translated into

³ *Principes d'une psychologie des tendances* (Paris: Alcan, 1938), pp. 82-83.

⁴ *L'Habitude et l'instinct*, p. 74.

“tout dire” (I, 835). A voice in the first person *does* speak to us from the *Dialogues* (I, 837-42), but as the remote voice of “Jean-Jacques” impoverished by the various homodiegetic layers of the text. “Ce discours direct”, writes Lejeune, “[...] ne nous apparaît plus que comme au bout d’une lorgnette renversée, au fond d’une sorte d’entonnoir”.⁵ The attempt by propositional truth to convey intuitive truth increases this effect. In one sense, the *Dialogues* do indeed exhibit a tension between transparency and mediation, as Starobinski holds, but for reasons other than Rousseau’s mental instability and with altogether different conclusions for both his work and its intellectual synthesis generally.

The approach of this thesis, in wanting to establish *l’histoire de l’âme*, finds support in the judgement of the *Dialogues* on themselves and “Jean-Jacques”. “Rousseau” spells out what a correct interpretation of each of these requires: “ce n’est plus sur ses œuvres présentes qu’il faut le juger [...] Il faut rétrograder vers les temps où rien ne l’empêchait d’être lui-même, ou bien le pénétrer plus intimement, *intus et in cute*” (I, 905). As it stands, Starobinski’s existential phenomenology cannot adequately account for the *Dialogues* for the simple reason that they do not constitute a descriptive, phenomenological document. A true assessment of Rousseau’s self-representation must identify the inner will and intention of the agent, in contrast to his outer conduct and its consequences. The phenomenology of autobiography emerges once the reader establishes the logic of relation between “Rousseau”, “Jean-Jacques” and “Le Français”, and re-allocates the facts that relation produces. What we face is a transcendental problem, given and accepted on the part of the reader whose task consists in giving an account of it. Rousseau’s position prompts comparisons with Hegel’s own in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As author, Rousseau possesses prior knowledge of the solution about the problem of “Jean-Jacques” at the time he begins his *Dialogues*. The reader, meanwhile, must formulate that solution as its conditions of possibility. Rousseau already possesses the synthetic concepts but the transitions required to arrive at these seem abstract, indeed absent, to readers who have to reach the endpoint by proving that these concepts are necessarily involved in the representation of “Jean-Jacques”. The *Dialogues* correspond, then, to a statement of the problem with the intention of bringing the reader to the same point of knowledge, much as “Rousseau” seeks to assist “Le Français” to

⁵ *Je est un autre*, p. 57.

arrive at the truth. However, the points of transition are intelligible only within Rousseau's system. Making the transitions relies on the faith and goodwill of readers who must first accept the system as the key to deducing the truth about "Jean-Jacques", the actuality behind whom stands an antecedent, infra-textual correlate that the former has sublated.

The deduced truth or conditions of possibility for the *Dialogues*, intelligible within the terms of Rousseau's intellectual synthesis, comes down to following: what "Jean-Jacques" is, he is at the same time historically. The determinate, intrinsic nature of "Jean-Jacques" rests on a mediation. His self constitutes a mediated immediacy, representing an intersection of relations to things beyond and extrinsic to it. The *Dialogues* deny this mediation, offering an incomplete account of "Jean-Jacques" as purely immediate, a definite present identity that can be seen and described without explicit reference to the history that has led up to it. This history nests within Rousseau's system but is also identical to it as the internalisation by the self of the truths that constitute the system. "Jean-Jacques" is not only his history, he also embodies the history pre-supposed by Rousseau's system: the history of original goodness, lost then recovered. Rousseau's system consists of a body of intuitions derived from efforts to understand the truth on a once-and-for-all basis. The search for intellectual and moral truth subsequently gives way to its application. An heuristic exercise makes way for a didactic process of full assimilation. Invention yields to a faithful imitation. The self known as "Jean-Jacques" rests necessarily on the progress made by the ethical self in gaining knowledge of its true nature and identity, reaching and sublating reflexion and self-consciousness towards a unified, moral spontaneity.

The text provides several indices of this progress of sublation, a synthesis of feeling and reason into conscience by way of *l'instinct moral* and *le sentiment intime*. *L'Art de jouir*, meanwhile, represents the work of moral sensibility that subordinates the aesthetic to the rational. For the points of transition, we must look to the three qualitatively ascending orientations of sensibility or will expressed in *Emile*, whereby each stage—aesthetic, utilitarian and ethical—integrates and surpasses the modalities of the former (IV, 248). The *Dialogues* reveal that, in "Jean-Jacques", physical sensibility is contained within, and subject to, the demands imposed on it by utility and moral sensibility. *L'Art de jouir* represents a necessary and useful resource for an individual who considers himself to be under constant surveillance and manipulation. This art

delivers plenitude from a minimum of available experience by sharpening and intensifying the intake of impressions. It matters little, therefore, that Rousseau ruminates on nothing, as the *Rêveries* put it (I, 1075); the secret of *l'art de jouir* lies not in the increased acquisition of new experience but in the enrichment that derives from possessing well the happiness one already has. Contrary to Starobinski's assessment, "Jean-Jacques" does not regress to a purely aesthetic existence but conceives his happiness through discriminations mediated by reason and consistent with the values of his system. The *Dialogues* do not, therefore, lie outside the system. They are intelligible in terms of the system which they also advance by providing a concrete example of how Natural Man is possible in a corrupt society.

Although frequently misunderstood by commentators, the example offered to us in the *Dialogues* remains consistent with the intellectual edifice Rousseau erects in the doctrinal works between 1759 and 1762. Demonstrating the massive gulf that separates him from Kant, Rousseau shows Natural Man siding with his inclinations, once deprived of everything that distorts them. This solidarity with our uncorrupted nature represents the challenging choice the *Dialogues* put before their readers. It also provides the basis for a new conception of virtue and duty based upon the possession and cultivation of natural dispositions, without which the later autobiographies fail to make any sense.

If Rousseau is right to take the side of inclination, the goal of every ethics that attempts to *corriger la nature*, as Wolmar puts it (II, 564) is fundamentally misdirected. A morality that consists in performing our duty in spite of, or contrary to, our natural impulses paradoxically involves us in a war against our nature. The successful end of any such struggle is the suppression of nature, a *denaturation*. Despite evoking them, Rousseau does not, in fact, ask us to decide between *bonté* and *vertu*. The very existence of this so-called 'duality of ideals' indicates not so much a choice as a profound crisis of civilisation that routinely throws up the opposition of morality and self-interest. But a further reason renders the choice between goodness and virtue unnecessary, a reason linked to Rousseau's rejection of that choice as generated by the crisis of decadent societies.

Informed by a life-long inability to find his own place in society, the basis of Rousseau's moral philosophy rests on a hypothesis that recalls Kant's famous formulation of his

metaphysics as a “Copernican revolution”.⁶ Rousseau’s innovation may be set out as follows: hitherto, all attempts on the part of the individual to live morally in society-as-we-know-it and unsupportive of the individual have come to nothing. The unrealistic burdens of duty and virtue such societies place on their members simply outweigh their limited moral strength to bear them. Their social existence constantly calls men to virtue, to winning one strenuous victory over themselves after another while at the same time weakening their capacity for self-mastery. Rousseau felt that such demands were not only beyond him but, with the exception of the mythic figures of classical Greece and Rome, beyond the scope of everyone else too. When Rousseau admits that he was never really fit for civil society at the end of the Sixth ‘Promenade’ (I, 1059), this is intended as much as an indictment of that society as an admission of moral weakness. Thus, the hypothesis continues, as long as men fail to organise ordinary civilised life along the lines of their nature and its goodness, individuals who act in accordance with their conscience inevitably come into conflict with the law and morality of the society in which they live. Would it not better serve the interests of morality, then, to make society conform to the capacity and nature of the individual, to eradicate the impossible demands of society rather than denature its members?

Short of a wholesale regeneration of society, a possibility about which Rousseau was largely sceptical, we are left with spiritual dissonance. What, then, can Rousseau and others like him hope to do? Live apart, like Emile and “Jean-Jacques”, examples of Natural Man unbroken by society; live as a sage who avoids those situations in which duty and self-interest conflict. Only that practical maxim, “la bonne philosophie, la seule vraiment assortie au cœur humain” (I, 56), manages to reconcile ethical demands with the demands of our nature in lieu of a society-as-it-ought-to-be supportive of its members. Instead of trying to overthrow or extirpate undisciplined desires with inevitable mixed results, one ought to modify the self through its relations to people and objects and eliminate the motives that give rise to such conflicts. In a note to the 1763 edition of *Julie*, Rousseau reiterates this view:

L’effort de corriger le désordre de nos désirs est presque toujours vain, et très rarement il est vrai: ce qu’il faut changer c’est moins nos désirs que les situations qui les produisent. Si nous voulons devenir bons ôtons les

⁶ *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the second edition B XVI-XVII.

rapports qui nous empêchent de l'être, il n'y a point d'autre moyen [...] un cœur droit en doute de lui-même sait s'ôter au besoin tout intérêt contraire au devoir (II, 1558 (a)).

Much later, Rousseau confides to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre that “le seul remède qui convienne à tous les maux [est] d'en ôter la cause”.⁷ Instead of vain and misguided superhuman efforts directed against ourselves, it is better to eliminate the motives that incline us to act against the good.

More positively, the *Dialogues* also mark the start of a new ethic, continued and elaborated in the *Rêveries*, that represents the synthesis of goodness and virtue. In the Third ‘Promenade’, Rousseau speaks of acquiring “des vertus nécessaires à mon état” (I, 1023). These virtues consist in a duty to oneself, in choosing to preserve one’s original inclinations in a hostile environment. Rousseau’s inner ethical attitude, arrived at by his own feelings, reason and conscience, finds no embodiment in the norms and institutions of society. This fact, like the ethic of “abstinence”, creates problems for the moral self, making a care of its inclinations all the more vital. Alongside the efforts to circumvent moral weakness, the *Dialogues* disclose an art of living, close to an Epicurean project, in which temperance and the resources of imagination establish a hygiene or virtue of sensibility by which the soul avoids self-alienation and dispositions contrary to its true nature. The will to be true to oneself and one’s nature in a corrupt society involves “Jean-Jacques” in a meritorious struggle that now qualifies him as a virtuous individual.

Away from his own bitter experiences of social exclusion, Rousseau elsewhere conceives a synthesis of legitimate self-interest and duty in which private demands for fulfilment become fully compatible with the demands of the community. Bringing together his moral and social theories, Rousseau conceives the individual’s well-being and moral progress as synonymous with his or her ideal existence in a community of other selves. The ideal social existence also expresses the rhythm of moral progress, a virtuous dialectic between retreat and participation, privacy and communion, the contemplative and active lives. These complementary poles serve to reverse the kind of dichotomy lamented by the *Discours sur les richesses* in which private goodness conflicts with public success. The reciprocity of being and action, of practice in

⁷ *La vie et les ouvrages de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p. 48.

thought (*meditatio*) and thought in practice (*exercitatio*) produces a fully enlightened self capable of beneficial relations with others, achieving the integration of the individual within himself and within society. The ethical self derives its essence from this matrix since conscience, as Rousseau understands it, depends on the relation between the self and others in society: “c’est du système moral formé par ce double rapport à soi-même et à ses semblables que naît l’impulsion de la conscience” (IV, 600). In such a framework, the need to choose between one’s self-interest and one’s duty towards others no longer has any meaning.

Rousseau resolves what appeared an intractable dilemma. Goodness and virtue are not distinct moralities but separate dialectical moments of the *same* morality. Far from reifying the fragmentation of instinct and reason or immediacy and reflexivity, the *Dialogues* further Rousseau’s system by surpassing those oppositions into the superior unity of the life lived according to nature. Self-alienation gives way to reconciliation: the reconciliation of essence and existence, nature and history.

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1 Rousseau:

[a] Complete Works and Correspondance

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SECONDARY SOURCES

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7 Studies in the History of Philosophy and Science

8 Studies in Contemporary Philosophy and Psychology

9 Literary Studies

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