





This is to certify that the
thesis entitled

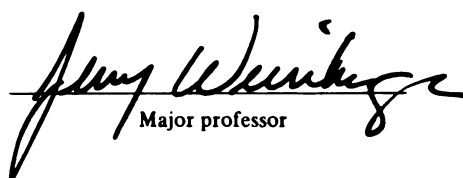
Rousseau and the Problem of Censorship

presented by

John W. Anderson

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Political Science


Major professor

Date October 31, 1977

~~MAY 15 '85~~

207206

~~MAY 18 '85~~

868208

~~JUN 29 '85~~

41 F 287

~~OCT 05 '85~~

~~JUL 23 '85~~

004

999

HOUSEMAN AND TWO OTHERS

John W. ...

1917

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

Specimen of
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

...

...

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

...

...

Department of Political Science

...

...

...

1917

...

...

...

ABSTRACT

ROUSSEAU AND THE PROBLEM OF CENSORSHIP

ROUSSEAU AND THE PROBLEM OF CENSORSHIP

By

John William Anderson

John William Anderson

In this work, a reconstruction of a new position of censorship is attempted, using Rousseau's initial, though perhaps not the final, vehicle. This inquiry was suggested by the existence of a marked discontinuity in the tradition of political thought. The problem of censorship, that is, of determining the proper relationship between the political realm and the

A DISSERTATION

for western, political philosophy. From a survey examination of the tradition reveals that there is a significant difference in response to the problem of censorship. This difference characterizes most modern thinkers. The former accepted censorship as a useful, indeed necessary, institution of political life, while the latter generally exhibit a marked aversion to the practice of censorship. This suggests the potential fruitfulness of a study which would recapture the ancient perspective on censorship, while recognizing aware of the modern alternative.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Political Science

Rousseau was selected to provide the focal point for a study, not only because the problem of censorship is so important one for him, but also because of the ambivalent nature of his thought; neither wholly modern nor wholly classical in outlook, his work exhibits characteristics of both modes of thought. Although all of

61079413
2v

Rousseau's major works are touched upon, the emphasis is upon a close analysis of the Letter to D'Alembert, in which the problem of censorship

ABSTRACT

ROUSSEAU AND THE PROBLEM OF CENSORSHIP

By

John William Anderson

artist, for example, and in a way which sheds considerably light upon a number of vitally important problems. What is a censor and how can

In this work, a reexamination of the question of censorship is attempted, using Rousseau's Letter to D'Alembert as the primary vehicle. This inquiry was suggested by the existence of a curious discontinuity in the tradition of political thought. The problem of it becomes clear that the problem of censorship is not a new one and others which have been treated in the tradition of political thought. The problem of the political realm and the life of the mind, has been a recurring one for western, political philosophy. Even a cursory examination of the tradition reveals that there have been two, distinctly different responses to this problem, that of the ancients and that which characterizes most modern thinkers. The former accepted censorship as a useful, indeed necessary, instrument of political rule, while the latter generally exhibit a marked aversion to the practice of censorship. This suggests the potential fruitfulness of a study which would recapture the ancient perspective on censorship, while remaining aware only of the modern alternative.

Rousseau was selected to provide the focal point for such a study, not only because the problem of censorship is an important one for him, but also because of the ambivalent nature of his thought; neither wholly modern nor wholly classical in outlook, his work exhibits characteristics of both modes of thought. Although all of

Rousseau's major works are touched upon, the emphasis is upon a close analysis of the Letter to D'Alembert, in which the problem of censorship is both posed in terms of a concrete situation, d'Alembert's proposal to establish a theater in Geneva, and treated thematically.

In the course of the inquiry, censorship is examined from several different perspectives, that of the political order and that of the artist, for example, and in a way which sheds considerable light upon a number of vitally important problems: What is a republic and how can it best be maintained? To what extent should the political order concern itself with the intellectual and artistic activities of the individual? To what extent is efficacious, political action possible? It becomes clear that it is Rousseau's answers to these questions, and others, which lead him to oppose censorship under certain, delimited conditions, and to advocate the practice of censorship, in various forms, when such conditions are not present. Equally important is the discovery that, while Rousseau is involved in discussing the question of censorship, he is at the same time engaged in the practice of a kind of self-censorship, making it necessary to consider not only what he says and how he says it, but what he refrains from saying as well.

Analysis of the Letter to D'Alembert reveals it to be a rich and multi-leveled work, a work which demonstrates that, for Rousseau, not only is censorship philosophically defensible, but that the practice of censorship by the philosopher, in the form of a truth-obscuring rhetoric, is compatible with the philosophic quest. Indeed, in the Letter to D'Alembert, one finds the true philosopher distinguished from the pseudo-philosopher in large part by the former's awareness of what should and what should not be openly spoken.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I would like to thank the following people, all of whom contributed in an important way to the writing and completion of this work: Betty Anderson, my wife; Jerry Weinberger, the chairman of my dissertation committee; Alan Grimes, who also served on my committee and who first suggested that an inquiry such as this one might be an interesting undertaking; Robert McLaughlin, a good friend and friendly critic; Iris Richardson and Kathy Bryant, friends and expeditors extraordinary; and Ellen Sherwood, friend and also typist of this manuscript. Needless to say, any errors of fact or judgement are my own.

CHAPTER V	131
NOTES	131
CHAPTER VI	135
NOTES	135
CHAPTER VII	139
NOTES	139
CHAPTER VIII	143
NOTES	143
CHAPTER IX	147
NOTES	147
CHAPTER X	151
NOTES	151
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	157
NOTES	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY	159

ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"B" (in the notes) = Block translation of the Letter to D'Alembert.	
ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
NOTES	16
CHAPTER I	20
NOTES	48
CHAPTER II	54
NOTES	106
CHAPTER III	113
NOTES	177
CHAPTER IV	183
NOTES	227
CHAPTER V	231
NOTES	252
CHAPTER VI	255
NOTES	331
CHAPTER VII	337
NOTES	381
CHAPTER VIII	385
NOTES	438
CHAPTER IX	443
NOTES	490
CHAPTER X	495
NOTES	558
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	562
NOTES	585
BIBLIOGRAPHY	586

ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE

"B" (in the notes) = Bloom translation of the Letter to D'Alembert.

"Corsica" = Projet de Constitution pour la Corse.

"Emile" = Émile ou de l'Education.

"First Discourse" = Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts.

"Government of Poland" = Considerations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne.

"Heloise" = Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise.

"Letter" (in the text) = Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les Spectacles (no particular ed.)

"Letter" (in the notes) = Fuchs edition of the Letter to D'Alembert.

"O.C." = Oeuvres Complètes (Pléiade).

"Political Economy" = Discours sur l'Economie Politique.

"Reveries" = Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire.

"Second Discourse" = Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité Parmi les Hommes.

"Social Contract" = Du Contrat Social.

a
l
t
f
t
a
f
r
o
q
a
t
a
t
a
s
a
t
l
se
p

expression of this point of view. Modern political thinkers, on the other hand, tend to exhibit a marked aversion to the practice of censorship, and this aversion has grown more noticeable as modernity has advanced. Thus, whereas Thomas debates, one of the founders of modern

INTRODUCTION

Determining the proper relationship between the political realm and the life of the mind has been a recurring problem for Western political philosophy. Briefly stated, this problem consists of two parts: to what extent, if any, do the requirements of the political order conflict with the claims of the philosopher, the scientist, and the artist to autonomy within their respective areas of endeavor?; and, when such a conflict occurs, how is it to be resolved? This problem can be refined somewhat if we assume that the political order in question is republican in nature, that is, an order characterized by self-government on the part of the citizen body as a whole. Under such conditions, the question becomes one of determining whether intellectual freedom is in any way disproportionate with civic freedom, and, if such a disproportion exists, how the competing claims are to be adjudicated. What is at issue here is essentially the question of whether or not censorship--the attempt on the part of the political order to regulate intellectual and artistic activity--can be defended in a free society.

In approaching the tradition of political thought from the perspective of the problem of censorship, one is immediately struck by an apparent discontinuity. The ancients, i.e., Plato and Aristotle, seem to regard censorship as a useful, indeed necessary, instrument of political rule, and this is particularly true of the institution and conservation of the good society. Socrates' provisional expulsion of the poets from the "city in speech" of the Republic is the archetypal and to

expression of this point of view. Modern political thinkers, on the other hand, tend to exhibit a marked aversion to the practice of censorship, and this aversion has grown more noticeable as modernity has advanced. Thus, whereas Thomas Hobbes, one of the founders of modern modes of political thought, was more than willing to concede the political order the right "to be judge of what opinions and doctrines are adverse, and what conducing to peace; and consequently, on what occasions, how farre, and what, men are to be trusted withall, in speaking to Multitudes of people; and who shall examine the Doctrines of all bookes before they be published,"¹ later thinkers have generally been less willing to concede such a right.²

What is at issue is the general tendency of modern political thinkers, as distinguished from the ancients, to view censorship in a less than favorable light. There are several reasons which might be cited to explain this phenomenon, but the preeminent place must be assigned to the modern conception of the proper role of the political order in a free society. The dominant focus of modern thought is on the individual rather than the community. "Freedom" is defined in terms of individual autonomy, that is, in terms of the absence of external constraints on the individual, and the political order is assigned the task of maximizing the area within which such autonomy exists by controlling and/or eliminating certain types of constraints. Notions of exactly what constitutes a legitimate subject for regulation by the political order have varied from time to time and from place to place--from the extreme laissez-faire policies of Herbert Spencer to the contemporary Welfare State, for example--but it has been almost universally conceded that the proper role of the political order does not extend to

12

ex

er

th

th

be

s

t

a

d

m

t

t

c

f

n

imposing constraints on the individual which do not help to maintain or extend individual autonomy in general.³ Moreover, the core of the modern idea of freedom lies in just that area in which censorship operates, the realm of thought and expression, with the result that any attempt on the part of the political order to extend its sway into this area has been viewed with extreme hostility by most modern thinkers.⁴

Reinforcing this individualistic perspective is the peculiar version of eudemonism which permeates modern thought. Modern thinkers tend to see "happiness" as an idiosyncratic phenomenon, and this results in a eudemonism highly prejudiced in favor of the maximum possible individual freedom: "I am the best judge of what constitutes happiness for me, and, insofar as my search for happiness does not impinge unduly on that of others, my actions, thoughts, and beliefs are of no concern to the political order."⁵ What is at issue here is the freedom of the individual to choose his own way of life. One man's meat may be another's poison, but it is assumed that only those directly concerned can determine this. In order to make this determination, the individual must possess information concerning the various possible ways of life; thus, no teaching concerning how one ought to lead one's life can properly be suppressed by the political order, nor is that order legitimately concerned with any effort to put such teachings into practice, provided that certain general limits on behavior are observed.⁶ Furthermore, the eudemonism of modern thought requires that "freedom" itself be defined in terms of individual autonomy. "Freedom" is the means by which happiness is achieved, but, since happiness is idiosyncratic, "freedom" becomes idiosyncratic and open-ended as well. "Freedom" cannot be limited by assigning it a definite content; rather, it must be defined

by

se

ba

is

co

is

o

l

f

a

n

n

e

t

h

s

h

y

by each individual in the pursuit of his own vision of happiness. Consequently, "freedom" comes to be seen as a negative, as the absence of barriers to the exercise of individual autonomy.

The difference between ancient and modern thought in this regard is significant. While a number of the ancients posited happiness as the only intrinsic good, that which is choiceworthy in and of itself and for which all other goods are instrumental, the radically individualistic orientation of modern thought was absent.⁷ Classical eudemonism articulated a vision of the good life, and happiness was seen as resulting from, or even identical with, living such a life.⁸ Thus, "happiness", according to the ancients, was not idiosyncratic; in particular, it was not the same as the pleasant, which every man judges himself.⁹ This is not to say that there may not have been several different forms of the good life for the ancients--Aristotle, for example, distinguished between the happiness associated with a life devoted to action and that happiness associated with the contemplative or philosophic life, while indicating that the latter embodied the highest form of happiness--¹⁰ but is rather to say that these forms were seen as severely delimited in number and objectively knowable.

The adherence of many modern thinkers to a progressive view of history has tended to reinforce the belief that censorship of any kind is necessarily undesirable. If progress is in some sense guaranteed, then censorship, which was traditionally seen as providing a defense against changes in an existing way of life, becomes anti-progressive, even reactionary. Furthermore, the practice of censorship is seen as interfering with the very mechanism of progress. For most moderns, the essence of progress lies in the gradual replacement of false beliefs by knowledge,

of the individual.

b
o
e
v
.
v
o
o
a
i
s
a
t
o
u
t
o
o
k
a
o
n
s
t
a
s
t

but truth can only win out when it is not prejudged, that is, when all opinions are allowed to compete in the "marketplace of ideas" on an equal basis. Censorship, by definition, handicaps certain opinions vis à vis others, and is thus condemned before the bar of progress.¹¹ Moreover, the free development and diffusion of the arts and sciences is viewed as constituting a vast educational process. The expansion and diffusion of knowledge is seen by most modern thinkers as not only rendering the life of the individual more pleasant by giving to man in general a greater control over nature, but also as tending to make the individual more knowledgeable as well, better able to distinguish truth from falsehood. The result of this process is an individual ever more able to govern himself, ever more able to fulfill the duties and assume the responsibilities of citizenship, and an individual ever more firmly committed to the ideal of freedom. Free government is seen as depending upon an enlightened citizenry, while superstition is viewed as one of the bulwarks of tyranny. Consequently, for modern thought, the free development of the arts and sciences goes hand-in-hand with the expansion of political freedom. This belief that the growth and diffusion of knowledge inevitably and progressively civilizes the members of society allows modern thinkers to take the position that, whatever the interests of society in a moral and/or virtuous citizenry, whatever its requirements in the way of civility, these are adequately and automatically taken care of by the general intellectual progress of the human race. The modern idea of scientific and technical progress thus has conjoined to it the idea of spontaneous moral progress, and this provides yet another justification for the political order abandoning to the autonomous workings of social forces any concern it might have with the character of the individual.

6
 5
 4
 3
 2
 1

If the foregoing brief remarks are correct, then we can conclude that the general refusal of modern political thinkers, and especially contemporary theorists, to treat the problem of censorship as of serious concern can be attributed in large part to three factors: their focus on the individual, their eudemonism, and their general commitment to a "progressive" view of the world. This does not mean that the place of censorship in a free society has been definitively settled, however; it means only that that problem has been resolved within the universe of discourse established by modern thought.

The origins of modern political thought are to be found in the self-conscious attempt to replace classical political philosophy by a radically new philosophy.¹² This project was successful, but its very success masks its problematic character. Coeval with the foundation of the new political philosophy was a new rhetoric, a rhetoric intended to direct thought away from certain of the problems posed by classical political philosophy, problems which were seen by the founders of modern thought as responsible for the inefficacy of classical thought in matters of political practice.¹³ The correctness of this view, i.e., of the superior efficacy of modern philosophy, is not an issue for us today; that superiority in matters of practice appears to have been amply established by the "scientific conquest of nature." It was the possibility and promise of such a conquest which informed the origins of modern political philosophy,¹⁴ while the established fact of such a conquest vindicates that philosophy. At the same time, however, what must not be lost to sight is that, while the superior practical efficacy of modern political philosophy seems to be well established, its theoretical superiority remains problematic. In particular, its theoretical

understanding of political things may be less than comprehensive, and this raises the possibility that its understanding of censorship may be less than complete. At the very least, the modern understanding of this matter is different from that of the ancients, and thus it behooves us to remain open to the possibility that either the ancients' understanding of censorship was more comprehensive than that of modern thinkers or that the ancients' understanding of censorship was superior in some regards, while perhaps inferior in others, to that of modern thinkers.

The preceding suggests that a reconsideration of the problem of censorship from a perspective other than that which dominates modern thought could, in addition to providing an alternative viewpoint on the question of the value of censorship in a free society, help to reopen a whole range of important question. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les Spectacles (hereafter, Letter) offers an ideal vehicle for the furtherance of such a project.¹⁵

Rousseau's Letter to D'Alembert has suffered from an ill-deserved neglect on the part of students of political philosophy.¹⁶ Admittedly, this indifference has not been complete, but most of what has been written concerning the Letter has focused on its historical and polemical aspects, rather than treating it as a serious contribution to political philosophy by a seminal thinker and, as such, deserving of careful and sustained analysis.¹⁷ This I believe to be an injustice, both to Rousseau's intentions in writing the Letter and to the seriousness of the questions which it addresses. In recent years, some progress has been made toward rectifying this neglect, most notably in the form of Allan Bloom's critical edition of the Letter. Bloom's effort, however, was limited by the space available to him in an introductory essay, and

he

nat

rem

and

ple

on

the

of

dis

the

the

are

wou

tao

out

the

men

the

ver

the

cus

est

of

had

lea

he was forced to confine himself to relatively general remarks on the nature and significance of the Letter. The following, to which these remarks are preliminary, was conceived with the intention of extending and deepening the work of Bloom and certain other writers who have grappled with the Letter and the problems to which it points.¹⁸

The Letter was first published in 1758 as a rebuttal to an article on the Republic of Geneva which had appeared late the preceding year in the seventh volume of the Encyclopédie.¹⁹ Although generally laudatory of the Republic, its institutions, and its people, d'Alembert's article did find fault with one aspect of Genevan life: its laws prohibiting theatrical performances, and its consequent lack of an established theater.²⁰ A properly instituted and regulated theater would, d'Alembert argued, serve an important educational and civilizing function: "It would form the taste of the citizens and would give them a fineness of tact, a delicacy of sentiment, which is very difficult to acquire without theatrical performances." Furthermore, the establishment of a theater need not, according to d'Alembert, lead to a taste for "adornment, dissipation, and libertinism among the youth," to the fear of which he ascribed the Republic's opposition to a theater. Through "severe and well-administered laws" regulating the theater--and especially the conduct of the actors--Geneva could retain its existing morals and customs, while at the same time enjoying the benefits accruing from an established theater. In this way, the Republic would "join the prudence of Lacedemon to the urbanity of Athens."²¹

In making this argument, d'Alembert was continuing a debate which had raged intermittently in Europe, and especially in France, since at least 1548,²² concerning the moral and social value of the theater.²³

tr

ti

d'

ed

no

in

ar

ly

he

Re

ge

an

de

el

gr

co

pu

an

the

In

con

Gen

the

Var

div

its

The terms of the debate had changed markedly over the years, but at the time in question there was ranged on the one side those who, like d'Alembert, saw the theater as a potentially valuable instrument for educating the public, and, on the other, those who saw the theater as nothing more than a school of vice and bad morals.²⁴ The former party included within its ranks Voltaire and the group of philosophes centered around Diderot and the Encyclopédie, while the latter was drawn primarily from the ranks of the clergy, together with a number of pious laymen heavily influenced by the Church's position on the theater. Although Rousseau had by this time already broken with Diderot, he was still generally thought of as an "Encyclopédist," both by the public at large and by the philosophes themselves.²⁵ Consequently, there was a good deal of surprise at the appearance of the Letter, in which Rousseau declared himself in absolute opposition to d'Alembert's scheme, on the grounds that the establishment of a theater at Geneva would inevitably corrupt the people and thus destroy the civic virtue upon which the republican liberty of the city was founded.

Rousseau's purpose in issuing the Letter was ostensibly patriotic and polemical: as a "Citizen of Geneva," he felt it his duty to defend the city of his birth from the dangers posed by d'Alembert's project. In entering into public debate on the matter, however, Rousseau did not confine himself to attacking the idea of establishing a theater at Geneva; rather his analysis contains, in addition to a consideration of the specific case of Geneva, an examination of the relationship between various forms of public entertainment and "virtue," both civic and individual. This analysis led Rousseau to condemn the theater insofar as its effect on virtue was concerned: "The theater," he concluded,

"
s
t
t
u
b
v
re

de
de
se
pe
so
is
po
the
an
on
ma
ci
the
and
let
the
the
spec

"will not harm us if nothing at all can harm us any more." Far from serving to educate man to civility and virtue, according to Rousseau, the theater at best serves to divert wicked men from the exercise of their wickedness, while at worst it is a corrupting influence which can undermine the virtue of a whole people. Thus, the theater is socially beneficial only in a corrupt society, and a positive danger in a healthy, virtuous, and free one.²⁶ Therefore, Rousseau argued, Genevan liberty requires the continued suppression of the theater.

The conclusions which Rousseau drew from his analysis were by no means original with him. The Catholic party in France had been arguing many of the same points for years.²⁷ What was unique to him was the fervor and skill with which he wrote and, more importantly, the peculiar perspective from which he approached the problem of the theater.²⁸ Before Rousseau, the attacks on the theater in both France and Geneva had issued from the Church party, and had been founded on the supposed opposition between the theater and a christian way of life. Rousseau was the first writer of any note to enter the lists against the theater armed with a nonchristian, even antichristian, argument.²⁹ His attack on the theater was based on the same belief in the basic goodness of man and the same belief in the corrupting influence of contemporary civilization which, together with a high regard for the teachings of the ancients, had informed his earlier works--the Discourse on the Arts and Sciences and the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.³⁰ In the Letter, we find Rousseau applying the principles he had enunciated in the two Discourses, and which he was in the process of elaborating in the Social Contract, to a particular institution, the theater, in a specific setting, Geneva. Thus, although more than a little polemical

in nature, the Letter enjoys a significance which transcends the immediate context for which it was written, in that it is illustrative of the application of Rousseau's principles to problems of actual practice. At the same time, the Letter serves as a valuable counterweight to the rather abstract theorizing of the two Discourses and the Social Contract. It is a continuation and expansion of the Discourses, but a continuation and expansion which is achieved through an attempt to deal with certain concrete problems facing the Republic of Geneva. Moreover, though it in many ways prefigures the Social Contract, the Letter is in an important sense more comprehensive; it does not deal solely with an abstract "political man," removed from the social context within which he lives: "Nor was it the Geneva of the Letter a republic in the merely political form delineated in the Social Contract, but a full and complete society peopled by men, women, and children, as well as by citizens."³¹

Aside from the light which it sheds on the application of Rousseau's principles to problems of practice, the Letter is significant in several other respects as well. In the first place, and more to our present purpose, it involves an attempt on Rousseau's part self-consciously to examine the relationship between the political realm and a specific province of the Republic of Letters, that is, the dramatic arts. As we have previously observed, modern political thought tends to beg the question of this relationship by assuming the extrinsic, if not always intrinsic, value of autonomy in the arts. Rousseau, by viewing the value of the arts as problematic, both in general terms--this being the dominant theme of the First Discourse--and in terms of the dramatic arts considered in themselves, provides us with an alternative viewpoint, a viewpoint which is certainly worthy of consideration even if we are finally led to reject it in favor of a more conventional position.

himself. The question of artistic autonomy is intimately related to the question of censorship in general, as the philosophes, and especially Voltaire, realized.³² In pointing up the problematic value of artistic freedom, Rousseau is operating from a perspective conducive to viewing freedom of speech in general in problematic terms. Thus, what Rousseau does in the Letter is to raise the possibility that a judicious censorship, far from being the negation of freedom, may be the price which a free people necessarily pays if their liberty is to be preserved. The Letter, then, serves a valuable purpose to the extent that it brings out once again the idea of citizen virtue as the sine qua non of a free society, and to the extent that it resurrects the idea that the political community is a moral community as well, an idea which has almost disappeared from modern political thought. In adopting in part the perspective of the ancients, Rousseau raises again the question of the relationship between self-government and the virtue of a people, the question of the connection between that virtue and a people's habits and institutions, and lastly, the question of the degree to which moral concerns and political concerns coincide. In the Letter Rousseau thus raises a number of important questions which, though they have not been settled once and for all by political philosophy, have largely ceased to be objects of concern for political thinkers. In a sense, then, a careful consideration of the Letter is a step in the direction of revitalizing a philosophic dialogue which in modern times has become almost a monologue.

In many respects, Rousseau is almost uniquely qualified to aid in a reexamination of the constellation of problems which emerge with any attempt to transcend the modern perspective on censorship. Rousseau

himself was at war with his century, and most especially with those elements of modern thought which characterized the Enlightenment.³³

Yet, as the Confessions demonstrate, he was preoccupied until early middle-age with a desire to become one with those bels esprits, epitomized by Diderot, who were the very soul of the Enlightenment.³⁴ His break with the Encyclopédists and his efforts to move beyond them were thus fraught with difficulties, difficulties which sprang not so much from any basic instability in Rousseau, as some writers have argued, as from the problems inherent in a modern thinker attempting to break out of the straitjacket of modern thought. Rousseau's position was consequently ambivalent in the extreme: a child of the Enlightenment, he was in rebellion against his intellectual parentage and yet could not escape its influence.

This ambivalence was, however, often a strength. Rousseau's recognition of the problematic nature of modern thought influenced him to turn in the direction of classical philosophy, but this return to the ancients was motivated by peculiarly modern concerns. Like most modern thinkers, Rousseau was committed to the twin values of freedom, defined in terms of individual autonomy, and equality; yet, unlike his contemporaries, he believed that the modern solution to the problem of implementing these values was ultimately untenable, in that its "freedom" led to unfreedom, its "equality" to inequality.³⁵ Despite his dissatisfaction with the modern solution to the problem of freedom, however, he could not commit himself completely to the perspective of classical political philosophy. Classical philosophy could be used as a point of departure for criticizing modern thought, but in itself it provided no final solutions to the questions Rousseau was seeking to

a

o

x

d

d

a:

e:

te

si

th

on

a

po

le

Cl

wa

di

th

the

don

to

sig

more

answer. Rousseau believed that man himself had changed since the time of the ancients:

When one reads ancient history, one believes oneself transported into another universe and among other beings. What do the French, the English, the Russians, have in common with the Romans and the Greeks? Almost nothing except shape.³⁶

Man's characteristic malleability has, according to Rousseau, led to a disproportion between modern man and ancient man. Modern man is more debased than his Greek or Roman counterpart and, as a result of this, antiquity's solution to the problem of freedom is insufficient for modern times.

Not only has man himself changed, but the political world has altered its character as well. To cite only one example, the very dimensions of the political world underwent a radical transformation between the time of Plato and Aristotle, on the one hand, and that of Rousseau on the other. Classical political philosophy presupposed the "polis"--a relatively small, and consequently intimate, community--as the unit of political association, while by the 18th century the only small states left in Europe were marginal, and political gigantism was the rule. Classical political philosophy's treatment of the problem of freedom was thus relevant not only to a different type of man, but also to a different kind of political environment. The upshot of this is that the modern problem of freedom is subtly different from that faced by the ancients and, in consequence, the solution to the problem of freedom proposed by classical philosophy can be no more than a rough guide to the solution required by modernity.

For all Rousseau's classicism, he remained sufficiently clear sighted to recognize that the problems of modernity required something more than a return to ancient modes of thought for their solution. If

modern thought did not provide a complete solution to the problem of freedom in the modern world, neither did classical philosophy. A synthesis of the two, however, could perhaps provide, if not a definitive solution, at least a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. The seeming ambivalence of much of Rousseau's thought--neither wholly modern, nor yet wholly classical--can be viewed as the necessary result of an attempt at such a synthesis.³⁷ In terms of our purposes, Rousseau's works serve to point up not only an alternative to the modern view of censorship, but also the difficulties inherent in attempting to transcend that view. For this reason, a careful examination of the Letter to D'Alembert can be doubly useful.

³⁷This is not to say that censorship is not common and is not done by even the most liberal regimes. It is the opposition to its practice, unlike the opposition to its theoretical foundation, from which it can draw support.

³⁸See John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (New York: Dutton, 1913), 91-113, for what is considered by many to be the classic version of this argument.

³⁹Justice William O. Douglas's dissenting opinion in Grain Processing United States, 383 U.S. 463 (1966), provides an interesting example of this position: "Masochism is a desire to be punished or subjected . . . the desire may be expressed in the longing to be whipped and lashed, bound and gagged, and cruelly treated. Why is it unpleasant to cater to the needs of this group? They are, to be sure, somewhat offbeat, non-conformist, and odd. But we are not in the realm of criminal conduct, only ideas and tastes. Some like Chopin, others like 'rock and roll.' Some are 'normal,' some are masochistic, some are deviant in other respects. . . ." For the Justice, the tastes and ideas of the individual fall completely outside the realm of legitimate government regulation, no matter how "offbeat" they are, as long as no overt criminal act is performed in giving expression to these tastes and ideas.

⁷See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, hereafter Nic. Ethics, 1097a-98a and 1176b (beginning).

⁸Plato, Republic, 580a-92b; Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1099a16-17 and 1176a-78b.

NOTES

⁹Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1102 and 1172a-76a; Plato, Phaedrus, 204e-67a. Even the ancient Epicureans, who identified "the good" with "the pleasant," argued that we must be guided in their pursuit of the good because they mistake what is pleasant for the good, or only pleasant for a time, for that which is most pleasant. Both practical and theoretical wisdom were necessary for the pursuit of the good.

Introduction

¹Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), Chap. XVIII, 233.

²Cf. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty and John Milton, Areopagitica, passim.

³Thus, both laissez-faire liberals and reform liberals would agree that the maximization of individual autonomy is desirable; their disagreement is almost solely in terms of the means necessary to realize this end. See John Dewey, Liberalism and Social Action (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), 28-55. Certain important modern schools of thought have in fact presupposed the ultimate irreconcilability of freedom, in the sense of individual autonomy, with any political order. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example, saw the complete elimination of the political, the withering away of the state, the replacement of "the government of persons by the administration of things," as a necessary step in the perfecting of human freedom. See Friedrich Engels, "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," Marx and Engels, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 106. Somewhat the same perspective underlay the laissez-faire orientation of 19th century liberals.

⁴This is not to say that censorship is not practiced in some form by even the most liberal regimes. It is the case, however, that this practice, unlike the opposition to it, lacks an articulated, theoretical foundation from which it can draw support.

⁵See John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 91-113, for what is considered by many to be the classic version of this argument.

⁶Justice William O. Douglas's dissenting opinion in Ginzburg v. United States, 383 U.S. 463 (1966), provides an interesting example of this position: "Masochism is a desire to be punished or subdued . . . the desire may be expressed in the longing to be whipped and lashed, bound and gagged, and cruelly treated. Why is it unlawful to cater to the needs of this group? They are, to be sure, somewhat offbeat, non-conformist, and odd. But we are not in the realm of criminal conduct, only ideas and tastes. Some like Chopin, others like 'rock and roll.' Some are 'normal,' some are masochistic, some are deviant in other respects. . . ." For the Justice, the tastes and ideas of the individual fall completely outside the realm of legitimate, government regulation, no matter how "offbeat" they are, as long as no overt criminal act is performed in giving expression to these tastes and ideas.

⁷See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, hereafter Nic. Ethics, 1097a-98a and 1176b (beginning).

⁸Plato, Republic, 580a-92b; Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1098a16-17 and 1176a-78b.

⁹Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1113a15-b2 and 1172a-76a; Plato, Philebus, 20e-67a. Even the ancient Epicureans, who identified "the good" with "the pleasant," argued that most men err in their pursuit of the good because they mistake what is less pleasant, or only pleasant for a time, for that which is most pleasant. Both practical and theoretical wisdom were considered necessary if one were to know the good, that is, the nature of the most pleasant life, and achieve it.

¹⁰Nic. Ethics, 1145a and 1177a-79a.

¹¹Cf. Mill, On Liberty, 19-67; William Lockhart and Robert McClure, "Literature, the Law of Obscenity, and the Constitution," Minnesota Law Review, 38 (March, 1954), 374-5.

¹²Cf. Hobbes, Leviathan, Intro. and chaps. IV-V, XXIX, and XXXI (end); De Cive, Ep. Ded. See also J. Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the New Atlantis," American Political Science Review, LXX (Sept., 1976), 865-85; "Hobbes' Doctrine of Method," American Political Science Review, LXIX (Dec., 1975), 1336-53.

¹³See Weinberger, "Hobbes' Doctrine of Method," 1349-53.

¹⁴Cf. Francis Bacon, New Atlantis, *passim*; Hobbes, Leviathan, Intro., chaps. V, XIII-XIV, and XXXI; De Cive, Ep. Ded.

¹⁵In French, the best available edition is that of M. Fuchs (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1948); it includes moderately extensive notes and an excellent introduction. The only English translation is that of Allan Bloom, Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

¹⁶C.E. Vaughan, for example, does not even include the Letter to D'Alembert in his edition of Rousseau's "political writings."

¹⁷Cf. Mary Margaret Moffat, Rousseau et la Querelle du Théâtre au XVIII^e Siècle (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1930); Amilda Pons, Rousseau et le Théâtre (Geneva: A. Julien, 1909); and Fuchs' introduction to the Letter, pp. vii-xliv.

¹⁸The reference here is primarily to Leo Strauss' brief remarks in "On the Intention of Rousseau," Hobbes and Rousseau, eds. Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 266n.

¹⁹Bloom's Politics and the Arts includes an English translation of D'Alembert's article on Geneva.

²⁰The portion of d'Alembert's article devoted to the question of establishing a theater at Geneva is quoted by Rousseau in the preface to the Letter. Rousseau, "Du Contrat Social de J.-J. Rousseau, ed. Bartrand de Joncourt (Geneva: Concorde, 1947), 11-12. For a discussion of the Letter, see Fuchs, 4; Politics and the Arts, trans. Allan Bloom, 4. References to these two editions will hereafter be given together and in the following form: Letter, 4 (B., 4).

²¹Letter to D'Alembert, ed. M. Fuchs, 4; Politics and the Arts, trans. Allan Bloom, 4. References to these two editions will hereafter be given together and in the following form: Letter, 4 (B., 4).

²²Moffat, 6.

²³See Fuchs' introduction and Moffat, 6-58.

²⁴It is significant that Rousseau poses the question of the theater in terms of its effect on "moeurs," a french term which is rather unwieldy to translate. The term connotes not so much abstract principles of conduct, as in the english "morals," as it does the way in which such principles are put into practice in everyday life. Bloom solves the translation problem by rendering the term as "morals" [manners]. I have not chosen to follow Bloom in this, primarily because of the awkwardness of the expression; however, it should be borne in mind that the term "morals," when employed in a translated passage, usually has a much broader meaning than in ordinary english usage.

²⁵Rousseau had himself written several articles for the Encyclopédie.

²⁶Letter, 77-80 (B., 58-60). See also "Narcisse," Oeuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Pléiade, 1959-), Vol. II, 972-3, hereafter cited in the form (O.C., II, 972-3).

²⁷Moffat, 90-4.

²⁸Ibid., 96: "Rousseau n'a rien créé, il a tout inflammé."

²⁹Ibid., 85-6.

³⁰The kinship between the Letter to D'Alembert and the First Discourse is particularly close.

³¹Charles Hendel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Moraliste (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934), Vol. II, 30-1.

³²See Moffat, 35.

³³See Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 369-76.

³⁴See Rousseau's Confessions, especially those chapters dealing with the years 1745-54.

³⁵Cf. Second Discourse, II.

³⁶Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 956).

³⁷See Judith Shklar, Men and Citizens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 12-32; and Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Essai sur la Politique de Rousseau," Du Contrat Social de J.-J. Rousseau, ed. Bertrand de Jouvenel (Geneva: Constant Bourquin, 1947), ii-xlix, for a discussion of the classical mode in Rousseau's thought.

In this chapter, we shall examine the Letter in light of what has already been said about Rousseau's purpose in issuing the Letter. We shall see that the Letter is not simply writing in opposition to the Discourse, but is rather a more or less sophisticated departure for a more or less sophisticated treatment of interrelated problems. That the Letter is not a simple "reply" to that article aims to call attention to the fact that some sort of disproportion exists between the Discourse and the Letter. Why such a disproportion exists can be seen only after a careful consideration of the Letter's preface and title page.

In his prefatory remarks, Rousseau ascribes the writing of the Letter to necessity. He then goes on to add that, "Justice and truth are man's first duties; humanity and country his first affections. Every time is also useful, so as not to deserve hatred? Isn't it useful against enemies, and as a preventive, like a drug, for so-called friends, when from madness or some other folly they attempt to do something bad?"

Plato, Republic¹

CHAPTER I

In this chapter, we will investigate Rousseau's possible purposes in issuing the Letter, and will attempt to elucidate those considerations which determine its form and content. Such a task might appear trivial as to what he means by a duty to truth, or a duty to humanity, or in light of what has already been said concerning the Letter. Is not Rousseau simply writing in opposition to d'Alembert's proposal? What more of any substance can, or need, be said on the matter? The question of Rousseau's purpose is not so easily resolved, however. While he is certainly engaged in arguing against d'Alembert's proposal, he is not doing so simply, but is rather using d'Alembert's article as a point of departure for a more or less comprehensive discussion of a whole range of interrelated problems. That the Encyclopédie article devoted little more than a page to the question of the theater, while Rousseau's ostensible "reply" to that article runs to well over a hundred pages, indicates that some sort of disproportion exists between d'Alembert's argument and the Letter. Why such a disproportion exists--especially in view of the fact that Rousseau himself admits to having originally anticipated "only one or two printed pages at the very most"²--can be understood only after a careful consideration of the Letter's preface and title page.

In his prefatory remarks, Rousseau ascribes the writing of the Letter to necessity. He then goes on to add that, "Justice and truth are man's first duties; humanity and country his first affections. Every time that private considerations cause him to change this order, he is culpable." Rousseau here appears to be saying that the necessity which compelled him to write was the result both of a concern for truth and justice and of an affection for humanity and country, and that such private considerations as animosity toward d'Alembert the man,³ or a desire for greater renown, played no part in the composition of the Letter. Despite this seeming clarification, Rousseau's motives are still not completely transparent; he leaves the reader in the dark, for example, as to what he means by a duty to truth and justice. All that we can say at this point is that, in explicitly including an affection for humanity in his list of motives, Rousseau tacitly widens the scope of the Letter by implying that its message may be relevant for mankind in general, and not just for the Republic of Geneva, and this possibility introduces a certain ambiguity into the Letter regarding the nature of Rousseau's intended audience.

The ambiguity is heightened and extended when one considers that Rousseau, who was a thinker and writer of international repute, states that he is writing as a "citizen of Geneva." This is underlined in the full title which Rousseau gives the Letter: "J.-J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva, To M. d'Alembert, of the French Academy, the Royal Academy of Science of Paris, the Prussian Academy, the Royal Society of London, the Royal Academy of Literature of Sweden, and the Institute of Bologna; On his article 'Geneva' in the seventh volume of the Encyclopédie, and especially on the project of establishing a dramatic theater in that city."⁴

In the very title of the work, Rousseau seems to be seeking to create the impression of a simple citizen confronting a philosopher with a long string of memberships in learned societies. Why, one might well ask, does Rousseau go to such lengths to stress d'Alembert's claim to the title of "philosopher," while ignoring or misrepresenting his own possibly superior claim? The answer is to be found, in part, in certain of Rousseau's remarks in the Letter's preface:

"truth In the first place, I am not dealing here with vain philosophical chatter, but with a practical truth important to a whole people. have I do not speak here to the few but to the public, nor do I attempt to make others think but rather to explain my thoughts must clearly.⁵

In this passage, Rousseau indicates that he is not writing as a philosopher, but rather as a citizen interested in practical truths. At the same time, he implies that a disjunction exists between philosophy and practice, and between philosophic truth and practical truth. Far from simply abandoning the title of "philosopher" in the Letter, he implies that he is adopting a position directly contrary to the position which a philosopher would normally be expected to take. Rousseau could have attempted to respond to d'Alembert with "philosophic argument"--that is, with those kinds of arguments which are the particular province of the philosopher--in addition to the "practical" arguments to which he claims to have restricted himself. To do so would have been only natural, given Rousseau's stated desire to prove that d'Alembert's project for the establishment of a theater was ill-advised. Why then does Rousseau openly disavow any intention of attacking d'Alembert's arguments from a philosophic perspective if it is not because he believes that a problem exists in reconciling the role of citizen with that of philosopher? is not attempting to impart the whole--that is, philosophic--truth, but is

rather. The distinction between practical truth and philosophic truth lies at the heart of the problem under consideration. For Rousseau, practical truth is that which it is useful to believe, and most especially that which it is useful for man in his capacity as citizen to believe.⁶ The philosopher as such, however, is committed to the disinterested search for truth in its entirety, whether or not the attainment of such truth is likely or even possible. For the philosopher, then, the search for "truth" is long, if not unending. Practice, however, requires that one have a basis for acting in the present. In the world of affairs, one must choose between various courses of action, but the basis for such choice cannot be philosophic truth. To search for the truth in its entirety before acting means that action will necessarily be deferred indefinitely.⁷ The philosopher, as such, either cannot act in the present or is, in other words, always committed to a particular course of action--that of taking no positive action--regardless of the apparent consequences. Practice, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with consequences; hence, it cannot delay until all the answers are in.⁸ Practice requires a basis for successful action, for deciding between various possible courses of action in a way which best ensures a desired outcome, and this is especially true of the political realm, which is the locus of the most important and pressing practical questions. It is irrelevant to practice whether the basis for choice is Truth, in some ultimate sense, or error, providing that it works. Such concerns are, however, the very essence of philosophy.⁹ Thus, insofar as Rousseau is concerned with counseling a particular course of action, he is writing as a citizen and not as a philosopher. In advising the Genevans, he is not attempting to impart the whole--that is, philosophic--truth, but is

rather attempting to inculcate a useful belief which, if acted upon, guarantees a high probability of success in the realm of practice.¹⁰

For Rousseau, the disjunction between citizen and philosopher extends beyond philosophy's inability to provide a guide to action. Philosophy is also a potential threat to the political community.¹¹ For Rousseau, as for the ancients, true knowledge, as opposed to opinion, can only be attained by a very few gifted individuals. At the same time, a community's very existence depends upon a pervasive agreement among its members concerning the legitimacy of the existing order, the nature of one's duties, the limits of action, and so on. As was noted in the preceding chapter, such agreement is necessary if stability is to be maintained and the community is to continue to exist as such. This agreement, because it must be pervasive, is necessarily based on opinion, which is accessible to all men, and not on a comprehensive knowledge of the truth, which is accessible only to a few. Opinion is fragile, however, and it is particularly fragile in the face of philosophic inquiry. The philosopher, the man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of wisdom, must be willing to question all opinions, including those which form the foundations of the political order itself, if he is ever to arrive at his goal. A willingness to doubt what is commonly believed is thus a prerequisite of philosophy. Such doubt is dangerous, however, if conveyed to the public at large, because it tends to undermine the agreement which is the basis of any political community, and most especially of a republican order. Thus, since philosophy tends to undermine received opinion, the public practice of philosophy is often in direct opposition to the needs of the political community.¹²

Without ambiguity or equivocation, he tells us, runs the risk of antagonizing

Rousseau's argument in the First Discourse is directed at this very point. What has been interpreted as an attack on philosophy is actually an attack on pseudo-philosophers, "that crowd of elementary authors who have removed the difficulties that blocked access to the temple of the muses . . . who have indiscretely broken down the doors of the sciences and let into their sanctuary a populace unworthy of approaching it."¹³ Such men reveal their lack of true philosophy by their attempt to impart it to the masses. The true philosopher is aware of the problematic relationship between philosophy and the political realm. Thus, when he is writing for a large audience and with an eye to the needs of society, the true philosopher is sometimes compelled to "lie," to teach only a portion of the truth as he knows it--that part which is useful to the community--that is, to substitute practical truths for philosophic truths.¹⁴ It seems that Rousseau's agreement with the ancients that censorship is sometimes necessary for the maintenance of a republican order may thus have led him to engage in a kind of self-censorship in the Letter, when a full statement of his principles might have damaged the existing order in Geneva. In such a situation, it is the citizen whose first affection is for his country, rather than the philosopher whose first responsibility is to the truth, who is speaking. In the case of the Letter, Rousseau explicitly abandons the title of "philosopher" for that of "citizen," in order to speak to the many. As a result, one is led to suspect that his overt teachings in the Letter may be less than comprehensive.

The concept of authorial prudence, which Rousseau elsewhere articulates, adds to our suspicions. The author who writes truthfully, without ambiguity or equivocation, he tells us, runs the risk of antagonizing

those men who are firmly wedded to falsehood. Human nature is such that, while the vast majority of men is more often wrong than right, it is inadvisable to attempt openly to correct popular errors. Men do not enjoy having their convictions, however false, questioned, and are apt to retaliate violently against the questioner; and the more unreasonable the conviction, the more violent does this retaliation tend to be.¹⁵

The common solution to this problem in Rousseau's time was to publish one's controversial works anonymously. Authorship was more often than not an open secret, but public opinion and the political authority which supported it were generally willing to accept a denial of authorship as sufficient penance for having violated majority prejudices; after all, to deny authorship is in a certain sense to retract what one has written. Rousseau, however, viewed such a course of action as blatantly hypocritical. According to him, it was preferable to publish openly and to conceal one's true meaning, where that meaning was controversial, under a surface conformity to popular prejudices.¹⁶ For this reason too, then, we can expect Rousseau's more controversial teachings in the Letter to be disguised or "hidden"¹⁷ in some way.

Several important considerations arise if the above argument concerning Rousseau's intentions in the Letter is correct. In the first place, it becomes apparent that the Letter is a much more complex and difficult work than its surface appearance would indicate; it involves not only a discussion of censorship in regard to the theater, but is in itself an example of the practice of censorship in the interests of the community as a whole. In the Letter, Rousseau the philosopher engages in self-censorship, and in so doing transforms himself into Rousseau the citizen. Moreover, the Letter emerges as a multilevel work. On

the surface we find Rousseau's practical teachings, his teachings for the many, which are designed to be useful to the Republic of Geneva. At a more basic level, however, there remains, despite the denial of the preface, the philosopher. It is, after all, Rousseau the philosopher who sees the necessity of censoring his own teachings. Furthermore, the teachings of Rousseau the philosopher have not been completely purged from the Letter. As we have seen, the full title of the Letter, taken together with the preface, suggests that there is a disjunction between practical truth and philosophic truth, and this is a philosophic teaching. Such a teaching could be included in a work circulated to the general public because it is not easily seen; it is implicit rather than explicit and, for it to be perceived at all, a familiarity with the implications associated with Rousseau's use of such concepts as "practical truth," "the few," and "the many," is required. For this reason, such a teaching is not accessible to the common reader--that is, the nonphilosophic majority--for whom it is potentially dangerous.¹⁸ Who then, one must ask, is this teaching meant for? The answer must necessarily be that it is intended for those who can discern it, for those who will not be dangerously influenced by it, for, in other words, those of a philosophic nature. But if this is the case, might it not also be true that Rousseau the philosopher has included other teachings within the Letter, teachings which, while not easily discerned, are still meant to be accessible to those of a philosophic nature? Such a possibility is certainly suggested by Rousseau's listing "truth" as one of man's first duties, while he locates a concern for country within the affections. Thus, even if one's affections should take precedence over one's duties, Rousseau still recognizes a duty to speak the truth if it can be done

without harming one's country or humanity in general. Without prejudging this, it would seem in order to keep such a possibility in mind when the time comes for a closer examination of the Letter, and to be wary of imposing too facile an interpretation. Support for the above position can be found in certain aspects of the relationship between the Letter and classical political philosophy.¹⁹ Of great significance, for example, is the fact that Rousseau's only real preparation for writing the Letter, as far as is known, involved making a paraphrase of the tenth book of the Republic.²⁰ In that book, the Platonic Socrates attacks the imitative arts in general, and poetry and the poets in particular. Thus, since the drama is the imitative art par excellence, and since poetry was closely associated with the ancient theater, Socrates' "quarrel with the Poets" implies a quarrel with the theater as well.²¹ Consequently, the tenth book of the Republic is thematically quite close to the Letter.²² Furthermore, as we shall see later, there are a number of passages in the Letter which closely parallel passages in the Republic. The implications to be drawn from this are by no means trivial. Though the Republic is by virtually unanimous agreement a "philosophic" work, its most important teachings are implicit rather than explicit,²³ and Socrates, the primary speaker, is noted for his ability to gear his teachings to his audience.²⁴ This, together with our previous suspicions concerning the existence of several levels of discourse in the Letter, strongly suggests that, although the Letter is explicitly dedicated to practical truths, it contains a philosophic teaching as well, a teaching which may resemble in certain respects that contained in the Republic.

It should be noted at this point that the preceding argument suggests yet another reason for Rousseau's attempt to divest himself of the title of "philosopher," while simultaneously labeling d'Alembert as such. A true philosopher recognizes that philosophy is not for "the many," that the doubts which it raises tend to subvert individual virtue in general and civic virtue in particular; yet, popular opinion of Rousseau's time had bestowed the title of "philosophe" on those representatives of the Enlightenment who believed that knowledge should be diffused as widely as possible and who were, as a result of their efforts to effect this, regarded by Rousseau as being largely responsible for the political degeneration and moral scepticism which he saw all around him.²⁵ The name of "philosopher" had thus become debased by reason of its association with men who were decidedly nonphilosophic, men who cared more for their own opinion than for the truth or the good of society.²⁶ Rousseau, who is ostensibly writing for the many in the Letter, must take the popular conception of philosophy and the philosopher into account. In rejecting the title of "philosopher," Rousseau may only be rejecting it in the de-generate sense in which it had come to be employed by the public at large. Similarly, his effort to bestow that title on d'Alembert may be more than a little ironic.

Rousseau's discussion of d'Alembert's application of the term "Socinian" to the Genevan clergy lends credence to this idea.²⁷ Socinianism was regarded as heretical by the Calvinist Church, and the effect of such an imputation on the clergy, despite d'Alembert's belief that he was praising them, is such as to undermine their moral authority, an authority which plays an important role in making Geneva and the Genevans what they are. Thus, Rousseau argues that, even if it were true that the Letter embodies Rousseau's complete thought on the subject of censorship,

all or part of the Genevan clergy was Socinian in outlook, it was notical
d'Alembert's place as a philosopher to say so: Rousseau's thought on the

problem. But if this were really their sentiment and they had confided
it to you, they would certainly have told you in secret, in
plate the decent and frank expansiveness of philosophic intercourse;
they would have said it to the philosopher and not to the
judge author. They did nothing of the sort, and my proof is without
reply: it is that you published it.²⁸

Rousseau's meaning is clear: "philosophic intercourse" is "secret,"
hidden, and not public; and this points to an opposition between the
Letter on any level. If Rousseau's secret intention is to discover
philosopher and the author. "Philosophic intercourse" implies a two-
way conversation, that is to say, conversation between a small number of
individuals. The philosopher speaks to a limited and specific audience,
better understood than the public. The philosopher's audience is a ques-
tion of censorship and of the limits of the philosopher's audience.
level. Moreover, the term employed by Rousseau implies that the philos-
opher's auditors in this form of intercourse are also philosophers or of
fact: in the various places, the philosopher's audience is a ques-
a philosophic nature; consequently, one can speak with a "frank expan-
siveness," since the many, those in whom salutary opinions must be pre-
served, are not listening. The author's audience, on the other hand, is
much larger and more varied; in a sense, books are accessible to anyone
and why.

who can read. The author speaks to an undifferentiated audience and
therefore must be careful about what he says.²⁹ Certain truths are bet-
ter kept secret, confined to those whom they will not harm or who will
not abuse them. D'Alembert has violated this rule, however: he has
the Letter's argument. Rousseau's argument is that the author's audience
openly revealed a truth which were better kept from the public view.

In doing so, he has shown himself to be unaware of the limits which a
will be rhetorical. Rather the philosopher's audience is the
wise author imposes upon himself, limits which a "true philosopher" is
necessarily aware of, and has thus revealed his own lack of philosophy.
knowledge or wisdom which is of primary importance in his

Finally, it is necessary to consider the extent to which the
Letter embodies Rousseau's complete thought on the subject of censorship.

As previously mentioned, its surface teachings are confined to "practical truths," and thus represent only one side of Rousseau's thought on the problem. At a deeper level, Rousseau may have camouflaged a more complete teaching on the subject of censorship, but it is impossible to judge whether this actually is the case prior to a careful analysis of the Letter itself. Thus, we must bear in mind that Rousseau's complete thought on the problem of censorship may not have been included in the Letter on any level. If this is so, then we must endeavor to discover that complete teaching by recourse to Rousseau's other works. This is vital for two reasons: in the first place, our goal is to arrive at a better understanding of the whole range of problems surrounding the question of censorship and, if our understanding is to be as complete as possible, we must have access to Rousseau's entire teaching on the subject; in the second place, the Letter itself cannot be completely understood without knowledge about Rousseau's entire teaching regarding censorship, since, without such knowledge, we would be unable to give an account of exactly what part of his teaching is excluded from the Letter and why.

Up to this point, we have answered in a preliminary manner the question of Rousseau's intended audience. In the process, we have been led to make certain observations which point to the probable form of the Letter's argument. That Rousseau is speaking to "the many" and is attempting to impart a practical truth, implies that his overt approach will be rhetorical, rather than philosophic, in nature. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and it is persuasion, rather than the imparting of knowledge or wisdom, which is of primary interest to Rousseau in his guise of citizen. The essence of practical truth is belief, regardless

of its relationship to Truth in any objective or ultimate sense; hence, insofar as Rousseau is attempting to inculcate a belief, he is not so much interested in employing arguments which are simply true, as he is in employing those which are likely to convince, and especially those which are likely to convince the many. As a consequence of this, we are led to suspect that Rousseau's arguments in the Letter may very well prove to be lacking in rigor, that there may be a tendency to substitute appeals to emotion for disinterested and dispassionate discourse, and that much of what is said is said in order to persuade and not because Rousseau himself believes it to be true. The caveat, "Let the reader beware," is thus a corollary to the question of Rousseau the philosopher versus Rousseau the citizen, in that Rousseau the citizen may be Rousseau the rhetorician as well.

Turning from form to substance, the general content of Rousseau's argument is something of a surprise. As was mentioned earlier, prior to the Letter the attacks on the theater had all issued from the Church party and had revolved around the supposed incompatibility of the theater with a christian way of life; yet, Rousseau makes no use whatsoever of this argument in the Letter.³⁰ One might be tempted to argue that Rousseau is approaching the issue from the standpoint of a citizen of Geneva and that his arguments are consequently political, rather than religious, in nature. To do so, however, is to disregard the fact that church and state were intimately bound together in Geneva.³¹ The persuasive character of the Letter further leads one to expect at least some mention of the religious objections to the theater; after all, religion is highly emotive in nature, and so would appear to be a natural tool for a rhetorician in Rousseau's position. Rousseau's failure to make use of religious arguments against the theater must therefore be explained.

The beginning of the Letter is devoted to an essentially religious question: d'Alembert's attribution of Socinianism to the Genevan pastors. Rousseau opens his discussion of the purported Socinianism of the clergy with a protestation: "I shall begin with what is for me most repugnant to treat and the consideration of what is least appropriate for me, but about which, for the reason I have just mentioned, silence is not permitted me."³² The same considerations--a duty to truth and justice, and affection for country and humanity--which initially led him to speak out against the theater have also forced him to dispute d'Alembert's allegations concerning the clergy. D'Alembert's intended praise of the pastors, while well-intentioned, Rousseau goes on to say, is misplaced because it is likely to be harmful to those he intended to honor. This is true, Rousseau argues, because the imputation of a sectarian name is always dangerous for those so labeled, in that it provides a focus for intolerance. Consequently, such imputations should be avoided. This is especially true as regards "matters of pure dogma which have nothing to do with morality." One should never impute a belief to another unless that belief is explicitly acknowledged--only the individual concerned can be certain of what he actually does and does not believe--and for a philosopher to do so is doubly condemnable because, not only should he know better, but he himself has been the victim of persecution resulting from such imputations. Finally, even if certain members of the clergy had confessed Socinian tendencies to d'Alembert, it was his duty as a philosopher to keep their secret.³³

This is far from an energetic defense of the clergy; afterward, Rousseau launches into a defense of Socinianism and, in the process, says what Rousseau is saying is that d'Alembert could not be absolutely sure that his imputation of Socinianism was correct and that, even if he was

certain, he should not have spoken out publicly. This is more an attack on d'Alembert, a calling of him to account for irresponsible behavior, than it is a defense of the clergy. The imputation of Socinianism is what is important, at least for the clergy, and nowhere does Rousseau deny the validity of this imputation. The closest that he comes to an actual defense of the clergy is his observation that the doctrine in which they instruct their communicants bears no resemblance to Socinianism.³⁴ Surely the weakness of this argument is surprising, especially in view of Rousseau's assurance to d'Alembert that, "Not to be of your opinion on some points is to make myself clear enough about the others." By not clarifying his position on the question of the clergy's alleged Socinianism, Rousseau may be indicating a belief that d'Alembert's imputation is a valid one, or perhaps the belief that there would be nothing blameworthy in a Socinian clergy.

Support for this view can be found in Rousseau's examination of Socinianism proper. He begins this examination with yet another protestation: "... in general, I am the friend of every honest religion

I do not know what Socinianism is, so that I can speak neither well nor ill of it (and, indeed, from a few confused notions of the sect and its founder, I feel more disinclination than liking for it).³⁵

Two points concerning this statement are noteworthy. The first is that Rousseau's "disinclination" is said to be based on "a few confused notions;" hence, he implies, this disinclination is not to be taken too seriously, since it is not founded on a reasoned evaluation of the sect's beliefs. Secondly, immediately following the above statement, Rousseau launches into a defense of Socinianism and, what is more, implicitly acknowledges his adherence to some of that sect's more controversial and heretical doctrines.³⁶ What is at issue here is Rousseau's "prudence."

This time it is a question of both the prudence of a man who recognizes that the appearance of orthodoxy is necessary in a situation where religious bigotry and intolerance is capable of exploding in to persecution, and the prudence of the philosopher who recognizes that the public practice of philosophy may have a disruptive effect on the social and political orders. Not only is Rousseau as an individual in danger of persecution if he should admit to Socinian views, but he is duty bound as a citizen to deny such views. In the Social Contract, he indicates that a belief in a god who rewards and punishes--a belief which the Socinian rejects on the grounds that a just god would not punish--is necessary to the good citizen and serves as an important bulwark of the laws.³⁷ Thus, Rousseau makes a prudent and pro forma bow in the direction of orthodoxy by expressing a "disinclination" for Socinian in like manner, Rousseau seems to have been aware that he was expressing a disinclination for Socinianism, which Socinianism is apparent from his tacit defense of that doctrine.

The core of Rousseau's defense of Socinianism lies in his statement that, ". . . in general, I am the friend of every peaceful religion in which the Eternal Being is served according to the reason He gave us."³⁸ The emphasis here is on the word "peaceful," meaning "tolerant." Human reason is not cast in one mold, and what can be admitted as reasonable by one man is unreasonable to another. This is a good prima facie argument in favor of religious toleration: "And how shall I conceive that God would punish him for not having made for himself an unthe body politic and so undermine the foundations of the social order the duties of the citizen. Intolerant religions which pretend to receive that God would punish him for not having made for himself an understanding contrary to the one he received from Him?" But if God himself lacks justification for punishment, how much less justification and overt actions and principles of conduct which are used to punish. must men have for persecuting an individual for not believing in some toleration should be confined to the former sphere. Only if God is thing he finds unreasonable?³⁹ The demand for conformity in belief, competent to pass judgement on matters of belief, Rousseau indicates

however, is the ultimate basis of all religious intolerance and persecution. Conversely, if it were recognized by all men that the demand for absolute conformity in religious belief was in itself unreasonable, and so contrary to the guide which God gave to man, intolerance and persecution would wane. *... proper moral beliefs is essentially a political problem.* Socinianism is tolerant, in the sense that it recognizes the variability of human reason in matters of faith. As such, it is praiseworthy in and of itself. It may not, however, be wise to publicly voice such praise in terms of a person or group one wishes to honor: *... necessary that*

Although such a system may perhaps have nothing that does not do honor to those who adopt it, I will refrain from attributing it to my pastors who have not adopted it, for fear that the praise I might make of it would provide others with the subject for a grave accusation and would hurt those I had intended to praise.⁴⁰ *... any one creed.* It is the Church's intention to in charge these beliefs in like manner, Rousseau seems to have been acting prudently when he expressed a disinclination for Socinianism, while at the same time making it clear to the careful reader that the very opposite was the moral and ethical beliefs as a political problem. *... Now, is a case of case.*

The case which Rousseau makes for toleration in matters of belief closely parallels his discussion of religion in the Social Contract, and ministers of virtue. *... Rousseau: we go on to say that as* where he indicates that, in a community governed by principles of political right, the only religions which will not be tolerated are those which are themselves intolerant or those whose teachings run counter to the duties of the citizen. Intolerant religions cause dissension in Rousseau's defense of the Geneva clergy. *... Rousseau's defense of the Geneva clergy* and so undermine the foundations of the political order. *... One must, however, distinguish between matters of pure belief* ⁴¹ One must, however, distinguish between matters of pure belief and overt actions and principles of conduct which are open to censure. *... way toward explaining Rousseau's* Toleration should be confined to the former sphere. While only God is competent to pass judgement on matters of belief, Rousseau indicates

that the judging of actions, and codes of behavior which directly influence actions, is a legitimate function of the Church.⁴² The authority of the Church over conduct and the principles which determine it, however, is not religious authority. The problem of controlling overt behavior and inculcating proper moral beliefs is essentially a political problem, and the Church's power in this area is derivative.⁴³ It is important to the community that its members share certain beliefs and, in particular, "that each citizen should have a religion which makes him love his duty" and obey the law. Indeed, it is not even necessary that everyone believe, provided that all act as if they do believe. The beliefs associated with good citizenship constitute a kind of principle of sociability, the Social Contract indicates, and are not peculiar to any one creed.⁴⁴ It is the Church's function to inculcate these beliefs insofar as is possible.

The problem of controlling overt behavior and of inculcating proper moral and ethical beliefs is a political problem. Thus, in speaking of the Genevan clergy's influence in this area, Rousseau employs essentially political language, calling them "a body of officers of morality and ministers of virtue."⁴⁵ Moreover, he goes on to say that he "view(s) with consternation any occasion which might cause them to descend to being mere churchmen," that is, their becoming something less than representatives of the political community as a whole.⁴⁶ Rousseau's defense of the Genevan clergy, then, seems motivated not by a desire to establish their religious orthodoxy, but rather by a wish to preserve them in their political function. This goes a considerable way toward explaining Rousseau's lukewarm assertion of the clergy's orthodoxy in matters of pure dogma: Such questions are, in general,

politically irrelevant;⁴⁷ what is important to the political order as such is the clergy's influence over the attitudes and morals of the community. We are now approaching a partial solution to the problem of why Rousseau eschews the use of religious arguments against the theater. In the first place, the problem of the theater is essentially one of its impact upon morals and behavior, and thus does not fall within the sphere of purely religious matters. For this reason, it constitutes a political and not a religious problem. Just as the Genevan pastors, when they are acting as preceptors and guardians of public morality, can be treated as officers of the state, those arguments of a religious nature which had previously been directed at the theater can be subsumed under purely political arguments. Furthermore, the problem of existing intolerance in religious matters, a problem which the controversy over d'Alembert's article so aptly demonstrates, makes appeals to religious feeling a dangerous practice because it may excite that public intolerance which a prudent man seeks to avoid.

The whole thrust of the first part of the Letter is thus to reduce the sphere of purely religious authority: such authority does not apply to matters of faith due to the incommensurability of individual reason; neither does it apply to matters of behavior and morality, except insofar as such authority is delegated by the political order.⁴⁸ This, in turn, serves to explain and justify Rousseau's avoidance of religious arguments in the remainder of the Letter.

Although the preceding seems to explain Rousseau's failure to make use of religious arguments in the Letter, it does not adequately explain his peculiar treatment of the Genevan clergy. Whether or not

that clergy is orthodox in its religious beliefs may be politically irrelevant as long as its public teachings are in conformity with the requirements of political life, but its reputation for orthodoxy most certainly is not a politically indifferent matter. Without such a reputation, the Genevan clergy's influence over the morals and behavior of the populace would be greatly reduced: the people, viewing their pastors as heretics, would no longer regard their teachings as authoritative and their continuation as "officers of morality and ministers of virtue" would become problematic. Thus, while Rousseau's apparent unconcern for the clergy's orthodoxy may be philosophically correct, as a practical matter, and if he is really interested in maintaining them in their position, it appears foolish. Moreover, Rousseau's disregard for the clergy's reputation is expressed in more than a simple indifference toward that reputation. Although Rousseau is writing as a self-proclaimed defender of the clergy, he presents no more compelling argument in their favor than the rather bland assertion that it is impossible to say with certainty whether they are Socinian and that, even if they are, there is really nothing blameworthy in this. Such a weak defense, where the reader is naturally led to expect a much stronger one, is more damaging to the Genevan clergy's reputation than no defense at all; it suggests that, since this is the most that a defender of Rousseau's stature can find to say in favor of their orthodoxy, that orthodoxy must be very questionable indeed. Even more disconcerting than Rousseau's public admission that the clergy may be Socinian in outlook are his transparent hints that he himself is so. What could be more damning for the Genevan pastors than such a defense by such an author? That the clergy was

itself quick to repudiate Rousseau's "defense" serves merely to confirm our suspicions in this regard.⁴⁹

Viewed in this light, Rousseau's treatment of the Genevan clergy is no less harmful to their reputation and position than d'Alembert's. Indeed, it may be more harmful. Because he is an outsider to Geneva, d'Alembert's opinions can be discounted as the product of misinformation and misunderstanding or even foreign prejudice. Rousseau, however, is a "citizen of Geneva," and takes pains to inform his readers of this fact, thus giving considerably more credence to his tacit imputation of Socinianism to the clergy.

If the preceding is correct, then it appears that Rousseau's discussion of the Genevan clergy is not directed toward defending them against d'Alembert's imputation of Socinianism. Accordingly, his chastizement of d'Alembert takes on a new coloring. We earlier speculated that Rousseau is more concerned with the effect of d'Alembert's imputation on the clergy than with its truth and that his chastizement of d'Alembert is founded upon his belief that that worthy has publicly revealed an opinion, or even a fact, which is better suppressed. A closer analysis, however, has shown this speculation to be at least in part incorrect. Rousseau cannot justly condemn d'Alembert for publicly suggesting that the Genevan clergy is Socinian when his own guilt in this regard is no less great. Neither the fact that d'Alembert imputes Socinianism to the clergy nor the consequences of that imputation can serve as an adequate basis for Rousseau's criticism of him: Rousseau makes the same imputation in the Letter and the consequences, damage to the clergy's reputation and standing in Geneva, are the same in both instances.

If we reconsider Rousseau's criticism of d'Alembert in light of the above, we see that it is reduced to two points: (1) either d'Alembert betrayed a trust by revealing something told him in confidence or he asserted certainty in a matter where certainty was lacking; and (2) he proclaimed a dangerous opinion without a proper regard for its consequences. The first point has already been discussed at some length, but what it is important to remember is that Rousseau links it to the charge that d'Alembert has failed to act as a true philosopher should.⁵⁰ The second point is also linked to d'Alembert's failure to live up to the responsibilities of a philosopher, but the responsibility is a relative one:

You have praised this respectable body [the Genevan clergy] in a way which is very fair, very true, which is appropriate to them alone among all the clergies of the world, and which still increases the respect for you of which they have borne testimony, by showing that they love philosophy and do not fear the eye of the philosopher. But, Sir, when one wishes to honor people, it should be done after their fashion and not our own, out of fear that they may be, with reason, offended by harmful praises which, for all that they are given with good intentions, do not do any less damage to the estate, the interests, the reputation, or the prejudices of those who are their subject.⁵¹

D'Alembert is culpable as a philosopher insofar as he did not pay a proper regard to the probable consequences of his action within a particular context, and thus effected the opposite of what he had intended: where he intended to praise the Genevan clergy and to advance their reputation, he succeeded merely in harming both their reputation and position.

For Rousseau to justly criticize d'Alembert, he must be free of those faults for which he takes d'Alembert to task, and this is indeed the case. On both points, Rousseau's superiority to d'Alembert is apparent: he neither betrays a trust, because the clergy has not confided

in him, nor expresses a false certainty, and he knows full well the probable consequences of his imputing Socinianism to the Genevan clergy. But if Rousseau's suggesting that the Genevan clergy is Socinian differs from d'Alembert's only because it was made in full knowledge of its probable consequences, it forces us once again to consider Rousseau's motives. D'Alembert's imputation of Socinianism to the clergy was motivated by a friendly impulse, and he was simply unaware of the likely effect of such "praise" on their reputation. Rousseau, on the other hand, shows himself to be in possession of full knowledge concerning the consequences of labeling the Genevan clergy "Socinian;" yet, he proceeds to do so despite his awareness that he is harming them. The harm is thus deliberate and, unlike that done by d'Alembert, cannot be attributed to friendly motives. By his chastizement of d'Alembert, Rousseau, the self-proclaimed defender of the Genevan clergy, reveals himself as their deliberate subverter and as a greater threat to their reputation and standing than d'Alembert himself; where d'Alembert unknowingly undermines their position, Rousseau does so knowingly. That d'Alembert is an open, if unwitting, subverter of the clergy, whereas Rousseau's subversion is both covert and deliberate, merely compounds the relative guilt of the latter: d'Alembert is a bumbling friend, while Rousseau is the clergy's secret enemy.

The foregoing compels us to reexamine Rousseau's intentions in the Letter. In particular, we are compelled to reexamine his attitude toward Geneva. That Rousseau is engaged in subtly subverting the position of the Genevan clergy implies that his commitment to Geneva as it is is not total. Despite Rousseau's protestations to the contrary, the Letter is not simply a defense of the Genevan status quo; sometimes it

is positively subversive of certain aspects of that status quo. It is possible to go even further. The Genevan pastors do not merely constitute a part of the Republic, but form one of its most important parts: they have a decisive influence over the character and morals of the populace and, according to Rousseau, constitute a body of censors, the first-line defense of the existing regime.⁵² Thus, insofar as Rousseau is engaged in subverting the position of the clergy, he is writing as something other than a good citizen. Indeed, we are led to wonder whether Rousseau's professed concern for Geneva is anything more than a surface phenomenon of the Letter, one which masks a radical disregard for Geneva and its institutions. If Rousseau's assertion that he is writing as a defender of Geneva cannot be taken at face value, however, we are forced to consider what his true motives for writing the Letter might be.

It is tempting to argue that Rousseau's subversion of Geneva as it is is in the interests of Geneva as it might be, and that he is not so much concerned with defending the Genevan status quo as he is with reforming it. According to this line of thought, Rousseau would still be writing as a good citizen, but one whose concern for Geneva does not preclude a critical and reformist attitude toward the Republic's shortcomings. If we accept this interpretation, it would then be possible to attribute Rousseau's treatment of the Genevan clergy to one or more of a number of motives, i.e., a belief that the power and influence exercised by the clergy was bad for Geneva or the belief that a Socinian clergy which was known to be so would be a greater asset to the Republic than a Socinian clergy which was not known to be so.

There are certain insurmountable objections to this view of Rousseau's attitude toward Geneva. Not the least of these is Rousseau's often stated belief that effective reform of an on-going polity is chimerical and the would-be reformer both ignorant and a poor citizen.⁵³ This point will be dealt with in detail later in our inquiry, but even at this relatively early stage, we have sufficient reason for rejecting the idea that Rousseau approaches Geneva primarily from the perspective of a good citizen. In particular, Rousseau's tacit acceptance of certain Socinian ideas marks him, according to his own principles, as a bad citizen. We stated earlier that, in the Social Contract, Rousseau distinguishes between those religions whose teachings run counter to the duties of the citizen and those religions whose teachings provide support for and are compatible with such duties. To be simply compatible with civic life, a religion must include within its body of doctrine certain specific teachings which should be presented "without explanations or commentaries," which, in other words, must be presented and accepted as matters of faith alone. Rousseau places among those doctrines which are to be taught in this way the teaching that sinners, including those who violate civil law, are punished by God. For obvious reasons, this doctrine provides an invaluable support for the laws and for the political order from which they emanate, but Rousseau goes even further and specifies acceptance of this teaching as a necessary part of the make-up of a good citizen. At the very least, the good citizen would, even if he privately rejected this teaching, publicly act as if he accepted it and would refrain from questioning it in any particular.

Socinianism is predicated on a rejection, as contrary to reason, of the idea of a God who punishes men. Thus, in tacitly accepting

Socinianism and in publicly suggesting that Socinianism may not be blameworthy, Rousseau reveals himself to be something other than a completely good citizen. Moreover, his public rejection of the idea of eternal punishment as unreasonable and unworthy of God constitutes an attack on the very foundations of citizenship. This attack is particularly subversive in that it is based on an appeal to reason. Reasons can be adduced in support of the Socinian position, but it is precisely to avoid such appeals to reason that the dogmas of a "civil religion" must be presented "without explanations or commentaries:" the religion of the citizen, Rousseau implies by his ban on explanations and commentaries, is inherently unreasonable. By opening up the dogmas of a civil religion to reasoned argument, one subverts that religion. This is precisely what Rousseau has done and, in so doing, he demonstrates a total disregard for the responsibilities of citizenship as he himself has articulated them.

In his discussion of Socinianism, Rousseau appeals to "reason," which in context constitutes an extrapolitical or even anti-political standard. In some respects our inquiry has come full circle. We earlier concluded that, in the Letter, Rousseau subordinates philosophic truth, or the truth simply, to practical truths, i.e., to that which is useful for most men to believe. This conclusion now appears to be incorrect: on at least one occasion, an important practical truth has been rejected in favor of what is in accord with reason, which is to say that, on at least one occasion in the Letter, Rousseau has employed a philosophic criterion, rather than utility, as the standard for determining what he will present as "true." This leads us to recall Rousseau's prefatory remarks, where he implies that he was motivated to

write the Letter out of a perceived duty to truth and to justice and out of an affection for both humanity and country. At the time, the relative priority of these four motives was unclear, although Rousseau led the reader to believe that his affection for Geneva was firmly in first place. This was in large part what led us to conclude that Rousseau would subordinate philosophic truth to what was useful and, in particular, to what was useful for Geneva. We were misled: Rousseau has shown himself to be willing to subordinate his concern for Geneva to a concern for truth. We are thus led to conclude that, if Rousseau's statement of his motives in the preface is accurate and complete, then his affection for country is decisively limited by a perceived duty to truth.

The preceding serves to make explicit once again a certain tension in the Letter and to place that tension in a new light. We earlier stated that the responsibilities of a philosopher and those of a citizen were frequently incommensurable, and had concluded from the Letter's prefatory remarks that in it Rousseau the philosopher would be subordinated to Rousseau the citizen. This conclusion, too, is no longer tenable. Rousseau's "defense" of the Genevan clergy and his only slightly veiled acceptance of Socinian doctrine indicate that civic duty will sometimes be sacrificed to other considerations, including a perceived duty to truth, and that the subordination of the philosopher to the citizen is far from complete. This provides new grounds for speculation concerning the relationship between Rousseau the philosopher and Rousseau the citizen in the Letter. Although it is now clear that the perspective of a "citizen of Geneva" does not dominate the Letter to the exclusion of all other perspectives, two other possibilities remain: either the

perspective of the philosopher effectively predominates or neither that of the philosopher nor that of the citizen does so. In the latter event, we would be faced with a situation where Rousseau sometimes speaks primarily as a philosopher and other times primarily as a citizen.

Although a final decision between the above alternatives would be a bit rash at this stage in our inquiry, we do possess sufficient evidence to permit a tentative choice between them. Within the confines of his discussion of the Genevan clergy, we have seen that Rousseau speaks overtly as a citizen and covertly as a philosopher, and that the former mode of discourse is ultimately subordinated to the latter, and this despite Rousseau's disclaimers to the contrary. Moreover, because the question of which he treats is of great importance to Geneva, and thus to all good citizens of the Republic, we are once again led to suspect that Rousseau's assumed role of good citizen is little more than a mask, the purpose of which is to disguise the philosopher. This is not to deny that in the Letter Rousseau is very much concerned with what is appropriate to a citizen. His concern in this regard, however, is that of the philosopher, who seeks to know what a good citizen is, and that of a teacher of potential philosophers, who seeks to convey this knowledge to others, and not that of a citizen as such. In the Letter, Rousseau acquaints the reader with the citizen and his duties, and he does so by reference to himself, but the Rousseau so disclosed is a hypothetical construct behind which stands Rousseau the philosopher.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹382c-d.

²Letter, 8 (B., 6).

³Letter, 3 (B., 3). Rousseau goes to great lengths to avoid any appearance of animus, not only toward d'Alembert, but toward Voltaire as well. Voltaire, although not mentioned in this connection in the Letter, was regarded by Rousseau as the guiding spirit behind the effort to establish a theater in Geneva. Voltaire was at the time living on the outskirts of the city and, being bored, launched a campaign to change Geneva's laws regarding theatrical performances. It was in fact Voltaire, as Rousseau suspected, who had persuaded d'Alembert to insert the section on the theater into his article on Geneva: Bloom, "Introduction," xv-xvi. Despite this, and despite his dislike for Voltaire, Rousseau decided to take the high road and eschew personal invective. This renunciation is implied in the Preface to the Letter, where Rousseau writes: "Since I see men no more, I have almost stopped hating the wicked. Moreover, the ill they have done me deprives me of the right to speak ill of them. Henceforth, I must pardon them so as not to resemble them." Indeed, at one point in the Letter, Rousseau goes so far in his efforts to avoid any appearance of animosity as to suggest that, if Geneva must have a theater, the only plays performed should be those written by Voltaire: Letter, 163 (B., 121-2).. It cannot be denied, however, that the controversy over the theater in Geneva was regarded by both Rousseau and Voltaire as something of a personal confrontation. Thus, Rousseau could write to Voltaire accusing him of having attempted to ruin Geneva: See Confessions, X (O.C., I, 541-2) for an account of this letter. And, thus, when in 1766 a theater was forced on Geneva by the French government, Voltaire could exult, "The theater is in Geneva, and in vain has Jean-Jacques played the role of a crackpot in that affair:" cited in Moffat, op. cit., 104.

⁴Rousseau also lays claim to being a citizen of Geneva on the title pages of both of the two Discourses and on that of the Letter to Beaumont. It is interesting to note that this claim is fully justified only in the case of the Letter and in the case of the Letter to Beaumont. Rousseau lost his Genevan citizenship when, at an early age, he left Geneva and underwent a prudential conversion to catholicism. It was restored only in 1754, after the Second Discourse had been written, but before publication.

⁵Letter, 8 (B., 6). Compare this with the opening paragraph of the Preface to the First Discourse.

⁶See Rousseau's discussion of civil religion in the Social Contract IV, viii. A civil religion is necessary to a well-ordered republic and, while no one can be compelled to believe its tenets, anyone who professes disbelief is subject to banishment as an asocial being.

⁷For Rousseau, action adequately informed by knowledge is possible only toward the close of a long life, if then: cf., Reveries III (O.C., I, 1011-13). In this, Rousseau is very like Plato's Socrates, who taught that the philosopher is a lover of, and seeker after, wisdom, but not necessarily wise as such. The truth about the whole may thus ultimately be unattainable. Cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 568-9, 630-1); V (815); Plato, Apology 19b-c, 20d-e, and 23a-b; and Xenophon, Memorabilia I, i, 11-16 and IV, vii, 6.

⁸Compare the Social Contract I, pref. (O.C., III, 351), where Rousseau blurs the distinction between theory and practice. The Prince or Legislator acts or remains silent; he does not speak or write about what must be done, but simply does it. The philosopher, on the other hand, writes because he cannot act, or so Rousseau suggests. A written work, however, can also have an effect on the world. Although writing involves a much more indirect form of action than that available to prince or legislator, it may still be the most efficacious available to the private man.

⁹Plato's Laches admirably illustrates this point. There, Socrates enters into a discussion with several military men concerning the desirability of a particular way of fighting, and convinces them that this eminently practical question cannot be adequately answered without first answering the philosophic question, "What is courage?" This latter question, however, is never answered; thus, the practical question remains unanswered as well. If Socrates had been a general, with the outcome of a battle hinging on the practical question of how his men should fight, his procedure would be patently absurd. See also Aristotle's distinction between phronesis (practical wisdom) and sophia (theoretical wisdom): Nic. Ethics 1139a-1144a.

¹⁰This does not mean that the man of action is necessarily inferior to the philosopher, or political activity inferior to philosophic inquiry. From the perspective of the political realm, for example, Rousseau clearly prefers Cato to Socrates: see Political Economy (O.C., III, 255).

¹¹See the First Discourse II (O.C., III, 28-30).

¹²See Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," 272-6 and 280-6, and Rousseau, "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 967-9), for a discussion of Rousseau's teaching concerning the incompatibility of science, including philosophy, and civil society. Philosophy is especially dangerous in that it tends to lay bare the conventional nature of civil society, thus calling its legitimacy into question. The dissemination of such a

teaching amongst "the many" produces bad citizens: see the manuscript version of the Social Contract I, iii (O.C., III, 291).

¹³First Discourse II (O.C., III, 28-9); cf., the attack on printing (27-8).

¹⁴See Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), especially the introductory remarks, for a treatment of those considerations which may lead a philosopher to suppress or disguise the truth.

¹⁵Compare Rousseau's remarks concerning Hobbes at Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 463).

¹⁶Letters Written from the Mountain V (O.C., III, 791-2).

¹⁷Rousseau himself employs the term, "se cacher," to characterize this type of writing: see Letters Written from the Mountain V (O.C., III, 792); cf. "Preface for a Second Letter to Bordes" (O.C., III, 106).

¹⁸For this reason, the use of an obfuscatory, philosophic jargon is sometimes salutary.

¹⁹The problem of the relationship between Rousseau's thought and classical political philosophy is quite complex, but see de Jouvenel, op. cit.; George Pire, "De l'Influence de Sénèque sur les Théories Pédagogiques de J.-J. Rousseau," Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau, XXXIII (1953), 57-92; Pire, "Du Bon Plutarque au Citoyen de Genève," Revue de Littérature Comparée, XXXII (1958), 510-47; and Shklar, Men and Citizens, 12-32.

²⁰Bloom, "Introduction," xxi. This paraphrase was later (1764) issued under the title, "De l'Imitation Théâtrale."

²¹Aristotle considered tragedy to be the highest form of poetry: cf. Poetics 1449b and 1461b-62a. See also Plato, Republic 394d, where the question of admitting tragedy and comedy into the "city in speech" is acknowledged by Socrates to be a part of his deliberation on poetry and the poets.

²²See Letter, 161n (B., 120n), where Rousseau sums up his argument with a quotation from the Republic. Admittedly, the quotation is from Bk. III, but the theme of that book is, as in the case of Bk. X, the question of the compatibility of poetry and poets with a well-ordered polis.

²³See Alan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," The Republic of Plato, 307-436.

²⁴Any careful reader of the Platonic and Xenophonic dialogues must come to this conclusion: what Socrates says, and how he says it, depends to a significant degree upon whom he is speaking to. For a philosophic justification of this procedure, see Phaedrus, and especially 277b-c.

²⁵"I little understand the tone of these societies, the matters which are treated of there, and the manner of treating them. What is the great marvel in spending one's life in idle conversation, subtly disputing the pro and the con, and establishing a moral scepticism which renders the choice between vice and virtue a matter of indifference for men:" "My portrait" (O.C., I, 1124).

²⁶"How pleasant it would be to live among us . . . if true philosophy were inseparable from the title of philosopher:" First Discourse I (O.C., III, 7). "In this age when prejudices and errors reign so proudly under the name of philosophy, men, besotted with their own learning, have closed their minds to the voice of reason and their hearts to that of nature:" Letter, 108-9 (B., 81). As for the difference between ancient and modern "philosophers," so-called--"I lived then with modern philosophers, who barely resembled the ancient; instead of lifting my doubts and fixing my irresolution, they disturbed all the certainties that I believed myself to have:" Reveries III (O.C., I, 1015-16). In the last passage quoted, Rousseau seems to be speaking in the capacity of Everyman. Cf. "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 969n). See also Plato, Republic 487b-96e, for a discussion of the false claimants to the title of "philosopher."

²⁷The Socinians were christian sectarians; they were anti-trinitarian, held that reason was the sole and final arbiter in scriptural interpretation, and denied the doctrine of eternal damnation. Calvin himself had condemned the sect; hence, d'Alembert's statement of what he considered the Genevan clergy's praiseworthy religious views was, in fact, tantamount to charging them with heresy, and was thus a real threat to their standing in the community.

²⁸Letter, 13 (B., 11).

²⁹Cf. Plato, Phaedrus 275e. In the First Discourse, Rousseau attacks the use of the printing press on the grounds that it makes possible the popularization and diffusion of works which had better been suppressed or which should be accessible only to the select few: First Discourse II (O.C., III, 27-8).

³⁰At one point, Rousseau does refer to "religious principles" as providing a reason for not attending the theater, but he fails to specify what these might be: Letter, 130 (B., 97)..

³¹Rousseau had himself been deprived of his citizenship as a result of a youthful, and decidedly opportunistic, conversion to catholicism; to regain it, he had to reaffirm his adherence to orthodox calvinist doctrine. See Confessions VIII (O.C., I, 392-3), and note 4 above.

³²Letter, 11 (B., 9).

³³Recall the prefatory discussion of this question earlier in this chapter.

³⁴Letter, 13 (B., 11).

³⁵Ibid., 13 (B., 11).

³⁶He, for example, asserts that, where reason and scripture part company, reason should be preferred. In addition, he implicitly rejects the doctrine of eternal damnation. Two spatially disconnected, but thematically similar, passages serve to establish Rousseau's sympathy for at least some of the teachings of Socinianism: "Nor am I scandalized that those who serve a merciful God reject eternal punishment if they find it incompatible with His justice;" and, "For of whatever authenticity the sacred text may be, it is still more believable that the Bible was altered than that God is unjust or malevolent." See Letter, 16 (B., 12 and 13). Moreover, in the Emile, the Savoyard Vicar, whose religious views Rousseau elsewhere indicates are similar to his own, expresses an essentially socinian position: see Emile IV (O.C., IV, 565-635, especially 590-2, and 607-28).

³⁷Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., 468).

³⁸Letter, 13 (B., 11).

³⁹Ibid., 13-14 (B., 11-12); cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 608-27).

⁴⁰Ibid., 13 (B., 11); cf. Letters Written from the Mountain V (O.C., III, 801-2).

⁴¹Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., 469); Emile IV (O.C., IV, 628n).

⁴²Letter, 17n (B., 13n). Cf. Letters Written from the Mountain I (O.C., III, 696-7); II (711); Emile IV (O.C., IV, 627).

⁴³See Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 467-9), and Letters Written from the Mountain I (O.C., III, 701-3).

⁴⁴Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 468).

⁴⁵Letter, 18 (B., 14). In a note appended to this phrase, Rousseau indicates that it may be taken as referring either to the clergy as they are or as they should be. Cf. Letters Written from the Mountain I (O.C., III, 695).

⁴⁶Ibid., 19 (B., 14). Cf. Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 119).

⁴⁷There are, however, certain exceptions to this rule; see Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 468-9), for example.

⁴⁸Cf. Letters Written from the Mountain I (O.C., III, 694-5).

⁴⁹Cf. Moffat, chap. III.

⁵⁰Letter, 12-13 (B., 10-11).

⁵¹Ibid., 11-12 (B., 9-10).

⁵²Ibid., 99-100 and 99n (B., 74 and n).

⁵³Ibid., 99-100 (B., 74-5).

Do you want the general will to be fulfilled? Make all the private wills conform to it; and, since virtue is only this conformity of the private will to the general, to say the same thing in a word, make virtue reign.

Rousseau, Political Economy¹

CHAPTER II

Rousseau begins his discussion of the theater proper with an assertion of its problematic status:

How many questions I find to discuss in what you appear to have settled! Whether the theater is good or bad in itself? Whether it can be united with morals?² Whether it is in conformity with republican austerity? Whether it ought to be tolerated in a little city? Whether the actor's profession can be a decent one? Whether the actresses can be as well behaved as other women? Whether good laws suffice for suppressing the abuses? Whether these laws can be well-observed? etc.³

The problematic status of these questions, he goes on to say, is a result of the dispute over the theater having hitherto been between "men of the church" and "men of the world," with each side viewing the question from the perspective of its own prejudices. This seems to imply that the problem of the theater can be resolved, and that the Letter is at least a step toward such a resolution. Furthermore, it implies that it is possible to approach the problem of the theater from a perspective which is free of prejudice, or at least free of those prejudices which characterize "men of the church" and "men of the world." But what might this perspective be? The preceding chapter suggests one possible response: insofar as both the clergy, viewed as guardians of public morality, and the "men of the world" are in any given instance fellow members

of a particular political order, to view the theater from the perspective of the political realm would be to transcend the prejudices peculiar to either of the two classes of men in question. The fact that Rousseau is writing as a "citizen of Geneva," as a member of a particular political community, suggests that such a solution is, at least in part, what he has in mind.

The political order has prejudices of its own, however. That it is capable of transcending the prejudices of particular individuals or classes should not blind us to this. Only the perspective of the philosopher is truly free from prejudice. That Rousseau also has this perspective in mind is implicit in a rather curious passage, and the note appended to it, which immediately precedes his recital of the problems which remain to be answered concerning the theater: apparently addressing d'Alembert, Rousseau says--

All that I will permit myself to say with respect to you is that you will surely be the first philosopher who ever encouraged a free people, a small city, and a poor state to burden itself with a public theater.⁴

At first reading, this assertion of d'Alembert's singularity appears to be contradicted by the note appended to it,⁵ in which Rousseau alludes to "two famous historians, both philosophers, both dear to M. d'Alembert," of which one, "the modern," would perhaps be of d'Alembert's opinion, while the ancient, Tacitus, would not.⁶ This seems to establish that d'Alembert's position on the theater is not all that singular after all, in that at least one fellow philosopher shares his opinions. This, however, is to forget Rousseau's opinion of modern claimants to the title of "philosopher:" modern "philosophers," so-called, are not philosophers at all, but rather pretenders to the title who subvert and distort the

meaning and purpose of philosophy. Conversely, the ancients--and Tacitus, who occupied a special place in Rousseau's heart, among them⁷--represent the true philosophic spirit. In fact, d'Alembert's position must be equated with that of "the men of the world." How else are we to interpret Rousseau's statement that hitherto the controversy over the theater has been between such men and "men of the church?" D'Alembert is obviously a party to the controversy; he is not a "man of the church;" and he was certainly very much in Rousseau's thoughts when the statement was made.

If the preceding is correct, then the claim of the philosopher to pass judgement on the theater is established as superior to that of the political order for two reasons. The true philosopher is free from prejudice, where the political order is not; while, at the same time, the philosopher is fully cognizant of the needs of the political realm, more so even than those intimately involved in it, and can be expected to bear these needs in mind when rendering his judgement. Tacitus, for example, would not have "encouraged a free people . . . to burden itself with a public theater." The fact remains, however, that this claim of the philosopher to superiority cannot, in the interest of prudence, be publicly made: such a claim would subvert the political order's own claim to supremacy, and, even if this were not undesirable in itself, could very well serve to direct the hostility of the powers that be toward the philosopher. Socrates was, after all, put to death for appearing to assert such a claim.⁸ Necessity, as well as a concern for the well-being of the political order, thus compels the philosopher to don the guise of a "citizen."

Following his comment on philosophers, Rousseau turns to the question of whether the theater is good or bad in itself. This is in keeping with the order in which he listed the various questions that remain to be settled concerning the theater. Moreover, there is a significance both to the order in which these questions were initially raised and to the fact that the first question actually addressed by Rousseau refers to the theater in esse. Of the eight questions specifically mentioned by Rousseau, the last seven are clearly political in nature; they deal either with questions of overt behavior, which is subject to regulation by the laws, with the more general theme of the desirability of an established theater in a small city such as Geneva, or with the still more general problem of the compatibility of the theater with a republican way of life. In contrast, the first question refers to a peculiarly philosophic concern--the nature of the theater in and of itself, and abstracted from any considerations which are relative only to a particular time and/or place. It is exemplary of the philosophic question par excellence: "What is ____?"⁹ Such a question is of no interest to the political order as such; since that order must exist at a particular time and place, since answering the question of whether the theater is good or bad in itself does not solve the problem of whether it is good or bad in a particular context, and since the political order views the world in terms of its own requirements and concerns, the question of the nature of the theater in esse is politically irrelevant. The fact that Rousseau begins his discussion with such a question thus once again implies the primacy of philosophy.

In keeping with a philosophic orientation, Rousseau begins his discussion of the nature of the theater with an attempt at definition: "I

see immediately that the theater is a form of amusement."¹⁰ Amusements are, however, only contingent or instrumental goods for Rousseau; ". . . they are permissible only insofar as they are necessary." But necessary for what? Rousseau does not say exactly, although he does give the reader some indication of what he means:

. . . every useless amusement is an evil for a being whose life is so short and whose time is so precious. The state of man has its pleasures which are derived from his nature and are born of his labors, his relations, and his needs.¹¹

An amusement is thus "permissible" insofar as it fulfills two interrelated criteria: it must be useful, and it must not conflict with man's nature, which means that it must be a "natural" amusement, an amusement in conformity with and stemming from his labor, his relations with others, and the satisfaction of his needs.

The theater fails to satisfy these criteria. In the first place, it draws man away from labor, and away from his wife and children. Moreover, far from satisfying natural needs, it inculcates unnatural desires and leads to a neglect of "simple and natural tastes." Thus, because the theater is an "unnatural" amusement, it is also "useless," and useless amusements are evils for Rousseau. This evil is especially significant in the area of human relations: men think they come together in the theater, but it is there that their isolation is most complete. The theater provides a kind of surrogate existence: "It is there that they go to forget their friends, neighbors, and relations in order to concern themselves with fables, in order to cry for the misfortunes of the dead, or to laugh at the expense of the living."¹² The theater thus leads to a forgetting of one's "natural" duties. The indignant surprise of the barbarian at the Roman circus parallels the judgement which Rousseau

passes on men who patronize the theater: "Have they no wives or children?"¹³

After having condemned the theater for being both unnatural and useless, however, Rousseau rejects the line of reasoning which led him to this conclusion. His reasons for doing so are worthy of note: "But I should have sensed that this language is no longer seasonable in our times. Let us try to find another which is better understood."¹⁴ As we have already noted, the argument at issue deals with an essentially philosophic question, and does so in the manner appropriate to philosophy. Consequently, we can tentatively conclude that the language which is "no longer seasonable" is the language of philosophic discourse. Such a conclusion draws support from Rousseau's opinion concerning the degenerate state of contemporary philosophy; the language of philosophy can perhaps no longer be understood because there are no longer any true philosophers.

That Rousseau decided to abandon the argument in question does not mean that he considers it to be incorrect. That he dismisses it as "unseasonable" means only that he considers it inappropriate for his present audience; it says nothing about his assessment of its truth or importance. Indeed, a persuasive case can be made to the effect that the line of reasoning which Rousseau begins and then appears to abandon goes to the heart of his thinking on man and the social state.

The argument which Rousseau dismisses as "unseasonable" in the Letter is not peculiar to that work; it can be found in a more general and complete form in the Second Discourse. There, Rousseau argues or appears to argue that the elaboration and proliferation of social institutions have served only to corrupt the human soul and to debase mankind.

Society is contrary to nature and, because man is naturally "good," the opposition between nature and society becomes one between goodness and corruption. Nature is thus established as a standard against which society is judged and found wanting. Rousseau's abortive criticism of the theater in esse in the Letter is merely a special case of the more general argument presented in the Second Discourse. To see why this is so, one need simply recall that the theater can exist only within the confines of a highly "developed" society, a society far removed from man's natural environment of the state of nature. As part and parcel of a complex society, the theater is unnatural and, as in the case of society as a whole, the opposition between the theater and what is natural to man becomes one between corruption and goodness.

Rousseau's incomplete criticism of the theater in esse can be read as simply applying the general criticism of the social state developed in the Second Discourse to a specific social institution. Seen in this light, Rousseau's dismissal of what we have labeled his "philosophic" argument against the theater becomes something of a problem. What makes Rousseau's action puzzling is the apparent suitability of this argument to his rhetorical purposes. An argument, even a "philosophic" argument, which characterizes the theater as unnatural and as a subverter of the family would seem to be a useful vehicle for discrediting d'Alembert's proposal. That Rousseau has already presented the argument in question in a more complete form in the Second Discourse compounds our puzzlement: in the Second Discourse, too, he writes as a "Citizen of Geneva," and that work is dedicated to the Republic;¹⁵ yet, in it he presents a more complete version of that argument which he dismisses as unseasonable in the Letter, that is, as unsuitable to its Genevan audience. The

problem at issue is not a trivial one. Rousseau has acted in an unexpected manner, a manner which seems to be at cross purposes with his stated intentions in the Letter, and this must be explained.

As a first step, we must refine our definition of the problem under consideration. What must be explained is Rousseau's apparent abandonment of "nature" as a standard for judging the theater. This has become a problem for us because, on the face of it, a natural standard, such as that developed in the Second Discourse, would seem eminently suited to Rousseau's stated purpose of opposing the introduction of a theater into Geneva. A careful reading of certain of Rousseau's other works, however, suggests that this is not the case, that a comprehensive inquiry into the theater in esse and its relationship to what is natural would, far from discrediting the theater, constitute a persuasive argument in its favor. To see why this is so, we must turn to the Second Discourse, the Social Contract, the Reveries, and the Emile.

A careful reading of the Second Discourse leads to a rather startling conclusion: the apparent superiority of nature to society and natural man to social man is misleading. It is misleading because the equation of what is according to nature with what is good for man and of society with what is bad for man is incomplete, hence false. Rousseau's conception of the state of nature is too well known to require recapitulation here, but the fact that he characterizes the period immediately following man's emergence from that state in its pure form as the happiest ever experienced, "the best for man,"¹⁶ is important. During the period in question, men led uncomplicated lives; they lived by their own efforts, "free, healthy, good, and happy." Their lives were family centered, and family life had given rise to "the sweetest sentiments known

to man, conjugal love and paternal love." Outside of the family, because of the self-sufficiency of this period, a man's contacts with his fellows were few, casual, and untouched by the desire for competitive advantage. Above all, amour propre and its consequent striving for superiority had not yet taken root.¹⁷ What Rousseau's subsequent rhetoric concerning the superiority of natural man to social man obscures is the fact that this best period for man, while not precisely social in the sense that we think of society, was not precisely natural either, in the sense that the pure state of nature defines man's natural condition. As a matter of fact, although it is easily lost to sight, the real contrast in the latter part of the Second Discourse is not between natural man and social man, but between savage and civilized man, both types of social man.

The preceding has important implications for Rousseau's argument against the theater in esse. That argument cites the effect of the theater on family life as a reason for opposing it: the theater takes man out of the family, leads him to concern himself with people who are not related to him by blood or marriage, and so interferes with fulfillment of his "natural" duties. Family ties are strongest, however, in savage society, and civilized society in and of itself weakens those ties by making men dependent upon others besides their immediate family. Rousseau's criticism of the theater in the name of nature thus becomes a criticism of civilized society in the name of savage society. Even more than this, Rousseau implies that the theater interferes with the natural duties of man as citizen and neighbor,¹⁸ but these are not really natural duties; such duties are a product of civil society, and it is precisely these duties which interfere with the more natural duties of

husband and father. Rousseau's criticism of the theater as contrary to nature is thus incorrect, in the sense that the standards he employs are those of society and not nature. Moreover, he employs two radically different standards for judging the theater in this regard, standards which cannot be met in full at any one time or in any one place: the best husbands and fathers are to be found in savage societies, while the good neighbor and the good citizen are products of civil society.

The Social Contract carries Rousseau's rejection of "nature" as a definitive standard a step further. In particular, Rousseau refers to the process by which man leaves the state of nature as highly beneficial:

Although [in civil society] he gives up several advantages which he had from nature, he gains in return far greater ones; his faculties are so exercised and developed, his ideas so enlarged, his sentiments so ennobled, and his entire spirit elevated to such a point that, if the abuse of this new condition did not often degrade him below that which he left, he should constantly bless that happy hour that wrenched him forever from [the state of nature] and which, from a limited and stupid animal, made an intelligent being and a man.¹⁹

Although the preceding passage is somewhat simplistic--Rousseau appears to have abstracted from savage society--it is more than a little suggestive. The opposition between nature and society remains, but it has become clearer that nature is not simply superior to society. Indeed, it appears that society is the home of man as such, while nature is the home of an animal which physically resembles man.²⁰ But if this is true, then it would seem that, in a sense, society itself is man's natural environment, since outside of society, or anterior to society, one finds only "a stupid and limited animal." Certainly, society frequently debases man and perverts his potential in such a way that life as a stupid and limited animal seems preferable to the life of social man, but what

must not be forgotten is that the potential for something else is there, a something else which ennobles and elevates.

The Social Contract presents the citizen as an alternative to both the animal of the state of nature and to debased social man. This, however, is neither the only nor the highest such alternative. In the Reveries and the Emile, the opposition between nature and society undergoes a radical modification: a life according to nature, but on a much higher plane than is possible in the pure state of nature, is shown to be realizable even in Paris, that most social of social environments.²¹ In these two works, "nature" ceases to be limited to the Second Discourse's "state of nature," and man emerges as a being whose nature it is to live in society. In effect, Rousseau's conception of man's nature takes on a dual aspect. On the one hand, there is nature in more or less a physical sense, "nature" defined as those qualities which man possesses anterior to and independently of society; this is the nature of man as a stupid and limited animal. On the other hand, "nature" is identified with man's highest potential, a potential which it is possible to realize only within society, but which is at the same time not associated with any particular time or place. In this latter sense, such capabilities as abstract thought and speech are eminently natural to man, something which the Second Discourse appears to deny.

Rousseau's treatment of nature indicates that the opposition between the natural and the good, on the one hand, and the unnatural or conventional or corrupt, on the other, is not complete. The natural is not always and everywhere superior to the unnatural. Indeed, at times what presents itself as most natural, man in the pure state of nature, is qualitatively inferior to that which is directly contrary to nature, the

citizen. At the same time, the Reveries and the Emile suggest the possibility of moving beyond the simple dichotomy of natural/unnatural to the reconciliation of these two qualities in a higher nature, and it is philosophy which points the way toward such a reconciliation. This, in turn, suggests that Rousseau may have other motives for breaking off his discussion of the theater in esse besides the stated reason that the language appropriate to such a discussion would not be understood. In particular, it is possible that a comprehensive analysis of the theater and its relationship to what is natural would have revealed that the theater is neither necessarily bad nor contrary to nature, properly understood. A truly philosophic investigation into the theater in and of itself might, in other words, lead to the conclusion that the theater is good in the same way that society is good, which is to say, because it is contrary to nature simplistically conceived.

Support for the idea that Rousseau, as a philosopher, sees the theater as good is not lacking. His criticism of the theater in esse itself points to such a possibility. As we have seen, that criticism focuses on the effect of the theater on man as husband, parent, neighbor, and citizen. The theater, Rousseau tells us in the Letter, takes man out of the family and undermines the "natural" sentiments upon which that institution is founded. By showing men embellished visions of other lives, it renders them dissatisfied with their own; by causing them to concern themselves with characters on a stage, it leads them to that degree to forget family and friends. The theater, in addition, subverts particularistic duties--duties to family, neighbors, and to one's fellow citizens--by fostering a kind of cosmopolitanism: the theater-goer learns to identify with a wide variety of different kinds of men

and to concern himself with the fate of people whom he has never met and who are not linked to him by familial or political ties. Cosmopolitanism, however, is one of the most important qualities shared by the philosopher, the promeneur solitaire, and Emile. Neither the philosopher nor the promeneur solitaire recognizes particular duties, as opposed to a duty to humanity in general, or rather, both include the whole human race within the confines of their benevolence.²²

Because the theater encourages cosmopolitanism, it is, from the stand-point of the highest human types, simply good. Moreover, if the theater is compatible with the life of a promeneur solitaire or of an Emile, which are lives according to nature, it loses its unnatural status. That it is compatible with such lives, and is indeed necessary to them, is apparent from the place of the theater in Emile's education and from the fact that the promeneur solitaire is a playwright, or at least was so at one stage in his life.

The above is obviously subversive of Rousseau's stated intentions in the Letter as well as inappropriate to his Genevan audience. If the theater is simply good in terms of the most comprehensive perspective, and if this is openly stated, Rousseau's rhetoric against the theater is undermined. Even more than this, Rousseau's role as a defender of Geneva would be called into question. Geneva is a particular society embracing a number of family units, and the ties which bind society and the family together are particularistic, thus opposed to the cosmopolitanism which a comprehensive and philosophic inquiry into the worth of the theater would show to be associated with the highest type of human life.

That the theater is simply good from the stand-point of the philosopher, the promeneur solitaire, or Emile does not mean that it is good for everyone: philosophers, promeneurs solitaires, and Emiles are rarities, and their respective ways of life are simply inaccessible to most men. The theater may be bad for the husband, parent, neighbor, and citizen, and it must not be forgotten that Rousseau's own cosmopolitanism leads him to include such men within the scope of his benevolence. Rousseau's abrupt termination of his "philosophic" inquiry into the nature of the theater can thus be understood as being in the interests of the people of Geneva, the many; to have pushed that inquiry to its conclusion would have been to call their way of life into question by suggesting to them the superiority of other ways of life, ways of life which are inaccessible to them.

If Rousseau's initial argument concerning the theater is unsuited to his intended audience, would it not have been reasonable for him to omit that argument altogether? To ask this, however, is to forget that the fragment of argument actually presented by Rousseau issues in a judgement which is eminently suited to both his purpose and his audience: before abandoning it, Rousseau employs this line of reasoning to label the theater as "unnatural" and as a subverter of those forms of association which most men hold in highest regard. That this judgement is incorrect is not readily apparent to the casual reader. Moreover, Rousseau's remarks that the language employed is no longer "seasonable," and thus no longer understood, suggests not so much that this language will be completely obscure to most of his readers, but that it will be misinterpreted. The prevalence of such a mistaken interpretation, an interpretation deliberately fostered by the incompleteness of Rousseau's argument,

is what renders his argument not inappropriate to his rhetorical purposes; he can depend upon most men to draw the wrong conclusion from his remarks. At the same time, Rousseau's remarks concerning the unseasonableness of his language, together with the abrupt termination of his discussion of the theater in esse, suggests to the careful reader that there is more to Rousseau's argument than immediately meets the eye and that the obvious conclusion to be drawn from his reasoning is incorrect, because incomplete. That Rousseau provides such a signpost supports our earlier suspicions that his intentions are more than simply rhetorical, as well as our suspicions that the Letter is directed at another audience besides the people of Geneva, i.e., at those for whom philosophic language is not entirely unseasonable and who are capable, on their own initiative, of following a philosophic argument to its final conclusion. At the very least, Rousseau is warning such men to beware of a superficial interpretation of the Letter and, in particular, to beware of taking his condemnation of the theater as unnatural at face value.

Wise men do not, as Rousseau observes in the Social Contract, use their own language when speaking to the many, since they would not be understood. In a like manner, the wise man does not speak to his fellows in the language of the many, since "there are thousands of kinds of ideas which it is impossible to translate into the language of the people."²⁴ Rousseau's initial argument against the theater is couched in philosophic language, the language of the wise. Thus, because the Letter is a popular work, a work readily accessible to the many, he deliberately courts misunderstanding by the majority of his readers. Even more than this, it is possible to say that the primary addressee of at least Rousseau's initial discussion of the theater, if not of the Letter

as a whole, is the wise man or the philosopher, insofar as the language employed is peculiarly appropriate to him. To say this is not necessarily to contradict our earlier point that Rousseau seems to regard the true philosopher as largely extinct. To possess a philosophic nature, a nature which fits one for philosophy and renders one open to philosophic language, is not always to be a philosopher; an individual with a philosophic nature is only more or less capable of becoming a philosopher.²⁵ It may thus be Rousseau's intention to aid in the development of this potential by exposing the proto-philosopher to the peculiar charms of philosophic discourse, in much the same way that Socrates attempts to win Glaucon to philosophy in the Republic.

Rousseau's rejection of the language of philosophic discourse as "unseasonable" leads him to search for a language which is more easily understood. To render the problem of the theater into a more easily understood language and one more appropriate to his rhetorical purposes, Rousseau must redefine that problem in such a way that the language of philosophy is no longer necessary for its solution. Specifically, Rousseau proceeds to reformulate the problem of the theater in such a way that it becomes relevant to and can be understood by political men. As we have seen, what makes the question of whether the theater is good or bad in itself a peculiarly philosophic question is its generality, its complete abstraction from considerations of time and place. In order to change this from a philosophic to a political question, one must consider the effect of the theater on a specific political order. The question of context is all-important, politically speaking.²⁶

What is it that characterizes a given polity, that sets it off as different from all others? What is it that must be taken into account

when evaluating the effect of the theater on a specific political order? Rousseau's answer to these questions is, "the people:" "The theater is made for the people, and it is only by its effects on the people that we can determine its absolute qualities." In his examination of the theater in and of itself, Rousseau has, in abstracting from questions of time and place, also abstracted from human diversity; he has spoken only of the effect of the theater on Man in general, and not of its effect on specific men. This is not to suggest that there is no such thing as human nature for Rousseau. We know this to be untrue: "Man is one, I admit it." Rather, it is to say that--

. . . man modified by religions, governments, laws, customs, prejudices, and climates becomes so different from himself that one ought not to seek among us for what is good for men in general, but only for what is good for them in this time or that country.²⁷

Rousseau is thus abandoning not only the language of philosophic discourse in favor of a more political language, but the realm of nature and the natural as well. The universality of both philosophy and nature are equally inappropriate to most men. Philosophy shows that a way of life according to nature may be best for man qua man, but such a life is attainable only by the few. A return to a life according to nature requires that one shed all those qualities which are the product of a particular time or place, but most men are inexorably determined by such influences; only a very rare individual is capable of leading the cosmopolitan life of a philosopher, a promeneur solitaire, or of an Emile. Rousseau thus turns away from nature and philosophy and toward the political in the interest of the common man, "the many."

The preceding serves to partially explain why Rousseau's thought as a whole tends to oscillate between three distinct and seemingly

incompatible positions: (1) a criticism of modernity in general, and modern society in particular, based upon a relatively simplistic appeal to "nature;" (2) a very different criticism of modernity founded upon an appeal to the virtue of the ancient city; and (3), a subtle praise of modernity for its cosmopolitanism and humanity, together with an implicit criticism of both ancient virtue and the simplistic conception of nature upon which the other two positions are founded.²⁸ The solution to the problem of modernity associated with the third position--that of the philosopher, the promeneur solitaire, and Emile--is best in the abstract, but is impracticable insofar as the majority of men is concerned. The solution associated with the first position is no solution at all: a return en masse to the state of nature as it is pictured in the Second Discourse is simply impossible, and would be undesirable even if it were possible. Nevertheless, Rousseau's articulation of this position in the Second Discourse and elsewhere does serve the highly useful purpose of laying bare many of the shortcomings of modern society. Lastly, the solution associated with the second position--the establishment of something approximating the ancient city--is both possible, however improbable, and is accessible to most men. Thus, while this solution is second best, it is often preferable to the "best" solution because it is applicable to men as such, and not just to certain rare individuals.

Ultimately, the difference between the two feasible solutions to the problem of modernity put forward by Rousseau corresponds to the difference between philosophy and nature, on the one hand, and politics and the city, on the other. Nature has been lost, and only philosophy can regain it, but in moving beyond nature, man has become political, or at

least potentially so, and a certain kind of political life can serve as an alternative to a life according to nature.

The worth of the theater can thus only be measured in terms of its effect on a specific people. The diversity of national characters makes such an approach mandatory. The nature of a given people cannot even be treated as a constant over time; as the factors which act to determine a people's character change, so too does that character. Consequently, Rousseau observes, not only were the works of Menander--which were more or less suited to the Athenians--out of place in Rome, but those entertainments which were salutary in republican Rome were out of place in imperial Rome.²⁹ This observation is extremely suggestive. In the first place, both Athens and Paris are employed by Rousseau as symbols of corruption and of cities where virtue had succumbed to the untrammelled development of the sciences and arts; whereas republican Rome, Sparta, and Geneva are employed as symbols of that stern republican virtue which Rousseau so admired.³⁰ Thus, the importation of the plays of Menander into Rome suggests the spread of the theater from Paris to Geneva, with the inappropriateness of the former implying a similar inappropriateness in the latter: for Rousseau's actual remarks, one could, without deviating from his meaning and intent, substitute "Paris" for "Athens," "Voltaire" for "Menander," and "Geneva" for "Rome." Secondly, the fact that the theater was employed by the original founders of Calvinist Geneva as a vehicle for public instruction, when combined with his observation of the Roman theater, is also suggestive. Rousseau's observation concerning the contrasting effect of a given amusement on the citizens of the Roman republic and the subjects of the Empire may be applicable to Geneva as well: what was tolerable and even beneficial at

the founding of Geneva may no longer be so, not because the amusement in question has changed, but because the character of the citizen body and/or the political order has altered, with the implication that present day Geneva is less "virtuous" than the Republic at its founding.

Rousseau next turns to the question of whether the theater can, even potentially, be used as an instrument for reshaping individual and public morals and behavior. That it could be so employed was the primary argument of the supporters of the theater. Rousseau, however, reaches an opposite conclusion. Because all entertainments³¹ are ultimately founded on their capacity to give pleasure, any utility associated with them is purely secondary and accidental.³² Furthermore, because such entertainments as the theater must succeed in pleasing the people who attend them, they can never be used as a vehicle for changing a people's character. A people's existing character determines what pleases them, and only that pleases which is in accord with their existing character:

An intrepid, grave, and cruel people wants deadly and perilous festivals in which valor and composure shine. A ferocious and intense people wants blood, combat, and terrible passions. A voluptuous people wants music and dance. A gallant people wants love and civility. A frivolous people wants joking and ridicule.³³

In order to give pleasure, then, an entertainment must cater to and promote the existing tendencies of a people. Where one is seeking to reform a people, however, the problem is to alter or moderate its penchants. A people already possessed of a good moral character would indeed seem to be susceptible to such entertainments as are morally uplifting, but such a people scarcely needs the theater to teach it virtue.

A good deal of the problem derives from the fact that, "The stage is in general a painting of the human passions."³⁴ These passions in turn have their counterparts in each and every individual. Because an

author must please and entertain his audience, he must necessarily cater to those passions for which his audience has a high regard, that is, those passions which are most pronounced in the individual members of the audience. To depict such passions in a derogatory manner, to portray them as undesirable, would be to alienate one's audience. Consequently, an author can hold up to ridicule only those passions which are already held in low esteem, while at the same time he must favorably depict and embellish those that are highly regarded, for it is only through the latter that he can hold the spectator's interest. For this reason, the dramatist is limited to following public opinion, and is completely incapable of directing or reforming it. To speak, as d'Alembert does, of the educational value of the theater is therefore to speak nonsense. For this reason, too, the theater cannot be reformed: Molière and Corneille, who have been credited with having effected such a reform, in fact did no such thing; they were simply following the changing taste of the public, which had become dissatisfied with the existing theater.

The character of the theater is thus always relative to the character of its audience. Those plays which are successful become so only by appealing to preexisting taste:

It is said that a good play never fails. Indeed, I believe it; this is because a good play never shocks the morals of its time. Who doubts that the best plays of Sophocles would fall flat in our theater? We would be unable to put ourselves in the places of men who are so totally dissimilar.³⁵

Specifically, then, to be successful a play must depict characters with whom the audience can identify. What is especially significant, however, is Rousseau's reference to Sophocles. The men whom Sophocles depicted are totally dissimilar to modern men, but this must mean that the man of antiquity is totally dissimilar to modern man:³⁶ Sophocles' plays could

only have been as successful as we know that they were if he had accurately portrayed his contemporaries. If we knew Rousseau's opinion concerning the men of antiquity, then, we would also know something about his opinion concerning modern men in general, and the Genevans in particular. In several of his works, he readily admits that he considers ancient man to be much the superior of modern man in terms of his virtue in general, and especially in terms of civic or political virtue.³⁷ If this is true, then Rousseau's seemingly off-handed reference to Sophocles contains important implications; he is not as convinced of Genevan virtue as he would have the casual reader to believe. As was indicated earlier, this idea of a possible deficiency of Genevan virtue is a recurring one in the Letter, but it is an idea which is never explicitly stated, and which is in fact studiously camouflaged. Once again Rousseau's prudence is at work: to state openly that the average Genevan is not virtuous, or is so only in part, would be not only to run the risk of inciting public indignation against oneself, but also to tacitly attack the existing order in Geneva. And, while that order may not be simply virtuous--or in contrast to Sparta, the Athens of Solon, or republican Rome--it is virtuous relative to most, if not all, of the other states of Europe. Moreover, the general tendency of the modern age is, according to Rousseau, to preclude the development of republican virtue, and to undermine and subvert it where it still survives. Thus, to call the virtue of Geneva into question in the interest of a quasi-ideal virtue which has, given modern conditions, ceased to be possible, would be only to participate in the destruction of a reasonably livable edifice, without the hope of erecting anything better, or even as good, in its place. The demand for an impossible perfection can be just as

dangerous for a republican order as the most anti-republican ideology.³⁸ For this reason, Rousseau prudently refrains from stating his true opinion of the status of Genevan civic virtue.

Rousseau's analysis of the relationship between the theater and its audience leads him inexorably to the conclusion that--

. . . the general effect of the theater is to strengthen the national character, to augment the natural inclinations, and to give a new energy to all the passions.³⁹

From this, it would seem to follow that the effect of the theater would be salutary where the character of the people was good, and harmful where that character was bad. However, Rousseau observes, even in regard to the former situation, it remains to be examined whether the repeated excitation of the passions by the theater does not in the long run incite men to vice. Even the most praiseworthy of the passions can be overstimulated. Rousseau thus seems to follow the ancients in regarding moderation as indispensable to virtue.⁴⁰ The overstimulation of the passions then--insofar as it leads to immoderate behavior--necessarily subverts virtue, and it is precisely such an overstimulation of the passions which it is the tendency of the theater to produce.

There is a tradition of dramatic criticism dating back to Aristotle which directly contradicts Rousseau's assertion that the theater tends to overstimulate the passions. According to this tradition, the drama, and especially the tragedy, performs a cathartic function, in that it excites the passions only to exhaust them harmlessly within the confines of the theater; one thus emerges from a dramatic performance purged of excessive passion and emotion.⁴¹ Rousseau cites, in addition to this tradition, a number of other related arguments which have been put forward in opposition to his position: the fact that the tragedy aims at

exciting the passions of the audience by means of the passions depicted on the stage does not mean that it seeks to elicit the same passions in the spectator, but rather it is often the case that the aim is to elicit sentiments opposed to those shown; the accurate depiction of the passions, and all the suffering attendant on them, serves to evoke such passions in the spectator; and, lastly, if the power of the drama to excite the passions is misused, this is the fault of the individual artist and not of the art.⁴²

Rousseau's response to the above arguments is two-fold. In the first place, the argument that the theater teaches us to avoid the passions "with all the care of which we are capable," by depicting the disastrous consequences which result from giving into them, is obviously incorrect; it is simply a reformulation of the already discredited idea that the theater is capable of effecting a reformation in morals: since the theater must necessarily cater to and embellish those passions which a people holds in high regard, it cannot at the same time portray those passions as anything less than desirable. In the second place, the theater, far from purging the spectator of passion, softens his resistance to the passions in general. Moreover, where passion is opposed to passion in an attempt to balance them, all that is achieved is the general stimulation of the passions: "Do we not know that all the passions are sisters and that one alone suffices for arousing thousands, and that to combat one by the other is only to make the heart more sensitive to them all?"⁴³ One thus becomes accustomed to having one's passions excited, and this carries over into life outside the theater.

Only reason can subdue the passions and purge man of them, but it is precisely reason which is not at home in the theater. The appeal of

the theater is based upon its capacity to depict and embellish the passions. Thus, the man without passions, or who always masters them, would be without appeal on the stage: ". . . a stoic in tragedy would be an insufferable figure; in comedy he would at most cause laughter."⁴⁴ Rousseau's remarks here prefigure his discussion of Alceste in the Misanthrope, but they also serve to recall Aristophanes' ridicule of Socrates in The Clouds. Of the two, Socrates and Alceste, Socrates is the man of reason par excellence, the philosopher; yet, Socrates, particularly in the Symposium, is portrayed by Plato as being a preeminently passionate or "erotic" man. Moreover, the passion which characterizes Socrates is intimately connected with his reason; his passion for wisdom, his all-consuming pursuit of it, leads him to neglect his family, his occupation, and his civic duties for a life of "idle conversation" in the marketplace.⁴⁵ Reason is thus not a panacea in regard to the passions, as Rousseau seems to imply. It is however antithetical to the passions which tend to be depicted on the stage. The only passion compatible with reason is that of the philosopher, and such a passion has no place in the character of the many who constitute the audience; hence, in that the spectator cannot identify with this passion, it cannot hold his interest, except as a subject for ridicule. Moreover, reason is an antidote to the passions depicted on the stage only insofar as the philosopher is concerned, because it is only in the case of the true philosopher that a cultivated reason does not serve as an instrument of the passions, and so of vice.⁴⁶ For common men, as for savages, "It is neither the growth of enlightenment nor the restraint of the law, but the calm of the passions and the ignorance of vice which prevent them from doing evil."⁴⁷

If reason has little effect in curbing the passions of most men, why does Rousseau emphasize its absence from the theater? Might it not be the case that, insofar as the theater is opposed to reason, and consequently to the philosopher, it is also opposed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the philosopher being one of his guises? This possibility is supported by a note which Rousseau appends to the argument under consideration:

. . . let a man righteous and virtuous, but simple and crude, with neither love nor gallantry and who speaks no fine phrases, be put on the french stage; let a prudent man without prejudices be put on it, one who, having been affronted by a bully, refuses to go and have his throat cut by the offender; and let the whole theatrical art be exhausted in rendering these characters as appealing to the French people as the Cid: I will be wrong if it succeeds.⁴⁸

The language which Rousseau employs here is the very language with which he habitually describes himself.⁴⁹ It is not so much, however, a case of Rousseau being piqued at finding himself possessed of a character which is incompatible with the drama, as it is a question of his fitness to pass judgement on the theater. Insofar as he is free from prejudice, and insofar as his reason has freed him from the tyranny of those passions which the theater tends to incite, it is Rousseau qua philosopher who is qualified to sit in judgement on the theater. It is important to note, however, that the passage quoted above refers to two different characters--one prudent, and the other righteous and virtuous--both of which are out of place on the stage. For the time being, Rousseau will judge the theater from the perspective of the man who is prudent and without prejudice, that is, the perspective of the philosopher. Later on, as we shall see, the philosopher will be supplanted by the righteous and virtuous man.

Following his dismissal of the argument that the drama tends to purge one of passion, Rousseau returns to the thematic question of the theater's utility in inculcating good morals and character. The problem, he indicates, is that for a variety of reasons--that is, those previously discussed--the theater is incapable of attaining "that perfection of which it is thought to be susceptible and from producing the advantageous effects that seem to be expected from it."⁵⁰ Moreover, he goes on to say, even if those factors--i.e., the necessity that the theater follow rather than form the taste of its audience--which limit the perfectability of the theater could be overcome, even if the theater could be reformed in such a way as to bring its subject matter into conformity with good morals, and even if the people were "as well disposed as could be wished," all would still be for nought. This is so because the morals of a people can be acted upon in only three ways--through the force of the laws, by means of public opinion, or through an appeal to pleasure--and none of these are capable of being combined with the theater so as to produce the desired effect. The essence of the theater is amusement; hence, the law, which is coercive and so carries the force of necessity, is incompatible with it. To compel attendance at the theater is to destroy the basis of its appeal, to make it a painful necessity rather than a pleasure. The power of the law in connection with the theater is thus limited: it can specify the subject and form of the plays, for example, and can compel attendance, but legislation cannot make such plays pleasurable and amusing. Public opinion, on the other hand, cannot be made dependent on the theater. The actual relationship must rather be the reverse, as has already been established: the theater takes its law from the tastes of the public. As for the appeal to

pleasure, its whole influence is confined to inducing the spectator to return, and this can only be accomplished by catering to his dominant passions.

Although he has seemingly refuted the claim that the theater can perform an educational function, Rousseau does not leave the matter there. Instead, he raises the question of whether there are possibly other means whereby the theater can be employed to alter existing morals. The possibility he chooses to discuss is plausible enough--that the theater, employed in the proper manner, can make virtue lovable and vice odious--but it serves to launch him into what amounts to a sermon on the innate goodness of man:

The source of the concern which attaches us to what is decent and which inspires us with an aversion for evil is in us and not in the plays. . . . The love of the morally beautiful is a sentiment as natural to the human heart as love of self; it is not born out of an arrangement of scenes; the author does not bring it; he finds it there; and out of this pure sentiment, to which he appeals, are born the sweet tears which he causes to flow.⁵¹

Man naturally prefers the good and abhors the vicious. Consequently, the theater can teach him nothing in this regard. This statement, however, seems to be in contradiction with Rousseau's earlier assertion that the theater appeals only to the passions. If the theater is capable of directing its appeal to that part of man which is naturally good, how is it necessarily a corrupting influence?

As previously noted, Rousseau is looking at the theater primarily from the perspective of civil society. It is the fact that he is operating from such a perspective that allows him to reconcile the seemingly conflicting statements that, on the one hand, the theater corrupts man through its appeal to the passions, and, on the other, that it is capable of arousing man's innate love of the good. This contradiction

disappears once it is recognized that, for Rousseau, the good citizen cannot be equated with the man who is good according to nature, and that man's "innate" goodness is not the same as, and indeed is in conflict with, the virtue of the citizen. The statement quoted on the preceding page refers to man as he is by nature, but for Rousseau this does not tell the whole story concerning human character. When he enters society, natural man undergoes a transformation: "nature," hitherto the sole determinant of his character, is augmented, and sometimes completely supplanted, by the molding force of convention. Civil man and natural man differ qualitatively, just as the state of nature differs from the state of civil society.⁵² Once this is recognized, however, the question arises of whether Rousseau is not once again employing language which is "no longer seasonable in our times" when he refers to man as he is by nature. This suspicion is confirmed by a passage from the Emile:

He who wishes to preserve the primacy of the natural sentiments in civil society does not know what he wants. Always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either a man or a citizen; he will be good neither for himself nor for others.⁵³

To see why this is so, we must look more closely at the contrasting characters of the citizen and of man as he is by nature. In the broadest possible terms, the latter is characterized by a love of self, the former by a selfless patriotism and concern for duty. The problem with man's innate goodness, as far as the civil state is concerned, is that it is inextricably linked to love of self. Both are "natural sentiments," but goodness is an effect of man's natural love for himself: through his ability to recognize a kinship between himself and other men, man is naturally inclined to avoid doing harm to others except--and this exception is crucial--when his self-preservation or self-interest is at

stake.⁵⁴ This leads Rousseau to qualify his statement that man naturally loves what is good and abhors what is evil, by indicating that such is the case only when his own interests are not involved:

The heart of man is always right concerning that which has no personal relation to himself . . . but when our interest is involved, our sentiments are soon corrupted. And it is only then that we prefer the evil which is useful to the good that nature makes us love.⁵⁵

In the pure state of nature, this qualification was of little import: since men were almost totally independent of one another, since they had few needs and each was fully capable of satisfying these himself, and since they came into contact with each other only infrequently and by chance, it was in no man's interests to attempt to take advantage of his fellows, and man's natural goodness was allowed free rein.⁵⁶ In the social state, however, the very opposite is the case. Men live together in close proximity, and are dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their multitudinous passions and desires, passions and desires which are themselves products of the social state; consequently, it is often to one's advantage to do harm to another. As far as the social state is concerned, lying, cheating, theft, and even murder are compatible with man's natural goodness, because the sphere in which that sentiment operates has been greatly reduced due to the increased scope of one's self-interest.⁵⁷

In the Second Discourse, Rousseau makes it clear that the root of the problem, the source of this expansion in the scope of man's subjective self-interest, is the transformation of love-of-self (amour de soi) into self-love (amour propre). The former characterizes natural man, the latter man in society. These two sentiments involve radically different orientations, despite the fact that they both involve a kind of

self-interest.⁵⁸ Amour de soi refers to the preference which man naturally gives to himself in questions of self-preservation; it is the self-interest of man in the state of nature, of man qua animal, of man before he becomes truly human. Speaking of such a man, Rousseau says--

His desires do not exceed his physical needs. The only goods that he knows in the universe are nourishment, a female, and repose; the only evils that he fears are pain and hunger.⁵⁹

The self-interest of man as he is by nature is thus extremely limited; its operation is restricted to the satisfaction of a limited number of physical, hence objective, needs. Moreover, limited as this self-interest is, his pursuit of it is limited even further by the innate "pity" which he feels for others like him.⁶⁰ The maxim by which natural man can be said to live is thus: "Do what is good for yourself with the least possible harm to others."

Man in the social state is another proposition entirely. The development of his reason, and consequently of his imagination, has served to greatly expand his desires, which are no longer limited to the satisfaction of physical needs, and his passions have developed concomitantly with his reason. Above all, amour propre has replaced amour de soi. The mutual dependence of men, the unequal development of capacities which were dormant in natural man, the multitude of new passions and desires, in the social state lead to a situation in which each man attempts to assert himself at the expense of his fellows: he seeks to make use of other men, to make them subordinate to his needs, desires, and passions; having learned to make invidious comparisons, he seeks prestige, position, and honor, so as to be above other men. For these reasons, social man becomes a slave to appearance. He comes to care about how he looks to others; he becomes preoccupied with the image he projects, a preoccupation

which eventually develops to such an extent that he comes to equate the image with the self.⁶¹ Amour propre, then, refers to self-love, where the self is defined in terms of the social image one wishes to project. The problem here is that the self-interest of a man characterized by amour propre is essentially limitless, or rather limited only by the extent of his imagination:

For man in society . . . it is first of all a question of providing for the necessary, then for the superfluous; next come delights, and then immense riches, and then subjects, and then slaves; he does not have a moment's respite. What is most singular here is that the less the needs are natural and pressing, the more the passions augment, and, what is worse, the power to satisfy them; consequently, after long prosperity, after having engorged much treasure and desolated many men, my hero will finish by destroying everything until he is sole master of the universe. In sum, such is the moral picture, if not of human life, at least of the secret pretensions in the heart of every civilized man.⁶²

Such a man sees others only as objects to be manipulated, or as instruments for the satisfaction of his desires. At his most extreme, the man characterized by amour propre is a solipsist; he comes to regard his fellow men as merely the mirror from which his image is reflected back to him.

Amour propre does not completely dominate social man, although it comes close to doing so. When his subjective interests are not at issue, social man is still capable of hearkening to the voice of pity. Unfortunately, the pervasiveness of amour propre tends to limit the operation of this sentiment to the context of the family, and to those situations in which one is a mere spectator. This is why the theater can appeal to man's natural goodness, but it is equally why this capacity is without social utility. The spectator is passive: he sees but does not act; he hears, but does not speak. As a spectator, man is capable of feeling pity for the unfortunate, hatred for the vicious, and admiration for the

virtuous, but, as soon as he leaves the theater, as soon as he becomes something other than a spectator, his amour propre reasserts itself.

It was his analysis of the difference between the social state and the state of nature which led Rousseau to pen the immortal words:

Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. Many a one believes himself the master of others, yet he remains a greater slave than they.⁶³

The more a man is motivated by amour propre, the more he must attempt to make use of others, both as the mirror in which his image is reflected, and to satisfy his multiplied desires. To maintain his self-image, certain "props" are required: wealth, prestige, power, etc., props which come to be regarded as needs. The acquisition of such, however, is beyond the power of the individual acting independently. Other men thus become necessary to him; even the tyrant depends upon his bodyguard, and upon the fear which he induces in his subjects, to maintain his aura of power. To the extent that this is so, such a man comes to depend upon the opinion which others have of him, and his efforts are directed toward influencing others to hold what is, from his point of view, the correct opinion. He becomes, in effect, the "other directed man" of David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd,⁶⁴ the very opposite of autonomous man. In the social state, every man is subject in one way or another to other men: the tyrant because he must overawe his subjects;⁶⁵ the subject because his very life is at the mercy of those in power; and men in general because the division of labor ensures their dependence on one another for even the most basic of necessities.

Most social ills are thus consequences of the fact that society constitutes an unnatural environment for natural man, whose basically "good" sentiments and inclinations are either perverted or extinguished

altogether. The problem of the incompatibility between man and his environment, however, cannot be solved by returning en masse to the state of nature, since to do so would be to renounce all that is uniquely human in man. It is only by leaving the state of nature that man becomes an intelligent and potentially moral being.⁶⁶ Besides, as we have previously observed, Rousseau believes that the course of human development is unilinear. The problem of the disproportion between man and his social environment can thus be solved only by going forward, by further altering man's character, by further "denaturing" him.⁶⁷ In order to make man fit for society, it is necessary--

. . . to transform each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he receives, in a way, his life and being; to alter the constitution of man in order to strengthen it; to substitute a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature.⁶⁸

This is the process by which Rousseau's "legislator" creates a people from an aggregation of individuals, but it is equally the on-going process by which a people maintains both its identity and its freedom. The aim of this process is the inculcation of "virtue." "Virtue" differs from "goodness" in that it is not natural. It is unnatural because it involves, in a sense, the "forgetting" of one's self, the subordination of self-interest to the common good, an adherence to civic and moral duties even at one's own expense.⁶⁹ Amour propre must obviously be expunged, but so too must amour de soi. Instead of the sense of moi individu which is natural to man, and which is the source of both amour de soi and amour propre, the citizen is provided with an artificial moi commun. This is the basic task of civil society. This is what Rousseau means when he says that, "He who desires to preserve the primacy of the

natural sentiments in civil society does not know what he wants." Civil society comes into being only when the most natural of all the sentiments, preference for oneself, has been suppressed.

This does not mean that the thrust of Rousseau's thought is totalitarian, or even authoritarian, although it has been so interpreted by certain writers.⁷⁰ According to Rousseau, only a people which is virtuous in the sense described above can be said to be "free." For him, as for modern thought in general, "freedom" is equated with "autonomy," obedience solely to one's own will.⁷¹ However, Rousseau's solution to the problem of reconciling "freedom," so defined, with the political realm differs radically from that solution which tends to characterize modern thought as a whole. Modern thinkers--both "liberal" and "socialist"--tend to seek to actualize this conception of freedom by shrinking the political realm--what they consider to be the realm of coercion--and by greatly expanding the private, or individual, sphere of activity.⁷² Rousseau, in contrast, argues for an expansion of the political realm: for him, freedom can be said to exist only when all citizens will the common good, and when the only positive law to which obedience is owed is the product of such a willing in common. To this requirement, Rousseau adds another: that each citizen be completely dependent upon the community as a whole, that he alienate to the community all his rights and powers without exception. The former requirement guarantees that each citizen is subject only to laws which he himself has willed, while the latter ensures that no one will be subject to the arbitrary will of another:

In sum, each, in giving himself to all, gives himself to no one; and, as there is not a single associate over whom we do not acquire the same rights which we have ceded him over ourselves, we acquire the equivalent of all that we have lost, and more power to preserve that which we have.⁷³

Such a definition of freedom is exclusively political in nature. Since all of the individual's rights and powers are ceded to the community, its writ runs, potentially at least, everywhere. All aspects of the citizen's life come under the authority of the political realm. The private sphere, sanctified by most modern thinkers, is thus almost completely eliminated, and this is necessary given Rousseau's view of the social state. Amour propre and freedom are incompatible. But the private--that which belongs peculiarly to the individual--is the breeding ground of amour propre. Thus, only by a complete identification with the moi commun, that is to say with the community as a whole, can man's life in its totality become free.

Citizenship is a matter of self-repression, but because of this the civic order does not need to make use of coercion. The fundamental function of the political order is educational: children--that is, potential citizens--must be brought up in such a way that they come to identify spontaneously with the community as a whole; they must be taught to suppress in the common interest those passions and desires which tend to lead the individual to assert himself and his private interests at the expense of his fellows; they must, in other words, be imbued with a selfless patriotism. Where such an educational process is in effect, there is no need to subject the individual citizen to external coercion, since by the time he reaches adulthood his education has made him completely self-disciplined. With such an up-bringing, the citizen can be allowed, for all intents and purposes, full autonomy.⁷⁴

Only a virtuous people is capable of reconciling freedom, understood as autonomy, with the social state. Thus, only a virtuous people is capable of true self-rule--the rule of general laws, directed at the

good of the community as a whole, binding on all equally, and in the making of which all have an equal voice. Ideally, the virtue of the citizen body ensures that all laws are in accord with the will of each and every citizen, in that all laws are directed toward the good of the community, and every virtuous citizen wills, by definition, the common good.⁷⁵

Rousseau's reasoning leads inevitably to the conclusion that what determines whether a people is free or not is ultimately the presence or absence of virtue,⁷⁶ rather than the existence of a particular governmental mechanism. This is not to say that institutions are irrelevant to the problem of maintaining freedom, but that their importance is secondary in nature. Where the people are not virtuous, private interest, selfishness, and amour propre reign supreme. But amour propre means slavery to Rousseau, slavery both for the ruled and for those who rule over them. A republic then is something more for Rousseau than a mere aggregation of individuals governed by majority rule; rather, it is a concert of wills, characterized by a concern for what is in the best interest of all; it is a "commonwealth" according to the original and literal meaning of the term. The continued existence of such a commonwealth, however, depends upon a continued congruence in the wills of its members. Once private interest intrudes at the expense of what is common, the end of freedom for all is in sight. But this in turn implies that anything which tends to destroy such a congruence should be banned from a republic, in that it threatens the moral unity of the community, that moral unity which is the sine qua non of political freedom.

It will hopefully be remembered that the preceding digression was occasioned by Rousseau's assertion of man's natural "goodness," together

with the implication that the theater is capable of addressing itself to this goodness. Why then, we wondered at the time, is Rousseau so adamant in insisting that the theater's appeal is to the passions, and why is he so insistent on condemning it? The preceding discussion has put us in a position to address these questions more fully.

The theater is capable of appealing to man's natural goodness, but the civic order is founded on the citizen, on denatured man. The sentiments of natural man are both more and less exclusive than those required of the citizen. When his interests are involved, natural man is the complete egotist; when this is not the case, however, the suffering of any human being will elicit his sympathy. The citizen, on the other hand, is concerned solely with the community of which he is a part; civic virtue requires that what is common take precedence over what is purely one's own, that the public interest supplant the individual's private needs and desires, and that one's self-interest be sacrificed to one's duties. Moreover, one's duties are owed to the other members of the community, and not to mankind in general. A citizen must, for example, sometimes go to war in the interest of the community's preservation. Such a situation is obviously not in his own interests--the fact that he may lose his life precludes this--but he nevertheless cannot give way to the sentiment of natural beneficence as regards his people's enemies. For similar reasons, the citizen must have no sympathy for the condemned criminal who has, by his actions, placed himself outside of the moral community, and who is executed "less as a citizen than as an enemy." Moreover, the citizen must recognize that ". . . such an enemy is not a moral person, he is only a man."⁷⁷

What is foreign has no claim on the citizen as such. All his affections are concentrated on the community: "Every patriot is hard on strangers; they are only men, they are nothing in his eyes."⁷⁸ The strength of the social bond depends upon a complete commitment to the community, and anything which detracts from this commitment weakens the commonwealth. In a sense, the amour propre which characterized social man has not been eliminated, but redirected and expanded to include the entire community within its scope. The individual citizen identifies himself with the community of which he is a member, but this expanded "self" still has the same relationship to the rest of the world as does the more limited self of social man. For this reason, "virtue" has meaning only within the confines of the community.⁷⁹

It is relatively easy now to see why the theater's appeal to man's natural goodness is implicitly condemned by Rousseau: even if the theater does not directly corrupt the citizen by awakening his self-interest or passions, it does so indirectly by inducing him to concern himself with beings outside the bounds of the political community, that is to say, with mere men. In this way, the strength of the social bond, which depends upon the maintenance of its peculiar mixture of exclusiveness and inclusiveness is attenuated,⁸⁰ and for this reason the theater is incompatible with a republican political order. Even more than this, it can never survive in such an order: virtuous men will not attend the theater because they have their duties to attend to, and this is the type of man who inhabits a republic, properly speaking.

Rousseau himself was the first to recognize that the perfectly virtuous republic described above is an impossible ideal, and particularly so in modern times.⁸¹ Once this is admitted, the problem of the theater

becomes one of considering its effect on a less than completely virtuous community. Here, the theater's claim to teach a love of virtue deserves at least a consideration. Since the simply virtuous citizen will not attend the theater anyway, our problem is reduced to one of examining the theater's impact on those "citizens" who are less than completely virtuous.

Given Rousseau's perspective, two consequences are immediately apparent. In the first place, the theater offers the spectator a surrogate world, a world in which one's duty to virtue is fulfilled by empathy with those characters depicted as virtuous, by weeping at their misfortunes and by wishing them well. The theater thus retails an easy morality. One need only be compassionate; neither exertion nor sacrifice is called for. The danger here is that might one not, from being content with the status of spectator in the theater, become content with being a mere sympathetic onlooker outside the theater as well? The virtue of the citizen, however, is not passive: his duty requires not only that he have the proper feelings but that he act upon them as well. "Duty" implies an overt obligation to the other members of the community. As such, it can only be satisfied by interaction with other men; its demands are not met by the existence of a purely internal feeling of sympathy or well-wishing. The virtue which the theater inculcates is thus not the virtue of the citizen. Moreover, insofar as an attempt is made to use the theater as an instrument for teaching virtue, virtue becomes surrounded with an aura of fantasy. As Rousseau notes: "The more I think about it, the more I find that everything that is portrayed in the theater is not brought nearer to us but made more distant."⁸² In his plan for making the theater a showcase for the virtues, then, d'Alembert is

advocating a course of action which would tend to remove virtue from the world of fact and consign it to the world of fiction. This is true partially because the "perfected" theater would depict something other than existing human beings. To correct existing morals, to provide "lessons in virtue," the theater must depict men not as they are but as they should be. Moreover, the theater possesses rules, principles, and conventions, to say nothing of a morality, which set it apart from the everyday world, just as it possesses its own peculiar language and style of dress.⁸³ Its heroes are more virtuous, its villains more evil, and the situations it depicts less complex, than in the world known to the spectator. It is larger than life, and so creates the impression that the virtues displayed in it are unsuited to actual men. As a result of this, Rousseau argues:

We say to ourselves that none of this is suitable for us, and that we should think ourselves as ridiculous to adopt the virtues of its heroes as it would be to speak in verse or to put on Roman clothing.⁸⁴

Thus, the overall effect of the theater is to relegate duty to the status of "some passing and sterile emotions, to make us applaud our courage in praising that of others, our humanity in pitying the ills that we could have cured, our charity in saying to the poor, 'God will help you'."⁸⁵

The above argument is directed primarily at the tragic theater. The case of the comedy is quite different. It is not, its partisans argue, so much that the comedy teaches us to love virtue, and it is a case of its teaching us to hate vice and the vicious. To effect this, according to Rousseau, the comedy cannot simply portray men as they are:

" . . . in this way morals are not corrected; they are depicted, and an ugly face does not appear ugly to him that wears it."⁸⁶ The alleged

educational capacity of the comedy thus depends upon its ability to caricature the vicious. Caricature, however, does not make its subject the object of hatred, but only of derision and ridicule, and derision and ridicule are not the same as the indignation which vice and viciousness elicit in the virtuous. The good man holds evil in contempt; he does not laugh at it. Derisive laughter is in fact an instrument more suited to vice than virtue: ". . . with it the respect that the heart owes to virtue is attacked at its root, and the love that is felt for it is finally extinguished."⁸⁷ Strangely enough, according to Rousseau, the virtuous man is more naturally the object of ridicule than is the vicious, and this leads to a situation where, ". . . afraid of being ridiculous, men are no longer afraid of being vicious." Why this should be so is not readily apparent. That men greatly fear ridicule is plausible enough, but what requires explanation is Rousseau's assertion that this fear necessarily leads to viciousness, because viciousness is less readily subject to derision than is virtue. In response to this problem, we might begin by noting that the "good man," like the true philosopher, is out of place on the stage, and, as in the case of the philosopher, the attempt to place him there produces either boredom or laughter.⁸⁸ As we have already observed, this is true of the philosopher because his character is such that the audience cannot identify with him, and most particularly because he has succeeded in subordinating his passions to his reason. In the case of the virtuous man, passion is subordinated to duty, but, as we have seen, the theater is essentially a "painting of the human passions," and its appeal is primarily to the passions of the spectators. The virtuous man thus appears as a drab nonentity on the stage. His sole effect is to point up the passions of the other

characters; and, to make the best use of this effect, a dramatic author naturally tends to employ the virtuous man as a foil and a butt. Furthermore, since we are here assuming an audience which is less than completely virtuous, there is a sense in which the virtuous man, by his very nature, appears ridiculous: for amour propre dominated social man, the virtuous man's apparent lack of concern for his own self-interest is laughable, the height of folly. In addition, and perhaps most telling of all, the virtuous man cares more for duty than appearance. He is thus not one to cultivate the so-called civility and good manners which conceal the vices of social man: he is direct where they are evasive; he is honest where they are hypocritical; and he speaks plainly where they employ flowery phrases. For this reason, the virtuous man appears uncouth as well as foolish.

In sum, the capacity of the theater to reform morals is a chimera: ". . . everything compels us to abandon this vain idea that some wish to give us the perfection of a form of theater directed toward public utility."⁸⁹ This is so because, even when it attempts to teach virtue, the theater must please its public, and, in order to do so, it must present a distorted vision of man and what he can be. The "poet" is a slave to public opinion. He is compelled to alter "the true relations of things" and to distort the world and man in order to please his audience:

In the comic he diminishes them and sets them beneath man; in the tragic, he extends them to render them heroic and sets them above humanity. Thus, they are never to his measure, and we will always see beings other than our own kind in the theater.⁹⁰

In support of this, Rousseau cites Aristotle's famous statement that, "Comedy aims at imitating men worse, and tragedy men better, than those of today."⁹¹ The problem with such imitation is that, between excess

and defect, the theater finds only that which is useless for its purposes, but it is precisely in this intermediate area that Rousseau locates virtue. Like the ancients, he believes that moderation and virtue overlap. Rousseau's citation of Aristotle thus recalls the latter's doctrine of the mean, but it also suggests another famous Aristotelian teaching as well: only a beast or a god lives outside of a political community.⁹² Aristotle actually speaks of the "polis," but the polis of the Greeks is employed by Rousseau as the archetype of a republican order. If this is so, then the implication seems to be that both comedy and tragedy are apolitical: they portray, respectively, "beasts" and "gods," that is to say, men as worse than they might be or better than is possible. It is, however, the area between these two extremes that the citizen inhabits.

Before proceeding with Rousseau to an examination of the effect of the theater on specific societies, it is necessary to consider what is by far Rousseau's most startling criticism of the theater as a teacher of virtue. Even if we grant, he says in effect, the theater the capacity to present "lessons in virtue," and even if we concede it the power to produce virtuous men, it would still be undesirable. This is so because the theater as a teacher of virtue would most benefit the completely vicious man. The unjust man profits doubly from the effective teaching of virtue: he benefits both from his own injustice toward others, and from their justice in dealing with him.

What more advantageous treaty could he conclude than one obliging the whole world, excepting himself, to be just, so that every man will faithfully render unto him what is due, while he renders no one what he owes?⁹³

Such a man loves virtue, but only in others, because he hopes to profit from it. Moreover, he would be one of the most enthusiastic supporters

of a theater actually capable of making men virtuous. He would attend such a theater because he would see there--

Precisely what he wants to find everywhere: lessons in virtue for the public, from which he excepts himself, and people sacrificing everything to their duty while nothing is exacted from him.⁹⁴

The implications of this argument are quite radical. In the first place, there is a tacit equation of injustice and vice, and justice and virtue; and the claim of the theater to teach virtue is reduced to the claim that it teaches justice. The question remains, however, of whether justice and virtue are simply identical, or whether justice is only one virtue among several. Secondly, justice emerges in Rousseau's argument as a less than simply desirable quality: justice involves "duty" and "sacrifice," whereas the unjust man is free to pursue his own advantage in all things. Furthermore, if it is, as Rousseau states, "a necessary effect of the constitution of things" that the unjust and evil are the greatest beneficiaries of the justice of others,⁹⁵ then it seems that no effort should be made to lead men to virtue. If the vicious benefit, then the virtuous, who are their natural prey, will suffer. But, if the potentially virtuous man is in some sense "better" than the unjust and vicious, should we not give him the preference and refrain from handicapping him with a virtuous character?

Rousseau seems to suggest that, where virtue and vice coexist, the man who practices the latter is better off than his virtuous fellows, and at their expense. This interpretation draws support from the fact that a very similar argument is made by Glaucon, one of the interlocutors in the Republic, to the effect that the perfectly unjust man lives the happiest of lives, while the perfectly just man lives the most miserable.⁹⁶ In the Republic, however, Socrates offers a refutation of Glaucon's

position, and, even though reflection shows this refutation to be defective,⁹⁷ the "unjust speech" is not left in sole possession of the field of battle; indeed, to the unreflective man it may well appear that the unjust speech has been decisively refuted. Seen in this light, Rousseau's failure to counter the unjust speech assumes great significance. The problem we are faced with involves not only the question of how Rousseau, a philosopher committed to, one might even say obsessed by, the idea of virtue, can tacitly agree that the vicious man is better off than the virtuous, but also the conundrum of how he--an exponent of the suppression of morally corrupting works--can allow such dangerous ideas as those embodied in the unjust speech to stand unopposed in a work he himself has written. By not defending justice in such a context, Rousseau shows himself to be unjust.

One possible solution to our problem is indicated by the language Rousseau employs in describing the unjust man. The language is essentially that of the marketplace: ". . . so that everyone will faithfully render unto him what is due him, while he renders no one what he owes;" "He loves virtue in others because he hopes to profit from it. He wants none of it for himself because it would be too costly to him." Thus, for Rousseau, the rewards of virtue are not economic or even material in nature, and virtue is not subject to individual profit and loss accounting. It is for this reason that Rousseau does not attempt to refute the unjust speech; it is impossible to give compelling reasons for always preferring justice to injustice. From the standpoint of individual self-interest, injustice is intrinsically preferable to justice. Furthermore, the superiority of injustice to justice is affirmed by nature: there are no natural duties, and every man naturally prefers himself in all

things.⁹⁸ Justice is thus unnatural in precisely the same sense as civil society was earlier seen to be unnatural:⁹⁹ both the just man and the citizen must, in certain circumstances, forget themselves and sacrifice their interests to their duties. The unnaturalness of the just man, moreover, points to the establishment of civil society as a necessary precondition for his coming into being. The creation of civil society establishes the possibility of justice, i.e., of reciprocal duties between men; indeed, this is the purpose of civil society.¹⁰⁰ In the interest of establishing justice as an external relationship between men, civil society can legitimately employ coercion. Coercion, however, is inefficient and uncertain; while the natural preference for oneself remains, men will be just only insofar as they believe that injustice will be punished. For this reason, civil society aims at denaturing man, and, more specifically, at inculcating a concern for the common good which takes precedence over the natural preference which every man feels for himself. This in turn creates the preconditions for the emergence of justice as a virtue, that is to say, as a highly valued internal quality. "Justice" is thus both an end and a support of civil society.

Rousseau's tacit acceptance of Glaucon's conventionalist argument places justice firmly within civil society, and several important consequences flow from this. In the first place, it results in the assimilation of "the just" to "the legal," or, in slightly more Rousseauian language, to what is in accordance with the general will. Justice is thus shorn of many of its traditional claims to transcendence. This does not mean that what is just, however, always coincides with obedience to those rules which are proclaimed as "laws." Far from it. In those societies which are not governed by the general will, the just deviates

from positive "law," but for Rousseau such rules are not laws properly speaking.¹⁰¹ Secondly, since justice is an artifact of civil society, it is possible only between fellow citizens. Foreigners cannot be treated unjustly, except insofar as the laws of one's own community command or prohibit certain treatment in the interest of the community as a whole. This serves to further elucidate Rousseau's remark, noted earlier, that "Every patriot is hard on strangers: they are only men, they are nothing in his eyes."

Rousseau's acceptance of the conventionalist position creates certain problems. In the first place, it would seem to deprive justice of any effective natural sanction; in particular, it destroys the basis of the argument, one employed by Socrates in the Republic,¹⁰² that the just man, simply because he is just, is better off than the unjust man, no matter how many seeming advantages the latter may enjoy. At the same time, it implies tacit acquiescence in the argument that perfect injustice is the best way of life for man, and that men desire and practice justice only because they are not strong enough or clever enough to do harm to others without suffering harm in return.¹⁰³ This is obviously subversive of human justice. Not only is the whole burden of maintaining justice placed on the political order, with no support from nature, but nature is seen as standing in open opposition to the just and legal. Men who believe that to practice injustice with impunity is better than to be just and is according to nature, and who believe that the only drawback to such practice is the retaliation of other men, are already lawbreakers in their hearts, and only await favorable circumstances to become so in deed as well; but, when all men are potential lawbreakers, the law is ineffective.

Human justice can be saved from the consequences of the conventionalist position in one or more of three ways: by a salutary forgetting or obfuscation of that position; by an appeal to the supernatural; or by the fostering of an essentially nonrational attachment to the laws. Obviously, the best solution to the problem posed by the conventionalist position would involve the utilization of all three of these means, and, in practice, this is precisely what political communities do. They obfuscate the distinction between the legal and the natural, between nomos and physis, most often by both an equation of the traditional and the natural and by ascribing the laws to the gods, who rule both man and nature.¹⁰⁴ In modern times, this has been supplemented by an appeal to natural law, that is to say, by the direct contradiction of the conventionalist position. That, given our tentative acceptance of the conventionalist position, this is a mistake is not at issue here: "lies" are sometimes necessary, according to both Plato and Rousseau, in order to protect men from unwholesome truths.¹⁰⁵

The gods can support human justice not only by serving as the source of law, but also in the capacity of guarantors of that law, by rewarding the just and punishing the law-breaker after their deaths.¹⁰⁶ It is for this reason that the gods have traditionally been treated with utmost respect and deference by the political realm, and it is for this reason too that the political order has so often looked askance on unbelief and heresy. Two of the three charges on which Socrates was indicted, for example, alleged that he did not believe in the gods of the city and that he introduced the worship of new gods;¹⁰⁷ in the eyes of the city, such a man is a potential law-breaker and a subverter of the laws. Lastly, the promptings of nature and reason can be overcome by

sentiment and passion, that is to say, by the inculcation of a feeling of patriotism. A man who loves his country also tends to love its laws, to feel an emotional attachment to them,¹⁰⁸ and to view the law-breaker as akin to, if not identical with, the traitor.¹⁰⁹

For Rousseau, political society stands or falls according to its ability to suppress or overcome knowledge of its conventional origins,¹¹⁰ and on its ability to suppress or replace many of the natural human sentiments. This poses certain problems for the philosopher who is also a citizen. A comprehensive treatment of the problem faced by the political realm requires an inquiry into its origins, but such an inquiry is necessarily subversive. The only practice consonant with both the philosopher's commitment to truth and the political realm's need for obfuscation, therefore, is silence, silence of the kind practiced by Rousseau when faced with the conventionalist argument. Silence alone, however, is an insufficient solution to the problem. As a good citizen, Rousseau cannot allow the conventionalist argument to stand undisputed, but he cannot combat it openly; to do so would be to stir up precisely those doubts concerning the just and the legal which must be suppressed. Therefore, after having allowed the careful or philosophic reader a brief glimpse of the conventionalist argument, alone in all its splendor, Rousseau must draw the veil of obfuscation around it again. This is partially a matter of self-protection. By allowing the unjust speech to stand unrefuted, Rousseau reveals his adherence to the conventionalist position and thus reveals himself to be perfectly unjust. Even more than that, he reveals philosophy to be perfectly unjust, for it is philosophy which allows one to penetrate beneath the myths with which civil society disguises the true character of justice and injustice. From the

standpoint of civil society, the philosopher is supremely dangerous, and his only safety lies in his ability to deceive the defenders of the law as to his actual character. Thus, we should not be surprised to find that in the remainder of the Letter the conventionalist argument is quietly forgotten, and that Rousseau once again explicitly equates justice and virtue with the natural. At the same time, we will not be surprised to discover that those arguments which rest upon such an equation are, when viewed from the perspective of Rousseau's more philosophical and less popular and rhetorical works, essentially defective.

Before ending our consideration of the conventionalist argument in the Letter, one more observation suggests itself. Rousseau's schematic statement of that argument has established that virtue is not subject to a profit and loss accounting, i.e., justice is not intrinsically more profitable to the individual than injustice. This in turn implies that a people which consistently thinks in terms of the marketplace, of profit and loss, is not virtuous, since unjust practices, provided that they are successful, will also be perceived as more profitable than strict justice. The tendency toward cold, rational calculation of profit and loss creates a predisposition toward injustice and lawlessness, and such a predisposition is incompatible with virtue. Moreover, it is bourgeois man, economic man par excellence, who is characterized by precisely this tendency; and this implies that the bourgeoisie as such are incapable of attaining virtue. This teaching is important to the Letter, but it cannot be made explicit. Geneva is, after all, a bourgeois city, a city which lives by trade and trade alone¹¹¹--i.e., by paying careful attention to profit and loss--a city whose very citizens proudly call themselves "burgesses." An attack on the

bourgeoisie, the revelation that they are necessarily less than virtuous, would thus be equivalent to an attack on Geneva itself, something which prudence dictates that Rousseau avoid, both for his own sake and for the sake of any vestige of virtue and republican liberty remaining to the city. In point of fact, Geneva may have been preserved from absolute corruption by those very pastors whom Rousseau defended at the beginning of the Letter. Geneva still takes its religion seriously, and this tends to result in virtuous behavior, if not a virtuous character. By inculcating belief in an afterlife, together with belief in an all wise and powerful God who rewards the upright and punishes the evil and unjust, the clergy introduces a nonmaterial factor into the Genevan bourgeoisie's utility calculations, a factor which tends to bias those calculations in the direction of virtuous behavior.¹¹²

NOTES

Chapter II

¹Political Economy (O.C., III, 252).

²The French term is "moeurs." It means more than the english "morals," in that it refers both to a code of ethical behavior and to the way in which men actually live. Thus, it combines the meaning of both the english "morals" and "mores" into a single term. In general, it will be left untranslated in all quotations from the Letter so that this duality of meaning will be preserved.

³Letter, 19-20 (B., 15).

⁴Ibid., 19 (B., 15).

⁵Rousseau's notes are sometimes more expressive of his final thinking on a given issue than is the body of the text proper.

⁶Bloom interprets "the modern" as a reference to David Hume. The editors of the Pleiade edition of Rousseau's works, with more reason, consider it to be an oblique reference to Voltaire.

⁷Cf. Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 118) and Emile IV (O.C., IV, 529). Moreover, Rousseau was the author of a translation of the first book of Tacitus' Histories: Confessions VIII (O.C., I, 394 and the editor's note at 1258).

⁸Cf. Plato, Apology 21a-e.

⁹I.e., "What is justice?" is the theme of the Republic; "What is courage?" is the theme of the Laches; and so on. Socrates is thus the archetypal philosopher, in that he was continually preoccupied with the "What is." See Strauss, The City and Man, 19-21.

¹⁰Letter, 20 (B., 16).

¹¹Ibid., 20 (B., 16).

¹²Ibid., 21 (B., 16-7). Compare this with Plato's discussion of poetry in the Republic, 386a-89b.

¹³Rousseau was in the habit of referring to himself as a "barbarian," when he wished to contrast his own principles with those of contemporary society, while at the same time emphasizing the "naturalness" of

the former and the artificiality of the latter. See, for example, the epigraphs to the First Discourse and to Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques.

¹⁴Letter, 21 (B., 16).

¹⁵Second Discourse, title page; cf. Dedication.

¹⁶Ibid., II (O.C., III, 170-1). The pure state of nature was, according to Rousseau, characterized by "contentment," rather than "happiness." To experience "happiness" one must possess a sense of selfhood, and such a sense is not present in the pure state of nature.

¹⁷Ibid., II (168-71).

¹⁸Letter, 20 (B., 16).

¹⁹Social Contract, I, viii (O.C., III, 364).

²⁰Cf. Second Discourse, I and note X.

²¹Although both Emile's and the promeneur solitaire's lives are according to nature, the promeneur solitaire resides in Paris and Emile goes there to complete his education.

²²Cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 178).

²³Cf. Emile, V (O.C., IV, 826-36).

²⁴Social Contract, II, viii (O.C., III, 383).

²⁵Cf. Plato, Republic, 487b-95e.

²⁶"Observations" (O.C., III, 56-7); Social Contract, II, viii and xi (O.C., III, 384-5 and 392-3). Cf. Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1104a (beginning), 1107a (end), and 1094b.

²⁷Letter, 22 (B., 17). Cf. Second Discourse, Preface and II (O.C., III, 122 and 169); Social Contract, II, viii and x; and Aristotle, Nic. Ethics, 1194b10-27.

²⁸These three positions are stated in their purest form in, respectively, the Second Discourse, the Social Contract, and the Reveries.

²⁹Letter, 22-3 (B., 17).

³⁰Cf. Shklar, Men and Citizens, 12-21.

³¹The term employed by Rousseau is "spectacle," the same term which has been previously translated as "theater." In general, the term refers to anything which one goes to see, but it can also be used to refer to the theater specifically.

³²Cf. Plato, Gorgias 500e-03a.

³³Letter, 23 (B., 18).

³⁴Letter, 23-4 (B., 18).

³⁵Letter, 25 (B., 19).

³⁶The idea of a disproportion between modern man and the man of antiquity is a recurring theme in Rousseau's political writings. See First Discourse II (O.C., III, 23); Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 956-9); Letter, 118-20 and 137-8 (B., 88-90 and 102-3); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 538-9 and 545-6; Emile I (O.C., IV, 249 and 250); II (371); IV (675-6); V (829-31); and Heloise I, xii (O.C., II, 60).

³⁷See especially Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 958-9), and compare "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 487).

³⁸See Giovanni Sartori, Democratic Theory (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), chaps. IV and V.

³⁹Letter, 26 (B., 20).

⁴⁰Cf. Aristotle, Nic. Ethics 1106a-09b; Plato, Republic 430d-30a and 442c-d.

⁴¹Aristotle, Poetics 1449b.

⁴²The argument that the artist, or practitioner of any "art," is, qua artist, without fault and incapable of making mistakes plays an important role in Socrates' "taming" of Thrasymachus at the beginning of the Republic: 340d-42e. There is good reason to believe, however, that Plato himself did not regard this argument as a compelling one.

⁴³Letter, 27 (B., 21).

⁴⁴Ibid., 24 (B., 18).

⁴⁵Cf. Plato, Apology 31c-32a, where Socrates states that he avoided a political life because it was incompatible with the practice of philosophy. In the Crito, 45c-e, Socrates is reproved by an old friend for choosing to die rather than give up philosophizing, and so, in effect, abandoning his wife and children.

⁴⁶"However much it befits Socrates and minds of his stamp to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would have perished long ago if its conservation had depended solely upon the reasoning of its members:" Second Discourse I (O.C., 156-7).

⁴⁷Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 154).

⁴⁸Letter, 28n (B., 21n).

⁴⁹It is also akin to the language he uses later in the Letter to describe Alceste, "the Misanthrope."

⁵⁰Letter, 28 (B., 22).

⁵¹Letter, 30-1 (B., 23). Cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 596).

⁵²Social Contract I, viii and II, vii.

⁵³Emile I (O.C., IV, 249-50).

⁵⁴Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 125-6 and 154-5); Emile III (O.C., IV, 467-8).

⁵⁵Letter, 31 (B., 24); cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 596-7).

⁵⁶See Second Discourse I, passim.

⁵⁷For an explicit account of the differences between natural man and social man, see Second Discourse, note IX (O.C., III, 202-8).

⁵⁸For a comparison of amour de soi-meme and amour propre, see Second Discourse, note XV (O.C., III, 219-20).

⁵⁹Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 143).

⁶⁰Ibid., I (153-7).

⁶¹Ibid., II (193); Emile IV (O.C., IV, 494 and 515).

⁶²Second Discourse, note IX (O.C., III, 203); cf. Emile II (O.C., IV, 304).

⁶³Social Contract I, i (O.C., III, 352).

⁶⁴David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New York: Doubleday, 1952), passim.

⁶⁵See Emile II (O.C., IV, 308-9 and 309n).

⁶⁶Social Contract I, viii; Second Discourse, note IX (O.C., III, 207).

⁶⁷Ibid., II, vii (O.C., III, 381-2).

⁶⁸Ibid., II, vii (381).

⁶⁹Manuscript version of Social Contract II, iv (O.C., III, 328-9).

⁷⁰See, for example, J.L. Talmon. The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (New York: Praeger, 1960), 38-49.

⁷¹Social Contract I, vii (O.C., III, 360); Emile II (O.C., IV, 309 and 311).

⁷²See pages 1-3 above.

⁷³Social Contract I, vi (O.C., III, 361).

⁷⁴Cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 251-2 and 259-60).

⁷⁵This is only ideally the case, however. Even a virtuous people is subject to error. "The people are never corrupted, but often mistaken, and it is thus that they appear to will that which is bad:" Social Contract II, iii (O.C., III, 371-2).

⁷⁶"The fatherland cannot subsist without liberty, nor liberty without virtue, nor virtue without citizens:" Political Economy (O.C., III, 259).

⁷⁷Social Contract II, v (O.C., III, 377).

⁷⁸Emile I (O.C., IV, 248-9). Cf. Plato, Republic 375c.

⁷⁹See Political Economy (O.C., III, 254-5).

⁸⁰Compare Rousseau's analysis of the effect of christianity on the political community: Social Contract IV, viii; and Letters Written from the Mountain I (O.C., III, 703-6).

⁸¹Cf. Emile I (O.C., IV, 250) and V (857-8).

⁸²Letter, 34 (B., 25-6).

⁸³Ibid., 34 (B., 26).

⁸⁴Ibid., 34 (B., 26).

⁸⁵Ibid., 34 (B., 26); cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 544-6).

⁸⁶Letter, 35 (B., 26).

⁸⁷Letter, 35 (B., 26-7).

⁸⁸Letter, 24 (B., 18).

⁸⁹Ibid., 35 (B., 27).

⁹⁰Ibid., 35-6 (B., 27).

⁹¹Poetics 1448a. The translation is by Allan Bloom and is from Politics and the Arts, p. 151, note 25.

⁹²Politics 1253a.

⁹³Letter, 31-2 (B., 24); cf. Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 378).

⁹⁴Ibid., 32 (B., 24).

⁹⁵Ibid., 31-2 (B., 24).

⁹⁶Plato, Republic 357a-62c. The remainder of the Republic constitutes Socrates' "refutation" of the unjust speech. Cf. Plato, Gorgias 468e-84c, 483e-84c, and 491e-92c.

⁹⁷See Strauss, The City and Man, pp. 80-4, for a discussion of the ambiguous status of Socrates' "refutation" of the unjust speech.

⁹⁸Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 152); Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 378).

⁹⁹See the manuscript version of the Social Contract, I, ii (O.C., III, 281-89).

¹⁰⁰Manuscript version of Social Contract, I, iii (O.C., III, 292); Social Contract, I, viii (O.C., III, 364); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 504-05); and Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 177).

¹⁰¹Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 379).

¹⁰²This argument informs the entire Republic, but see especially 588b-91b. Cf. Gorgias 466d-79e.

¹⁰³Republic 343c-44d and 357a-67e.

¹⁰⁴Cf. Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 956-9) with Social Contract, II, viii (O.C., III, 383-4) and IV, viii (460-2).

¹⁰⁵Rousseau, First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 24-30); Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 383); Plato, Republic 382c-d, 414b-15d, and 459c-60d; Gorgias 522e-end.

¹⁰⁶Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 468-9); Emile IV (O.C., IV, 602, 629, and 634n-5).

¹⁰⁷Plato, Apology 24b-c.

¹⁰⁸Political Economy (O.C., III, 254-6); Government of Poland I (O.C., III, 955) and II (958-9).

¹⁰⁹Social Contract II, v (O.C., III, 377).

¹¹⁰See Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 286-8.

¹¹¹Letter, 124-5 (B., 93).

¹¹²See Rousseau's discussion of civil religion in the Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 460-9 and especially 468). Because it is christian, the religion of Geneva does not constitute a civil religion, properly

speaking, but it does come closer to this status than most other modern religions, because the sect is idiosyncratic to Geneva, hence quasi-national.

Socrates: Then what of the purpose that has inspired our stately and wonderful tragic poetry? Are her endeavor and purpose, to your mind, merely for the gratification of the spectator, or does she strive hard, if there be anything pleasant and gratifying, but bad for them, to leave that unsaid, and if there be anything unpleasant, but beneficial, both to speak and sing that, whether they enjoy it or not? To which of these two aims, think you, is tragic poetry devoted?

Callicles: It is quite obvious in her case, Socrates, that she is bent rather upon pleasure and the gratification of the spectators.

Plato, Gorgias¹

CHAPTER III

The problem of the theater as it has emerged thus far is essentially one of its effect on character; the question of whether the theater can teach virtue is only another way of asking if the theater, in and of itself, can form men with a particular character. Rousseau has denied that the theater can teach virtue, but this does not necessarily mean that it cannot significantly influence the formation of certain kinds of men, or even that it cannot, under the proper circumstances, aid in the inculcation of virtue. Indeed, all that Rousseau's argument permits him to say at this point is that, by itself, the theater cannot educate men to virtue. It has been established that the theater is related to the character of its audience in a complex manner. Of necessity, it caters to that character, yet at the same time is capable of altering it. Insofar as "character" is assimilatable to the peculiar mix of passions which an individual exhibits, and insofar as

the theater is capable of selectively arousing and heightening certain passions, while neglecting and calming others, the theater does possess a kind of influence over character. It cannot create, but it can modify. Its ability to do so, however, is limited by the existing character of the people concerned; thus, gladiatorial combats, which are a form of "spectacle," produced one effect in republican Rome and quite another under the Empire, although in each case their influence was such as to intensify preexisting passions. Furthermore, it also appears reasonable to assume that the effect of the theater on character depends upon the nature of the plays presented; at the grossest level, one would expect the comedy, the tragedy, and the romance to have significantly different effects due to the obviously different sentiments and passions which they evoke. To address the question of the effect of the theater on character in anything like a comprehensive manner, therefore, it is necessary to begin with a specific people, and then consider the effect of each of the various genres in turn. In keeping with this, Rousseau turns to a consideration of the French drama.

Rousseau's examination of the French drama is a lengthy one, and this seems somewhat incongruous, given that the Letter ostensibly deals with a Genevan problem, and is ostensibly directed at a Genevan audience. Such an examination, however, is almost mandatory at some point in the Letter, even assuming a complete preoccupation on Rousseau's part with Geneva and its problems. In the first place, Rousseau must sooner or later come to grips with the question of the French drama, since it is the model which the partisans of the theater are holding up to Geneva. Thus, in order to refute the argument for the establishment of a theater at Geneva, Rousseau must either show that the French theater is

undesirable in and of itself, or that it is so in the case of Geneva but not in that of France. Rousseau provisionally adopts the first approach, but later, as we shall see, acknowledges that this may be an error, that the theater may be beneficial in France, and yet undesirable in Geneva. With either approach, however, the nature of the French drama, and its effect on the French people, presents itself as a problem of major importance. In addition, Rousseau's peculiar mode of argumentation makes an analysis of the effect of the theater on both France and Geneva more attractive than a consideration of the case of Geneva alone. It is Rousseau's practice, when discussing the problem of corruption, to juxtapose virtue and vice--Sparta and Athens, republican Rome and imperial Rome, antiquity and modernity--so as to, in effect, put the choice directly to the reader.² Moreover, if Rousseau is indeed working with such a contrast in the Letter, a contrast between virtuous Geneva and a corrupt France, then his analysis of the French theater can only serve as a warning to Geneva: that Geneva is virtuous and France corrupt implies that the effect of the drama on the latter bears no necessary connection to its possible effect on the former. On the other hand, to the extent that Genevan virtue is problematic, there is the possibility that the effect of the drama on Geneva will be similar to its effect on France.

Rousseau's lengthy examination of the French drama is explicable in another way as well. If, as we speculated earlier, Rousseau's interests and intentions transcend the problem which the theater poses for Geneva, if he is indeed motivated by an "affection" for both humanity and country, then an analysis of the French theater becomes highly important, in that the majority of mankind lives in corrupt societies

rather than virtuous ones, in approximations of France rather than of Geneva. If this is the case, then we might expect to find two separate teachings in the Letter: one dealing with the problem of the theater as it relates to more or less virtuous states such as Geneva, and one dealing with that problem as it relates to corrupt societies such as France. Furthermore, France, and especially Paris, symbolizes modernity for Rousseau. What Paris is today, the rest of Europe will be tomorrow. Even Geneva is following, albeit at a distance, along the path marked out by the French capital;³ the movement to establish there a theater on the French model itself exemplifies this tendency. The analysis of French character, which is a necessary part of any comprehensive inquiry into the French theater, is thus also something of an analysis of modern man as well.

Rousseau's undertaking in the Letter is not unique. Inquiry into the relationship between various artistic genres and the human passions dates back at least to Aristotle's Poetics and Plato's Republic, and this will prove to be of the utmost significance. We have already observed several more or less elliptical references to Aristotle in the Letter, but it is Plato's influence which is really pervasive. As was mentioned earlier,⁴ Rousseau prepared for writing the Letter by paraphrasing Book X of the Republic. More significantly, the Platonic Socrates' banishment of the poets is paralleled by Rousseau's rhetorical banishment of foreign dramatists, and eventually all dramatists, from Geneva, with Plato's own words being cited in support of this action.⁵ Moreover, for Rousseau, as well as for Plato, it is an analysis of the effect of the drama on the passions which leads to condemnation of "the poets." That Rousseau is not simply imitating Plato, however,

is indicated by the fact that Plato's banishment of the poets is only provisional,⁶ while Rousseau's appears final.⁷ Thus, although the Republic looms in the background of the Letter, the latter can be viewed as, in part, a commentary on, and correction of, the former. Such a correction is necessary from Rousseau's perspective. Given the disproportion between modern men and the men of antiquity, the Republic can provide only an incomplete guide to determining the place of the dramatic arts in Geneva or in any modern society, and the Letter is intended to fill this lacuna. To understand fully Rousseau's teachings in the Letter, then, it is necessary to know both how and why these teachings differ from those of the Republic.

The drama is, following Plato, an imitative art, but it does not aim at the imitation of all things; it imitates human life and the human things. This is not to say that it only imitates--drama, when it attains to the status of true art, can transcend and transform its subject--or even that it can perfectly imitate life and still remain art. A consideration of the aesthetics of the drama, however, would lead us too far afield. It suffices for our present purposes that we recognize that the drama contains a large imitative element.

To say that the drama imitates human life and the human things is not sufficiently precise, however. The drama also aims at eliciting applause, that is, at pleasing its audience, and thus tends to imitate those aspects of human life and those human things which its audience finds appealing or pleasurable. As a work of art, a play may be independent of the opinion of its time, but as a practical proposition it is not: those plays which bore or annoy their audiences will soon cease to be presented. Moreover, the playwright himself craves applause.⁸ There

may be a few exceptions, but in general the dramatist measures the value of his work by the success of his plays. The dramatist is thus a prisoner of the opinions and taste of his time, and this fact informs Rousseau's discussion of the French theater.

The Letter's initial characterization of the French theater is highly laudatory:

I believe I can assert as a truth easy to prove that . . . the French theater, with all of its faults, is as close to as perfect as it can be, whether in terms of pleasure or of utility, and that these two advantages are in a relationship which cannot be disturbed without taking more from the one than would be given to the other, something which would render the theater even less perfect.⁹

Public utility and pleasure are the criteria for judging the theater.

"Utility" alone is insufficient, because it does not entertain or give pleasure; the most useful or instructive play ever written would go unattended if it were not also entertaining and pleasurable. Pleasure alone is insufficient because some pleasures are harmful to men and to citizens. Furthermore, the pursuit of useless pleasures is a pure waste of time, and time is precious for "a being whose life is so short." The pleasure imparted by a given play, however, is itself a function of what its audience experiences as pleasurable, and this is relative to the character, taste, and opinions of that audience. Thus, since the utility of a play is dependent upon the pleasure it evokes, and since that pleasure depends upon audience character, the potential utility of a play is necessarily limited by the character of the public from which its audience is drawn. In any given society, there is therefore an equilibrium point, at which both the utility and the pleasurable-ness of the drama are maximized. In general, the French theater is at this equilibrium point, and is thus relatively perfect. Rousseau does add that a

man of superior genius, and only such a man, could write a play with greater utility than those currently performed, while continuing to please the public. The implication here is that the man of genius is that man who is capable of either molding the taste and opinions of the public or of otherwise reconciling them to plays which teach virtuous behavior. Any reforms along this line, unfortunately, would seem to be transitory. Genius is not immortal, and is not even perpetuated in the plays which it produces. Public opinion is in continual flux; to control and direct it, one must tailor one's tools to the exigencies of the moment. Thus, without the guiding hand of the man of genius, the public will regain its autonomy of taste. Consequently, when such a man dies the theater must necessarily revert to its former character. Specifically, it must revert to "common means of interesting and pleasing" the public, and must follow public opinion and taste, rather than forming them.

Rousseau's initial characterization of the French theater as "as close to as perfect as it can be" thus involves an abstraction from the possibility of a man of superior genius, and his discussion is consequently limited to ordinary, rather than extraordinary, plays, and to ordinary authors, rather than those of consummate genius. Who does Rousseau have in mind when he speaks of such geniuses? We have no way of knowing for sure, but we can be certain that no modern authors fall into this class; the greatest of these, Corneille and Molière, are followers of public taste and opinion rather than their directors. Perhaps Rousseau is thinking of that other man of superior genius, the potential legislator, who is capable of forming the character of an entire people,¹⁰ but this is only speculation. What is important here is that, in

limiting his discussion to "common means of interesting and pleasing," Rousseau will be able to arrive at an idea of both the average effect of each of the various kinds of plays, and an idea of the average or predominant character of the French as a people. The "common means of interesting and pleasing" are not simply those which are employed most frequently or by run-of-the-mill authors, but are also those which the great majority of men find interesting and pleasing. An analysis of these means will thus tell us a good deal concerning the nature of the French, which is the archetypal modern, soul. This is why the plays of the man of genius are an inappropriate subject for the Letter: such plays mold the character of their audience, rather than reflecting it; and Rousseau is, for the moment at least, interested more in discovering that character than reforming it.

The tales told by a people--whether in prose, epic, or dramatic form--both reflect, and have a decisive influence on, national character. These tales tend to possess a certain unity; they generally agree as to what good things are most worthy of pursuit, as to what qualities are desirable and laudable in men, and as to what qualities are undesirable or ignoble. In part, this unity is derived from the character of the people concerned: the tales of a warrior people, for example, will tend to praise courage, honor, endurance, strength, loyalty, etc.; those of a mercantile people will tend to praise honesty, hardwork, cleverness, wealth, and so on. But more than this, such tales help to inculcate the ideals which they depict; they are instruments for the perpetuation of national character over time.¹¹ Simple tales are told to children to amuse them or put them to sleep, more complex ones to adults, but there remains the essential unity: they all tend to portray

the same type or types of men as "best," and thus provide both children and adults with a common model for emulation.¹² Moreover, those things which are generally praised in a people's stories as best, and those qualities which are accorded most honor, will be those things which are pursued and those qualities which will be most assiduously cultivated.¹³ One can thus learn a great deal concerning a people from the nature and content of its common stories.

The "common means of interesting and pleasing" form the subject of Rousseau's inquiry into the French theater. These are "celebrated actions, great names, great crimes and great virtues in tragedy; the comic and the amusing in comedy; and always love in both."¹⁴ This would seem to divide the "common means of interesting and pleasing" into two categories, those pertaining to tragedy and those pertaining to comedy, with "love" commonly employed in both genres. Such a division is more or less in keeping with the traditional classification of plays as either "comedies" or "tragedies." Rousseau, however, divides his inquiry into three parts, treating those plays, the main theme of which is romantic love, as constituting a separate and distinct category. Romantic love thus comes to assume considerable significance: not only does it constitute a separate genre in itself, but it is also intimately associated with both the other genres. The preeminence of romantic love in the theater is peculiarly modern: "The Greeks had no need to found the principal interest of their tragedy on love, and did not do so; ours, which does not have the same resources, could not do without this interest."¹⁵ Romantic love is ubiquitous in the modern theater, and serves as its defining characteristic. Rousseau's recognition of this constitutes an adaptation of the traditional categories of drama to a modern

context, and this adaptation points to the problematic status of the ancients' critique of the theater, as far as modernity is concerned. The modern theater differs significantly from the ancient; thus, what was true of the ancient theater may not be true of the modern.

According to Rousseau, the "common means of interesting and pleasing" have a questionable effect on morals, but he offers no reasons for this assertion; rather, he immediately turns to countering the objection that the French theater promulgates the socially useful teaching that crime is always punished and virtue rewarded. This objection is not simply a rephrasing of the earlier argument that the perfected theater is capable of teaching a love of virtue and a hatred of vice. True, it does lead in part to the same conclusion as the earlier argument--the theater is capable of promoting virtuous behavior--but it has been modified to take into account Rousseau's teachings that the theater cannot educate men to virtue because it speaks only to their "natural goodness," a sentiment which is ineffectual outside the theater, and that a theater capable of instructing men in virtue would most greatly benefit the unjust and vicious at the expense of the virtuous. The modified argument does not make the claim that the perfected theater can teach a love of virtue for its own sake, and a corresponding hatred of vice; instead, it is based on the assumed capacity of the theater to manipulate the individual's conception of his self-interest. The theater, so this argument goes, can influence men to choose to behave in a virtuous manner because of the benefits such behavior will bring them, and to avoid unjust actions because such actions are seen as always having undesirable consequences. The perfected theater is thus conceived of as leading men

to virtuous behavior through an appeal to their self-interest, while the claim that the theater can form men who are simply virtuous is abandoned.

The claims put forward in favor of the theater have been reduced, but, if allowed to stand, they constitute a persuasive argument in favor of the establishment of a theater at Geneva. Rousseau's counter-argument is somewhat puzzling. He begins by asserting that, even if virtue were always rewarded and vice punished on the stage, "Most tragic actions are only pure fables, events known to be inventions of the poet," and so fail to make a strong impression on the audience. (That Rousseau's reply to the proponents of the theater is couched solely in terms of the tragedy is neither an oversight nor a deliberate avoidance of the question of the comedy--that question is dealt with further on in the Letter--but it does imply his later teaching that the comedy is by its very nature vicious, when it is not criminal: it is impossible to conceive of a comedy in which virtue is uniformly rewarded and vice punished.) More is involved here than the simple assertion that virtue is not always rewarded and vice punished in the real world, the world outside the theater, and that the attempt to impart a contrary belief is doomed to failure. Nor is it a mere reiteration of the earlier argument that, since tragedy is removed from man as he actually is, he discounts its teachings as irrelevant to his own life. What is perceived as fables, as "fabulous," is not so much the tragic actions and characters as the very idea that virtue is always rewarded and vice punished: ". . . these punishments and rewards are always effected by the most extraordinary means that nothing similar is expected in the natural course of human things." The French look only to punishments and rewards which emanate from "the natural course of human things," that is to say, only to human

punishment and reward. They discount all that is "extraordinary" as having no bearing on their lives. But what is divine or supernatural is neither ordinary nor does it, by definition, result from "the natural course of human things." In looking only to human punishments and rewards, then, the French discount the possibility of such emanating from nonhuman sources, and this points not only to a fundamental impiety but to a potential for lawlessness as well.

All regimes claim to dispense "justice," and this claim is founded upon the idea that the political order is capable of passing out rewards and punishments, and especially the latter, in accordance with the deserts of men. On the face of it, however, this claim is open to a serious objection. The laws are enforced by men, and men are both fallible and subject to being deceived. The observant man is confronted with the fact that the vicious frequently seem to prosper, while the virtuous are murdered, robbed, and otherwise suffer what appears to be undeserved harm. These observations are extremely subversive of the political and moral orders: they imply that one's virtue, or even law-abidingness, bears no necessary relationship to the happiness of one's life, and that the vicious, if they are lucky or clever enough, can enjoy the fruits of their wickedness without suffering retribution. The city has traditionally solved this problem by establishing the gods as the ultimate arbiters of rewards and punishments, and as the ultimate guarantors of the laws. One may escape the eyes of men, but not those of the gods; one may escape human punishment, but not that of the gods, especially if there is an afterlife where the dead are judged according to their deeds and merit on earth. That the French do not believe in "extraordinary" rewards and punishments thus implies a lack of belief in the gods, or

at least in their relevance to human affairs, and the primary, traditional support of the laws is undermined.¹⁶

Rousseau's treatment of the gods here is noteworthy. His references to them are brief, elliptical, and difficult to interpret. Despite this, we have seen that the problem of the tragedy is at least in part a religious problem. The ability of the tragedy to convey the teaching that virtue is always rewarded and crime punished has been seen to stand or fall, on the one hand, according to the answer it gives to the religious question--Do the gods exist and, if they do, do they concern themselves with rewarding and punishing men according to their virtue or lack thereof?--and, on the other, according to the piety or impiety of its audience. It might even be said that the ability of the theater to convey this teaching depends upon its ability to make men pious and god-fearing. Rousseau, however, no sooner suggests this problem than he abandons it altogether; he no sooner brings up the question of the status of the gods, albeit elliptically, than he descends once again to "the natural course of human things," that is, to a consideration of what men can do. The theater, he asserts, cannot in general be expected to teach that virtue is always rewarded and vice punished:

. . . for this end, not being that toward which authors direct their plays, must rarely be attained by them, and will often be an obstacle to their success. Vice or Virtue? What is the difference, provided that it is charged with an air of grandeur? Thus, the French stage, undeniably the most perfect, or at least the most correct, that has ever existed, is no less the triumph of great villains than of the most illustrious heroes.¹⁷

Rousseau thus shifts from what the poets say about the gods, and the effect of this on their audience, to what they say about heroes and villains, without really having dealt with the former problem. Moreover, he proceeds to abandon the question of whether the theater does, or even can,

convey the teaching that virtue is always rewarded and vice punished:

I fully understand that it is not always necessary to look to the final catastrophe in order to judge the moral effect of a tragedy, and that, in this regard, its end is fulfilled when one sympathizes more with the virtuous unfortunate than with the happy criminal.¹⁸

Rousseau has, in effect, relaxed the standard for judging the theater: a play which puts both a vicious man and a virtuous man on the stage will be salutary, even when the former is portrayed as the happier and better-off of the two, if the audience is led to identify most closely with the latter. This abrupt change of course is highly suggestive. It implies that for some reason Rousseau is unwilling to address the theater's treatment of the gods. Equally suggestive in this regard is the radical way in which his treatment of the poets' speech about the gods differs from that of Plato. In the Republic, Plato explicitly attempts to reform the poets' speech concerning gods, heroes, and men,¹⁹ and in that order; speech concerning the gods is thus given priority. Rousseau, on the other hand, far from attempting to reform the poets' speech concerning the gods, explicitly mentions such speech only once, and then only in passing. Furthermore, there is at least one passage in the Letter where Rousseau, in effect, lies in order to avoid speaking about the gods and the poets' treatment of them: in comparing Crebillon's Atreus with Seneca's version, Rousseau explicitly asserts that the modern author followed the ancient in everything except his injection of a romantic interest.²⁰ This is a patent and glaring falsehood. Seneca's play begins with the raising of a ghost by one of the Furies, traditionally an instrument of divine vengeance, while the Chorus which follows immediately invokes the gods' wrath as the cause of all the horror which is to come. None of this is present in

Crebillon's play; yet, Rousseau chooses to ignore this difference in asserting the similarity of Crebillon's and Seneca's treatment of Atreus.

Rousseau's studied silence on the question of the proper treatment of the gods implies either that that question is irrelevant to the problem of the theater, or that for some reason he chooses not to address it in the Letter. But the question of the gods is obviously relevant to the problem of the theater: it has been asserted that the worth of the theater depends upon its ability to convey convincingly the teaching that virtue is always rewarded and vice punished, and omnipotent and omniscient gods are the traditional, and possibly necessary, guarantors of such rewards and punishments. Therefore, we can conclude that there is some more substantial reason for Rousseau's general disinclination to speak about the gods.

To better understand Rousseau's silence, it is necessary to consider exactly how the French tragedy treats the gods. The various plays cited by Rousseau in the Letter indicate two disparate approaches to the question of the nature of the gods and the status of divine punishments and rewards. On the one hand, he tells us that plays such as Atreus and Mahomet "do not even employ the feeble contrivance of the denouement," that is, of a finale in which virtue is rewarded or, at the least, crime is punished:²¹ "The monster who serves as the hero in each of these two plays calmly finishes his crimes and enjoys the benefits thereof." In fact, the final lines of Atreus, spoken by "the black Atreus" himself, constitute a paean to crime and villainy: "Finally I enjoy the fruits of my crimes." Such plays obviously teach a disregard for the gods and their punishments: the worst criminals, the

murderer and fratricide, can lead a happy life. On the other hand, there is another class of plays, the moral of which is very different:

What does one learn from Phaedra or Œdipus other than that man is not free and that heaven punishes him for crimes that it makes him commit?²²

These two kinds of plays convey seemingly contradictory teachings concerning the gods: Mahomet and Atreus teach that there is no necessary punishment, divine or otherwise, for the crimes one commits; Phaedra and Œdipus convey both the salutary teaching that the gods do punish crimes, and the pernicious teaching that they are unjust insofar as they do so. This latter point requires elaboration. The city appeals to divine justice in order to remedy the defects inherent in the justice of mere men. To remedy this defect, however, the gods must be made both omniscient and omnipotent, so that it is impossible to deceive them or to escape their judgement. Yet, this idea of divine power makes the gods appear unjust. If the gods are omnipotent and omniscient, then they countenance crime by their very failure to prevent it, and, in this sense, are accessories to every crime committed. But, to punish what one has acquiesced in or permitted is, in human terms, to act unjustly; therefore, the gods are unjust.²³ Even more than this, however, if the gods are indeed omnipotent, if they are the ultimate cause of all things, then they are the cause of all that is in the world, including all injustice and evil; and, according to this line of reasoning too, the gods are unjust. Extrication from this position is not even possible by arguing that the gods have given man freedom of choice and action; if this is the case, then as the cause of man's moral freedom, the gods are also the cause of all its abuses.

Each of the tragedy's teachings concerning the gods is pernicious, and each is pernicious in the same way. Although seemingly mutually contradictory, they are in fundamental agreement on the most important point: both point to human justice as standing alone, without support from the heavens. This is not to deny that there may be divine justice, but only that it is not the same as, nor compatible with, human justice. Five possibilities remain: that men are simply incapable of understanding the ways of the gods, and especially the ways of divine justice; that there are no gods; that the gods do exist, but are capricious and/or unjust; that the gods are not omniscient and omnipotent; or that the gods simply do not concern themselves with human affairs. Each of these possibilities once again suggests the conventional status of justice and the law. The law and justice are human creations and, as such, share in the imperfection of all manmade things.

The teaching of the French tragedy is thus extremely impious; and this makes Rousseau's failure to consider the possibility of reforming its treatment of the gods all the more puzzling. What must not be forgotten, however, is that, while Rousseau is speaking about the French theater, he is also speaking to and for a Genevan audience. We know from the first part of the Letter that the Genevans are still pious. They fear the gods and consider religious belief to be an important part of their lives and of their city; if this were not the case, then the controversy over the alleged Socinianism of the Genevan clergy would never have arisen. Moreover, it is characteristic of the French tragedy's treatment of the gods that any comprehensive reflection on it is subversive of piety and, indirectly, of the laws. In particular, to discuss for the purpose of correcting them the two contradictory

teachings of the French tragedy concerning the gods, would be to raise doubts regarding the validity of existing belief. As regards one of these teachings, the seemingly more impious one that the gods do not necessarily reward or punish men according to their virtue or lack thereof, that is, that the gods are largely irrelevant to human affairs and can safely be ignored, there is little danger for Geneva. It can be countered by the simple assertion that the gods do indeed judge men according to their desserts, and by an appeal to traditional piety. The other teaching, that the gods invariably reward the virtuous and punish the wicked, is seemingly much more pious in content. Indeed, it reflects those religious beliefs which form the basis of Genevan piety: God is omniscient and omnipotent; He punishes and rewards men with heaven and hell, respectively; and He is just. As we have seen, however, in predicating omniscience and omnipotence of the gods, this position leads to the conclusion that the gods are unjust, a conclusion even more impious than that the gods are simply unconcerned with human affairs. Not only is this teaching ultimately impious, then, but it is also self-contradictory in the same way that conventional piety, including Genevan piety, is self-contradictory: in seeking to make the gods guarantors of human justice, it predicates qualities of them which render them unjust in human terms.

To reform the theater's speech concerning the gods, both its obviously, or conventionally, impious teaching and its unconventionally impious teaching must be rejected simultaneously. This is precisely what Plato attempts in the Republic when he makes the gods the source of only that which is good.²⁴ In order to do so, however, he is forced to reject the belief that the gods are omnipotent;²⁵ and this means,

in turn, that he must reject the gods as guarantors of human justice and as a bulwark of the political order and the laws. Moreover, human justice sometimes entails punishment, i.e., doing harm to men, but Plato's reasoning denies the gods the power of doing any harm whatsoever. Rousseau could easily have followed Plato by advocating that the theater adopt a Socinian position, that very position which he tacitly accepts at the beginning of the Letter; yet, he does not do so. He does not do so partly because he is writing as a "Citizen of Geneva," as a defender of its laws and the piety which helps to maintain them. To attempt to reform the theater along the lines indicated is tantamount to attacking Genevan piety. Furthermore, Rousseau is acting not only as a defender of the Genevan polity, but of all reasonably legitimate political communities, and, from the standpoint of the political realm, common piety must be both unreflective and ultimately inconsistent, with the latter making the former necessary. Common piety must be inconsistent because those beliefs which are necessary if the law is to claim a divine sanction are necessarily inconsistent, even mutually contradictory. Indeed, Rousseau insists in the Social Contract that it is precisely those beliefs concerning the gods which we have shown to be inconsistent and contradictory which constitute "the sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be either a good citizen or a loyal subject;"²⁶ and the Social Contract culminates in an argument in favor of the establishment of a "civil religion" embodying such beliefs:

The dogmas of the civil religion should be simple, few in number, and expressed precisely, without explanations or commentaries. The existence of a powerful, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of the

wicked; the sanctity of the social contract and the laws. These are the positive dogmas.²⁷

It is important to notice that these dogmas are precisely that; they are to be tendered without explanation or commentary, and are not subject to dispute, but must simply be accepted if one is to be a good citizen. The civil religion embodies a set of salutary beliefs, but beliefs which are not necessarily true. Indeed, it is because they are open to grave doubts that disputation is forbidden.

Looking once again at the tragedy, we see that what we have referred to as its "more impious teaching" is very little removed from the dogmas of the civil religion, as set forth by Rousseau; and this similarity compels the good citizen to refrain from discussing the former, just as he refrains from discussing the latter. Even the less impious teaching of the tragedy--that the gods either do not exist or take no interest in the affairs of men--is closed off as a subject for discussion. It is certainly true that such a teaching is incompatible with the dogmas of the civil religion, but those who adhere to it cannot be transformed into conventionally pious men by means of argument. Conventional piety is, and must be, unreflective; hence, reasoned argument cannot form men who are pious in the same way as the good citizen is pious. Furthermore, reasoned discussion of the tragedy's less impious teaching would tend to open the whole of religion to scrutiny, and, as has been indicated, this must be avoided if conventional piety is to be maintained. Any reasoned discussion of the gods is dangerous, even if it is undertaken in their defense, because reason is by its very nature subversive of the unreflective piety of the common man, that is to say, of those beliefs upon which civil society must rest. From the standpoint of the political order, reason, even "philosophic" reason,

provides no substitute for conventional piety;²⁸ and, if it is sympathetic to the requirements of the political order and civil society, philosophy will publicly remain silent on the entire subject of religion. This is, in part, why Rousseau does not follow Plato in raising the question of the theater's treatment of the gods, and why he does not speak of reforming the theater in this regard. As a good citizen, he respects the laws. As a philosopher, he realizes that the power of the laws over men depends upon their holding certain common, but inconsistent, beliefs concerning the gods, that these same or related beliefs are reflected in the tragedy, and that it is not prudent to discuss them openly for fear of calling attention to their inconsistencies.

Rousseau has very good reasons, then, for not following Plato in attempting to reform the poets' speech concerning the gods. This does not mean, however, that Plato was less wise or less prudent than Rousseau, or that he failed to realize the necessity of a divine sanction for human justice. Paradoxically, Plato and Rousseau arrive at approximately the same final position on this issue, although by means of different paths. After having excluded the gods from the realm of human affairs, Plato, at the end of the Republic, reintroduces them in the form of a new myth, one which asserts that the soul lives on after death, and is rewarded or punished in the after-life according to the justice or injustice of its life on earth.²⁹ This reintroduction of a divine support for justice implies that cities, even the best city, cannot do without such a support. For Plato, the problem with the poets is not that they "lie," but that the "lies" or myths they tell are deficient and pernicious. The task he sets for himself, therefore, is

to devise new myths which will perform the same function for the city as the old, but without their defects.

We still have not penetrated to the heart of the difference between Rousseau's treatment of the poets and that of Plato. Plato reformed the poets' speech concerning the gods, without at the same time doing away with all divine support for civil society; might not Rousseau have done the same? The answer to this question must be "no," at least in terms of the Letter. In his more theoretical writings, Rousseau is much less loath to consider fundamental religious questions, and to subject them to the authority of philosophic reason,³⁰ although, even there, he frequently maintains a prudent silence on certain issues, or refers to them only obliquely.³¹ The nature of the Letter, however, imposes certain constraints which are not present in most of Rousseau's other works and which Plato did not face in the Republic. The Platonic Socrates seeks to perfect a "city in speech," while engaged in private conversation with a few friends and acquaintances, whereas, in the Letter, Rousseau speaks of, for, and to an existing city; and, for this reason, the latter has much more need of prudence than the former. In particular, Rousseau must not give the city any grounds for leveling a charge of heresy or unbelief against him. Tampering, or seeming to tamper, with the gods is a serious offense in the eyes of both the pious man and the citizen. Socrates' trial and condemnation is a case in point, but, even more than this, the Genevans have already shown themselves to be prone to hasty judgement and outrage when their religious beliefs are threatened: it was essentially against the charge of heresy, of not believing in the god or gods of the city, that Rousseau was earlier compelled to defend the Genevan

clergy. At the time, Rousseau chastized d'Alembert for speaking too openly on this subject, and indicated that a true philosopher would not have done so. Rousseau, who is a philosopher, is not about to repeat d'Alembert's mistake. He does not attempt to reform the existing tales concerning the gods, not because they are perfect or true, but because the attempt to replace or reform them may well awaken precisely that religious conflict which he sought to dampen at the beginning of the Letter, and this time with himself, rather than the Genevan clergy, at the center of the controversy. That Rousseau's prudence in this regard is not misplaced is demonstrated by the effect which a later work, one in which he calls certain popular religious beliefs into question, had on his standing in Geneva: largely as a result of the Emile, and particularly the section known as "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," Rousseau was subjected to intense criticism, his books were burned in wholesale lots, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.³²

Plato's reform of poetry was directed toward the poets' speech concerning gods, heroes, and men. Rousseau avoids discussing the gods for reasons of prudence, but heroes, and particularly men, may be treated much less gingerly. Rousseau's silence concerning the gods, however, has an important effect on his analysis of the ways in which the theater treats heroes and men. Because he is unable to posit a divine sanction for human justice, Rousseau cannot hold the theater to task for presenting plays in which virtuous men are not rewarded and the vicious punished. Only the gods can serve as guarantors for such absolute justice, and they must not be spoken of. Some other standard of judgement

must thus be found, one which does not transcend the realm of human affairs.

Rousseau finds such a standard in the principle of sympathy or identification:

I fully understand that it is not always necessary to look to the final catastrophe in order to judge the moral effect of a tragedy, and that, in this regard, its end is fulfilled when one sympathizes more with the virtuous unfortunate than with the happy criminal.³³

As was noted earlier, this involves a decided relaxation of standards: a play which puts both a virtuous man and a vicious man on the stage will be judged "good," even when the latter is portrayed as the happier of the two, if the audience is led to identify principally with the former. The introduction of such a standard, however, once again involves a marked deviation from Plato's treatment of the poets. Where Plato seeks to purify poetry by forbidding the poets to depict virtue as going unrewarded or vice unpunished, Rousseau shows indifference to such a project; where Plato would impose "pretty nearly the extreme penalty on those authors who say that scoundrels can live a pleasant life or that the pleasant or useful can be something other than the just,"³⁴ Rousseau is willing to concede that a play may have a salutary moral effect even when a criminal is portrayed as leading a happier life than a virtuous man.

This relaxation of standards on Rousseau's part would seem to herald a desire to deal less stringently with the tragedy, but this appearance is deceptive. Far from prefiguring a gentler attitude toward the tragedy, it allows Rousseau to condemn both the tragedy and its audience in a much more persuasive manner than if he had adhered to a stricter standard of judgement. In particular, it endows Rousseau's

analysis of the moral effect of the tragedy with an aura of fairness, and so makes his final condemnation all the more convincing. From the standpoint of the tragedy, the earlier standard articulated by Rousseau--that virtue always be rewarded and vice punished--was intrinsically unfair. It has already been established that the principal aim of the tragic author, indeed of any playwright, is not, nor can it be, to demonstrate the rewards of virtue; his overriding purpose is to please and amuse the spectator, and all other ends must be subordinated to this one. On the other hand, the requirement that the tragedy should lead the spectator to sympathize and identify with certain kinds of characters, and not with other kinds, is one that can be imposed without altering the priorities of the dramatist as such. The appeal of the theater rests upon its capacity to draw the spectator onto the stage in spirit, and on its ability to induce him to identify and empathize with the characters which are sympathetically portrayed. This is the primary aim of the playwright, and the new judgemental standard employed by Rousseau leaves this intact; it only requires that the sympathies of the spectator be directed toward the virtuous characters rather than the vicious, that is to say, that virtue be depicted sympathetically and vice unsympathetically. At the same time that it largely maintains the internal priorities of the drama, Rousseau's articulation of this standard also serves to direct our attention to what is perhaps the primary moral phenomenon associated with the theater, the act of identification which draws the spectator out of himself and causes him to become someone else for a time. The question of the nature of this "someone else" is not a morally indifferent one. Identifying and sympathizing with a criminal makes one a bit of a criminal oneself; the

spectator participates, albeit vicariously, in the crimes committed and, because of this, is less outraged or shocked by them, and less apt to condemn them out of hand, than he would otherwise be. A theater which treats vicious men or criminals sympathetically is thus subversive of both morality and the law.

At this point, the order in which Rousseau listed the "common means" by which the French theater interests and pleases its audience becomes significant. As far as the tragedy is concerned, "celebrated actions, great names, great crimes and great virtues" were specified as the means most generally employed to achieve the desired effect. The order given implies that "great virtues" are less interesting and pleasing than "great crimes" or, at best, coequal with them. This is substantiated later on in the Letter:

Vice or virtue? What is the difference, provided that it is charged with an air of grandeur? Thus, the French stage, undeniably the most perfect, or at least the most correct, which has ever existed, is no less the triumph of great villains than of the most illustrious heroes.³⁵

This statement, however, only suggests that an author, insofar as he wishes to hold the interest of his audience, and insofar as he adheres to the tragic format, is indifferent between the depiction of great virtues and great vices; both are "charged with an air of grandeur." To remedy its moral defects then, the French tragedy seemingly need only focus exclusively on the sympathetic depiction of great virtues; and, since great virtues and great vices are apparently equally capable of interesting and pleasing, this could be done without disaffecting the spectator. To admit of such a possibility, however, would be to contradict Rousseau's earlier assertion that "the French theater is pretty nearly as perfect as it can be." But, if this is so, there must

necessarily be something preventing the tragedy's reformation along the lines indicated. What this something might be is only too obvious: although Rousseau refrains from saying so explicitly, the French must take greater delight in the depiction of great crimes and great villains than in that of great virtues and "the most illustrious heroes." This is not in contradiction with what was said earlier: although "the French stage . . . is no less the triumph of great villains than of the most illustrious heroes," this by no means precludes the former triumph from being more extensive and complete; it even marginally suggests that this is the case, since Rousseau could as easily have said that great villains and men of great virtue do equally well on the French stage. At any rate, the dramatist follows the taste of his audience, and the French tragedy appeals to a corrupt and wicked taste, that is to say, it more often than not depicts the vicious more sympathetically than the virtuous. Thus, even according to the more lenient standard, the French tragedy has an undesirable moral effect: "But, according to the same principle, what judgement ought we to bring to a tragedy where, even though the criminals are punished, they are presented to us in so favorable a way that all our sympathy lies with them?" The question is rhetorical; such plays are obviously pernicious, and so then is the French tragedy.

In order to support his condemnation of the French tragedy, Rousseau considers three plays--Crebillon's Cataline and Atree, and Voltaire's Mahomet--in some detail. These plays exhibit a common characteristic which makes them appropriate to Rousseau's purpose: the title of each is derived from the main character, who is also a "great villain." Thus, insofar as the spectator tends to identify and

sympathize with the main character in a play, that character whom he sees the most of and is consequently most familiar with, Rousseau has chosen to examine three plays which have, even according to the relaxed standard, an undesirable moral effect. While each of these three plays serves to illustrate the problematic nature of the French theater's claim to teach a love of virtue, Rousseau's three analyses involve something more than three minor variations on a single theme. These three plays are not equally pernicious; and this stems not only from the different crimes and criminals they treat of, but also from the differing nature of the minor characters who appear alongside the protagonist. The new standard Rousseau has introduced for judging the moral effect of a tragedy does not hinge only on whether the spectator is led to sympathize with a villain, but also on whether that sympathy was usurped from virtue. A play which depicts only vicious characters, even where one monopolizes all the spectator's interest and sympathy, is much less corrupting than one in which a vicious man and a virtuous man appear together, and in which all the spectator's sympathy lies with the former. Thus, the greater the difference between the most vicious character in a play and the most virtuous, the more pernicious it is if the audience's interest and sympathy is directed toward the villain. This must be borne in mind because Rousseau will consider several kinds of both vice and virtue, and this variety will prove to be extremely important. It will serve to explicate the nature of French taste, and so of French character: knowledge of those kinds of men whose depiction on the stage the French find interesting and appealing, and of those kinds of men whom they find less interesting and less appealing, will

tell us a good deal concerning the character of the French themselves, and of that of modern man in general.

Cataline, the first example cited by Rousseau, is a play

. . . where Cato,³⁶ the greatest of humans, plays the part of a pedant; where Cicero, the savior of the Republic, Cicero who, of all those who have borne the name of father of their country, was the first to be honored by it and the only one to merit it, is presented to us as a vile orator, a coward; while the vile Cataline, covered with crimes that one does not dare to name, prepared to slaughter all his magistrates and reduce his country to ashes, plays the part of a great man, and gathers by his talents, his firmness, and his courage, all the esteem of the audience.³⁷

In Cataline, Cato, "the greatest of humans," and Cicero, "the savior of the Republic," are juxtaposed to Cataline, a vicious and lawless rebel whose crimes "one does not dare to name;" yet, it is Cataline with whom the spectator sympathizes, and Cicero and Cato whom he scorns. Two important points emerge from this. In the first place, it suggests once again a fundamental disproportion between modern man and the man of antiquity. Both Cato and Cicero were held in high regard by their contemporaries, while Cataline was vilified and seen as the worst of criminals.³⁸ The French, the most modern of modern men, have reversed this evaluation. In the second place, Cataline is, according to Rousseau, representative of the public's taste, the taste which must be flattered on the stage. This confirms our suspicions concerning the reasons behind Rousseau's refusal to consider reforming the tragedy along the lines indicated by Plato in the Republic, that is, by purging it of great villains and great crimes, or at least the sympathetic depiction of such. Rousseau earlier argued that tragedy required an air of grandeur and that, as long as this requirement was met, the dramatist and his audience were indifferent between virtue and vice, but it now appears that greatness is not in itself sufficient to please French taste.

In Cataline, we have two of the greatest men of antiquity sharing the stage with a scheming villain who failed miserably in a plot against his country, and the taste of the French is such that they prefer the latter to the former. To be sure, this is in large part due to the way in which the playwright depicts Cato and Cicero, on the one hand, and Cataline, on the other, but this treatment is not accidental, nor is it simply the result of the author's preference. Crebillon only follows common opinion; it is the taste of the French public which dictates that Cato be treated as a "pedant," Cicero as a "vile orator," and Cataline as a hero. Conversely, a play which treated Cato and Cicero sympathetically would fail because it would run counter to the general taste of the French as a people.

That the French approve of Cataline is highly significant. This approval indicates that Cataline, as opposed to Cato and Cicero, strikes a responsive chord in the French character. Cato and Cicero are public men whose virtues are public or political in nature, whereas Cataline, whose orientation is essentially private and self-interested, is ruled by personal ambition to such an extent that he is willing to sacrifice the public good to further that ambition. Moreover, the approval which the play has met with on the French stage suggests that the French are themselves characterized by Cataline-like qualities: intense personal ambition, a preoccupation with self-interest, and little or no concern for the public welfare. In addition, it tells us a good deal concerning the objects of striving and emulation in France. The individual Frenchman would welcome greatness, but the greatness dreamed of is that of Cataline, or perhaps a successful Cataline, and not that of Cato and Cicero. This preference is itself determined by public opinion:

Knowledge, wit and courage alone have our admiration. And thou, sweet and modest virtue, thou remainst ever unhonored! Blind men that we are, amidst so much enlightenment. Victims of our own mad applause, will we never learn how much contempt and hatred any man merits who abuses, to the harm of mankind, the genius and talents that nature gave him?³⁹

It is not that the French are inherently incapable of appreciating the greatness of Cicero and Cato; they, like all peoples, are simply "victims of [their] own mad applause." What is most honored and most praised in common opinion tends to present itself to each individual as worthy of honor, praise, and, what is more, emulation. This is why Cataline is so pernicious: it elicits public applause for Cataline, and public contempt for the more or less virtuous Cicero and Cato, and thus confirms the spectator in the belief that only knowledge, wit and courage win honor and praise, and in the belief that the qualities displayed by Cicero and Cato are dishonorable and indicative of a flawed character. Furthermore, since most men live in and for the opinions of others, they will seek to cultivate at least the appearance of those qualities which are praised, while caring nothing for those which are held in low regard. The problem with Cataline is that it leads men to despise virtue as something associated with "pedants" and "vile orators," while simultaneously teaching them that viciousness, if accompanied by "knowledge, wit, and courage," is honorable, and thus worthy of emulation: "To what else does the moral of such a play lead, if not to the encouragement of Catalines, and to giving the wicked the public esteem which is owed to the virtuous?"⁴⁰

Part of the problem, Rousseau elsewhere indicates, is that the spirit or soul of modern man has become enfeebled in an important sense. In this connection, the following passage from Considerations on the Government of Poland is worthy of consideration:

When we read ancient history, we believe ourselves transported into another universe and among other beings. What do the French, the English, and the Russians have in common with the Greeks and Romans? Almost nothing except [human] shape. The robust souls⁴¹ of the latter appear to the former as exaggerations of history. How can those who feel themselves to be so small think that there would have been such great men? They existed, nevertheless, and were human like us. What prevents us from being men like them? Our prejudices, our base philosophy, and the passions of petty self-interest, concentrated along with egotism in all hearts by inept institutions . . .⁴²

The soul of man has become so shrunken, so limited as a result of his characteristic petty passions and egotism, that he is incapable of appreciating the greatness of the ancients for what it really was. His vision is defective because he interprets and judges everything in terms of himself; what is inconceivable for him is inconceivable simply. Such men are like Edwin Abbott's Flatlanders⁴³ who, living in only two dimensions themselves, are incapable of even perceiving, let alone understanding, a three dimensional being. It is Cicero's and Cato's virtue, and especially their civic virtue, which makes them alien to modern audiences. The playwright, in turn, takes this alienness and renders it less disquieting and more understandable by transforming it into something which can be looked down upon and despised, into pedantry, for example. Cataline, on the other hand, is eminently understandable: his passions and purposes, although much magnified, are similar to those of modern man. Consequently, Cataline is naturally a more successful stage character than either Cicero or Cato; the spectator can empathize with him quite easily because they are fundamentally alike.

This is not to say, and Rousseau must not be understood as saying, that modern man in general, or the French in particular, would not claim to admire virtue. The problem is that "virtue" is no longer understood properly; our understanding of it has become fragmented and

defective, Rousseau's reference to knowledge, wit, and courage alone having our admiration, while virtue remains unhonored, implies as much. These qualities are not unworthy of admiration. Although Rousseau himself often speaks deprecatingly of "wit," and less often so of "knowledge," he does recognize both of these, along with "courage," as potential virtues. Setting aside "wit," the status of which is extremely problematic,⁴⁴ courage is indispensable to a free people, that is to say, is a part of civic virtue, while great knowledge is part and parcel of the highest virtue attainable by man.⁴⁵ Knowledge and courage are not simply identical with virtue, however, but are parts of it. There is a difference between virtue as such, and the individual "virtues." The latter are constituent parts of the former; indeed, they are "virtues" only insofar as they occupy their proper place within the former. "Courage," for example, which is not in the service of virtue as such, is not a virtue and may even be a vice, in that it is capable of being employed in a vicious manner; a traitor or a murderer may be brave, but in such a man this is not a virtue. This may seem somewhat opaque, but a good deal of the difficulty is linguistic in nature. "Courage" and "knowledge" are almost virtues by definition,⁴⁶ parts of human excellence. What we are seeking are those two general qualities which are called "courage" and "knowledge" in the good or virtuous man, and something else in the nonvirtuous or vicious. "Spiritedness" and "reason" provide such general terms. The former is especially felicitous, in that it suggests the Greek "thymos," a term which plays an extremely important role in the Republic.⁴⁷ To adopt this term is useful for other purposes besides clarification of concepts, in that it serves to direct our attention to the thematic treatment of "reason" and

"spiritedness" in the Republic,⁴⁸ a treatment which Rousseau presupposes even as he revises it.

The Republic can be read as an inquiry into the relative claims of reason and spiritedness to rule in the human soul and in the city. In the Republic, three constituent parts of the soul are identified--a reasoning part which questions, evaluates, judges, and knows, a spirited part which is the seat of such qualities as anger and love of honor, and a desiring part, which is the locus of all those desires which relate to the body or to material things⁴⁹--and a man's character is said to depend upon the relationship between these parts of his soul. "Justice" is identified with the right ordering of these parts, and is thus provisionally equated with "virtue." Reason, which is the highest and most divine element in the soul, should rule over the spirited and desiring parts, with spiritedness serving as an ally of reason in keeping the desires in check.⁵⁰ The pursuit of the good depends upon knowledge of the good, something which only reason can acquire; the other parts of the soul are unreflective, and are thus incapable of distinguishing between what seems good and is not, and what is really good. More than this, the other parts of the soul are each concerned exclusively with their own particular province--honor in the case of the spirited part, bodily needs and material possessions in the case of the desiring part--while reason is capable of taking cognizance of the good of the whole soul. Similarly, the virtuous or just city is a city ruled by the wise in conjunction with a "guardian" class--those men whose soul is dominated by spiritedness, but a spiritedness which is under the direction of the wise--over those men primarily concerned with the acquisition of material goods, that is, over the desiring element of

of the city.⁵¹ As in the case of the good man, the claim of the knowing element to rule rests upon its unique ability to perceive the good of the whole, as distinct from that which merely seems good; only the truly wise can know this good, and thus only they are capable of guiding its pursuit by the city.⁵²

In the Republic, both the virtue of the good man and of the good city appear to subsist in the proper ordering of their parts. The virtue of these parts--the parts of the soul in man, and the different kinds of men in the city--is equated with the proper articulation of these parts within the whole. In the soul, for example, courage consists in the subordination of spiritedness to the rule of reason; in the city, the virtue of the spirited man lies in his acceptance of the rule of the wise. Moreover, each of the parts of virtue is indispensable to the whole; there is no good man whose spiritedness is not developed, and no city can subsist long without men who love honor and who are willing to fight in its defense. At the same time, however, spiritedness in and of itself is not a virtue, and the spirited man is not simply virtuous.⁵³ This creates something of a paradox. In a good city, only a small minority, the wise, are truly virtuous; the virtue of all other men depends upon their subordination to something external to themselves, that is to say, to the rule of the wise. This is so because virtue in the individual involves the rule of reason in the soul, but, in the good city, this is characteristic only of the wise: the souls of the guardians are dominated by spiritedness, and those of the bulk of the population by material desire.

Although Rousseau's treatment of both virtue, considered as a whole, and the individual virtues, differs from that of the Republic

in certain crucial respects; his general approach is more than a little reminiscent of the earlier work. Rousseau treats virtue as a complex whole, a whole which is, in the case of the city at least, oriented toward the pursuit of the common good. Cato and Cicero, whom he praises, are, for example, defenders of the public realm, that realm which is concerned with the good of all. Similarly, he distinguishes between the parts of virtue, such as courage, and virtue as such, and seems to equate the latter with the proper ordering of the former; thus, he attacks Cataline, and common opinion in general, for praising as first that which should be subordinate, in a manner which recalls the Platonic Socrates' criticism of the poets for praising spiritedness as the noblest part of the soul, and the spirited man, Achilles, as the highest type of human being. Rousseau deviates from the Republic, however, in his treatment of knowledge and in his equating of virtue with a concern with the good. For Plato, virtue and knowledge are identical: only that man who is truly wise, who has comprehensive knowledge of the good, can be virtuous in the complete sense. As far as the individual is concerned, knowledge or wisdom is the highest part of virtue, and, with knowledge, the other parts fall into place; to know the good is to be good, while viciousness and vice are the result of ignorance.⁵⁴ Similarly, the realization of the virtuous or just city depends upon the actualization of the rule of the wise. The trouble with this conception of virtue is that it makes virtue, even in the best city, accessible only to the few. Most men are followers of common opinion, and those who merely opine do not know, and those who do not know cannot attain true virtue; like the guardians, the virtue of such men is incomplete and contingent.

While Rousseau accepts the Platonic distinction between the few who know and the many who only opine, he treats this distinction as largely irrelevant to the problem of virtue. Cato was not a philosopher or a knower, and Cato was virtuous. For Rousseau, it is a concern for the good, rather than knowledge of it, which is crucial in distinguishing the virtuous man from the nonvirtuous. It is "willing," rather than "knowing," what is good which is the essence of virtue. The virtuous citizen wills the public good, although in practice he may require help in determining what that good actually is; he must be led to opine correctly, but he need not know the good as such.⁵⁵ Even when he wills the common good, but mistakes it, he is no less virtuous. Similarly, the virtuous man follows conscience, not reason; conscience conveys an intuitive and almost prerational awareness of the good.⁵⁶ Conscience, too, can be mistaken concerning what is right behavior in a given situation, but, even when he acts badly, the follower of conscience remains virtuous. It is intention which is all-important, according to Rousseau, in distinguishing the virtuous man from the nonvirtuous. This, in turn, partially serves to explain Rousseau's previously remarked revision in the standards to be employed in judging the theater. A play which leads men to sympathize with the virtuous inculcates an approximation of virtue. To identify with the virtuous is to wish them well and, above all, to accept their ends for the moment as one's own. But to wish the virtuous man well is to will the triumph of virtue, and to accept such ends as one's own is to will the good. That this sympathy and identification is necessarily passing and sterile, however, underlines the theater's limited usefulness in this regard.

More than this, however, the Letter points to a potential conflict between reason and virtue, and between the pursuit of knowledge and the practice of virtue. Knowledge and virtue are not only not identical, but are, in most men, mutually opposed. We have already seen how certain kinds of knowledge tend, when made accessible to "the many," to corrupt civic virtue. In the same way, the possession of certain kinds of knowledge may corrupt the soul of the knower.⁵⁷ Indeed, reason itself has such a subversive effect when it supplants conscience as the arbiter of one's actions;⁵⁸ it leads, for example, to the "unjust speech," and to behavior in accordance with that speech.⁵⁹ Moreover, the theater's praise of knowledge and reason not only leads men to pursue other ideals besides virtue, but also tends to lead them to scorn and despise the virtuous. If virtue is following one's conscience, and if conscience is unreflective, then virtue is unreflective as well, and the unreflective man is often viewed as a fool. The same is true of civic virtue: the good citizen is unreflective in his obedience to the laws. It is for this reason that praise of reason is often corrupting; if reason and reflection are viewed as the most desirable of human qualities, then virtue, both individual and civic, must necessarily be seen as of at most secondary importance. Indeed, to exalt reason over virtue is to subordinate the latter to the former, and, according to Rousseau, this has an inevitably corrupting effect, in that, for most men, reflection and virtue are incompatible.

Rousseau's discussion of Voltaire's Mahomet adds a new dimension to his critique of the effect of the French tragedy on the soul of the spectator. As in the case of Cataline, he refers to three of the play's characters--Mahomet himself, Zopire, and Omar. Each of these three

characters represents a distinct kind of man. Indeed, Rousseau argues that the value of the play lies in its juxtaposition of these three types. While it is true that Mahomet exhibits "the fault of directing the public's admiration to the guilty," it partially redeems itself on two counts: it depicts a virtuous man, Zopire, who counterbalances to a certain extent "the terror and amazement" which the protagonist inspires; and, through its treatment of Mahomet and Omar, it exposes the criminal nature of fanaticism.

The lesson to be learned from the juxtaposition of Mahomet and Zopire is more important than that to be derived from the juxtaposition of Mahomet and Omar. Not only is the former discussed first and at greater length, but Rousseau himself praises it highly; of the scene in which Zopire and Mahomet confront one another, he says: "I do not know of another in the French theater where the hand of a great master is so visibly imprinted, and where the sacred character of virtue triumphs so visibly over the elevation of genius."⁶⁰ The reference to virtue triumphing "over the elevation of genius" may refer only to Zopire and Mahomet, or it may be intended as a subtle slap at Voltaire as well, but what is important is the opposition which is implicitly established between virtue and genius. This opposition is thematic as far as Rousseau's discussion of Mahomet is concerned. Mahomet's "superiority," for example, is described as "eclipsed by the simple good sense and intrepid virtue of Zopire," Mahomet's apparent superiority masks an actual inferiority to Zopire in those qualities which are most important. Zopire's ultimate superiority, however, is visible only to men such as Rousseau. Most men see, and are intended to see, something entirely different:

. . . I greatly fear that, with regard to Mahomet, his greatness of soul considerably diminishes the atrocity of his crimes in the eyes of the spectators, and that such a piece, played before people capable of choosing, would create more Mahomets than Zopires.⁶¹

It is Mahomet's "greatness of soul," his greatness as such, which makes his way of life appear choiceworthy to the many; Zopire's "simple virtue" cannot compete with such grandeur. Moreover, if virtue is associated with simplicity, as Rousseau seems to suggest, then greatness in any form may be incompatible with virtue; and this in turn implies that, insofar as one wishes to make virtue appear choiceworthy, greatness, including perhaps "great virtues," should be banished from the stage. True, the example of Cato and Cicero seems to contradict the proposition that virtue and greatness are incompatible, but this is a case of the exceptions proving the rule: a very few men may be capable of reconciling virtue and greatness, but, for Rousseau, the vast majority of men is not; for the many, greatness is a temptation which leads men from the path of virtue.

Rousseau's reference to Mahomet's "greatness of soul"⁶² supports the above conclusion. The term is the literal and conventional translation of Aristotle's "megalopsychia."⁶³ Aristotle regarded greatness of soul as the crown of the virtues; he saw it as characteristic of that man who considers himself deserving of great things, and who actually does deserve them.⁶⁴ Aristotle's great souled man possesses a potential for greatness of action: "His actions are few, but they are great and distinguished."⁶⁵ Such "greatness," however, can potentially be for either good or evil, in that it is essentially unregulated. The great souled man is a law unto himself, self-sufficient and unconcerned with the opinions of the Vulgar regarding good and evil, right and

wrong, justice and injustice. This means that he is oriented not toward civic virtue as defined by the political order, but toward greatness, and especially honor, as he himself conceives of them. The great souled man, in point of fact, is epitomized by Alcibiades, a man of immense talent, but one who placed his own honor above the welfare of his city.⁶⁶ The great souled man thus exhibits a certain ambivalence, when viewed from the perspective of the political order; he may be either an asset or a bane. Even Cicero, Rousseau tells us elsewhere, "loved his own glory more than his country," and was willing to subordinate the latter to the former.⁶⁷ Cicero could, for example, have put an end to Cataline's plot without violating the law. Such a course of action, however, would have entailed his playing a subordinate, hence less than glorious, role. Instead, he chose to employ extraordinary and unlawful means, correctly believing that such means would increase his reputation, in addition to being more in keeping with his estimation of his own worth. Thus, even Cicero's virtue is rendered problematic by his concern with glory and personal honor: a truly virtuous citizen would have abided by the law and accepted a subordinate position, being more concerned with the welfare of the city and the integrity of its laws than with his own reputation and honor.⁶⁸

Rousseau's analysis of Mahomet points to the ambivalent position of the "great souled man" in any political community. In large states, this ambivalence is not always so apparent: the great souled man can often achieve great things within the confines of the community; Cicero is a case in point. In smaller states, however, such a man dwarfs the political community; he can achieve greatness only by turning his eyes outward, by moving beyond the community. This is precisely Mahomet's

situation in Voltaire's play. Although born a citizen of Mecca, he is willing to destroy that city's independence in order to realize his dream of world empire. More than this, he repudiates the very gods of the city in favor of a new god more suited to his ambitions,⁶⁹ and this in turn brings us to yet another problematic aspect of the great souled man's character: his ability to inspire lesser men with blind and fanatical faith, and to draw them away from the city. Because he is something more than most men, it is easy for him to convince others that he is divinely inspired, touched by grace. Mahomet's effect on Omar exemplifies this. Formerly a staunch defender of Mecca, and an equally staunch opponent of Mahomet, Omar has been won over by the other's force of personality, and has even accepted him as the prophet of a new god. The fanaticism which Mahomet inspires in Omar has, in other words, led him to become an enemy both to his city and its gods.

Rousseau suggests that the threat which men such as Mahomet pose for the political community lies primarily in their ability to inspire others with fanaticism, in their ability to present themselves as something more than mere men. He goes on to argue that there is no cure for this; once fanaticism has been allowed to develop, it can only be curtailed by force. It is thus in the city's interests to prevent the development of fanaticism; but, to do so, it must somehow prevent the development of Mahomets, that is to say, of men with a potential for greatness. There is something paradoxical in this, however. Rousseau indicates in the Social Contract that it is precisely such "religious impostors" as Mahomet who are necessary to the formation of a free people. Numa and Moses were also "impostors" of a sort; yet, Rousseau is unstinting in their praise.⁷⁰ Even Mahomet comes in for some qualified

praise as a "founder" in the Social Contract.⁷¹ Moreover, a case can be made for the necessity of such men during periods of extreme crisis, when only extraordinary individuals can provide the inspired and inspiring leadership which will preserve the community. Lastly, much of Rousseau's condemnation of Mahomet rests upon the latter's ability to inspire fanaticism; yet, Rousseau tells us elsewhere that fanaticism, if properly directed, is beneficial, even crucial, to the political community.⁷² Indeed, civic virtue involves a kind of fanaticism: the good citizen's commitment to his city and its laws must be just as blind and impervious to reason as is the religious fanatic's commitment to his beliefs. Fanaticism takes man out of himself, so to speak, and causes him to give his allegiance to something which transcends both his self-interest and his individuality; the fanatic is willing to sacrifice everything, including his life, for what he believes. But it is precisely this quality which characterizes the good citizen; the good citizen values the welfare of his city above his own life or the lives of his children.⁷³ Even the religious fanaticism of an Omar is a part of civic virtue. Omar's fanaticism is opposed to civic virtue because it involves a blind belief in gods other than those of his city; yet, the same fanaticism, if directed toward the gods of the community, provides a strong support for civic virtue. This is so for two reasons. On the one hand, the fanatical attachment of a body of men to gods which are exclusive to their city binds them more closely together than if they worshipped several different gods, or gods that are also worshipped in other cities; they share both citizenship and religion, each of which serves to set them apart from other men and gives them a sense of common identity and shared purpose. Thus, when political and religious

communities are coextensive, an intense commitment to the one fosters an intense commitment to the other as well. On the other hand, fanatical attachment to the gods of one's city, gods which are identified with that city, promotes civic virtue by encouraging the equation of civic duty with religious duty, as well as the equation of the bad citizen with the heretic or impious man.

Rousseau's attack on fanaticism, and those men capable of inspiring it, raises certain difficulties. In particular, we are led to ask why, in the Letter, he seems to treat fanaticism as something which must either be prevented from arising altogether or which must be eradicated by force once it has come into being. We are further led to wonder at his failure to distinguish in the Letter, as he does elsewhere, between that fanaticism which is undesirable, such as Omar's, and that which is salutary, as well as at his failure to distinguish between those founders of religions whose work was essentially destructive of communal bonds, and those such as Numa and Moses who benefited the political community. As far as Rousseau's condemnation of fanaticism is concerned, it is important to note that it is made in conjunction with references to Mahomet and, by implication, the islamic faith. Like christianity, Islam is a peculiarly "modern" religion; it differs in certain crucial respects from those of antiquity, most notably in the fact that it is a proselytizing and cosmopolitan religion, that is to say, is not associated with any particular people.⁷⁴ Such religions do not contribute to the solidarity of a political community. Indeed, they undermine that solidarity by teaching that all Christians or all Mohammedans are, in the most important sense, brothers, and that all Christians or all Mohammedans are more closely related to one another

than they are to nonbelievers who happen to share a common citizenship with them. Moreover, as the case of Omar aptly demonstrates, the fanaticism of a Mohammedan or a Christian, unlike that of a Roman or a Greek, tends to divorce man from the city, and to subject him to an authority which exists apart from, and claims to be higher than, that of the political community. Christianity and Islam, and the former more than the latter, are thus politically disruptive.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, there are no practical alternatives to religion in its modern form; paganism is dead and cannot be resurrected,⁷⁶ and this is why Rousseau condemns fanaticism so sweepingly in the Letter. That religious fanaticism which is characteristic of modernity precludes the development of civic virtue or, at the very least, relegates such virtue to a subordinate position. It is certainly true that both Islamic and Christian doctrine speak of an afterlife, in which the virtuous are rewarded and the evil punished, but the virtue which is to be rewarded is not that of the good citizen, but of the devout man, and the devout man is not and cannot be a good citizen when, as will inevitably happen, the law of the city conflicts with his religious beliefs. For this reason too, an "impostor" such as Mahomet, who is capable of inspiring fanaticism, is an extremely dangerous man. Unlike a Numa or a Moses, his appeal transcends political boundaries, and so carries disorder in its wake. Far from being the founder of a city, he is the destroyer of existing cities.

The foregoing observations suggest that, in his condemnation of fanaticism and the great souled man, Rousseau may have omitted certain qualifying conditions mentioned in his other works, most notably the Social Contract, and that this omission was deliberate. Earlier in the

Letter, Rousseau rejected as "unseasonable" certain arguments which were inapplicable to the time and place for which the Letter was written, although he considered those arguments correct. Similarly, in his remarks concerning fanaticism and great men of the stature of Mahomet, he omits all considerations which are not applicable to 18th century Europe in general, and Geneva in particular. Thus, although a kind of fanaticism may have been an integral part of civic virtue in ancient times, because that particular kind of fanaticism is no longer possible, it is not mentioned in the Letter. Although the greatness of a Mahomet may have been salutary at another time, because it is no longer so and is even pernicious, it must be condemned without qualification. To do otherwise, to speak of fanaticism as sometimes desirable, and of men like Mahomet as sometimes capable of true greatness, would be to encourage fanatics and emulators of Mahomet amongst those men incapable of making the distinctions necessary to the realization that neither fanaticism nor a Mahomet is desirable here and now. One might well ask why Rousseau does not articulate the distinctions necessary to a true understanding of fanaticism as he sees it. The answer to this question is quite simply that such a course would be contrary to his purposes in the Letter, which are, in part, to win over the Genevan people. The Genevans are relatively devout Christians, and a comprehensive treatment of the relative worth of fanaticism in antiquity and in the modern world would necessarily contain an implicit attack on Christianity: it would present paganism as superior to Christianity from the standpoint of the city, and would lead to the conclusion that the pagans made much better citizens than do present day Christians. Such an argument could be made in the much more theoretical Social Contract, but

not in the Letter, where it would tend to alienate Rousseau's intended audience, and so make them less susceptible to his rhetoric.

Rousseau's criticism of the French tragedy's emphasis on "greatness" reaches a crescendo in his analysis of Atreé. Atreé is the extreme case. In Cataline, the villain fails in his enterprise; in Mahomet, he succeeds, but only at the cost of losing that which he loves best.⁷⁷ In Atreé, on the other hand, the villain not only meets with complete success, but actually exalts at his crimes; it is the virtuous who suffer, and the vicious man who appears happy and satisfied with his lot. Furthermore, its protagonist, unlike Cataline or Mahomet, is utterly lacking in any redeeming qualities; Rousseau refers to him as "the black Atreus," and tells us that ". . . he teaches us nothing other than to tremble at his crime." That crime itself--the murder of his brother's son, whom he has raised as his own offspring--and the horrible way in which it is committed, serves to further distinguish Atreus from Cataline and Mahomet. The crimes of the latter two are essentially political in nature, while that of the former is intensely personal; the crimes of Cataline and Mahomet are, in a sense, crimes by convention only, while that of Atreus, the shedding of a nephew's blood, is a crime against nature, as are his earlier attempts at fratricide. Atreus' crimes, both those he commits and those he plots, are thus more horrible than those of Cataline and Mahomet. Atreus is not even redeemed by any greatness of soul: ". . . he is great only in his rage." Despite this, however, he dominates the stage and the sympathy of the spectator: ". . . there is no other personage in the entire play who is capable, by his character, of sharing the public's attention with him."⁷⁸ Atreé has, in other words, no Zopire or Omar, no Cato or

Cicero, who is capable of capturing the spectator's attention and sympathy for even a moment. From the standpoint of its moral effect, then, Atreé is more pernicious than either Cataline or Mahomet, and this appears to be in large part the result of the nature of the minor characters portrayed. Indeed, Rousseau devotes much more time to these characters than he does to Atreus himself.

Rousseau's analysis of Atreé begins with a few brief remarks concerning the protagonist, but focuses principally upon two other characters, Plisthenes and Thyestes. This discussion of Plisthenes and Thyestes is, however, of only secondary interest to Rousseau; its primary purpose is to introduce a comparison between the ancient and the modern theater, together with an attempt to establish the superiority of the former.

Rousseau approaches the question of the ancient theater indirectly, almost surreptitiously. The first indication that he is moving in this direction is his observation that the love interest in Atreé is inappropriate, that he does not see how the mawkish Plisthenes can be tolerated in such a play, that Seneca, who authored a play dealing with the same events and characters, included no romantic elements in his version, and that

. . . since the modern author was able to bring himself to imitate Seneca in everything else, he really should have done so in this as well. Indeed, one must have a very flexible heart to tolerate amorous conversation alongside Atreus' scenes.⁷⁹

This observation serves two purposes. In the first place, it introduces the ancients as a standard against which modern authors can be judged; secondly, it reminds the reader of an earlier note which Rousseau appended to the Letter:

The Greeks did not need to found the principal interest of their tragedy on love, and did not do so. Our tragedy does not have the same resources and could not do without this interest.⁸⁰

It would seem that Rousseau's criticism of the author of Atreé for injecting a romantic element into the play is inconsistent with the assertion that modern tragedy is incapable of doing without this element. Such, however, is not necessarily the case. It may be that for Rousseau the ancients provide an absolute standard against which the modern theater can be judged, but, at the same time, the modern theater may be inherently incapable of meeting this standard; that is to say, what is good simply in dramatic productions, as determined by the model of ancient virtue, may not be practicable in the modern theater. This interpretation is in keeping with Rousseau's reference to the necessity of one having "a flexible heart" if one is to tolerate the mixture of amorousness and horror which is to be found in Atreé. Such a heart is characteristic of modern man, and this is the basis of Rousseau's assertion that the modern tragedy requires a love interest in order to survive. "A flexible heart" may be bad, and for Rousseau it is, but the theater must please its audience and, if that audience is corrupt or vicious, the theater must adapt itself to this situation, that is to say, must present plays which are corrupt or vicious in the same way that its audience is corrupt or vicious.

Rousseau's mention of Seneca is preparatory for a more important discussion, a discussion in which antiquity as a whole is established as a standard for judging the modern theater in particular, and the modern world in general. This discussion is presented as a digression, but its importance is underscored by the very passage in which Rousseau

seems to assign it the status of a digression: "Before finishing with this play, I cannot refrain from mentioning a merit in it which will, perhaps, seem to be a fault to many people."⁸¹ The language here is a curious mixture of off-handedness and necessity; Rousseau only "mentions," but he "cannot refrain" from doing so.⁸² What compels him to speak is the nature of the role assigned to Thyestes. Specifically, he feels obliged to mention that this role is ". . . of all those which have been put on our stage the one which comes closest to the taste of the ancients."⁸³ The essence of Thyestes' character, according to Rousseau, is its commonness. He is neither a great hero nor a model of virtue. Thyestes does have his faults, but these are small and no more than can be ascribed to that weakness which is common to all men. His appeal as a character is, according to Rousseau, in fact founded on his commonness, on those qualities which Thyestes as a man shares with each and every spectator:

He is a weak man, but nevertheless interesting on this basis alone: he is a man and unfortunate. It seems also, on this basis alone, that the sentiment he inspires is very tender and moving. For this man is very near to all of us, while heroism overwhelms us even more than it moves us, because after all what has this to do with us?⁸⁴

What Rousseau seems to be saying is that, insofar as Thyestes' character conforms to the taste of the ancients, the ancient theater based itself on an appeal to man's innate goodness, on each man's ability to identify with his fellows at the most basic level--their common pain and suffering. Furthermore, this is held up as a model for the modern theater, a model which that theater falls far short of. Rousseau strongly implies that the reason for this rests with the modern theater itself and those men who write for it. In particular, it seems that the modern theater's emphasis on grandeur interferes with the operation

of the spectator's natural goodness. Thyestes, for example, has little appeal when juxtaposed to Atreus; the "greatness" of the latter, even though it is a petty kind of "greatness," overwhelms the spectator and causes him to ignore or forget the bonds of common humanity. Thus, once again Rousseau rejects the modern theater's emphasis on greatness in favor of another model; this time it is the model provided by the ancient theater:

Would it not be desirable if our sublime authors deigned to descend a little from their habitual elevation, and touched us occasionally with simple, suffering humanity, for fear that, having pity only for unhappy heroes, we shall pity no one? The ancients had heroes and put men on their stage; we, on the other hand, place nothing but heroes there, and scarcely have any men. The ancients spoke of humanity in less finished phrases, but they knew how to practice it better.⁸⁵

There are several difficulties with Rousseau's argument, however. In the first place, he chooses to ignore the already established fact that it is not the theater which molds its audience's taste, but that taste which determines both what will be presented on the stage and the manner of its presentation. In other words, the modern theater's emphasis on grandeur to the detriment of common humanity is an artifact of its audience's taste and that audience's preference for viewing "celebrated actions, great names, great crimes, and great virtues," rather than common men. Even when such men are portrayed on the modern stage, as in the case of Thyestes, their appeal is limited or nonexistent; Rousseau may be moved by Thyestes' plight and may consider the inclusion of such a common sort of character to be praiseworthy in a play, but it "would seem to be a fault to many," if not most, of his contemporaries. Most modern playgoers are simply unable to sympathize or identify with Thyestes, which is to say that they are simply unable

to sympathize or identify with the weak, the unfortunate, and the common. What appeared as a flaw in the theater now emerges as a flaw in the audience, and this undermines the worth of Rousseau's proposed reform: the portrayal of more characters like Thyestes can contribute nothing toward awakening the sentiments of common humanity in the French; if those sentiments had not already been stifled, Thyestes would have been better received to begin with and the portrayal of grandeur would not so dominate the modern theater.

The preference of the French for portrayals of greatness is not a morally indifferent quality. It is associated with a disdain for that which is merely human and, at the same time, with a certain moral obtuseness. The French spectator lacks pity, and this lack is a result of the gulf which he believes separates him from "le peuple." Rousseau tells us in the Emile that we pity the woes of others only to the extent that we feel ourselves susceptible to them, and that the extent of this pity is proportionate not to the amount of evil we perceive, but to the feeling we attribute to those who suffer.⁸⁶ Thus, we have little pity for those to whom we attribute shallow feeling or for those with whose woes we cannot identify:

We do not pity a grazing sheep, although we know it will soon be slaughtered. In the same way, we become callous regarding the fate of men; and the rich console themselves for the harm they do the poor by supposing that they are too stupid to feel it.⁸⁷

But the origin of morality is in the sentiment of pity and in man's capacity to identify, at least on the level of pain and suffering, with his fellows; hence, those who are unable to identify with Thyestes, that is, with that which is common to all men, tend to see themselves as under no moral obligation to the majority of men. The French theater's

emphasis on greatness is merely the other side of this self-same coin. The French, or at least the theater-going public, do not sympathize with Thyestes, but they do experience a feeling of kinship with Atreus; although Atreus is "great only in his rages," he is still removed, as the spectator feels himself to be, from the common run of men. Furthermore, the French spectator can even sympathize with Atreus' crimes, for they are not really crimes at all, in that they are perpetrated on those who are beyond the moral pale, on lower beings not much different from sheep. The theater confirms the spectator in this feeling: the plays he sees are, after all, about Catalines, Mahomets, and Atreuses, great men all; those characters who are more common are merely secondary, and their action, their speeches, even their deaths, are significant only insofar as they affect the great.

There is yet another difficulty with Rousseau's appeal to modern authors to imitate those of antiquity. It is by no means certain that it was the character of the ancient theater which caused the ancients to exhibit pity for man as such. Not only is it appropriate here to once again reiterate the argument that the character of the audience molds the content of the play, but it is also necessary to point out that Rousseau himself implicitly casts doubt upon the idea that the ancient theater was responsible for the relative moral elevation of antiquity, and upon the idea that the ancients had heroes because they "put men on their stage." In this connection, the anecdote drawn from Plutarch's Sayings of the Unknown Spartans, which Rousseau recounts immediately following his praise of the ancient theater, is highly significant. According to the story, an elderly Athenian was having difficulty locating a seat at the theater. A group of youths sitting at a

distance beckoned him over, but, when he arrived, commenced to jeer. This happened repeatedly as the old man worked his way around the theater, until he reached the place where the Spartan ambassadors were seated. These latter immediately stood and gave the old man an honored seat in their midst; whereupon the Athenian was moved to remark, "Woe is me, the Athenians know what is decent, but the Lacedemonians practice it."⁸⁸

Rousseau's purpose in relating the above story is not immediately clear. In terms of his characteristic symbolism, Athens is identified with learning, the arts, and a highly civilized way of life in general, while Sparta stands for a simpler, less refined way of life, one characterized by a high degree of civic virtue. From this we might be led to conclude that Rousseau is implying by his anecdote that civic virtue and a concern for one's fellow man, whether or not he is also a fellow citizen, go hand-in-hand, while a highly civilized way of life, which is in itself opposed to civic virtue,⁸⁹ tends to destroy or pervert the sentiment of natural pity. This interpretation, however, conflicts with our earlier observation concerning the exclusiveness of Rousseau's conception of civic virtue, an exclusiveness which ultimately depends upon the suppression of the sentiment of natural benevolence. Moreover, it conflicts with Rousseau's conception of the true Spartan:

Every patriot is hard on strangers; they are only men, they are nothing in his eyes. This impropriety is inevitable, but it is minor. The essential point is to be good to the people with whom one lives. Outside of Sparta, the Spartan was ambitious, avaricious, and iniquitous; but disinterestedness, equity, and concord reigned within the walls.⁹⁰

The story which Rousseau recounted should thus be read more as a criticism of Athens and all that it symbolizes than as a celebration of Spartan humanitarianism. There are several additional reasons for

inclining toward this view. Firstly, Rousseau concludes the tale with the remark that, "Here are modern philosophy and ancient morals." The reference to "modern philosophy" is directed at the young Athenians, and is clearly derogatory, implying as it does all the vices, particularly egoism and a lack of concern for others, which Rousseau associates with "modern philosophy" so-called. In addition, it implies that Athens, which was then the seat of philosophy, was lacking not only in civic virtue--the old man was after all the fellow citizen of the youths--but in pity or humanitarian sentiments as well, with the practice of philosophy bearing at least a partial responsibility for this. Even more than this, however, the story takes place at a theater, and an Athenian theater at that, the very place where one would expect the ancient theater's supposed ability to teach pity to most clearly manifest itself. Moreover, the Athenians had the most highly developed theater in Greece; hence, one would expect them to be the readiest of all the people of Greece to pity the weak and unfortunate. Yet it is the Spartans--whom, at the time the Letter was written, Rousseau believed had no theater⁹¹--who recognize the "duties of humanity," while the Athenians seem blind to these same duties. At the very least, the Spartan ambassadors who, according to Rousseau's view at the time, could be expected to attend the theater only when abroad, exhibit a more highly developed sense of pity than do the Athenians, who could and did attend frequently. Thus, we can conclude that, Rousseau's praise of the ancient theater notwithstanding, if the ancients exhibited a more highly developed sense of pity than does modern man, this is not due to the fact that the former "put men on the stage."

If the above argument is correct, then Rousseau's stated reason for choosing the ancient theater over the modern is subverted: despite its greater emphasis on common men and common humanity, the ancient theater no more promoted benevolence than does the modern. Indeed, in both cases the presence of a highly developed theater seems to be associated with a near absence of pity, while the lack of a theater is the mark of a more charitable people: on the one hand, the contrast is between Athens and Sparta, and, on the other, it is between France and Geneva. Moreover, the great crimes and great villains which Rousseau excoriates in the modern theater are also to be found in the ancient theater, and, indeed, largely originated there. Rousseau implicitly acknowledges this:

What does one learn from Phedra and Oedipus except that man is not free and that Heaven punishes him for crimes that it makes him commit? What does one learn from Medea if it is other than how a jealous rage can make a mother cruel and unnatural? Consider the greater part of the plays in the French theater: you will find in almost all of them abominable monsters and atrocious actions, useful, if you will, in making the plays interesting and in providing exercise for the virtues, but certainly dangerous in that they accustom the eyes of the people to horrors they ought not even to know and to crimes that they ought not even to suppose possible.⁹² It is not even true that murder and parricide are always odious there. With the help of some facile suppositions, they are rendered permissible or pardonable; it is difficult not to excuse Phedra's incest and shedding of innocent blood; Syphax poisoning his wife, the young Horace stabbing his sister, Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter, Orestes slitting his mother's throat do not cease to be sympathetic characters.⁹³

What is significant is that all of the plays mentioned above as demonstrating the French theater's tendency to portray abominable characters sympathetically are derived from, and even closely follow, plays first performed on the stages of antiquity. How then can Rousseau hold up the ancient theater as a model for the reform of the modern?

A partial answer to the above question can be found in the statement which immediately follows Rousseau's cataloging of crimes and criminals:

If the Greeks tolerated such a theater, it was because it represented for them national traditions which were always common among the people, and which they had reasons for constantly recalling.⁹⁴

The Greeks thus tolerated a theater which portrayed the likes of Phedra and Medea because it served a political purpose, and this is the real basis of the ancient theater's claim to superiority over the modern. The stories upon which the ancient plays were based were "common among the people," in the sense that they were known to all. More importantly, these stories were part of a national tradition--common across time--and so served to give the citizen a sense of continuity, a belief that he was part of an enduring community. Attendance at the theater was thus a form of civic celebration in which all citizens could and did take part, if only as spectators. Such celebrations are extremely important in creating and maintaining a sense of community, in that they help to create a feeling of living a life in common with one's fellows.

In the case of Athens, the theater served as a means of keeping alive a sense of community, of commonness, even after the Athenians had largely ceased to be virtuous as a people. This was possible, however, only because the plays presented were drawn from a national tradition, and such is not the case with the French theater which, as the examples cited by Rousseau indicate, bases many of its plays on an alien tradition. The Athenian theater, moreover, was a focal point for community life; it was attended by all, and the Athenians went to the length of subsidizing the admission of the poor in order to insure that this would continue to be the case.⁹⁵ This element of community is also

absent from the French theater. In the first place, it tends to appeal to, and can only be afforded by, the wealthier strata of society.⁹⁶ In the second place, the French theater is closely associated with the larger cities, such as Paris in particular, and the rural population consequently lacks the opportunity to attend. The French theater is thus an amusement peculiar to the more well-to-do city dwellers, and so cannot serve as a bond uniting the people as a whole, as did the Athenian theater.

In opposition to the ancient theater, which dealt with much the same material, the French theater's sympathetic depiction of criminals and bloody and unnatural crimes is without redeeming social value, and Rousseau can consequently ask--

Deprived of the same motives and the same concerns, how can the same theater find among you spectators capable of enduring the scenes presented to them and the characters which are depicted?⁹⁷

The answer to this question must be quite simply that such spectators can be found because the French are a corrupt and vicious people. The French spectator's tolerance of, and even sympathy for, Cataline, Atreus, Mahomet, Phedra, and Medea, is symptomatic of an inner corruption, as is his preference for Cataline over Cato, Mahomet over Zopire, and Atreus over Thyestes. This is something, however, which Rousseau, living as he does in France, cannot with prudence state openly.⁹⁸ This conclusion also serves to explain Rousseau's earlier aversion to considering the possibility of adding to the "perfection" of the French theater by substituting for its present subject matter one which places less emphasis on great but wicked characters, as well as resolving the seeming contradiction between his description of the French theater with its many faults, and his assertion that that theater is "pretty nearly

as perfect as it can be." The French theater cannot be improved because it must, by its very nature, conform to the taste of its audience, and that taste is corrupt.

We can now conclude that Rousseau's preference for the ancient theater over the modern is not derived from any belief that the former is superior to the latter; as far as subject matter is concerned the two are almost identical. The decisive difference between the ancient and the modern theater is contextual: the question of what is appropriate to a given time and place is all-important here. The same plays which were salutary in ancient Greece are pernicious in modern France precisely because the two contexts are so vastly different. The former were redeemed by the political functions which they performed. In particular, it appears to be the tie between the theater and the city in antiquity, a tie which no longer exists, which makes the ancient theater a model institution of its kind. Not only did that theater, through its foundation in a national tradition, contribute to the citizens' sense of sharing a common identity, but it also was in and of itself something of a civic assembly.

There is yet another reason for Rousseau's preference for the ancient over the modern theater: the question of context is also relevant as regards the spectator. The same plays presented before an audience of antiquity, on the one hand, and a modern audience, on the other, can be expected to have vastly different moral effects, even aside from the question of the degree to which a sense of community is promoted. We noted earlier that there is a certain ambivalence to Rousseau's treatment of "greatness" in the Letter. On the one hand, Cato and Cicero are presented as great men--both in the sense of having

performed deeds which are remembered, and in the sense of possessing great virtue--and as such are regarded as worthy of praise. On the other hand, "greatness" is implicitly presented as incompatible with virtue. We attempted to reconcile these seemingly contradictory teachings by arguing that Rousseau is treating of two distinct kinds of virtue--great virtue, which only a few exceptional men possess, and that less exalted virtue which is accessible to the common man--as well as two distinct kinds of greatness--that which is accompanied by virtue and is in the service of the community, and that which is accompanied by viciousness and vice and is self-seeking. The virtue of the common man may be simply incompatible with the pursuit of greatness of any kind, and that greatness which is associated with the likes of Mahomet may be simply incompatible with virtue, but that virtue which belongs to Cato and Cicero may confer greatness on any who possess it. Thus, Rousseau's attack on greatness was made in the interest of the common man and common virtue, and should not be taken to imply that for uncommon men, the Catos and Ciceros, great virtue is not a good to be striven for. This solution is still incomplete, however: in Rousseau's thought as a whole the distinction between the common and the uncommon man, between "the many" and "the few," is less decisive than that between modern man and the man of antiquity.⁹⁹ Elsewhere in his writings, he indicates that the disproportion between ancients and moderns includes the relative inability of modern man to distinguish between great virtues and great vices. Speaking of a proposed "History of Lacedemon," Rousseau observes that--

The greatest inconvenience in that which I attempt is that in it men are seen who resemble us in almost nothing, who appear to us as unnatural, perhaps as much because we are

ourselves so, than because they are. Their crimes horrify us. Sometimes even their virtues make us shudder. Equally pusillanimous in good and evil, nothing which bears a modicum of force and vigor any longer appeals to us.¹⁰⁰

The great virtues and the great vices of the ancients are almost equally alien to modern man. The portrayal of either tends to elicit the same response--disbelief, a feeling of removal from what is portrayed, and a kind of horror¹⁰¹--because only "greatness," and a distorted kind of greatness at that, is apparent to modern eyes. The ancient spectator was capable of seeing evil for what it is, something radically opposed to virtue. If it did not precisely teach virtue, the ancient theater at least provided an arena for the exercise of the moral sense. Due to the nature of its audience, however, the modern theater cannot make an equivalent claim; rather, its effect is such as to obfuscate moral distinctions. This is why Rousseau can praise the ancient theater, even with its great crimes and great villains, while condemning the portrayal of the same crimes and the same villains on the modern stage. The ancient spectator, unlike the modern, never lost sight of the difference between hero and villain.

The above conclusion points to the most sweeping condemnation yet of modern man in general, and the French in particular. A man who can distinguish between virtue and vice, and yet prefers vice, is in a certain sense much less corrupt than one incapable of even perceiving this distinction: the latter lacks a moral sense, while the former merely misuses it; the former is potentially capable of virtue, while the latter is necessarily base. Modern man, as compared to the man of antiquity, is morally blind, and thus incapable of true virtue. The root of this incapacity is political in nature. The man of antiquity

could easily distinguish between virtuous men and bad, between heroes and villains, because these were determined by the city and its traditions. The virtuous man obeyed the laws and placed the good of the city above his private interests, which the bad man did not; the hero was a man who benefited the city, while the villain was a man who did it great harm. The political order thus provided a standard for judging men, a standard which, unlike power or glory or grandeur of design, contained an explicit moral component. Modernity, on the other hand, lacks such a standard precisely because cities, according to the true meaning of the term, no longer exist,¹⁰² and because most men no longer have any concern for the political realm;¹⁰³ men are judged according to their success in purely self-interested pursuits. But, where this is the case, even the possibility of recognizing true greatness is lost. If all men are assumed to act from motives of selfishness, then "great" men are no different from common men, except in the degree of their success or the magnitude of their selfishness. This is why Cicero and Cato are no longer considered "great," while Cataline and Mahomet are, although the idea of "greatness" associated with the latter is itself base:

The limits of the possible in moral things are less narrow than we think. It is our weaknesses, our vices, and our prejudices which limit them. Base spirits do not believe in great men; vile slaves smile mockingly at the word "liberty."¹⁰⁴

True greatness, that greatness which transcends petty self-interest, is thus largely inaccessible to modern man, and it is this more than any belief that greatness as such is intrinsically bad which causes Rousseau to attack greatness as an unfit subject for the drama. Indeed, Rousseau elsewhere acknowledges the value of great men and an understanding of greatness to a republican polity.

As the above quotation implies, the problem of liberty is linked to the question of greatness. Those "base spirits" who do not believe in great men are also the same "vile slaves" who scorn the word "liberty," and such men are fit only to be subjects. Men who see only baseness in others are incapable of acting from motives other than self-interest, and so are by nature bad citizens. Moreover, great men are sometimes necessary to the preservation of liberty--Cicero is after all called "Savior of the Republic"--and are always necessary to its establishment.¹⁰⁵ True greatness, then, is a phenomenon associated with free men, and it is largely because men are no longer capable of being free that Rousseau speaks so harshly of greatness. The "greatness" admired by the modern world has much in common with the "philosophy" which it also admires: both are false. The philosophy of the ancients shows up the false claims of modern philosophy, just as their greatness reveals that which modern man applauds to be nothing more than baseness in disguise.

Rousseau's attack on the portrayal of greatness in tragedy is thus insincere or, rather, the reasons he adduces to justify that attack are not his real reasons. To be sure, the tragedy does present to modern eyes characters which appear "chimerical" and "bloated," but this is indicative of a defect in the spectator and not in the tragedy as such. For Rousseau to draw attention to this, however, would be worse than useless, in that it would tend to alienate his audience without achieving any positive results. True greatness is not only foreign to France, but to Geneva as well; Geneva too lacks both heroes and men capable of appreciating them;¹⁰⁶ hence, a full articulation of Rousseau's position on greatness would show the vaunted liberty of the Republic to be

highly problematic. Modern man is simply incapable of either emulating or even appreciating the greatness of the ancients, and this must be accepted. It is much better to lower one's sights than to be forever criticizing the actual in the name of the unattainable, no matter how desirable it may be, and this is precisely what Rousseau does in the Letter: he banishes greatness from the stage and, by implication, from Geneva. Greatness may go hand-in-hand with the highest virtue and republican liberty, but, since such virtue and such liberty are no longer possible or even recognized as such, and since the sight of "greatness," without recognition of the virtue or evil associated with it, is either useless or encourages vicious behavior, greatness as such must be dispensed with. Neither the heroes of antiquity nor its virtues can serve as models for modern man. Eventually, Rousseau will provide a substitute, both for the greatness of the ancients and for their civic virtue, a substitute more in keeping with the modern condition. This substitute, however, will not be a suitable subject for tragedy. Tragedy itself must be abandoned because its subject matter and its "common means of pleasing" depend upon the portrayal of greatness. Accordingly, Rousseau turns away from the tragedy to the comedy, with a special emphasis on Molière's Misanthrope.

NOTES

Chapter III

¹502b-c, in Plato, vol. II, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925).

²See First Discourse I (O.C., III, 10-13) and II (20).

³Letter, 149-51 (B., 110-12).

⁴See Bloom, "Introduction," xxi.

⁵Letter, 161n (B., 120n).

⁶Republic 606e-08b.

⁷This applies only to more or less virtuous communities, however. Where society has become corrupt, Rousseau is more than willing to grant the theater a place, for the reason that, in such societies, anything which keeps men occupied and out of mischief for a time is a valuable adjunct to the police. In "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 972-3), Rousseau even justifies his own experiments at playwriting on these grounds. Cf. Letter, 77-9 (B., 58-9).

⁸"Every artist wants to be applauded:" First Discourse (O.C., III, 21).

⁹Letter, 36 (B., 27-8).

¹⁰Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 958-9) seems to suggest such a possibility.

¹¹Ibid., II (958).

¹²Cf. Plato, Republic 377c.

¹³This is one of the reasons why Emile, who is to be educated according to nature and to be at home anywhere, is not exposed to stories as a child. The stories of childhood leave an ineradicable mark on one's character. Moreover, they tend to form frenchmen, englishmen, and russians, rather than men: Emile II (O.C., IV, 348-57) and III (454-8). When Emile is first exposed to stories during adolescence, they will deal with men far removed in time and space: IV (526).

¹⁴Letter, 37 (B., 28).

¹⁵Ibid., 37n (B., 28n).

¹⁶Compare Emile IV (O.C., IV, 645-6).

¹⁷Letter, 37-8 (B., 28).

¹⁸Ibid., 38 (B., 28-9).

¹⁹Republic 379a-92c.

²⁰Letter, 41 (B., 31).

²¹Ibid., 39 (B., 29).

²²Ibid., 43 (B., 32).

²³For a discussion of the problems which the existence of evil in the world entails for belief in a just, omnipotent, and omniscient God, see "Letter to Voltaire" (O.C., IV, 1059-75); cf. Emile IV (O.C., IV, 586-92 and 634n-35).

²⁴Republic 379c-80c.

²⁵Compare Republic 379c with 382e-83a.

²⁶Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 468); cf. Plato, Republic 330d-e.

²⁷Ibid., IV, viii (468).

²⁸See Emile IV (O.C., IV, 634n-5).

²⁹Republic 614a-21d. Cf. Phaedrus 108d-115a and Gorgias 523a-27b.

³⁰See Emile IV (O.C., IV, 565-635); Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 462-9).

³¹Compare the surreptitious way in which Rousseau replaces the teachings of the Bible regarding the first men with that of science and philosophy in the Second Discourse, Proemium (O.C., III, 132-3); the way in which he implicitly subordinates religious to political considerations in the Social Contract II, vii (O.C., III, 383-4) and IV, viii (460-9), and in the Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 957-8); and his use of the "Savoyard Vicar" to criticize revealed religion in the Emile. Note also how much more outspoken he is in Letters Written from the Mountain, concerning the rights of individual conscience and the problematic nature of revelation, than he is in the Letter: cf. Letter 12-17 (B., 10-15) and Letters Written from the Mountain III (O.C., III, 711-54). The latter was written after the beginning of his troubles in Geneva and after he had renounced his Genevan citizenship.

³²See Letters Written from the Mountain, *passim*. Much of the controversy in Geneva concerning Rousseau is attributable to the Social Contract, in which Rousseau implicitly casts doubt on the legitimacy of Genevan government.

³³Letter, 38 (B., 28-9).

³⁴Plato, Laws, trans. by Trevor Saunders (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), 99.

³⁵Letter, 37-8 (B., 28).

³⁶The Cato referred to is Marcus Cato "The Younger," grandson of Marcus Cato "The Censor." Rousseau, however, tends to confuse the two Catos in his writings, perhaps deliberately: see, for example, Political Economy (O.C., III, 255), where actions of each are attributed to a single "Cato." It is certainly true that Rousseau seldom, if ever, employs the appellations commonly used to distinguish between the two Catos, and this may be the source of the confusion. At any rate, Rousseau seems to have more or less fused Cato The Censor and Cato The Younger into a single personage in his writings.

³⁷Letter, 38 (B., 29).

³⁸See Cicero, In Catalinam, for an account of Cataline's plot and Cicero's role in opposing it.

³⁹Letter, 39 (B., 29). Note that the passage also suggests that men who write plays such as Cataline deserve "hatred and contempt."

⁴⁰Letter, 38-9 (B., 29).

⁴¹"les fortes ames."

⁴²Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 956).

⁴³Edwin Abbott, Flatland (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), *passim*.

⁴⁴See Emile V (O.C., IV, 712-3 and 768).

⁴⁵On the importance of courage, see First Discourse II (O.C., III, 22-3). On the relationship between knowledge and the highest virtue, see "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 970-1); "Observations" (O.C., III, 39); First Discourse II (O.C., III, 29-30); Political Economy (O.C., III, 255); and Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156-7).

⁴⁶Cf. Aristotle, Nic. Ethics 1115a-17b.

⁴⁷In his translation of the Republic, Bloom consistently renders "thymos" as "spiritedness."

⁴⁸I say "the Republic," rather than "Plato," because it has not been, and almost certainly cannot be, established which of the "teachings" in the Platonic dialogues are those which Plato himself accepted as correct, and which he intended to merely acquaint the reader with certain problems.

⁴⁹Plato, Republic 435b-41c.

⁵⁰Ibid., 441c-42b.

⁵¹Ibid., 433a-34c.

⁵²Ibid., 428d-29a.

⁵³The "timocratic" regime, that regime in which spiritedness rules, thus involves a degeneration from the best regime; and Achilles, the epitome of the spirited man, is less than a model of human excellence. On the timocratic regime, see Republic 545c-51a. On the failings of Achilles, and the timocratic man in general, see Republic 386a-88b, 390e-91e, and 545c-51a.

⁵⁴Compare Republic 441e and 442c with 443d and 444d-45b.

⁵⁵See Social Contract I, vi (O.C., III, 380).

⁵⁶Emile IV (O.C., IV, 600-01); First Discourse II (O.C., III, 30).

⁵⁷See, for example, First Discourse II (O.C., III, 19 and 28).

⁵⁸The rule of the head over the heart, of reason over conscience, tends to lead to a preoccupation with selfish interest: cf. Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156); note IX (202-3); and Letter, 55 (B., 41-2).

⁵⁹True, it is only the limited reason of the pseudo-philosopher and "man of the world" which is at issue here; the reason of the true philosopher, such as Socrates and Rousseau, is compatible with virtue: Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156-7). This is an exception, however. What is important is that, for the vast majority of men, such is not the case.

⁶⁰Letter, 40 (B., 30).

⁶¹Letter, 41 (B., 31).

⁶²"Grandeur d'ame."

⁶³See Nic. Ethics 1123a (end)-1125a. "Megalopsychia" has also been translated as both "high-mindedness" and "pride:" see Nicomachean Ethics, trans. by Martin Ostwald (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 93-8, and especially note 18; and W.D. Ross's translation of the Nicomachean Ethics in Richard McKeon ed., Introduction to Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1947), 383.

⁶⁴Nic. Ethics 1124a (beginning).

⁶⁵Ibid., 1124b25; trans. by Martin Ostwald.

⁶⁶See Plutarch's treatment of Alcibiades: Plutarch's Lives, trans. by John Dryden and revised by A.H. Clough (New York: Random House, 1862), 233-62.

⁶⁷Social Contract IV, vi (O.C., III, 457).

⁶⁸On the problematic status of Cicero's virtue, see "Response" (O.C., III, 227); Emile IV (O.C., IV, 676).

⁶⁹See Mahomet, passim.

⁷⁰Social Contract II, vi (O.C., III, 383-4); Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 956-7); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 500).

⁷¹Social Contract IV, viii (O.C., III, 463).

⁷²See Emile IV (O.C., IV, 632n-33), where "fanaticism" is praised, albeit in a qualified manner.

⁷³Cf. Emile I (O.C., IV, 249).

⁷⁴For a discussion of the differences between Christianity and the ancient religions, see Social Contract IV, viii.

⁷⁵Ibid., IV, viii (O.C., III, 462-3).

⁷⁶Ibid., IV, viii (462).

⁷⁷See Mahomet's final speech in Voltaire's Mahomet.

⁷⁸Letter, 41 (B., 31).

⁷⁹Ibid., 41 (B., 31).

⁸⁰Ibid., 37n (B., 28n).

⁸¹Ibid., 41-2 (B., 31).

⁸²"Je ne puis m'empecher d'y remarquer . . ."

⁸³Letter, 42 (B., 31).

⁸⁴Ibid., 42 (B., 32).

⁸⁵Ibid., (B., 32).

⁸⁶Emile IV (O.C., IV, 507-08).

⁸⁷Ibid., IV (509).

⁸⁸Letter, 42-3 (B., 32). Cf. Plutarch, Sayings of the Unknown Spartans LV.

⁸⁹This idea is thematic in the First Discourse; see, for example I (O.C., III, 11-13) and II (20).

⁹⁰Emile I (O.C., IV, 248-9).

⁹¹See Letter, 105 and note (B., 79 and n).

⁹²Ignorance of vice appears, once again, to be virtue's best defense.

⁹³Letter, 43-4 (B., 32-3).

⁹⁴Ibid., 44 (B., 33).

⁹⁵That a man of means was seen as simply fulfilling an obvious civic duty when he financed the production of a play also reflects the essentially public nature of the Athenian theater.

⁹⁶See Letter 152-4 (B., 113-15).

⁹⁷Ibid., 44 (B., 33).

⁹⁸Rousseau's fear of arousing the French against him was not unjustified. As a result of an earlier work criticizing French music, he was subjected to innumerable verbal attacks and even some physical abuse: see "Biographical Fragment" (O.C., I, 1113-19).

⁹⁹See Chap. III, note 36.

¹⁰⁰"Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 545-6).

¹⁰¹Compare Crebillon's Atreus with that of Seneca. The former is much less horrifying because the crimes it depicts have been prettied up in order to make them palatable for a modern audience.

¹⁰²Cf. Social Contract I, vi (O.C., III, 361n).

¹⁰³Letter, 62 (B., 47).

¹⁰⁴Social Contract, III, xii (O.C., III, 425).

¹⁰⁵Compare Rousseau's treatment of Cicero and the institution of "dictator" with his discussion of the character of the "legislator:" Social Contract, IV, vi (O.C., III, 455-8) and II, vii (381-2).

¹⁰⁶Letter, 161-2 (B., 120).

CHAPTER IV

Although the problem of the tragedy and that of the comedy are closely related, Rousseau considers the latter to be the more important. As we have seen, much of Rousseau's criticism of the tragedy centers around the belief that it presents a distorted vision of man and a false view of human worth. In particular, the tragedy's emphasis on greatness is seen as subversive both of the virtue of the citizen and of the natural benevolence of man. The dangers posed by the tragedy, however, are of little consequence when compared with those associated with the comedy. The tragedy is partially saved by one of its faults, its removal from everyday life: because the characters portrayed in tragedy are "so enormous, so bloated, and so chimerical," the example of their vices "is almost as unlikely to be contagious as the example of their virtues is to be useful."¹ The comedy is quite a different matter. Both its characters and their behavior are closer to those of the human world. Moreover, its appeal is directed toward the base and vulgar in man, rather than to the possibility of "greatness," whether for good or evil. Thus, the impact of the comedy is both greater and more uniformly pernicious than that of the tragedy. Where the tragedy attacks virtue somewhat indirectly, the comedy does so directly. In particular, Rousseau sees the comic theater as a direct threat to the two models of human virtue capable of replacing the civic virtue which is no longer possible, that of Socrates and that of Alceste, virtue as a kind of reason and virtue as a kind of passion.

Rousseau begins his discussion of the comedy with the rather startling statement that, if we take the comedy in its perfection, which is to say at its birth, Molière is the most perfect comic author whose works are known. This statement startles because it is so blatantly untrue. On the one hand, Rousseau asserts that the perfection of the comedy was achieved at its birth; on the other, that Molière is the most perfect comic author. In doing so, he completely ignores the fact that, as in the case of the tragedy, the comic theater originated with the ancient Greeks. Rousseau cannot escape from this falsehood by citing the "whose works are known" clause of his statement and pleading ignorance of Molière's Greek precursors. Elsewhere in the Letter, he indicates that he is well aware that the comedy was a Greek invention.² Rousseau is thus guilty of lying to and misleading the reader. The misstatement of fact which he makes, however, contains a subtle hint regarding his intentions in discussing the comedy. In the first place, it appears that he is interested in confining his discussion to the modern comedy. Indeed, it seems as if he wishes to establish the modern comedy as the only comedy; the ancient comedy must be forgotten. This is necessary because Rousseau wishes both to condemn the comic theater absolutely and to preserve antiquity as a standard against which to judge the modern world. Once Rousseau admits the existence of an ancient comedy, one of these purposes must be abandoned. Either he must qualify his condemnation of the comedy or he must admit that the ancients were, in one respect at least, as corrupt as modern men, and perhaps more so, in that they began the comedy and so bear a certain blame for all the subsequent evils resulting from it.

There is another sense in which Rousseau's lie concerning the origin of the comedy serves his purposes in the Letter. Aristophanes is generally considered to be the best of the Greek comic authors; and it was this same Aristophanes who ridiculed Socrates,³ who accused him of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens, and who contributed to the climate of suspicion which eventually resulted in Socrates' trial and death.⁴ Molière, by way of comparison, is to be accused by Rousseau of ridiculing the slightly stupid, but decent and passionately upright Alceste, the protagonist of the Misanthrope. Rousseau's substitution of Molière for the Greek comic authors, and especially Aristophanes, thus prefigures his substitution of Alceste for Socrates as the model of human excellence which men should attempt to imitate, as well as the substitution of decency and righteousness for reason and philosophy as standards of judgement.

Before considering the question of Rousseau's substitution of Alceste for Socrates, it is necessary to present Rousseau's critique of Molière, since that critique points to the reasons behind such a substitution. The heart of Rousseau's critique is to be found in the statement immediately following his characterization of Molière as "the most perfect comic author:"

But who can deny that the theater of that same Molière, whose talents I admire more than anyone, is nothing more than a school of vice and bad morals, more dangerous than the very books which profess to teach such? His greatest care is to ridicule goodness and simplicity, and to set forth subterfuge and lies in such a way as to arouse our interest and sympathy. His decent people only talk; his vicious people act, and are generally favored by the most brilliant successes.⁵

Molière is more dangerous even than those books which openly profess to teach vice; he is the more dangerous because he is the more effective

teacher. In part this is due to Molière's great talent, talent which Rousseau admits to admiring, but the superior efficacy of Molière as a corruptor of morals also points to a similar superiority of the drama over the written word. One must avoid being misled by Rousseau, however; neither Molière nor the unnamed books referred to claim, either openly or tacitly, to teach vice. "Vice" is bad by definition, hence undesirable. What these works implicitly claim is that they portray or teach a desirable way of life. Rousseau's objection to this claim is not only that the way of life portrayed by Molière et al. is corrupt and vicious, but that it is portrayed as desirable. Molière is more dangerous than the most pernicious books because both his great talent and the genre he works in enable him to adorn vice with beauty and to render it much more attractive than is possible in a written work. A dramatic work, as opposed to something which must be read, appeals directly to the senses and emotions. The art of reading always engages the mind and the critical faculties to a certain minimal extent; this is necessary if print is to be translated into mental imagery or ideas. A play, on the other hand, can be assimilated directly, and thus passively: one sees and hears in a direct and immediate manner. To be sure, a play can be viewed in a critical and self-conscious way, but the point is that this is not necessary or even common, that there is always a nonrational component to the drama, and that, insofar as this is true, the drama tends to by-pass those faculties upon which conscious judgement of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice depend. Those elements of a play which impinge directly upon the senses and emotions please or displease, attract or repel, prior to and independent of any conscious judgement concerning the moral or ethical

content of that play. Such judgements may be made, but they occur only belatedly, after one's senses and emotions have been stimulated. One is first pleased or amused, even though what is pleasing or amusing may later, upon reflection, shock one's moral sensibilities; and this in turn tends to reduce the shock or outrage, to make one almost willing to applaud the vicious man or woman because of their physical beauty, outward charm, or wit. The most unjust and vicious actions can be rendered attractive, provided that they are accompanied by an appeal to the senses and touch the proper emotional chords within the spectator. The long-term effect of such presentations is to blunt the individual's moral and ethical sensibilities, and to introduce a certain ambivalence into his judgements concerning right and wrong, good and evil. What reason condemns, the senses and emotions have already applauded. That Rousseau himself admits to admiring Molière's talents, and to never having willingly missed a performance of one of his plays, is a good measure of the dangers inherent in the works of such an author. Despite his awareness that Molière's plays are subversive of morals because they are full of vicious characters made to appear charming and amusing, Rousseau cannot help being enthralled by them. Thus, even the wise man is vulnerable to Molière's genius. How much more vulnerable must the unreflective man be?

It would seem from the above line of reasoning that the moral effect of a play depends upon its content: if virtuous characters and actions are portrayed in conjunction with appealing sensual and emotional stimuli, would not virtue be rendered more attractive to the spectator? Rousseau's sweeping condemnation of the theater, however, precludes such an argument. In the case of the comedy, that Molière,

"the most perfect comic poet," is also the most dangerous, implies that it is the comedic art itself which is pernicious, and that the more perfectly that art is developed the more pernicious it becomes. Furthermore, the fact that the perfected drama is treated as more subversive of virtue than the other arts, implies that there is something peculiar to the drama which makes it such a threat. But, as we have seen, the drama differs from the other art form explicitly mentioned by Rousseau--the art of writing books--primarily in its ability to appeal directly to the senses and emotions. Consequently, we can provisionally conclude that for Rousseau direct appeals to the senses and emotions are often, if not always, linked to the subversion of virtue. At the very least, such appeals would appear to have a problematic effect; what is pleasant is not always right or just. Moreover, as we have seen, virtuous action depends upon overcoming what is in a sense most natural, hence easiest and most pleasant to the individual, the subordination of all other considerations to those of self. It must be emphasized, however, that this conclusion is only tentative. It may well be that, for Rousseau, artistic appeals to the senses and emotions pose a threat to virtue only within certain contexts of time and place, that of 18th century France, for example. Indeed, Rousseau's deliberate abstraction from the ancient comedy suggests that this might be the case; it may be only in a modern milieu that "the most perfect comic poet" is also the most dangerous.

The relationship between the Letter and the First Discourse has now become clearer. In the latter, Rousseau deals with the problematic character of the arts and sciences in general, and especially with the deleterious effect which their unregulated diffusion and pursuit has

upon civic virtue, while the former focuses almost exclusively on the dramatic arts. It would be facile, and consequently tempting, to ascribe the reduced scope of the Letter vis à vis the First Discourse to the ostensibly occasional nature of the former, to Rousseau's stated purpose of replying to the questions raised in d'Alembert's article on Geneva. Rousseau's remarks on the subject of Molière, however, serve to establish a more theoretically interesting reason for the Letter's focus on the drama: of all the arts and sciences, the dramatic arts are by their very nature the greatest threat to virtue, because they most directly appeal to the senses and emotions.

Much of Rousseau's criticism of Molière recalls his earlier observation that it is much easier to cause the virtuous man to appear ridiculous than it is the vicious. Specifically, what Molière is guilty of is portraying the clever "man of the world" as the most admirable kind of man. It is primarily in opposition to the clever man that the virtuous man appears ridiculous, and Molière's comedy is based upon the clever man. Rousseau's choice of the term "man of the world" to describe Molière's characteristic protagonist is doubly significant. On the one hand, it connotes an amusing, cynical, clever, self-interested, and worldly person. On the other, the term refers to the genesis of the character: the "man of the world" is a character whose traits are determined by a world which exists apart from Molière and which is a given for him, the world of his audience. The character of the man of the world is compounded of those traits which the author's potential audience most approves of, that is to say, of those traits which in general characterize that audience. This is the foundation of Molière's success. The man of the world is the likable man, and

Moliere's genius lies in his exposing to ridicule all those qualities which are opposed to those of the likable man. But the virtuous man is the supremely unlikable man, in that his very existence makes one aware of unwelcome truths concerning one's own failings. For this reason the capstone of Molière's comedy is the Misanthrope: after having pilloried all the other kinds of men who appear ridiculous when contrasted to the man of the world, Molière turned his attention to that kind of man whom "the world pardons the least," the man who is ridiculous because he is virtuous.⁶

Rousseau begins his discussion of the Misanthrope with an assertion that it is undeniable that Alceste, the so-called "Misanthrope" of the play, is "an upright man, sincere, worthy, truly a good man." He follows this with an attack on the idea that what Molière is portraying in the case of Alceste is not virtue, but exactly what the title of the play indicates, an individual who hates or despises all mankind:

To that I respond that it is not true that he gave this hatred to his character: the name, Misanthrope, must not convey such an impression, as if he that bears it were the enemy of human kind. Such a hatred would not be a fault but a perversion of nature and the greatest of all the vices. . . . The true Misanthrope is a monster. If he could exist he would cause not laughter but horror.⁷

"Who then is the Misanthrope?" Rousseau asks.

. . . a good man who detests the morals of his century and the viciousness of his contemporaries; who, precisely because he loves his fellows, hates in them the evil that they do one another and the vices of which this evil is the product.⁸

The vehemence with which Rousseau defends Alceste suggests that he is defending something much more important than a mere character in a play. Indeed, there is good reason to suspect that his defense of Alceste may be something of an apologia for Rousseau himself. The term,

"misanthrope," holds a special meaning for Rousseau: he was himself referred to as such by a number of friends and acquaintances, sometimes with exasperated affection and sometimes with thinly veiled or even overt hostility.⁹ It may thus be something more than the necessities of his argument which causes Rousseau to devote a considerable part of the Letter to an analysis of the Misanthrope and the character of Alceste. In this connection, it is interesting to recall our earlier speculation that what Rousseau is engaged in in his discussion of Molière is the implicit substitution of Alceste for Socrates as the model of human excellence. If Alceste actually functions in the Letter as a persona of Rousseau, then it is only fitting that Rousseau defend his way of life against his accusers,¹⁰ just as Socrates does in the Apology.

Having stated his opinion of Alceste's character, Rousseau attempts to establish its accuracy, to prove that Alceste is not a "misanthrope" according to the literal sense of the word. The hatred Alceste displays, he argues, is directed only toward the viciousness he finds in others, and such hatred is one of the defining characteristics of the good man.¹¹ Thus, the Misanthrope is preeminently a man who distinguishes between virtue and vice, who gives his affection to the former and hatred to the latter, and whose every action is based upon this distinction. It is the man who does not make such distinctions, the amiable man of the world and everyone's friend, who is the true enemy of mankind. Such a man encourages the vicious by seeming to approve of them and fosters vice by his culpable complacency. Indeed, the man whose character is diametrically opposed to that of the Misanthrope is not the "philanthrope," but the man who is supremely

uninterested in his fellows, the man who cares nothing for the character of others, but only how their actions affect him and his interests. He is pleasant and charming to everyone because he is indifferent to their good.

Nevertheless, it is the virtuous Alceste who is made to look ridiculous in the Misanthrope, and the man of the world who appears estimable. That this was Molière's intention is demonstrated, according to Rousseau, by his having juxtaposed the character of Philinte with that of Alceste. Philinte is "the wise man of the play," the clever and calculating man, the likable man, the man of the world, "everyone's friend." In Rousseau's words, he is

. . . one of those decent men of the world whose maxims so greatly resemble those of rogues, one of those gentle and moderate men who always find that everything is going well because it is in their interest that nothing go better, who are always satisfied with everyone because they do not care about anyone; who, at a well-set table, maintain that it is not true that the people hunger; who, with a well-lined pocket, find it quite unpleasant that some declaim in favor of the poor; who, from their tightly shut-up house, would see all mankind robbed, plundered, killed, and slaughtered, because God has endowed them with the meritorious gentleness to endure the misfortunes of others.¹²

This description of Philinte has been quoted at some length because it is not only a key to understanding why Alceste necessarily appears ridiculous on the stage, but also points to precisely those qualities which Rousseau is most opposed to in French society and which he is most concerned with keeping out of Geneva. An inquiry into Philinte's character therefore seems very much in order.

The most striking element in Rousseau's description of Philinte is his characterization of Philinte as "the wise man of the play." Given Rousseau's obvious disapproval of Philinte, this immediately

recalls his critique of the modern philosopher. In order to clarify this point, it is useful to compare the description of Philinte with the following passage from the Second Discourse:

It is reason which engenders amour propre, and it is reflection which fortifies it; it is reason which turns man back upon himself and separates him from all that troubles or afflicts him. It is philosophy which isolates him; because of it, he says in secret at the sight of a suffering man: Perish if you will, I am safe. There is no longer any danger, other than to the entire society, which can trouble the tranquil sleep of the philosopher and tear him from his bed.¹³ One could murder his fellow man with impunity under his window; he has only to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself a little to prevent Nature, which revolts within him, from causing him to identify himself with the man who is being assassinated.¹⁴

The parallel between Rousseau's description of Philinte, on the one hand, and "the philosopher," on the other, is so striking as to imply a high degree of similarity, if not an identity, between the two types. That Rousseau later refers to Philinte as "a philosopher" merely serves to confirm this judgement.¹⁵

Rousseau's critique of Philinte's character is in the most important respect identical with his critique of the modern philosopher in the First and Second Discourses, and elsewhere. This critique is directed at the overdevelopment and misuse of reason. Specifically, the hypertrophied reason of both Philinte and the modern philosopher is seen as interfering with the operation of natural pity, the basis of man's ability to identify with his fellows, and specially with those who are suffering in some way.¹⁶ This innate sentiment of pity is the foundation of all the social virtues.¹⁷ By taking man out of himself, by causing him to identify with others, pity paves the way for the extension and qualitative transformation of amour propre. Expansion of the individual's amour propre so as to include others thus makes moral

behavior, behavior which does not begin and end with the "I," possible. Vulgar reason tends to interfere with this process. Identifying with other men and concerning oneself with them is, from the standpoint of the purely egoistic interests of the individual, irrational. Reason teaches man that cooperation with others is sometimes in his self-interest, but it tends to stop at this point. Indeed, reason counsels that other men are irrelevant insofar as one's self-interest is not at issue: thus, the "philosopher" need only argue with himself a little to avoid the promptings of conscience; thus Philinte, secure in his house, could see the whole of mankind "robbed, plundered, killed, and slaughtered without complaining." Such is also the basis of the man of the world's amiability: he treats all men alike insofar as his self-interest is not at issue; he is pleasant when he has nothing to gain by being unpleasant because this is the course of least resistance, the easiest course, that which makes the fewest demands and, above all, that course which is least likely to adversely affect his interests at some time in the future. Moreover, reason and reflection lead man to compare himself with his fellows, and this comparison results in turn in such sentiments as vanity, envy, and the desire for preeminence, sentiments which are the expression of an immense and unadulterated amour propre, and which lead to the absolute assertion of oneself and one's private interests at the expense of other men. The reason of Philinte and men like him thus becomes subordinate to their sense of self-interest; it becomes an instrument of self-aggrandizement, and it is employed only in the service of those passions stemming from a primitive amour propre.

Unfortunately, if reason is an insufficient foundation for morality, so is pity. Pity is essentially passive; it produces commiseration, but no action. It prevents men from doing harm to others, but does not impel them to do good. At best it fosters an easy sort of benevolence: pity may motivate one to the performance of a good or virtuous action when that action is easy, but not when it is difficult, and most especially not when the performance of such an action is contrary to one's self-interest. Moreover, the more man becomes social and civilized, the more his natural character becomes overlaid with artificial desires, passions, and sentiments, and with false knowledge.¹⁸ As a consequence of this, the more advanced the social state, the more the influence of natural pity tends to become obscured. Something more than natural pity is therefore required as a foundation for morality in highly civilized, 18th century Europe. For Rousseau this "something else" is to be found in certain salutary prejudices and traditional moral codes. Most men are capable of virtuous behavior, according to Rousseau, only insofar as they are guided by beliefs and sentiments which, strictly speaking, are not rational, but which when acted upon produce morally sound actions. The authority of traditional morality, revealed religion, or even inertia of habit, provide an alternative basis for morality which is stronger and more sure in its workings than natural pity.

In opposition to the Enlightenment, Rousseau holds that reason cannot serve as an adequate guide to action for most men, particularly in regard to moral action. The average man reasons imperfectly and so tends to fall into error, and this is especially true as regards reasoning about the good and the bad, the just and the unjust.¹⁹ Moreover,

reason not only fails to provide an adequate basis for social morality, but it also has a subversive effect on traditional morality and revealed religion, in that it lays bare their conventional and/or "irrational" foundations. What is good by convention is not good simply; hence, in revealing the conventional nature of traditional morality, reason reveals it to be nothing more than a prejudice, a prejudice which is in no way intrinsically superior to the most extreme prejudice in favor of oneself. The most viciously self-interested actions thus come to seem permissible; reason has destroyed all exterior standards by which they might have been judged. Reason goes even further. Once all moral codes have been stripped of their claims to transcendence or to embody absolute truth, only self-interest remains to provide a guide to conduct. Because of this, Rousseau can assert that "the man who reasons is a depraved animal." Because of this too, in a society where the vulgar have been exposed to the teachings of reason, the virtuous man, the man whose belief in traditional morality has led him to concern himself with the well-being of others, comes off poorly when compared with a man like Philinte. The virtuous man's reason is relatively undeveloped. He does not stop to ask himself, "What do I have to gain?" when he sees one of his fellows suffering, but rather acts almost instinctively:

In riots, in street quarrels, the populace assembles, the prudent man departs. It is the rabble, the marketwomen, who separate the combatants and prevent respectable people from killing each other.²⁰

Furthermore, the virtuous man regards duty as an absolute and not as a convention. The virtue which Rousseau defends in *Alceste* is the unreflective virtue of the common man, in whom the ideas of absolute duty

and morality still subsist; it is virtue based upon a traditional moral code which has not been subverted by reason.

One must not infer from the preceding that a cultivated reason is necessarily incompatible with virtue. Striking exceptions to the general rule do exist. Indeed, there are men whose virtue is a product of their reason. Socrates was such a man, but the Socrateses of this world are all too few. The path to virtue through reason and reflection is closed to most men because they lack the intellectual requisites:

. . . for to use science well, it is necessary to unite great talents and great virtues. This one can barely expect of a few privileged spirits, but not of a whole people.²¹

In the Letter, however, Rousseau is primarily concerned with the virtue or lack thereof of the people, of "the many." It is for this reason that Alceste must be substituted for Socrates. Socratic virtue is limited to "a few privileged spirits," and this is of decisive importance:

However much it befits Socrates and minds of his stamp to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would have perished long ago if its conservation had depended upon the reasoning of its members.²²

The present existence of the human race thus proves that there is an alternative to Socratic virtue; the continued existence of the race requires the maintenance and strengthening of this alternative. By obscuring Socrates, Rousseau strengthens the alternative to Socratic virtue. By refraining from mentioning Socrates by name (except much later, when referring to the theater as a cause of his death), Rousseau in the Letter presents Alceste as the sole model of human virtue. This is necessary because, although Socrates was himself virtuous, the pursuit of a similar way of life tends to divert the many from the path of virtue. For the many, to seek virtue through reason is to become vicious

and depraved. Rousseau thus cannot praise Socrates because to do so is tantamount to urging Socrates' way of life on his audience. To attack Socrates, however, is equally out of the question, since he is the supreme example of human excellence. Rousseau is thus compelled to maintain a discrete silence on the subject.

The evidence hitherto presented in support of the idea that Rousseau is offering Alceste as an alternative to Socrates has been limited to a somewhat controversial reading of Rousseau's statement concerning the comedy being most perfect at its birth, together with his assertion that Molière is "the most perfect comic author." Our analysis of these statements, taken alone, is not completely convincing. There is, however, additional evidence that a substitution of Alceste for Socrates does take place on one level of the Letter. Before proceeding to a consideration of this evidence, it should be noted that what is not at issue here is whether or not Alceste, as he is depicted by Molière, bears a resemblance to Socrates. In the first place, we have already established that Alceste and Socrates represent two very different types of men. Secondly, we are concerned here with Rousseau's interpretation of Alceste's character. It may well be that Rousseau's treatment of Alceste will depart from that of Molière and, when this happens, we must follow Rousseau.

The first point to be made concerning the evidence for a substitution relates to Rousseau's primary criticism of Molière: that he makes Alceste to appear ridiculous. According to the First Discourse, this is precisely the fate which a contemporary Socrates would face:

Among us, it is true, Socrates would not have drunk the hemlock; but he would have drunk from an even more bitter cup, insulting ridicule and scorn a hundred times worse than death.²³

Moreover, Alceste's life as described by Rousseau bears certain marked similarities to that of Socrates, as described by Plato and Xenophon. Both Alceste and Socrates are made objects of public ridicule by comedic authors. Each makes his home in what Rousseau considers a corrupt society, and each takes a stand against that corruption. Each is the subject of a law suit, and each sees the judgement go against him. Admittedly, these similarities are no more than suggestive, but stronger evidence in support of our suspicions can be adduced as well.

The evidence referred to takes the form of several passages in which Rousseau discusses Alceste's character, passages which bring immediately to mind parallel passages in certain of the Platonic dialogues. Rousseau's description of Alceste's dominant passion is a case in point:

The character of the Misanthrope is not at the poet's disposal; it is determined by the nature of his dominant passion. This passion is a violent hatred of vice, born from an ardent love of virtue and honed by the continual spectacle of the viciousness of men. It is only a great and noble spirit which is susceptible to such. The horror and scorn which this passion nourishes for all the vices that have troubled it serve also to keep these vices from the heart it agitates. Furthermore, this continual contemplation of the disorders of society detaches him from himself and fixes all of his attention on mankind. This habit elevates and enlarges his ideas and destroys in him those base inclinations which nourish and focus amour propre; and from this conjunction is born a certain courageous strength, a pride of character, which leaves room in his soul only for those sentiments worthy of occupying it.²⁴

This passage recalls Socrates' characterization of the true philosopher in the Republic:

For presumably, Adeimantus, a man who has his understanding truly turned toward the things that are has no leisure to look down toward the affairs of human beings and to be filled with ill will and envy as a result of fighting with them. But, rather, as he sees and contemplates things that are set in a regular arrangement and are always in the same condition--things that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it at one

another's hands, but remain all in order according to reason--he imitates them and, as much as possible, makes himself like them.²⁵

Just as the peculiar passion of the virtuous man, his love of virtue and consequent hatred of vice, causes him to assume a broad and disinterested perspective on human affairs and so helps him to avoid the acts of injustice and personal viciousness which characterize those men who are dominated by a narrow amour propre, so too is the philosopher affected by his peculiar passion. This similarity between Rousseau's virtuous man and Socrates' philosopher, however, cloaks an even greater difference. The philosopher's passionate love of wisdom inclines him to a life of contemplation rather than action, and directs his attention away from human affairs, which are contingent and tumultuous, and toward those eternal truths which, while they may pertain to human things, are in their changelessness set over and above the human world.²⁶ The passion of the virtuous man, on the other hand, prompts him to act: his love of virtue and hatred of vice lead him to attempt to promote the one and eradicate the other. Reinforcing this difference is the fact that the primary orientation of the philosopher, qua philosopher, is the pursuit of wisdom, while that of the virtuous man is toward other men. Thus, Socrates was "guilty" of parental neglect and of failing to play an active part in the political life of his city, and both of these omissions were the result of his single-minded pursuit of a philosophic way of life.²⁷ Socrates' concerns were intensely personal, in that the pursuit of wisdom is by its very nature extremely personal, but at the same time unrelated to material goods.²⁸ Alceste's concerns, by way of contrast, are largely social in nature. Rousseau, in fact, corrects Molière on this very point. Molière portrays Alceste as in a rage

at having lost a law suit due to chicanery. According to Rousseau, however, ". . . the Misanthrope should always have been furious against public vices, and always tranquil concerning the personal viciousness of which he was a victim." In other words, Molière was correct in portraying Alceste as angered over the corruption of the court, but incorrect as to the cause of this rage. Alceste should have been portrayed as angered because the courts were corrupt, not because they had rendered an unjust verdict against him.

Other similarities between Socrates and Rousseau's conception of Alceste emerge in connection with their respective trials. Socrates accepted an adverse verdict phlegmatically, and Rousseau corrects Molière by arguing that Alceste, to remain in character, must do the same. Each explicitly refuses to make use of an opportunity to influence his trial through a personal appeal to those sitting in judgment.²⁹ Each is approached by a friend with a plan for circumventing the legal process. In the case of Alceste, this plan involves an attempt to corrupt the presiding judge; in that of Socrates, it involves flight to avoid a death sentence. Lastly, both Alceste and Socrates reject their friend's offer on grounds of civic duty.

The similarities between Alceste and Socrates are striking, but so too are the differences. It is, for example, characteristic of Socrates that he is largely indifferent to the verdict against him, even though it means his death. Indeed, by his conduct he literally compels the Athenians to sentence him to death, and so forces them to commit what amounts to an unjust act. According to Rousseau, it is equally characteristic of Alceste that he is enraged by the verdict against him, not because it affects him adversely but because it is symptomatic

of public corruption and injustice. Most importantly, although Socrates refuses to consider soliciting his judges, he does agree to consider the question of the desirability of breaking jail and fleeing to Thes-saly,³⁰ while Rousseau takes Molière to task for having Alceste's friend suggest that such a man as the Misanthrope would even consider breaking the law:

Alceste's friend ought to know him. How can he dare propose to visit the judges, that is to say, in honest terms, to seek to corrupt them? How can he suppose that a man capable of renouncing even decorum for love of virtue could be capable of neglecting his duties for private interest? Solicit a judge! It is not necessary to be a Misanthrope, it suffices to be a decent man, to have no part of it. For in the end, however one twists the thing, either the one who solicits a judge exhorts him to fulfill his duty, or he proposes that he make exceptions for particular persons and thus seduces him, since any exceptions for particular persons is a crime in a judge who ought to consider the suit and not the parties and look to nothing except order and the law.³¹

What is important here is that, where Socrates is willing to consider whether the law should be obeyed or not, Alceste would see only his duty. Moreover, Socrates' inquiry into the question is eminently in character, in that he indicates that he is simply reiterating a line of reasoning to which his friend, Crito, had been exposed before. Alceste's friend should know better than to suggest a breach of the law to him; but Crito, because he does know Socrates, knows as well that ultimately there is no question which he will not consider. That Socrates' inquiry issues in an exhortation to obey the law is irrelevant in this regard. Ultimately, his decision not to take flight rests on his commitment to a philosophic way of life, and not on an assumed obligation to obey the law. The philosopher is thus willing to consider the correctness of the law, to subject it to the authority of reason, while Alceste, the man of unreflective virtue, is not.

By far the most persuasive evidence of a link between Socrates and Alceste in Rousseau's mind is to be found in a note to the Letter. After having taken Molière to task for diluting the Misanthrope's character in the interest of eliciting laughter, Rousseau adds that, had Molière dealt more honestly with the character of the Misanthrope, that character would have been incomparably more effective and the audience would have directed its laughter at the man of the world rather than Alceste. It is at this point that Rousseau appends the following note:

I do not doubt that, on the basis of the idea I have just proposed, a man of genius could create a new Misanthrope, neither less true nor less natural than the Athenian one, equal in merit to that of Molière and incomparably more instructive. I see only one difficulty for this new play, which is that it could not possibly succeed. For, whatever one says, in those things which dishonor, no one laughs easily at his own expense.³²

As far as the surface argument of the Letter is concerned, this note is obscure; one has no idea of what is meant by an "Athenian Misanthrope." In light of the preceding analysis, however, the reference is fairly clear. In ascribing to Molière invention of the comedy, Rousseau ignored Greek comedy, and in particular that of Aristophanes; the reference to an Athenian Misanthrope partially corrects this omission. Moreover, the similarities which the preceding analysis has called to our attention between Socrates and Rousseau's corrected version of Alceste's character suggest that the subject of the ancient version of the Misanthrope was Socrates, and this in turn suggests that the "Athenian" Misanthrope refers to Aristophanes' The Clouds. Aristophanes' depiction of Socrates is, however, generally considered to be a caricature, and it most certainly involved an overt attack on the man and on philosophy. How then can Rousseau speak of a corrected

version of Molière's Misanthrope--a version corrected according to the ideas he himself sets forth--as being "neither less true nor less natural than the Athenian one." This seems to establish The Clouds as a definitive characterization of Socrates and, by extension, of the true philosopher. That Aristophanes' work was a defense of the Athenian political order and of traditional Athenian values against what he saw as the subversive influence of philosophy offers a solution to this problem. If the philosopher really is a threat to the political order in which he lives, and if this is especially true in the case of a republic, then Rousseau's seeming acceptance of Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates could, in keeping with his claim to be writing as a "Citizen of Geneva," very well be motivated by political concerns. Support for this interpretation is derived from the fact that, despite the similarities between Socrates and Alceste, their characters do diverge sharply. Specifically, insofar as, qua philosopher, Socrates' attention is directed away from human affairs, away from the political realm, he is at best on the fringes of the political community. Furthermore, insofar as Socrates is apparently willing to subject the very foundation of the Athenian political order, its laws, to the authority of philosophy, his way of life is potentially subversive of that order. Thus, just as Rousseau corrects Molière by insisting on the worth of the virtuous man as opposed to the man of the world, he accepts Aristophanes' version of Socrates in place of that of Plato. In both cases the requirements of the political community serve as his criteria for judging. Virtue is the sine qua non of a republican order, while the philosopher represents a potential threat to that order; consequently, Rousseau, qua citizen, is compelled to assert the worth of the virtuous

man in opposition to that of the philosopher. For this reason, Rousseau's discussion of the Misanthrope can be read as an attempt to substitute both the virtuous man for the man of the world as the standard of human worth, and the virtuous man for the philosopher as well.

In Rousseau's work as a whole this substitution finds a parallel in his treatment of the two Catos. The Catos, Elder and Younger, typify the virtuous man for Rousseau. Indeed, he frequently omits the distinguishing appellation and seems to speak of a sort of generalized "Cato" who provides the human race with "the spectacle and the model of the most pure virtue which has ever existed."³³ Rousseau's treatment of Cato the Elder, in particular, is close to his treatment of Alceste in the Letter. Like Alceste, Cato lived in "a century of wise men and philosophers;" like Alceste, too, he was "treated as a fool for not having wished to sully his great soul with the crimes of his contemporaries."³⁴ Lastly, and most importantly, Rousseau sees Cato as in a sense replacing Socrates:

What Socrates began in Athens, Cato the Elder continued in Rome, raging against the artificial and subtle Greeks who seduced the virtue and weakened the courage of his fellow citizens.³⁵

What it is important to observe is that Rousseau sees Cato and Socrates as performing essentially the same task, that of combating the subversive influence of "those artificial and subtle Greeks." Cato must replace Socrates, however, because the virtue which Rousseau is interested in sustaining is that of the citizen and not that of the philosopher. This theme is continued in Rousseau's treatment of Cato the Younger:

Let us therefore contrast Socrates himself with Cato: the one was more a philosopher and the other more of a citizen.

Athens was already lost, and Socrates had no other country than the entire world. Cato always carried his in his heart; he existed only for it and could not bear to outlive it. The virtue of Socrates is that of the wisest of men but, between Caesar and Pompey, Cato seems a god among mortals. The one instructed a few individuals, combatted the Sophists, and died for truth; the other defended the state, liberty, and the laws against the conquerors of the world. . . . A worthy pupil of Socrates would be the most virtuous of his contemporaries; a worthy follower of Cato would be one of the greatest. The virtue of the former would be his happiness, the latter seeks his happiness in that of all. We should be taught by the one and led by the other, and this alone should indicate which to prefer; for no people has ever been made into a nation of philosophers, but it is not impossible to make a people happy.³⁶

Like Alceste, Cato the Younger is a more appropriate model for man in general than is Socrates.

Rousseau never speaks of Socrates by name in the Letter. He does refer to an "Athenian" Misanthrope, but even this elliptical allusion is confined to a footnote. Moreover, we cannot doubt that Rousseau considers the virtue of the true philosopher, that which characterizes a "few great and cosmopolitan spirits," to be the highest form of virtue; yet, he is strangely silent on this subject too. He does not even openly consider the possibility that the virtue of the philosopher, or Socratic virtue, may offer an alternative to the virtue of an Alceste and to civic virtue, and this serves to separate the Letter from the bulk of Rousseau's works.³⁷ The omission is glaring but, given Rousseau's purposes, necessary. His silence in regard to Socratic virtue can be explained by reference to the attractiveness which the pseudo-philosopher, Philinte, holds for the common man. Unfortunately, Philinte and Socrates tend to become confused in the popular mind. Not only does the attempt to imitate Socrates often result in Philintes, but praise of Socrates is interpreted as praise of Philinte. At bottom, this is the reason for Rousseau's silence regarding Socrates and for

his attempt to establish Alceste as the standard of virtue. Alceste is, even to the vulgar, obviously Philinte's opposite; there is no danger of confusing the two. Given a choice, however, men tend to choose Philinte over Alceste, the calculating man over the simple but virtuous man. Thus, Rousseau attempts to deny men this choice. In the Letter, the reasoning man is always depraved; and the absolute superiority of simple virtue is asserted by means of the identity established between reason and vice. In order to assert this identity, however, Rousseau must ignore the true philosopher, and particularly Socrates, whose virtue is a product of his reason. The very possibility of attaining virtue through reason must be suppressed. It is not enough to say that the cultivation of one's reason is almost always corrupting. Every man regards himself as an exceptional case and, as long as the possibility of a Socrates is admitted, corrupt and vicious men will continue to cite his life as a justification for their own, and the public will continue to be deceived. This is why the substitution of Alceste for Socrates must occur surreptitiously, and this is why Rousseau must in effect censor certain of his own teachings concerning virtue.³⁸

The only major question remaining to be answered concerning Rousseau's treatment of the Misanthrope is that of his intended audience. To the extent that Alceste is presented as of exemplary character and as a model to be imitated, Rousseau would seem to be writing for an audience largely lacking in civic virtue. Alceste's virtue is not that of a citizen; it is not based, insofar as we are told, upon a love of country or upon any kind of an identification with the political community. Rather, it is founded upon "a violent hatred of vice,

born from an ardent love of virtue, and honed by the continual spectacle of the viciousness of men."³⁹ The very existence of such a "spectacle" implies a society which is already vicious and corrupt and, a fortiori, deficient in civic virtue. Moreover, unlike civic virtue, Alceste's virtue is not accessible to a whole people: "It is only a grand and noble spirit that is susceptible to such." At the same time, however, it is not exclusive in the same way that philosophic virtue is exclusive; it depends not upon superior talents, but upon the possession of a particular passion, a passion which in itself confers greatness and nobility of spirit. Unlike most other passions, Alceste's passionate love of virtue does not turn him back upon himself, and his hatred of vice and human viciousness serves to insulate him from the more ignoble passions. Moreover, his stern, unbending character acts to remove him from "every excessively intense personal interest to which he ought not to be susceptible." Like the true philosopher, the Misanthrope is motivated by so intense and exclusive a passion that he is relatively immune to all others. The saving grace of this passion for Rousseau, who elsewhere in the Letter is so critical of the passions, is its disinterestedness, the forgetting of self which accompanies it, a forgetting of self similar to that which characterizes the good citizen.

This is not to say that the Misanthrope is without fault, "that his passion does not often render him weak, unjust, and unreasonable." If such were the case, he would cease to be a man, and this is Rousseau's main criticism of those paragons of virtue which crop up from time to time in the French tragedy. The crucial difference between Alceste and those paragons is that the character of the former is realizable in practice, and virtue is nothing if it is not practiced.

Because of this, Rousseau presents Alceste as the model of the virtuous man, or at least as that model which should be taught in a corrupt society. One can conceive of a more perfect virtue--that of the philosopher or that of the citizen, for example--but, as far as most men are concerned, the virtue of the Misanthrope is the only practicable alternative to viciousness. A philosophic life is simply inaccessible to the vast majority of mankind, while the life of a citizen is possible only in an uncorrupted republic, the possibility of which has become remote in modern times. The peculiar passion which characterizes Alceste, on the other hand, is potentially accessible to anyone. Alceste is, after all, only an ordinary man living in a corrupt society. This is not to deny that the inculcation of such a passion may require a particular upbringing or a fortuitous series of accidents. In a corrupt society, everything militates against the development of a character such as Alceste's. Alceste's virtue is superior to that of the citizen or that of the philosopher only in the sense that it is potentially open to all men; its realization depends neither upon the possession of certain rare qualities of mind nor upon the existence of an uncorrupted republic.

Knowing that Rousseau intends Alceste to serve as a model of that virtue capable of existing in a corrupt society, however, does not completely resolve the question of whom he is writing for. Specifically, it does not answer the question of whether Geneva is included in his intended audience or not. Is, in other words, Geneva corrupt? There is no problem as regards the status of France, but the case of Geneva is more ambiguous. Time and time again, Rousseau tacitly acknowledges the corruption of French society, but he only hints that

Geneva may be less than completely virtuous. If civic virtue is still possible in Geneva, then the model provided by Alceste is inappropriate there; where it is possible, civic virtue is superior to that virtue typified by Alceste. On the other hand, it may be the case that, insofar as virtue still exists in Geneva, it is more the private virtue of Alceste than the public virtue of the citizen, with Rousseau's defense of Alceste serving also as a defense of Geneva. Thus, Rousseau may be preferring the model of Alceste to the Genevans as a replacement for the civic virtue which they have either already lost or are in the process of losing. The private virtue of an Alceste cannot completely fill the void left by a departed civic virtue, but it is preferable to unalloyed corruption and viciousness.

The problem with Molière's plays, and particularly the Misanthrope, is that they make the virtuous man an object of public ridicule, while simultaneously presenting the amiable viciousness of the man of the world as a model to be emulated. That the formula upon which Molière's plays are based is not his own creation, that it is derived from the likes and dislikes of his audience, only makes his guilt greater. In putting the man of the world on the stage and presenting him sympathetically, in simultaneously ridiculing the virtuous man, Molière gives public expression to private taste, and so legitimatizes that taste. Where before one might have hesitated to follow one's inclinations and behave in the manner of a Philinte for fear of the disapproval of other men, the success of Molière's plays serves to make one aware that the complacent pursuit of self-interest is both expected and accepted by the public at large, and that any other mode of behavior is regarded as folly by that same public. The root of the

problem lies in Molière's attempting to please a corrupt audience; to accomplish this, he is necessarily compelled to put a pleasing face on corruption:

Since the author's intention is to please corrupt minds, either his morality leads to evil, or the false good that he preaches is more dangerous than evil itself: in that it seduces by an appearance of reason; in that it causes the usages and principles of society to be preferred to strict probity; in that it makes wisdom consist of a certain mean between vice and virtue; in that, to the great relief of the spectator, it persuades him that to be a decent man it suffices not to be a perfect villain.⁴⁰

It is important to observe that Rousseau is not asserting that there exists a direct causal link between plays like the Misanthrope and vicious behavior, but only that such a play gives public sanction to practices which are already vicious, and thus removes certain barriers to the practice of vice. Molière relieves his audience of the feeling that certain vicious tendencies should be repressed, by convincing them that there is no danger of public disapproval if they follow their inclinations. Indeed, he intimates that public ridicule is reserved almost exclusively for those individuals, such as Alceste, who attempt to live virtuously.

According to Rousseau, Molière's work is redeemed somewhat by the greatness of his art and his inherent personal decency.⁴¹ What is interesting here is that there is an implied opposition established between great art and decency:

In all the other plays of Molière, the ridiculous character is always hateful or contemptible. In this one, however much Alceste has real faults at which it is not wrong to laugh, it is impossible to keep from feeling respect for him in the depths of one's heart. On this occasion the force of virtue prevails over the art of the author and does honor to his character. Although Molière wrote reprehensible plays, he was personally a decent man, and the brush of a decent man has never been able to paint righteousness and probity in odious colors.⁴²

In speaking of virtue prevailing over art, Rousseau implies that Molière's decency led to a defect in his art. The following passage specifies the nature of this defect:

. . . Molière puts into the mouth of Alceste so many of his own maxims that many have believed he wished to depict himself. This appeared in the resentment the audience⁴³ felt during the first performance at not sharing the Misanthrope's opinion about the sonnet; for it was apparent that it was also the author's.⁴⁴

According to Rousseau, Molière's art is defective to the extent that he fails to please his audience. But what did not please Molière's audience was precisely that scene in which the virtuous man's opinion is shown to be superior to that of the man of the world. Molière is thus not a perfect author insofar as he allows his own decency to manifest itself in his plays or, rather, when he portrays virtue as superior to vice. To succeed as an artist, Molière must appear as less decent than he really is; he must dissemble his own preferences and cater to the corrupt taste and judgement of his audience. Molière's plays thus corrupt not only the audience, but the author as well.

The above quotation reveals a certain parallel between Molière and Rousseau: both speak through Alceste's mouth. We have already noted that Rousseau seems to identify with Alceste at times, while he himself observes that "many have believed" that Molière employs Alceste as something of an alter-ego. The similarities between Rousseau and Molière run even more deeply. In particular, both Rousseau and Molière are artists and dissemblers. But where Molière hides his decency, Rousseau conceals his artistry. In the preface to the Letter, Rousseau tells the reader that his pen has "lost the art of pleasing," that "taste, selectiveness, and correctness" are not to be found in the Letter, that he is concerned only with the unadorned truth, and

that his writing is haphazard and may be boring. Surely this is disingenuous! By this time, there should be little doubt that the Letter was written with great care and with an eye toward its effect on the reader, that in it Rousseau makes use of any number of rhetorical devices, and rhetoric is an art. Indeed, Rousseau is a greater dramatic artist than Molière; he corrects that worthy's treatment of Alceste and indicates how the Misanthrope could be improved.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for Rousseau to deny his status as an artist, and thus separate himself from Molière. As an artist, Molière was compelled to veil his own decency in order to please his audience, but Rousseau suggests that he is under no such compulsion; he is no artist, he tells the reader, and can thus "[speak] the truth coldly." Rousseau's indecency is greater than Molière's: Molière appears as worse than he really is, Rousseau as better; Molière deceives his audience as to his vices, Rousseau deceives them as to his virtues. In his denial of any artistry, Rousseau deceives his readers to a greater extent than Molière deceives his audience. Molière is an avowed artist, and everyone knows that artists distort and embellish the truth. Thus, the effect of Molière's deception is minimal because it is expected. Rousseau, on the other hand, leads his readers to suppose that they will be presented with the unadorned truth, and so puts them off their guard, rendering them more subject to deception.

There is also a problem with Rousseau's defense of Molière's "decency." In conducting this defense, Rousseau implicitly identifies the artistic component of a drama with that which pleases the author's public. According to this criterion, the greatest dramatic artist would be that playwright whose work exhibits the least deviation from the

general taste of his time, and the demands of art become identical with those of "vulgar" taste. According to the First Discourse, however, the subjugation of the artist to common taste is precisely what is wrong with modern "art," so-called: in order to succeed as an artist, the man of genius must lower his sights and compose ordinary works which will be admired in his lifetime, rather than marvels which will live after him.⁴⁵ True art evokes an aesthetic experience which in a sense is timeless, and so transcends the taste of its times. In the First Discourse, Rousseau admits that this timeless quality is, to a greater or lesser extent, part of every true work of art; yet, in the Letter, the dramatic artist is portrayed as a follower of common taste, and the existence of a transcendent dimension to art is suppressed.

Why does Rousseau treat art and the artist in this way? Why does he misrepresent their character? As we have seen, Rousseau is engaged in the task of defending "decency" against a corrupt common opinion, and art is no respecter of decency. If Molière is a great artist, and Rousseau acknowledges that he is, then great art is compatible with the ridiculing of what is decent and with the sympathetic treatment of vice. Molière in fact never subordinates art to decency; Rousseau is wrong, probably deliberately so, in saying that he does. The example of the sonnet is misleading. Molière, through Alceste, is expressing himself on an artistic question, the worth of a piece of poetry, and not on a question of decency. Moreover, the artist, qua artist, can lay claim to a measure of superiority for his vision of the world, including his vision of the decent man, in that that vision transcends, hence surpasses in some way, the common way of looking at

the world. This claim of the artist forces Rousseau into what amounts to a two-front war in his defense of Alceste: he must oppose not only common opinion, but also the artist's claim to a transcendent vision, either of which would, if accepted, subvert his own interpretation of Alceste's character. Rousseau accomplishes this by lumping his opponents together, by equating "art" with the satisfaction of common taste. In the process, he deprives the artist of any claim to superiority: the true artist is no longer understood as someone who transcends the everyday in the direction of some higher reality, but as someone who panders to vulgar taste. In this way, Rousseau's superiority as an interpreter of Alceste's character is established.

Ultimately, Rousseau's rejection of an independent artistic perspective has the same status as his earlier rejection of philosophy; both are misleading. Not only does Rousseau continue to write as a philosopher in the Letter, but as an artist as well. Like his "rejection" of philosophy, his attack on the artist is made for rhetorical purposes and in the interests of the common man, and it masks a subtle approval. Both philosophy and art transcend common opinion; both are timeless and tap a universal dimension of human experience. Like philosophy, art is cosmopolitan, in the sense that true art reveals the human condition and elicits a feeling of pity, that most cosmopolitan of sentiments, for characters who are not bound to us by particularistic familial or political ties, but only by reason of our common humanity. To this extent, the perspective of the artist approximates that of the highest type of man, those cosmopolitan spirits who feel benevolence toward humanity as such. Art expands the limits of our personal horizons and acquaints us with the phenomenon of humanity. It

is for precisely this reason that art, like philosophy, is subversive of the particularistic societies within which most men make their homes: to concern oneself with humanity is to become less preoccupied with the concerns of a husband, father, neighbor, and citizen, upon which all societies as such are founded.

True art, according to Rousseau, should be the preserve of the few. In the First Discourse, he blames those who have broken down the barriers to the temple of the Muses, allowing all and sundry access, and it must be remembered that the Muses are more patrons of the arts than of philosophy. In the Letter, Rousseau attempts to reerect these barriers. By blaming art and the artist publicly and to the many, he is protecting both art and the common man: art is protected from profanation and the common man is insulated from a perspective which is subversive of those ways of life within which he can find what happiness is possible to him. Rousseau's artistry thus serves both art as such and the many, but, in order to achieve this two-fold purpose, the very existence of such artistry must itself be denied.

In a corrupt society, necessity compels the decent artist to appear corrupt,⁴⁶ and appearance soon becomes reality, if not in the first generation, then in the second. The reprehensible aspects of Molière's comedy may have been redeemed somewhat by his talent as an artist, but in the hands of his successors, the true followers of common taste, his approach to comedy came to embody absolute corruption. Speaking of Regnard's Le Legataire Universel, Rousseau observes that--

The most punishable acts are gratuitously gathered together here, with a playfulness which makes it all pass for nicety; counterfeiting, forgery, theft, imposture, lying, inhumanity; everything is here and everything is applauded.⁴⁷

The effect of such a play is to produce, if only for a moment, as many counterfeitors, forgers, thieves, impostors, liars, and sadists as there are individuals in the audience:

Who among us is so sure of himself as to withstand the performance of such a comedy without halfway taking part in the acts which are portrayed in it? Who would not be a little put out if the thief were surprised in the act or foiled in the attempt? Who does not become a thief for a moment in becoming concerned for such? For is concerning oneself with someone anything other than putting oneself in his place?⁴⁸

The appeal of the theater rests upon its ability to draw the spectator onto the stage in spirit, on its capacity to induce him to identify and empathize with those characters which are sympathetically portrayed. The sympathetic depiction of criminals thus tends to lead the spectator to become, for a moment, a criminal himself.

All societies are founded upon a general recognition that rules regulating what is and is not permissible under various circumstances are necessary to security and well-being. The individual living in society must control certain of his passions and desires in order for his relations with others to be tolerable; the desire to acquire wealth, for example, must be curtailed, in the sense that it is forbidden for such a desire to manifest itself in the form of "murder" or "theft." Without such limitations established by convention, according to Rousseau, caprice and arbitrary power would rule human affairs: no one would be secure in either life or property.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the dangerous passions and desires can only be suppressed, and thus continue to lurk beneath the surface. Consequently, their portrayal on the stage often titillates rather than shocks, and this is especially true if what is portrayed is passions, desires, or actions which are only marginally forbidden. A play can succeed by pandering to the

desire for titillation, to the desire to experience, if only vicariously, the forbidden.⁵⁰ The forbidden, however, can only be enjoyed if the social rules which define it as such are first undermined, and this undermining can best be accomplished by pointing out the conventional nature of these rules and then ridiculing them as unnatural. In a sense this ridiculing of traditional standards of behavior is in itself yet another kind of titillation. Moreover, the success which plays depicting marginal behavior tend to enjoy seems to give the stamp of public approval to what is portrayed, thus eliminating that fear of others' disapproval which is the mainstay of all laws and conventions. Behavior which had formerly been beyond the pale comes to seem more and more acceptable, and this is true even when the behavior in question has a disruptive effect on the social order. Such a situation exhibits a striking resemblance to a system undergoing positive feedback. As formerly marginal behavior becomes acceptable, the boundaries of the forbidden are pushed back, creating a new area of marginal behavior. As far as the theater itself is concerned, what had previously appealed to the spectator no longer does so; the sense of titillation is gone, because the desires or actions in question have become acceptable. Hence, an author must search further for new thrills capable of stimulating a jaded audience.

The problem of the theater, as described above, is especially crucial for a republican order. Such an order is predicated on the idea of self-rule, and self-rule presupposes self-control. Self-control, however, is not innate; it must be acquired through practice. Thus, when the area of permissible behavior expands, the opportunity to develop self-control decreases proportionately, until a point is

reached where the citizenry, taken either individually or as a collective body, is no longer willing or capable of subordinating individual desire to the good of the community. At such a point, republican government collapses and the people acquire rulers, rulers who are quite willing for them to pursue their individual desires as long as they vacate the public realm in the process.⁵¹

The conduct which a play encourages need not be overtly criminal for it to be culpable. In his discussion of Le Legataire Universel, Rousseau lists six specific punishable acts, of which four--counterfeiting, forgery, imposture, and lying--involve deception of some sort. These acts are not just "punishable," but are among "the most punishable," according to Rousseau. The seemingly disproportionate emphasis on deception, as opposed to more violent acts, is not accidental: it recalls Rousseau's criticism of social man in the Second Discourse:

. . . the social man [lives] always outside of himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others; it is, so to speak, from their judgement alone that he derives the sentiment of his own existence. It is not part of my subject to show how, from such a disposition, so much indifference to good and evil originates, along with such fine ethical discourse; how, everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes fictitious and feigned . . . how, in a word, always asking others what we are and never daring to question ourselves on this, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity, civility, and sublime maxims, we have only a lying and frivolous exterior, honor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness.⁵²

The majority of the vices indeed derive from the "hidden desire to profit at the expense of others."⁵³ Vice is thus founded in deception and, for this reason, the possibility of virtue depends upon the limitation, if not elimination, of deception in human affairs.

Such a reformation, however, is extremely difficult to effect. Deception is rooted in social life. In the first place, the ubiquity

of the pursuit of relative advantage, which is born of amour propre, means that most men perceive an interest in the ruin of others; what is bad for one is perceived as good by another, and vice versa, and men who look at the world in this way are natural enemies. But, since men are interdependent, since each seeks to make use of others, and because of fear of reprisal, this enmity cannot be openly admitted:

Finally, consuming ambition, the fervor to advance one's relative fortune, less from true need than out of a desire to place oneself above others, inspires in all men a base inclination to harm one another, a secret jealousy all the more dangerous because, in order to strike its blow in greater safety, it often assumes the mask of benevolence; in a word, competition and rivalry on the one hand, opposition of interest on the other, and always the hidden desire to profit at the expense of others.⁵⁴

Deception may be caused by competition and the opposition of interest, but it is encouraged by the existence of a code of "good manners" and civility, a code which ensures an artificial and superficial conformity in outward appearance and behavior:

Before art had shaped our manners and taught our passions to speak an affected language, our morals were rustic, but natural; and differences of conduct announced at a single glance those of character. At bottom, human nature was no better, but men found their security in the facility of seeing through each other, and that advantage, the worth of which we no longer perceive, spared them many vices.

Today, when more subtle researches and a more refined taste have reduced the art of pleasing to a set of principles, a vile and deceptive uniformity reigns in our manners, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mold. Ceaselessly, politeness requires and propriety demands; ceaselessly, usage is followed and never one's own inclinations. One no longer dares to appear as he is and, in this perpetual constraint, the men who form the herd called society, placed in the same circumstances, all act in the same way unless stronger motives deter them.⁵⁵

The man of the world adheres to such social conventions; Alceste transgresses them. The former always wears the mask of politeness and good

manners; the latter is himself. The decisive difference between Philinte and Alceste is thus that the one dissembles and the other does not. In a sense, Philinte's deception is necessary, in that it serves to mask a multitude of vices which cannot bear the light of day. Only a truly virtuous man can risk being completely open; only he has nothing to hide.

The theater encourages deception and the cultivation of false appearances in a number of ways. It may depict criminal deception--counterfeiting, forgery, imposture, lying--in a sympathetic manner, and so leads the spectator to vicariously participate in such practices; this, however, is not intrinsic to the theater. On the other hand, the theater must depict the man of the world as superior to the virtuous man, and so seems to sanction the cultivation of uniform social masks such as that worn by Philinte. A playwright who wishes to be successful must adhere to the conventions of politeness and civility of his time and place or run the risk of alienating his audience; consequently, he necessarily ridicules the open and virtuous man as uncouth. Lastly, the theater by its very nature teaches deception. It is an art form predicated upon the ability of men to appear as other than they really are; the actor is not the character he portrays. Rousseau will assert later that the actor is potentially the most corrupt of men because he possesses the greatest ability to deceive.⁵⁶ By the same token, the theater is corrupt in its essence and fundamentally opposed to virtue, in that its existence depends upon its capacity for deception and upon its ability to make that deception entertaining. For this reason, the theater cannot be transformed into an instrument for the inculcation of virtue. For this reason, too, the

theater can never accurately portray the completely virtuous man, who is always as he appears to be; no matter how inspired the author who creates it, no matter how gifted the actor who portrays it, the character of a dramatic personage is always less than completely virtuous because it is grounded in deception.

According to Rousseau, the proposal to employ the theater as an educational instrument, as an instrument for civilizing men and leading them to virtue, is thus ultimately doomed to failure. The proponents of the theater, however, see the problem in a different light. The core of the problem for such men as Voltaire and d'Alembert is not that there exists a fundamental opposition between an art form founded on deception and instruction in virtue, but that the subject matter of existing plays is inappropriate to such instruction. They would perhaps concede the general correctness of Rousseau's point that the comedy is based upon "the vices of the human heart," and would agree with his argument that most tragedies portray evil in entirely too favorable a light, but they would argue that this can be rectified, that a form of drama which does not appeal to man's baser side is possible. Rousseau himself admits that both the portrayal of great crimes and great virtue are among "the common means of pleasing," and we earlier observed that, if this were indeed the case, then it would seem that the improvement of the theater depends only upon an alteration in its subject matter. Moreover, Rousseau's criticism that, even when virtue is displayed in a favorable light on the stage, this virtue is that of gods and not of men, can seemingly be overcome if the theater confines itself to the portrayal of those virtues which are accessible to men.

Admittedly, Rousseau's other criticisms of the theater would still more or less apply, but the drama would have been at least improved.

The attempt to effect such a transformation, however, encounters certain obstacles. The foremost involves the necessity that a play appeal to the public, and men go to the theater to be entertained, not instructed. Thus, according to Rousseau, while the good intentions of those authors who seek to educate their audience often result in "more refined plays," this is achieved only through the sacrifice of those elements which entertain. In the comedy, for example, the comic effect is almost entirely lost: "such plays are very instructive, if you will, but they are even more boring; one might as well go to a sermon."⁵⁷ The fate of the tragedy is similar. Thus, the attempt to employ the theater as an instrument of instruction tends to devitalize the two traditional genres. As a consequence of this, Rousseau argues, the French theater turned to a reliance on the motif of romantic love:

In this decadence of the theater we are forced to substitute for those true beauties, now eclipsed, pleasurable little accessories capable of impressing the multitude. No longer capable of maintaining the strength of the comic, the love interest has been reinforced. The same has been done in the tragedy in order to replace the situations drawn from political concerns which we no longer have, and the simple and natural sentiments which no longer affect anyone. In the public interest, the authors compete with one another to give a new energy and a new coloring to this dangerous passion; and, since Molière and Corneille, one sees only romances . . . succeeding in the theater.⁵⁸

Rousseau's argument is unexpected, to say the least. In certain respects it constitutes a defense of the theater against those who would employ it for nonartistic purposes. He criticizes the contemporary theater as decadent, as being marked by "the substitution of

pleasurable little accessories" for "the true beauties" of the past, and implies that this decadence is at least partially caused by the attempt to employ the theater in the public interest, that is, as an instrument for public instruction. Decadence thus seems to result in part from the subordination of the requirements of art to what are thought to be considerations of public utility. Those thinkers who propose using the theater for educational purposes are, in other words, guilty of a two-fold ignorance: they do not realize that the theater is inherently incapable of teaching virtue; nor do they see that their proposed reforms will debase and destroy the theater as art. A "reformed" theater is thus in neither the public interest nor in the interest of art as art.

The preceding argument appears out of place in the Letter. Rousseau wishes to prevent the establishment of a theater at Geneva, or so he claims, and to accomplish this he must convince his Genevan readers that the theater is undesirable, even pernicious; he must be "hard" on the theater. The above argument weakens his position. By introducing the possibility of employing an artistic perspective in judging the theater, Rousseau reveals that the public good, on the basis of which he has condemned the theater, is not the only applicable standard: the theater may be defensible as a form of art. Rousseau's opposition to the theater is thus revealed to be a qualified opposition. From the standpoint of a "Citizen of Geneva," the theater is undesirable, in that it tends to undermine civic virtue, and the same is true of the fine arts in general. However, even if it is conceded that the opposition between art and virtue is complete, the claims of art and the artist to our admiration would remain. The artist may not be virtuous

and the practice of the fine arts may even tend to undermine virtue as such, but they are praiseworthy nonetheless, if only from the standpoint of art.

Rousseau's remarks concerning the decadence of the modern theater, insofar as they reflect an implicit adherence to artistic standards of judgement, transcend the dominant perspective of the Letter. They point beyond the problem which the theater poses for Geneva, and even beyond the general problem of censorship, to a more comprehensive, and thus philosophic, perspective. Taken as a whole, Rousseau's works reveal the existence of a number of choiceworthy ways of life: that of citizen,⁵⁹ philosopher,⁶⁰ solitary dreamer,⁶¹ family man,⁶² and artist,⁶³ among others.⁶⁴ These various ways of life are, for the most part, mutually incompatible, in the sense that the adoption of one generally precluded the adoption of any of the others. The citizen, for example, becomes something less than a good citizen when he attempts to practice the arts or philosophy.⁶⁵ The philosopher is something of an exception to this; because his way of life is characterized by a freedom from prejudice, he is capable of understanding all of these various ways of life and appreciating them for what they are, both in terms of their individual strengths and individual weaknesses. Moreover, he alone is capable of moving freely from perspective to perspective. This accounts for many of the seeming paradoxes in Rousseau's writings. In the Letter, for example, he provisionally adopts the perspective of a citizen, and must thus reject that of the artist which is incommensurable with it. Yet this is only a mask; Rousseau does not become a simple citizen in fact. He remains a philosopher and, as a philosopher, occasionally allows Rousseau the lover of art

to peek through from behind the mask of a citizen and tell the reader that he never willingly missed a production of Molière.⁶⁶ Similarly, Rousseau is sometimes irresistably drawn into a defense of art and the artist, even while he is engaged in a vehement attack on both.⁶⁷

Rousseau's anomalous defense of artistic standards in the Letter serves a philosophic purpose. It suggests to the careful reader that the perspective of the citizen is one-sided, necessarily so perhaps, but one-sided nonetheless. Moreover, it suggests that other perspective, including that of the artist, must be taken into consideration in attempting to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the problem of the theater. Ultimately, the briefness and incompleteness of this defense warns the careful reader that the Letter, in which a civic perspective predominates, does not in itself provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem of the theater. The claims of art must be partially suppressed because they are opposed to those of the civic order and because their articulation would subvert Rousseau's rhetoric against the theater.

NOTES

Chapter IV

¹Letter, 44-5 (B., 34).

²Ibid., 103-4 (B., 78).

³See Aristophanes, The Clouds, passim.

⁴See Plato, Apology, 18b-19c.

⁵Letter, 45 (B., 34).

⁶Ibid., 48 (B., 36).

⁷Ibid., 48-9 (B., 36).

⁸Ibid., 49 (B., 37).

⁹See Jean Guehenno, Jean-Jacques (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), passim.

¹⁰Cf. Letters Written from the Mountain, I (O.C., III, 710).

¹¹"There is no good man who is not a misanthrope in this sense:" Letter, 50 (B., 38).

¹²Ibid., 51-2 (B., 39).

¹³Rousseau's phrasing, especially the "no longer," implies that the philosopher was not always such as he is described in this passage. In fact, the classical philosopher's superiority to the modern rests on just this point.

¹⁴Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 156); cf. the parable of the irishman in Letter, 55 (B., 42).

¹⁵Letter, 55 (B., 41).

¹⁶Compare the two discussions of "natural pity" in Second Discourse, Preface (O.C., III, 125-6) and I (153-7).

¹⁷In the Second Discourse, Rousseau presents pity as a substitute for the "principle of sociability," upon which the traditional understanding of natural law was founded: I (O.C., III, 153).

¹⁸Ibid., Preface (122). The comparison of social man to the sea-changed statue of Glaucus is particularly suggestive.

¹⁹". . . to study man and know his nature, his duties, and his end, is much more difficult than the acquisition of knowledge concerning the nonhuman universe:" First Discourse, I (O.C., III, 6); cf. Second Discourse, Preface (O.C., III, 122).

²⁰Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156).

²¹"Observations" (O.C., III, 39); cf. "Last Response" (O.C., III, 78) and "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 950-1).

²²Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156-7).

²³First Discourse I (O.C., III, 15).

²⁴Letter, 52 (B., 39-40).

²⁵Plato, Republic, 520b-c; the translation is from Bloom's The Republic of Plato.

²⁶For the Platonic Socrates, the human world, the world which most men inhabit, is analogous to a cave, a cave which the philosopher leaves behind him and to which he is loath to return: Republic, 514a-17d. This is why Socrates' criterion for the realization of the best regime, that philosophy and political power coincide, is seen by him as provoking laughter and ridicule; the philosopher is unwilling to return to the cave of human affairs, even as a ruler: Republic, 473c-e. In order to establish a truly just regime, the philosopher, who alone possesses the requisite knowledge, must be treated unjustly; he must be forced to turn away from contemplation of the eternal and compelled to return to the cave. Thus, Socrates advises, ". . . don't be surprised that the men who get to that point [those who have escaped from the cave] aren't willing to mind the business of human beings, but rather that their souls are always eager to spend their time above:" Republic, 517c-d, Bloom trans.

²⁷See, for example, Plato, Apology, 32e, 41e, and context; Crito, 45c-d.

²⁸Socrates was both a poor man and supremely uninterested in the acquisition of wealth: see Plato, Apology, 23b-c and 31b-c.

²⁹Letter, 57-8 (B., 43-4); Plato, Apology, 34c-5d.

³⁰Plato, Crito, 46b-c.

³¹Letter, 57-8 (B., 43-4).

³²Ibid., 56 (B., 42).

³³"Last Response" (O.C., III, 87).

³⁴loc. cit.

³⁵First Discourse I (O.C., III, 14). Roger Masters, in his translation, renders "dechainer" as "declaiming," rather than "raging." While this is certainly more in keeping with the traditional view of Socrates and, by extension, anyone continuing Socrates' work, it does not do justice to the french term, which has connotations of "breaking loose."

³⁶Political Economy (O.C., III, 255).

³⁷Cf. First Discourse II (O.C., III, 29-30); Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 156-7) and note IX (207); Social Contract II, vii (O.C., III, 381-4); Political Economy (O.C., III, 255); and Letter to Franquieres (O.C., III, 1141-2).

³⁸Rousseau achieves a somewhat similar effect in the First Discourse by characterizing Socrates as "eulogizing ignorance:" I (O.C., III, 13-4). There, Rousseau misrepresents the nature of Socrates' life and virtue; in the Letter, he suppresses them.

³⁹Letter, 52 (B., 39-40).

⁴⁰Ibid., 60 (B., 45).

⁴¹Ibid., 51 (B., 38).

⁴²Ibid., 51 (B., 38).

⁴³The term employed by Rousseau, "parterre," has connotations of "rabble."

⁴⁴Letter, 51 (B., 38-9).

⁴⁵First Discourse II (O.C., III, 21-2).

⁴⁶Cf. First Discourse II (O.C., III, 21-2).

⁴⁷Letter, 61 (B., 46).

⁴⁸Ibid., 61-2 (B., 46).

⁴⁹Cf. Second Discourse II (O.C., III, 174-7 and 191) and note I (195); and Hobbes, Leviathan, I, xiii.

⁵⁰Cf. Plato, Republic, 605c-06d.

⁵¹See First Discourse I (O.C., III, 6-7).

⁵²Second Discourse II (O.C., III, 193).

⁵³Ibid., II (175).

⁵⁴Ibid., II (175).

⁵⁵First Discourse I (O.C., III, 8).

⁵⁶Letter, 107 (B., 80).

⁵⁷Ibid., 62 (B., 46-7).

⁵⁸Ibid., 62-3 (B., 47).

⁵⁹See Social Contract I, vi and viii; Emile I (O.C., IV, 248-50).

⁶⁰See First Discourse II (O.C., III, 29-30); "Observations" (O.C., III, 39 and 78); "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 970-1).

⁶¹See Reveries, especially Promenades II and X.

⁶²See Second Discourse II (O.C., III, 168).

⁶³First Discourse II (O.C., III, 21-2); Letter, 138-9 and n (B., 103-4 and n).

⁶⁴Most importantly, natural man in the pure state of nature and natural man in society. The former enjoys the thoughtless contentment of the wild beast: Second Discourse I (O.C., III, 134-5 and 142-3) and note XI. The latter's happiness is that of a man in harmony with himself; he is, like man in the pure state of nature, a being who lives for himself, but his powers and faculties are developed. The aim of the Emile is to educate such a man.

⁶⁵This idea is thematic in the First Discourse.

⁶⁶Letter, 176n (B., 131n).

⁶⁷Ibid., 50-1 (B., 38-9).

Nuptial love maketh mankind; friendly love perfecteth it;
but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it.

Bacon, Essays¹

CHAPTER V

As was noted earlier, in the Letter Rousseau divides the drama into three genres: the tragedy, the comedy, and what we have called, for want of a better term, "the romance." In that it is founded upon the portrayal of romantic love, a passion which Rousseau tells us was unknown in the ancient theater, this last is peculiarly modern.² Moreover, it is that genre which largely dominates the modern theater; the modern theater and its audience, or at least the French theater and its audience, are such that the only successful plays are romances.³ For this reason, romantic love has come to pervade the modern theater, subordinating even the two traditional genres to itself. Applying Rousseau's teaching that only those plays are successful which appeal to the characteristic passions of their public, we are forced to conclude that the sentiment of romantic love pervades modern society and is characteristic of modern man. Any comprehensive understanding of modern man, then, depends upon coming to grips with the question of the nature of the romance's appeal.

Rousseau is compelled to turn his attention to the romantic theater for yet another reason. It is the romance which lends itself most readily to d'Alembert's project for establishing a theater which instructs men in virtue. It is the nature of the romance that it

possesses a considerable didactic element. The romance is a chronicle of love, but a kind of love which men must win or earn. In the romance, men are pursuers and women the pursued, but because it is the essence of romantic love that it desires to be reciprocated, the pursued are in a position of authority:

Love is the realm of women. It is they who necessarily give the law in it, because, according to the order of nature, resistance belongs to them, and men can overcome their resistance only at the expense of their own liberty. A natural effect of this kind of play is therefore to extend the empire of the female sex, to render women and girls the preceptors of the public, and to give them the same power over their audience that they have over their lovers.⁴

In a love affair the woman rules, and the romantic theater, because its subject is love, duplicates this state of affairs. Thus, insofar as the romantic theater specifies how this love is to be achieved by presenting models of its achievement, it gives the law to its audience, and particularly to those spectators of the male sex. It specifies how they must act, talk, feel, and even dress. For this reason, the romantic theater presents itself as a potentially powerful educational instrument, and for this reason too Rousseau must take issue with it. If the romantic theater can teach a kind of virtue, then his opposition to d'Alembert's project is unfounded.

Rousseau's above quoted description of the romantic theater suggests the form which his attack on that theater will take. His choice of language in particular is extremely suggestive: "realm," "law," "liberty," "empire," and "preceptors of the public" are all terms laden with political connotations, implying that the romantic theater may not be a politically neutral phenomenon. Moreover, he speaks of female rule depriving men of their liberty, and of this being in

accordance with "the order of nature," thus suggesting a conflict between freedom and what is natural or between nature and republican government. That Rousseau views the political effects of the romantic theater as problematic, at any rate, seems quite clear: "Do you think, Sir, that this order is without inconvenience and that, in augmenting with such care the ascendancy of women, men will be the better governed?"⁵

The Letter, however, cannot be understood as involving an unqualified attack on romantic love and the rule of women. Rousseau himself tells us that a virtuous woman is supremely capable of touching a sensitive heart and leading it toward virtue.⁶ Moreover, in the Emile, a work explicitly devoted to the subject of education, one of the most important stages in Emile's education revolves around the need to secure his romantic attachment to a woman capable of wielding the authority such an attachment would give her in the proper way and for the proper ends.⁷ Partial subjugation to the rule of a virtuous woman is, indeed, an indispensable part of Emile's education, and the nature of this rule provides several important clues to understanding the reasons for Rousseau's attack on the romantic theater in the Letter. As has already been made clear, only the rule of a virtuous woman is salutary, according to Rousseau, but more than this, that rule must be unobtrusive and circumscribed as well:

I expect that many readers, remembering that I accord women a natural talent for governing men, will accuse me here of contradiction; nevertheless, they are mistaken. There is a great difference between arrogating to oneself the right to command, and governing him who commands. The empire of woman is one of mildness, tact, and kindness; her commands are caresses and her threats are tears. She should rule in the home as a minister in the state, arranging to be ordered to do what she wishes. In this sense, it is invariably true

that the best households are those where the woman has the most authority, but when she disowns the voice of her chief, when she desires to usurp his rights and command herself, this disorder results in only misery, scandal and dishonor.⁸

The kind of female rule promoted by the romantic theater does not satisfy the criteria established in the Emile, and so breeds disorder. In part, this is due to the nature of the women involved. Most women, and here we are unsure whether Rousseau means modern women in general or only French women, are not virtuous. Thus, by encouraging the passion of romantic love and by inculcating the idea of woman as a moral guide, the theater actually tends to cause the young man "who has seen the world only on the stage" to place himself in the hands of "women without honor." The romantic theater, in other words, lacks proper discrimination. In exposing its audience to the charms of romantic love, and in presenting an idealized version of such love, it promotes the rule of women over men without concern for variations in the relative fitness of women to command. It is capable of awakening passion, but not of directing that passion toward its proper object. Indeed, there appears to be an insufficiency of such objects, that is to say, of virtuous women. In the Emile, for example, Rousseau presents as extremely formidable the task of bringing a young man together with a decent and virtuous woman.⁹

Even aside from the character of the women involved, the romantic theater embodies an undesirable kind of female rule. It is undesirable precisely because it is exercised before an audience, that is to say, in public. In the passage from the Emile quoted on the preceding page, Rousseau indicates that women, insofar as they seek to command men, should do so both subtly and in private, and that any

other course of action inevitably carries with it "misery, scandal, and dishonor." The heroines of the romantic theater, however, become "preceptors of the public," and acquire the "same power over their audience that they have over their lovers." What should remain private has, because of the radically nonprivate character of the theater, been made public, and has undergone a qualitative transformation in the process. The romantic theater, in other words, breaks down a barrier which Rousseau believes should exist between the private and the public, and this entails graver consequences than does the romantic theater's leading young men to place themselves under the authority of corrupt women. This latter is a significant problem only where most women are corrupt--i.e., in France--and may not, for example, be a problem in Geneva. The rending of the boundary between private and public is, however, more likely to constitute a problem for Geneva than for France because the French, we have been told, no longer have any political concerns, that is, because the maintenance of the integrity of the public realm is no longer of any importance for the French. At the very least, Rousseau's use of explicitly political language in describing the effects of the romantic theater, together with his disparaging remarks concerning French political life, suggests that the problem posed by a theater dominated by romantic love possesses a dimension which transcends the French context.

At this point, the question of why Rousseau insists on the maintenance of a barrier between the private and the public, together with the question of why the proper-ordering of the male-female relationship is so important to the conservation of that barrier, presents itself.

Instead of answering this question directly, Rousseau turns to a consideration of the ancients' treatment of women:

This furnishes me the occasion to propose a sort of problem. The ancients had, in general, a very great respect for women, but they demonstrated this respect by refraining from exposing them to public judgement, and thought to honor their modesty by remaining silent concerning their other virtues. They had as their maxim that the country where the morals were most pure was the one where the least was spoken about women, and that the best woman was the one about whom the least was said.¹⁰

This attitude, Rousseau indicates, had very real consequences for the ancient theater. The only roles portraying women in love and marriageable girls were those of slaves or prostitutes; to represent decent women on the stage would have been considered a direct affront to the female sex. The only exception to this rule, Rousseau notes, was in the tragedy, which was largely political in subject matter and import:

If they did otherwise in the tragedy, it is because, following the political beliefs of their theater, they were not distressed if it were believed that persons of high station had no need of modesty and were always exceptions to the rules of morality.¹¹

For Rousseau, the ancients exemplify political man. Moreover, we have seen that throughout the Letter the ancients are employed as a standard against which to judge modern man. The conclusion to be drawn from the above quotation, then, would seem to be that women, as women, are to play no part in the political life of a well-regulated republican order;¹² when women do enter the political realm, they are figuratively stripped of their sex and become like men. The problem posed by the romantic theater is thus reduced to the status of a particular aspect of a more general problem: the problem of the place of women in civil society. By redefining the problem in this way, Rousseau in effect dismisses the French situation as irrelevant; France does not

constitute a civil society because the French no longer understand political concerns.

In order to see why the question of the place of women in civil society is so crucial, it is necessary to recall that for Rousseau civil society is artificial.¹³ It rests upon the suppression of many of man's natural sentiments and inclinations, and particularly upon the suppression of the natural preference which man tends to give to that which is peculiarly his own,¹⁴ that is to say, upon a significant reduction in the scope of private life. Thus, the family--the locus of "the sweetest sentiments known to man"--is often treated by Rousseau as a competitor with the civic order, in that familial ties and loyalties are by nature particularistic and so tend to draw the citizen away from a complete identification with the community as a whole.¹⁵ Indeed, Rousseau has been interpreted as arguing that good citizenship and love of family are mutually exclusive.¹⁶ According to this interpretation, the sentiments associated with family life--the love of a man and woman for each other and for their children--are both intensely private and powerful, and so conflict with the requirement that the good citizen be oriented primarily toward the community as a whole, that his major concerns be exclusively public in nature. The denaturing of man which Rousseau speaks of in the Social Contract as fundamental to the establishment of a true political community, a community based upon right, would thus seem to include the elimination of those more or less natural sentiments which hold the family together.¹⁷

If family life and civic life are incompatible, however, we would expect Rousseau to advocate measures akin to those put forward

by the Platonic Socrates in the Republic: the eliminations of all social and political distinctions between men and women, the elimination of marriage, and the establishment of institutional arrangements for keeping the citizen in ignorance concerning the identity of his blood relations.¹⁸ Certainly, Rousseau's statement at one point in the Emile--"If you want an idea of public education, read Plato's Republic"--seems to point in such a direction.¹⁹ The problem with this line of reasoning is that Rousseau explicitly contradicts it:

Plato, in his Republic, gives women "the same training as men; I can well believe it. Having removed private families from his government and no longer knowing what to do with women, he found himself forced to make them men. This noble genius had combined everything and foreseen everything; he forestalled an objection that perhaps no one would have thought of raising, but he poorly resolved that which was raised. I do not speak of that supposed community of women, of which the oft-repeated reproach proves that those who make it have never read him; I speak of that civil promiscuity which everywhere confuses the two sexes in the same activities and the same labors, and cannot fail to engender the most intolerable abuses; I speak of that subversion of the sweetest sentiments known to nature, immolated to an artificial sentiment which can only exist by means of them. As if a natural hold was not necessary in order to form conventional bonds! As if the love that one holds for those who are close is not the principle of that which one owes the state! As if it was not by the small fatherland, which is the family, that the heart is attached to the large! As if it was not the good son, the good husband, the good father, who makes the good citizen!"²⁰

The above passage shows that Rousseau most certainly does not regard the family and the civic order as inherently incompatible. Indeed, he seems to consider the former indispensable to the latter. The point he makes concerning the place of women in Plato's Republic is that the duties, responsibilities, and labors of women should not be confused with those of men, because this tends to destroy the family, and the maintenance of the family is crucial to the preservation of the civic order.

The importance of the family for civil society is decisive for Rousseau's argument in favor of the unequal treatment of men and women. The importance of the family in this regard derives from the fact that, in isolation, love of country is a shallow and pallid thing at best, and impossible to sustain if it is not ultimately founded on the more immediate and natural sentiment of familial love;²¹ the artificial sentiment of patriotism draws its strength from the more natural sentiment of love of family. Thus, it is only when one becomes the head of a family that one becomes completely a citizen.²² This does not mean, however, that the family is not ultimately subordinate to the political order: the Spartan woman celebrates the victory of her city, in the winning of which her five sons perished, before mourning her own dead; Brutus kills his sons in order to preserve the Roman Republic; and Rousseau approves their actions as those of good citizens.²³ Moreover, familial concerns must be kept separate from political concerns, for, if questions of "mine" and "thine" are allowed to intrude into the public realm, the community of wills upon which the survival of that realm depends is in danger of dissolving into a struggle for private advantage.²⁴ Given these two premises--that the family must be maintained as an indispensable support for civil society and that, in a republican order,²⁵ private concerns, including those of family, should not be allowed to intrude into the political realm--only one conclusion is possible concerning the proper place of the family within civil society: at the same time that the family is excluded from the political realm, it must be kept both intact and subordinate to that realm. The way to achieve this, Rousseau implies, is to distinguish strictly between what is private and what is public, to erect

a kind of barrier between these two spheres of activity, a barrier which is only passable in one direction, so that the political order can exercise a certain amount of supervision over what is private, while what goes on in the private sphere has as little direct effect as possible on the political order.

We are now in a position to answer the question of why Rousseau holds up the ancients' treatment of women as a model to be followed and against which to judge modern practices. To begin with, the ancients' treatment of women amounts to an exclusion of that sex from the public realm:

Among all the ancient, civilized peoples, [women] led very retiring lives; they rarely showed themselves in public and never with men; they did not go walking with them; they never had the best places at the theater, and did not put themselves on display; they were not even always allowed to attend, and it is common knowledge that there was a death penalty for those who dared to show themselves at the Olympic Games.²⁶

Furthermore, Rousseau indicates that there was an effort to keep men and women apart at social functions and, to a certain extent, even in the privacy of the home.²⁷ Above all, women were not to be spoken of or judged in public. The barriers between the public and the private were thus erected on the basis of the male-female distinction.

Rousseau obviously approves of the ancients' restrictions on women, and even indicates that contrary modern practices represent a degeneration from ancient, republican virtue. On the surface, this would seem to conflict with Rousseau's assertion of civic, or political, equality as necessary to republican government. This unequal treatment of women and men, the restriction of the former to a largely private life, however, is compatible with the principle of civic equality only if woman's role in civil society is nonpolitical in

nature, that is, only if for some overriding reason women must remain purely private beings. For Rousseau, this is indeed the case.

The equality of civil society is artificial in nature,²⁸ while the inequality of women and men rests on a much more natural foundation: the physical differences between the sexes. It is these physical differences, and the resulting inequality of the sexes, which lies at the foundation of the family. While the family may not be natural in the sense that it is necessarily to be found in the state of nature as described in the Second Discourse,²⁹ it is natural in the sense that it is based in fundamental natural differences between the two sexes.³⁰ As far as the natural inequality in the duties and responsibilities of male and female is concerned, the consequences of the sexual act are decisive:³¹

This inequality is not of human institution; at least it is not the product of prejudice, but of reason; it is fitting for that one of the two [sexes] entrusted the deposit of children to answer for it to the other.³²

For Rousseau, the authority of the father over the family is primarily derived from the "temporary incommunities" which women suffer, and from the father's need to be certain that the children he supports are actually his own. In the case of the latter need, "the woman, having nothing similar to fear, does not have the same right over the husband."³³ The woman has nothing to fear regarding the parentage of those children she calls her own because she is so intimately bound up with the child bearing and rearing processes: she gives birth out of her own body and nurses her children out of her own substance. The link between a mother and her children is thus more intimate and intense than that between a father and his. Moreover, because of this,

women live closer to the natural, as opposed to the conventional, side of life than do men. This was recognized by the ancients, who "gave [women] several honorable names which we no longer have, or which are now out-dated amongst us," and who drew "their titles of honor [for women] from the rights of nature," while modern men derive theirs "from the rights of rank."³⁴ By way of illustrating the "natural" titles of honor bestowed upon women by the ancients, Rousseau specifically mentions the Roman term Matre, or Mother, indicating that a woman's honor derives to a considerable extent from child bearing and rearing. Such a title also points to the private character of female virtue; for what is more private than the act of giving birth, unless it is the sex act which precedes it, and what relationship is more private than that between a mother and her children, unless it is that between a woman and a man?

Women are more bound up in the private realm than are men; hence, when the necessity of drawing a boundary between what is private and what is public arises, it is only natural that women be located predominantly on one side of that boundary and men on the other. That Rousseau allows men to pass across this boundary line between public and private, while simultaneously confining women to the private sphere, however, goes far beyond the simple recognition that the private plays a larger role in the life of women than in that of men; rather, it implies that men are capable of leaving family considerations aside when they act as citizens, whereas women are not, and that for the latter family ties are too strong to be made compatible with the disinterested patriotism of the good citizen.

With the above in mind, the reason for Rousseau's vehement attack on the romantic theater becomes clearer. By holding up romantic love as a model, and by encouraging the spectator to imitate that model, the theater not only subverts the natural order of the family by encouraging those passions which lead to female ascendancy, but it also subverts the political realm in a novel way. Romantic love is so intensely private that it tends to cancel out the rest of the world in the minds of the two lovers. More specifically, the all-consuming nature of this passion leads men to abandon the public realm, to abdicate their responsibilities as citizens, and to immerse themselves totally in private life. In the Letter, Rousseau illustrates this tendency by reference to Racine's Bérénice, in which the Roman Emperor, Titus, despite his undoubted virtue, comes close to abdicating his public duties out of love for Bérénice, so that

. . . the two, intoxicated by the charms of love, peace, and innocence, renounce vain grandeur and, with that sweet joy which the true promptings of nature inspire, take leave to go and live happy and obscure in some corner of the earth.³⁵

This is only a hypothetical denouement supplied by Rousseau. In actuality, Titus continues to serve his country. But, Rousseau observes regarding his proposed ending,

The play, ending thus, will be, if you please, less good, less instructive, less conformable to history, but will it give less pleasure, and will the spectator depart less satisfied?³⁶

The answer to this query is obviously "no!" This is true because scenes of love always make a greater impression on the spectator than do "maxims of wisdom." Romantic love is one of the most seductive of the passions; even when it is depicted as ending in tragedy, it continues to exert an overwhelming appeal:

Depict love as you will, it seduces or it is not love. If it is depicted badly, the play is bad. If it is depicted well, it obscures everything which accompanies it. Its combats, its troubles, its sufferings, render it more touching than if it had no opposition to overcome. Far from its sad effects putting us off, it becomes more interesting by its very misfortunes. One says, in spite of oneself, that such a delicious sentiment makes up for everything. Such a sweet image insensibly softens the heart. One takes from the passion that which leads to pleasure, and leaves aside that which torments. No one believes himself obliged to be a hero; and it is thus that, in admiring decent love, one abandons oneself to criminal love.³⁷

The problem with romantic love is that it is both the most seductive of the passions and the one which is least subject to regulation once aroused. Moreover, since "all the passions are sisters," in admitting one into the heart, we run the risk of admitting a whole flock of its relations as well.

The above analysis seems quite plausible. It is defective, however, in at least one respect: it seems to suggest that it is because romantic love is a passion--"a blind penchant" and "a perfidious sentiment"--that Rousseau condemns it. Moreover, it suggests that Rousseau is opposed to the passions as such. This cannot be the case. It is reason, and reason alone which can purge one of passion,³⁸ but we know from Rousseau's other works and from the Letter that the good man or the good citizen is, in general, not a man whose life is dominated by reason:³⁹ it is the Philintes who reason and the Alcestes who feel. Thus, insofar as it is reason alone which can subdue, control, and eliminate passion, and insofar as a highly developed reason is undesirable as far as most men are concerned, it follows that Rousseau cannot be opposed to the passions as such. Furthermore, he tells us elsewhere that passion is a necessary ingredient in the make-up of

the good citizen and that "a man without passion would be an extremely bad citizen."⁴⁰

The seeming inconsistency involved in Rousseau both attacking the passions and defending them as necessary to a good life must be resolved, and a passage in the Emile points toward a possible resolution:

It is a mistake to distinguish between permissible and forbidden passions so as to yield to the former and refuse the latter. All are good when one remains master of them, and all are bad when one allows oneself to be subjugated to them. . . . It is not up to us whether we feel or do not feel a passion, but it is up to us whether we rule over them. Every sentiment we control is lawful; all that control us are criminal. A man is not culpable for loving another's wife if he holds this unhappy passion subject to the law of duty; he is culpable for loving his own wife to the point of sacrificing everything to that love.⁴¹

The passions are not bad as such, but they must be controlled. In particular, they must be subordinated to duty. The problem with romantic love is that it is so powerful. Decent love--i.e., romantic love which is under control--is possible but, as Rousseau indicates in the passage quoted on the preceding page, something approaching heroism is required in order to resist the subversive blandishments which tend to transform such love into "criminal love," that love which involves a renunciation of virtue. Thus, since heroism is the exception rather than the rule, the passion of romantic love must be prevented from developing if men are to remain virtuous, and this means that those practices and institutions which serve to encourage it must be excised from the social body.

For Rousseau, romantic love is not the only passion which poses a threat to virtue by its very existence. Avarice and vanity, for example, have a similar effect.⁴² Romantic love is the most dangerous,

however. One's heart is not moved by the sight of avarice or vanity. This is what makes the romantic theater such a threat to virtue.

The problem posed by romantic love points directly to the general problem of civil society, as it is articulated by Rousseau, illuminating the middle-range problem of the theater in the process. Rousseau's notion of political freedom is predicated on the idea of the general will, the common willing of the public good by each and every citizen. This common act of willing, together with the effective sovereignty of the general will which flows from it, defines the criteria according to which Rousseau judges whether a people is "free" or not. These criteria are purely formal, in that the objects of the general will are unspecified; it is the act of willing in common which is crucial, and not the content of that will. In particular, the form of government to which the general will gives rise is, in the abstract at least, irrelevant to the question of political legitimacy or, what is the same thing, the question of political freedom. For Rousseau, it is the "freedom" consonant upon the rule of the general will which is the end of civil society and which establishes its legitimacy. Thus, he can criticize Montesquieu, and implicitly the ancients, for making virtue the principle of a republic narrowly conceived: the subordination of private interest to a common vision of the public good characterizes all legitimate regimes, be they monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic.⁴³ Rousseau, in fact, broadens the conception of republican government to include all regimes where the general will is sovereign. This does not mean, however, that in practice the form of government possessed by a people is completely irrelevant to the twin questions of legitimacy and freedom.

The existence of civic virtue is a necessary condition for the effective rule of the general will, and civic virtue tends to flourish under certain conditions and to wither under others. The crucial problem of practical politics thus becomes one of creating those conditions under which civic virtue flourishes or, in other words, maintaining those conditions which encourage the attachment of the citizenry to a common vision of the public good. Obversely, Rousseau's criticism of the theater, and particularly the romantic theater, is based upon his belief that the theater as an institution tends to corrupt civic virtue by directing the attention, desire, and interest of the citizen to objects other than the community as a whole.

To see why this is so, we need only recall what was said earlier concerning the romantic theater. The plays presented by that theater seduce the citizen away from the public realm by displaying an image of private life which is so attractive that everything else pales in comparison. Insofar as the theater encourages romantic love, it also undermines the unity of the political community by reducing what was formerly a whole, the citizen body, to an aggregation of pairs of lovers, the dominant concern of each of which is the pair and its fate, not the community; private interest rules in the heart of the citizen, and the unity of wills, upon which civic freedom depends, is broken. Rousseau, however, condemns the entire theater in the name of civic virtue, and not just the romantic theater. He can do this because the romantic theater represents the extreme case, that case in which the effect of the theater upon civic virtue appears most baldly.

Rousseau's criticism of the theater is ultimately founded upon that institution's tendency to inculcate passions which are, by their

very nature, opposed to virtue. Seen in this light, Rousseau's critique of the theater can be reduced to a critique of the passions. Not all of the passions are bad or undesirable; a passionate attachment to the community or a passionate love of virtue are, for example, the hallmarks of the good citizen and the good man, respectively. In the case of *Alceste*, it must be remembered, Rousseau praises such passion. The problem with these "good" passions, however, is that they are so unnatural: man naturally tends to prefer his own interests and desires to those of others and even to those of the community as a whole. Moreover, those passions which tend to develop as a matter of course in society, and which are "natural" in this sense, are those which are directed toward the satisfaction of purely personal desires--lust, jealousy, ambition, the desire for power over others, the desire to be respected, feared, or envied--and depend for their satisfaction upon frustrating similar desires in others; all men cannot be wealthy, powerful, or envied. In order to create the citizen, these passions must be suppressed and replaced by a passionate attachment to the common interest. Such a task is extremely difficult because those passions which must be held down are so powerful, being rooted in man's individuality. In fact, for Rousseau, such a task is well-nigh impossible; civic virtue can only be inculcated in those peoples who have not yet developed to a significant extent those passions which characterize man in society:

Peoples, like men, are docile only in their youth; in growing old, they become incorrigible. Once customs are established and prejudices rooted, it is a dangerous and vain enterprise to seek to reform them. Like stupid and cowardly patients who shudder at the sight of a doctor, the people cannot even bear that someone should lay hands on its faults in order to excise them.⁴⁴

This may explain in part Rousseau's aversion to the establishment of a theater in Geneva. The theater, as we have seen, appeals to existing passions and prejudices, and so reinforces them; it, in other words, contributes to the ageing of a people.

According to Rousseau, republican government depends upon the suppression of certain passions which the French theater, at least, tends to encourage. At the same time, certain other passions are praiseworthy--love of country, love of virtue, etc.--and are necessary to a free people. Lastly, it appears that there are passions which are neither salutary nor pernicious in themselves, in that their effects depend upon the object toward which they are directed. The influence of romantic love may be beneficial, when the object of that love is a virtuous woman, and pernicious when it is not. Or, it may be the case that a given passion has a salutary effect on one people and a corrupting effect on another. If there should exist a people capable of experiencing romantic love, and capable as well of subordinating that love to love of country, then for such a people the passion of romantic love would cease to be blameworthy in any respect. Even more than this, if romantic love could be made not only subordinate to love of country, but a positive support for it, then such love would be an asset to a republican order and thus, from the standpoint of the "Citizen of Geneva," praiseworthy.

The foregoing suggests that the status of certain passions is problematic for Rousseau. Their status depends upon the objects toward which they are directed and, in addition, varies from society to society as the nature of the people inhabiting those societies varies. Romantic love, for example, is seen as especially dangerous by Rousseau.

This is so, he tells the reader, because, although "all the passions are sisters" and the awakening of one tends to awaken others, this is particularly true in the case of romantic love, which is one of the tenderest and which tends to invest the other passions with a similar seeming. The danger posed by this passion, however, is most acute in a corrupt society, where love of country inculcated at an early age does not act as a check on the development of this and other passions. In this vein, it is important to note that it is the corrupt Roman Empire which furnishes Rousseau with his illustration of the pernicious effects of romantic love, and not the virtuous Roman Republic. Similarly, it is instructive to recall that Rousseau initially condemned romantic love on the basis of the assumption that, in France, it would necessarily be directed toward unworthy objects, while simultaneously acknowledging that romantic love, directed toward a virtuous woman, is "able to touch a sensitive heart and lead it to the good." Thus, in a society where such women are the rule, the passion of romantic love is less dangerous than in the case of France, where such women are the exception.

The dangers posed by romantic love are relative, for Rousseau. So too is his criticism of that passion, and of the theater for encouraging it. As far as France is concerned, he criticizes the romantic theater for fostering the development of a passion which is more likely than not to be misdirected. Insofar as this is the case, Rousseau's criticism is apolitical in nature. This is completely in keeping with his assessment of the French as a people who have no "political concerns." Rousseau's digression on the subject of the ancients' treatment of women, however, does imply a critique of the

romantic theater from the perspective of the political realm, and thus would apply to a people with political concerns. The problem with this latter critique is that it is both incompletely articulated and general in nature. In particular, no reference is made to Geneva. We are thus at a loss as to exactly how Rousseau's teachings concerning the romantic theater and the passions apply to Geneva. Without an assessment of the character of the Genevans as a people, we cannot determine the probable impact of the romantic theater, or the theater in general, on Geneva. Specifically, the question of Genevan virtue once again presents itself: if Genevan women are virtuous, then Rousseau's criticism of the romantic theater in the French context is inapplicable; conversely, if Genevan women are less than virtuous, then the criticism leveled at the French also applies to Geneva. By the same token, if the Genevans are sufficiently virtuous to subordinate romantic love to patriotism, a different conclusion would be drawn than if such were not the case. Rousseau's criticism of the French theater, and the romantic theater in particular, thus points to the need for a close and searching examination of the question of Genevan virtue, as well as the need for a more complete discussion of the ways in which the general effects of the theater are mitigated or exacerbated by differing national characters.

NOTES

Chapter V

¹Francis Bacon, Essays, X (1625 edition).

²Letter, 37n (B., 28n).

³Ibid., 63 (B., 47).

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Loc. cit.

⁷Emile, V (O.C., IV, 692-770).

⁸Ibid., V (O.C., IV, 766-7); cf. Heloise, IV, x and Emile V (693-7).

⁹Ibid., IV (O.C., IV, 648-62).

¹⁰Letter, 64 (B., 48).

¹¹Ibid., 65n (B., 49n).

¹²See Emile, V (O.C., IV, 705).

¹³Cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 186); Social Contract, II, vi and III, xi (O.C., III, 381-2 and 424); and the manuscript version of Social Contract, I, ii and II, ii (O.C., III, 238-9 and 312-18).

¹⁴See Political Economy (O.C., III, 243).

¹⁵Thus, Sparta, one of Rousseau's models for civil society, is referred to as having been built upon the ruins of the family: cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 180); Social Contract, II, iii (O.C., III, 372); and Government of Poland II (O.C., III, 957). In keeping with this, Rousseau cites as an example of true citizenship the Spartan woman who rejoices at the victory of her city, a victory in which all five of her sons were killed: Emile, I (O.C., IV, 249).

¹⁶See Shklar, Men and Citizens, 21-2.

¹⁷Cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 243-4).

¹⁸See Republic, 423d-24a and 449c-66d. It should be noted that this program, which Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates, is not presented in a completely serious manner, but rather, with typical Socratic irony, serves to illustrate the practical impossibility of establishing a completely just state, the logos of which involves an abstraction from man's innate love of what is his own.

¹⁹Emile, I (O.C., IV, 250).

²⁰Ibid., V (699-700). This translation was, with certain minor changes, excerpted from Roger Masters' The Political Philosophy of Rousseau, 22.

²¹Aristotle criticizes the Republic on precisely these grounds; see Politics, 1261a-64b.

²²Emile, V (O.C., IV, 823).

²³Ibid., I (249); cf. Letter to Franquières (O.C., IV, 1143).

²⁴Cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 243-4).

²⁵For Rousseau, "civil society" and "republic" are synonymous; see Social Contract, I, viii and III, iv (O.C., III, 364-5 and 405).

²⁶Letter, 118 (B., 88-9).

²⁷Ibid., 119 (B., 89).

²⁸See Social Contract, I, vi.

²⁹The question of the naturalness of the family, in the sense of its existence in the pure state of nature, appears to be problematic for Rousseau. It is true that, in Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 157-9), he argues that the family develops only after man has emerged from the pure state of nature, but elsewhere in the Second Discourse, and especially in the notes, he suggests that in a certain sense the family may exist even in the pure state of nature; see especially Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 182), and note XII in conjunction with note VIII (214-18 and 201). Masters concludes from this that the family in a physical sense--i.e., a man, a woman, and their young children, remaining together over a considerable period of time--quite possibly existed in the state of nature, but that the family as a moral union did not; in the pure state of nature, the family continues in existence only so long as the young cannot fend for themselves, and is thus based upon necessity or upon a limited and instinctual drive toward species preservation: see Masters, The Political Philosophy of Rousseau, 125-32. Nevertheless, whether the family is simply natural or not, it is the most natural form of human association; "The oldest of all societies, and the only natural one, is that of the family:" Social Contract, I, ii (O.C., III, 352). See also Political Economy (O.C., III, 241-2).

³⁰"For several reasons drawn from the nature of things, the father should command in the family:" Political Economy (O.C., III, 242).

³¹Political Economy (O.C., III, 242-3); Emile, V (O.C., IV, 697-700).

³²Emile, V (O.C., IV, 697); cf. Letter, 113-14 (B., 85).

³³Political Economy (O.C., III, 242); manuscript version of Social Contract, I, v (O.C., III, 299).

³⁴Letter, 64n (B., 48n).

³⁵Ibid., 72 (B., 54).

³⁶Ibid., 72-3 (B., 54).

³⁷Ibid., 74 (B., 55).

³⁸Ibid., 27 (B., 21).

³⁹Cf. Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 155-6); note IX (202-3); and Letter, 54-5 (B., 41-2).

⁴⁰Political Economy (O.C., III, 259).

⁴¹Emile, V (O.C., IV, 819); cf. Letter to Franquières (O.C., IV, 1143).

⁴²Political Economy (O.C., III, 260).

⁴³Social Contract, III, iv (O.C., III, 405).

⁴⁴Ibid., II, viii (O.C., III, 385); cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 259-60).

CHAPTER VI

Rousseau's discussion of the theater has hitherto revolved around the question of the effects of certain kinds of plays or subject matters on the spectator. Because such effects are relative to what is portrayed on the stage, Rousseau's arguments are no more than conditional, in that the development of new dramatic forms, new subject matters, or the advent of a man of genius, may very well render them inappropriate. Stated differently, Rousseau has analyzed the three principal genres of the French theater--tragedy, comedy, and romance--but he has not established that these three categories exhaust the universe of possible forms of drama, as indeed we know they do not. The possibility exists, therefore, that new dramatic forms might be developed to which the greater part of Rousseau's criticism does not apply, and this has the effect of rendering that criticism provisional. To be sure, certain of Rousseau's arguments, particularly his reference to the theater's foundation in deception, seem to be capable of universal application, but such exceptions serve only to make the general tendency that much more apparent. This might be thought to accord with Rousseau's contention that the effects of the theater can only be judged with reference to a particular time and place and, more specifically, only with reference to the natures of specific peoples. This creates something of a puzzle, however. Rousseau's analysis of the French theater does tell us something about its relationship to the French as a people, but not a great deal, and there are a number

of hints concerning the effect of such a theater on a people which is more virtuous, or at least more politically active, than the French. Even considered in this light, however, Rousseau's arguments still appear excessively contingent. In particular, he implies that the most important question to be asked in connection with analyzing the effect of the theater on a particular people is whether that people is virtuous or corrupt; yet, he provides no real criteria for deciding this question. Thus, we are at a loss as to how to proceed from his analysis of the French theater to a consideration of the theater in other settings. Particularly startling in this regard is Rousseau's long silence concerning Geneva and the Genevans: from the end of his defense of the Genevan clergy early in the Letter, through his discussion of the French theater, Geneva is not mentioned once.¹ As far as any indication on Rousseau's part is concerned, his lengthy analysis of the French theater is completely irrelevant to the case of Geneva. At any rate, given the ostensible purpose of the Letter--to defend Geneva against those forces bent on establishing a theater there--Rousseau's silence on this point is surprising.

Rousseau breaks his silence concerning Geneva at the same time that he widens the scope of his inquiry beyond the French context, and at the same time that he abandons his preoccupation with dramatic forms and subject matters in favor of an analysis of the theater as an institution:

Beyond these effects of the theater, which are relative to what is performed, there are others no less necessary, which pertain directly to the stage and to the persons performing; and it is to these that the previously mentioned Genevans attribute the taste for luxury, adornment, and dissipation, the introduction of which among us they rightly fear.²

Rousseau thus turns his attention from the moral effect of certain kinds of dramatic productions on the spectator to those effects associated with the theater as an institution. Furthermore, he seems to imply that what is to follow will be particularly pertinent to the question of establishing a theater at Geneva and will be couched in a language which the Genevans can understand and appreciate. Moreover, with his reference to "us," Rousseau once more identifies himself with the Genevans, and the Citizen of Geneva again emerges.

Rousseau begins his discussion of the theater as an institution with the assertion that the mere establishment of a theater will effect alterations in the habits and morals of a people, in that attendance at the theater will make necessary a decrease in the amount of time previously devoted to other activities:

If the theater had no other effect than to interrupt at certain hours the course of civil and domestic affairs and to offer an assured resource to idleness, it is impossible that the convenience of going every day to the same place to forget oneself and become involved with foreign objects should not give to the citizen other habits and form new morals in him.³

The use of the term "citizen" is significant. Rousseau never employed the term in connection with the French, and its use here implies that what is to follow will be concerned more with republics and with more or less free peoples, than with those peoples which "no longer have any political concerns."

The establishment of a theater, Rousseau tells us, will result in a decrease in the amount of time which the citizen will be able to devote to either public or private concerns. The theater is neither public nor private, but something in between, and it steals time from both of these realms. At this point, however, all that we know is that

the establishment of a theater will effect some sort of change in a people's existing way of life. Whether that change will be for the worse depends upon the people involved and upon the nature of the occupations which the theater replaces wholly or in part. This statement of the problem of the theater differs markedly from Rousseau's earlier formulations, in that it abstracts completely from what is presented on the stage, either for good or ill. Indeed, Rousseau indicates that he is willing to consider the theater as a form of amusement which is by its nature indifferent, that is to say, which is neither salutary nor pernicious.⁴ This seeming concession, however, strengthens Rousseau's argument: if he can show that, irrespective of content, the theater is harmful to a particular kind of community, and that Geneva is included in this category, then his argument against the theater cannot be challenged by reference to the possibility of reforming the content of the plays to be presented.

Rousseau's new formulation of the problem of the theater seems more rigorous than his earlier statements of that problem. His argument is almost a pure syllogism, although certain of the premises are not explicitly stated. To begin with, man is a finite being with a finite amount of time at his disposal. This time can be either well or ill used, and "the misuse of time is a great evil."⁵ Expenditure of time is involved in attendance at the theater; thus, the crucial question becomes one of whether this time is well used or not. Since it is folly to expect men always to make the absolutely best possible use of their time, however, it is pointless to argue that the theater involves a waste of time relative to some ideal occupation. Nevertheless, we can ask how the individual's time would have been spent if

there were no theater to attend. This question is decisive as regards the problem of the desirability of a theater. If, in a particular context, the individuals concerned would generally have spent their time better had there been no theater to attend, then the theater is a harmful institution in that context. If, on the other hand, the time involved would otherwise have been spent in a corrupt or vicious manner, then the theater is salutary in that context. The solution of the problem of the desirability of the theater thus depends more upon a consideration of the character of the spectators than it does upon the theater itself. For one people the theater may be extremely harmful, while for another people that same theater could well be beneficial. Moreover, this conclusion is not confined solely to the theater, but can be generalized to all amusements which are neither harmful nor beneficial in themselves:

Reason dictates that we encourage the amusements of those people whose occupations are harmful, and that we discourage from these same amusements those whose occupations are useful.⁶

To the extent that this is true, Rousseau's analysis of the theater points beyond itself to the question of human activity in general. To adequately judge the effect of the theater on any given people, one must know both the activities in which that people engages and the relative worth of those activities.

The criterion for determining the value of the theater would thus seem to be the value of those occupations which would suffer as a result of the existence of an established theater, but this is only a subsidiary consideration. As far as a particular people is concerned, the utility of establishing a theater depends upon the degree of their

virtue and industry, with the latter seeming to be the more important. In particular, idle and corrupt men should not be allowed to choose their own amusements out of fear that they will invent ones in line with "their vicious inclinations, and become as mischievous in their pleasures as in their business."⁷ The theater is a structured amusement, and attendance there by such men prevents them from engaging, at least for a time, in those harmful activities which they would have chosen if left to their own devices. Rousseau thus tentatively links idleness and vicious behavior, and idleness, he tells us, is characteristic of populous and wealthy regions, especially large cities:

In a large city, full of scheming, idle people without religion or principle, whose imagination, depraved by sloth, laziness, the love of pleasure, and by great needs, produces only monsters and inspires only crimes; in a large city, where morals and honor are nothing, because each, easily hiding his conduct from the eyes of the public, shows himself only by his reputation and is esteemed only according to his wealth; there the police cannot multiply permitted pleasures too much, nor too much apply itself to rendering them agreeable, in order to deprive the individual of the temptation to seek more dangerous ones. For, to prevent them from occupying themselves is to prevent them from doing harm. Two hours a day stolen from the activity of vice prevents a twelfth part of the crimes that would otherwise have been committed; and all the conversation in the cafes and other refuges of idlers and rogues, caused by plays seen or to be seen, is that much more gained by the heads of families, either for their daughters' honor, or that of their wives, either for their purses or those of their sons.⁸

Large cities, idleness, and corruption are inextricably linked, according to Rousseau, although this is simply asserted and not proven.

Elsewhere in his work, however, Rousseau argues that the association of idleness and corruption with large cities is a necessary consequence of the nature of things.⁹ Central to this argument is the idea that large cities permit and encourage the practice of deception, that is, of men appearing as other than they really are. In large urban areas,

people are in an important sense anonymous; one knows many men slightly, but few well. Furthermore, the extensive division of labor which is associated with cities means that most of one's acquaintances are known only in terms of their social or economic roles--Mr. Smith is a baker, Mr. Jones a banker, and Mr. Green a noble--but few if any men are known as whole persons. The facade of baker, banker, or noble provides a ready-made camouflage for viciousness. The man himself is not judged, but only his outward appearance. One doesn't need to be virtuous, but only to appear to be so, and such appearances are easy to keep up, especially if one is wealthy, since the possession of wealth and public esteem seem to go hand-in-hand. Moreover, large cities also tend to be centers of luxury and a highly civilized way of life, which compounds the problems posed by the anonymity of life in such places. Highly civilized peoples tend to develop uniform standards of conduct for social situations; and, whether such standards are called "manners," "politeness," "civility," or "social etiquette," they provide yet another facade behind which a man can conceal his true nature:

Today, when subtler researches and a finer taste have reduced the art of pleasing to rules, there prevails in our morals and manners a vile and deceptive uniformity, and all minds seem to have been cast in the same mold. Incessantly, politeness requires, propriety prescribes. Incessantly, one follows usages, never one's own inclinations. One no longer dares to appear as he is; and, in this perpetual constraint, the men who form the herd called society, placed in the same circumstances, do the same things unless stronger motives deter them. Consequently, one never knows well those with whom one deals. . . . What a procession of vices must accompany this uncertainty? No more sincere friendships. No more real esteem. No more well-founded confidence. Suspensions, offenses, fear, coldness, reserve, hatred, and betrayal will lurk beneath that uniform and false veil of politeness . . .¹⁰

Uniformity of manners makes deception and covert viciousness possible, but luxury and the proliferation of felt needs, which are associated with a highly civilized way of life, actively encourage such behavior. The more civilized a man, the more desires he has;¹¹ and the existence of visible luxuries keeps these desires forever at a fever boil. At the same time, most, if not all, of these desires can only be satisfied at the expense of other men, and this is especially true of the most prevalent and intense of the desires--the desire for wealth and esteem.¹² The anonymity of society facilitates the satisfaction of these desires: the pickpocket melts into the crowd; the slanderer hides behind a mask of amiable urbanity; the exploiter of human misery is known for his generosity, and the corrupt official for his honesty and public spiritedness.

Under such conditions, the theater performs a public service in distracting men from their customary pursuits. Indeed, this argument can be generalized to all those forms of organized amusement which do not involve doing harm to others. Thus, even if cultivation of the arts and sciences tends to undermine virtue, as Rousseau argues in the First Discourse, such activities still have a place in corrupt societies. Such pursuits appeal to the idle and so tend to reduce the amount of time available to scoundrels. At the theater, a rogue cannot "ruin a woman or cozen a man out of his purse."

In this light, Rousseau's earlier reference to the perfection of the French theater becomes more understandable. Paris is the largest and most urbane city on the continent, hence, according to Rousseau's reasoning, necessarily the most corrupt. In such a milieu, the worth of the theater depends upon its ability to pull men in off the streets,

that is to say, upon its appeal as an amusement. According to this criterion, the French theater is "as perfect as it can be:" it is extremely entertaining, and so attracts a large audience from among the idle. The plays presented may be such as to corrupt a virtuous man, but not such as to corrupt its actual audience, which is undeniably less than virtuous. The individuals who comprise that audience are, if not actively vicious, inclined to be so; if the theater cannot make them better, it won't make them any worse, and it does perform the salutary function of occupying the time of a number of men who would otherwise be engaged in less innocuous pursuits. Moreover, the French theater manages to satisfy some of the demands of art which, while these demands should be subordinated to those of virtue, is a praiseworthy accomplishment in a context where virtue is impossible.¹³

Admittedly, there are self-serving elements in this argument. Rousseau was himself attacked for having seemed to violate the principles set forth in the First Discourse by virtue of the fact that he was the author of several comedies and operas;¹⁴ as a vindication, this argument smacks of sophistry, and certainly involves something of an ex post facto justification of Rousseau's own conduct. This is, however, largely beside the point. What is important is Rousseau's teaching that the worth of the theater is relative, and that proper assessment of this worth in a particular context depends upon an inquiry into the overall impact of the theater on morals, habits, and other institutions. This teaching lies at the core of Rousseau's thought concerning censorship, in that it is generalizable to almost all activities and institutions. For Rousseau, as for the Romans, the question of censorship does not apply only to the products of the

mind--the arts and sciences--but to all practices which might have an adverse impact on the morals and habits of a people. The implications associated with the preceding argument, which range far beyond the problem of the theater and far beyond the problem of amusements in general, thus point to the universality of the question of censorship.

The preceding discussion suggests that virtue, or good morals and manners, is related to population density, in that large cities are generally characterized by a corrupt and vicious populace. This relationship seems to hold universally, and Rousseau's condemnation of the large city is unequivocal. If this is true, however, then the converse should also be true: in areas where the population is relatively low, in small towns and in the country, the people should be relatively virtuous. At the very least, corruption should be of a lower order than is found in large cities. This implies in turn that the question of the desirability of the theater is radically different in such a context, and Rousseau agrees that such is indeed the case:

But in small cities, in less populated places where individuals, always in the public eye, are born censors of one another, and where the police¹⁵ can easily keep a watch over everyone, completely contrary maxims must be followed.¹⁶

The decisive difference between "small cities" and large metropolises is that in the former anonymity is lacking. Everyone knows everyone else and it is almost impossible to deceive others concerning one's true character or to hide that character behind a mask of civility. In addition, the implication is that the force of public opinion will tend to keep the individual in line; he is "always in the public eye" and is surrounded by "born censors" who are intimately aware of all his doings and who, through social pressure, are capable of ensuring

conformity to good morals. It is thus the "public" nature of life in small towns which tends to guarantee the virtue of their inhabitants.

The "contrary maxims" which Rousseau refers to in the above passage relate to the question of establishing a theater. As we have seen, the crucial question which must be asked is whether or not the establishment of a theater will decrease the amount of time which the individual would otherwise devote to more important and beneficial occupations. In regard to large cities, this question is closed; it has already been established that in such places the overall effect of the theater is always salutary. As far as small cities are concerned, however, the question of the desirability of the theater would still seem to be open, unless one assumes that the inhabitants of all small cities are industrious and beneficially occupied. Rousseau could conceivably make such an assumption, but he does not; rather, he shifts the grounds of his argument:

If there is industry, arts, and manufactures, one should take care not to offer distractions which relax the greedy interest which makes pleasure of its cares, and enriches the prince from the avarice of his subjects. If the country, without commerce, nourishes the inhabitants in inactivity, far from fomenting the idleness to which a simple and easy life already too much inclines them, it is necessary to render their life unbearable, constraining them by dint of boredom to employ their time usefully.¹⁷

Rousseau thus divides small cities into two classes: those where the populace is industrious, and those where it is not; those where commerce, manufactures, and the arts are developed, and those where they are not. In both cases, however, amusements such as the theater should not be made available. Where the people are industrious, time spent at the theater is so much time lost to more profitable pursuits. Conversely, where the people are idle it is necessary to make them more

industrious, according to Rousseau, by rendering their idleness insufferably boring; amusements such as the theater should thus be discouraged because they relieve the boredom associated with complete idleness.

Rousseau seems to suggest that the industriousness of a people is the criterion according to which the effect of the theater on small cities must be judged. Furthermore, he argues that, according to this criterion, the theater is always undesirable, in that it either results in a diminution in the industry of a people or prevents its development where it is lacking. This is a rather startling argument insofar as Rousseau seems to identify industry with "avarice" and the avid pursuit of self-interest. Nothing at all is mentioned concerning virtue, either civic or individual, and no reference is made to familial or civic responsibilities, thus suggesting that money-making is the only occupation which really counts. What makes this even more startling is that earlier in the Letter Rousseau condemned the theater in no uncertain terms for drawing men away from their duties as fathers, sons, husbands, and citizens, and for causing them to "forget their friends, neighbors, and relations in order to concern themselves with fables."¹⁸ To be sure, he simultaneously asserted the value of industry, but industry was seen as valuable because it banished the boredom which tended to lead to a taste for frivolous pleasures.¹⁹ Most significantly, in his earlier discussion Rousseau did not link the idea of industry to avarice and the pursuit of self-interest. His initial argument against the theater emphasized the effect it had on the fulfillment of one's duties to others; time spent at the theater meant so

much time diverted from the fulfillment of one's responsibilities and duties, and

A father, a son, a husband, a citizen, have such cherished duties to fulfill that [no time] is left to them to lose to boredom. The good use of time makes time even more precious, and the more it is turned to account, the less one can find to lose.²⁰

The argument under consideration, however, ignores the question of one's duties to others completely. Not only this, but the avarice which Rousseau sets up as a standard is only asserted to be useful to "the prince;" nothing is said concerning the benefits the people as a whole will derive from such industry. Rousseau in fact seems to be giving advice to princes: the ruler of an industrious people should take care not to allow the introduction of certain amusements into his realm, because they tend to reduce productivity and so result in decreased revenue to the prince; the ruler of a people which is not industrious, due to the simple and easy life which the natural abundance of some areas encourages, should likewise exclude such amusements from his realm, in that he desires to see his subjects industrious and prosperous so as to increase the surplus which he appropriates to himself, and, to accomplish this, he must make them bored with inactivity. Rousseau's advice to rulers is, indeed, in many ways analogous to the advice which an expert might give to the owner of a flock of sheep regarding how best to increase his yield of fleece. To the problem of reconciling Rousseau's earlier argument against the theater with the one under consideration, we thus have added the incongruity of Rousseau the republican giving advice to princes and other rulers on how best to increase their revenues, and the problem of Rousseau the defender of

virtue seeming to replace virtue with avarice and acquisitiveness as the standard by which a people is judged.

These problems are by no means insoluble. In the first place, it is necessary to recall that Rousseau himself rejected his initial argument against the theater's tendency to distract men from their duties because its language was "no longer seasonable," and that he proposed to search for a language which would be better understood.²¹ We speculated at the time that Rousseau may have rejected this argument because it ignored distinctions of time and place, that is to say, because it involved an abstraction from those factors which differentiate one people from another. At this point, we might add that Rousseau may also have rejected the argument in question because he felt that virtue--in the sense of a people willingly accepting and fulfilling a set of demanding civic and moral duties--is largely an impossibility in the modern world. If, even in the least corrupt states, the duties of father, son, husband, neighbor, and citizen will go largely unfulfilled whether or not such amusements as a theater are present, then some other basis for judging the effect of such amusements is necessary. This seems to explain Rousseau's substitution of industriousness for virtue: a virtuous people may be best in an absolute sense, but a people which is industrious, although not virtuous, may be better in some way than a people which is neither virtuous nor industrious. In particular, if idleness breeds corruption, then the fact that a people is hard-working may tend to prevent it from becoming more corrupt. Moreover, Rousseau's apparent willingness to accept industriousness as a substitute for virtue also points to his reason for speaking to "princes." The industriousness Rousseau

describes is avidly acquisitive; self-interest, conceived of in strictly economic terms, appears to be the dominant motivating factor. For Rousseau, a people so motivated is not only not fit to rule itself, but unwilling to do so. Such a people requires and desires rulers, someone to manage the common concerns of society so that the energy of the individual can be directed toward purely private concerns, that is to say, toward the pursuit of economic self-interest. Thus Rousseau's advice to princes may not only be beneficial to rulers, in that he tells them something they need to know if they are to maximize their revenues, but also beneficial for the rulers' subjects; if Rousseau's advice is acted upon, he suggests, it will lead a prince to promote industriousness and, as we have seen, there are worse things than an industrious and hard-working people.

What exactly Rousseau has in mind when he praises industriousness is clarified by his description of the country of Neufchatel. Because of its importance, it is necessary to quote at some length from this description:

I remember having seen in my youth, in the environs of Neufchatel, a very pleasant sight, and one perhaps unique on this earth: a mountain entirely covered with dwellings, each of which constitutes the center of the land belonging to it, so that these houses, separated at distances as equal as the fortunes of the proprietors, simultaneously offer to the numerous inhabitants of this mountain both the tranquility of a retreat and the sweetness of society. These happy rustics, all comfortably well-off, free of the taile, taxes, petty officials, and forced labor, cultivate with all possible care land, the produce of which is theirs, and employ the leisure that cultivation allows them to make numerous handcrafted products and to put to use the inventive genius which nature gave them. In winter particularly, a time when deep snows prevent easy communication, each, warmly closed up with his numerous family in a pretty and clean wooden house which he himself has built, busies himself with a thousand enjoyable labors which drive boredom from his sanctuary and add to his well-being. Never does carpenter,

locksmith, or glazier enter this country; each is such for himself, and no one is anything for another. Among the multitude of comfortable and even elegant pieces of furniture which make up their households and adorn their lodgings, one never sees any which were not made by the hand of the master. There still remains to them the leisure to invent and construct many diverse instruments of steel, wood, and cardboard, which they sell to foreigners; many of these even reach Paris, including those little wooden clocks which have been seen there the past several years. They also make some of iron. They even make watches. And, what seems incredible, each unites in himself all the diverse crafts into which watchmaking is subdivided, and makes all his tools himself.²²

Rousseau then goes on to praise the intellectual atmosphere of Neufchatel: the people are "reasonably educated;" they have many useful books; and they reason sensibly and even brilliantly about many things. Their scientific and technical skills are extensive: "They make syphons, magnets, eyeglasses, pumps, barometers, and cameras obscura. . . . You would take a farmer's stoveside for the workshop of a mechanic and for a workbench in experimental physics." The people draw, paint, and calculate. Most play the flute, and there are a number of fine singers. Moreover, these arts were not introduced by outsiders, but are traditional in nature.²³

Rousseau's description of Neufchatel presents some difficulties. In the first place, although he seems to find the people of Neufchatel praiseworthy, it is certain that they are not as he describes them. His catalogue of the talents and industry of the simple "rustics" of Neufchatel appears deliberately exaggerated to achieve an effect. Rousseau implies that each family is completely self-sufficient, for example, but they are stated to make steel watches, and surely the individual householder does not mine, smelt, and cast this steel for himself; yet, if Rousseau's description is taken at its face value,

this must be the case. Rousseau himself implies that his description may be less than completely accurate:

I could no more tire of traveling among these charming dwellings than could the inhabitants of showing me the frankest hospitality. Unhappily, I was young; my curiosity was only that of a child, and I thought more of amusement than of instructing myself. With the passage of thirty years, the few observations that I made have been erased from my memory. I remember only that I continually admired in those singular men an astonishing mixture of shrewdness and simplicity that one would have believed almost incompatible. For the rest, I remember nothing of their morals and customs, of their society, or of their characters. Today, when I would bring other eyes to it, must I never again see that happy land. Alas, it is on the road to my own.²⁴

Rousseau admits that he remembers nothing concerning the actual way of life of the Neufchateliens, that he retains only a memory of their "astonishing mixture of shrewdness and simplicity;" yet, he has just finished describing their way of life in great detail. What Rousseau has described, it would seem, is not Neufchatel as it is, but Neufchatel as it suits his purpose that it be, Neufchatel as an ideal type. A possible reason for his treating Neufchatel in this manner is given in the last line of the passage quoted above: "Alas, it is on the road to my own [country]." This statement is not literally true. Neufchatel is considerably off the direct route from Paris to Geneva; on his return to Geneva in 1754, several years before the Letter was written, for example, Rousseau did not pass through or even near Neufchatel. Indeed, for all his traveling between Paris and Geneva, Rousseau was only in Neufchatel once. The statement may be metaphorically true, however. Rousseau's description of an ideal Neufchatel may be relevant to his teachings concerning Geneva. In particular, if Neufchatel represents something of an ideal type for Rousseau, then Geneva may be an imperfect example of that ideal type.

Thus, to understand the problem which the theater poses for Geneva, one must understand that problem as it applies to Neufchatel. That Rousseau immediately turns to an examination of the effects resulting from the hypothetical establishment of a theater in Neufchatel supports this line of reasoning.

Rousseau's Neufchatel is an aggregation of isolated families, and is thus essentially apolitical. It is explicitly stated that the people pay no taxes, and Rousseau notes the absence of magistrates. Neufchatel in fact barely constitutes a society at all: the people seem to have little contact with, and no real need for, one another. Moreover, any kind of a division of labor is notably absent; each individual head of household seems to practice all crafts and trades to the extent necessary to make himself self-sufficient, or at least independent of his immediate neighbors. This mutual independence of the various households is crucial. As was noted earlier, Rousseau's description of the universal competence of the various householders is exaggerated, but it is not inconceivable that self-sufficiency as far as everything except raw materials could be achieved by such individuals, and raw materials can be brought in from outside Neufchatel in exchange for the products of the family. What is important is that the Neufchatelians have no need to engage in commerce among themselves or to employ the services of one another. This forestalls the development of most of the social vices;²⁵ since no man is in economic competition with his fellows, since there appear to be no differences in rank and so no competition for prestige and honor, there is no pressing need to cultivate a talent for deception, of appearing as other than

one really is, and this talent is a necessary element in the growth of most of the social vices.

In his description of Neufchatel, Rousseau depicts a society in which commerce and manufacturing have developed without a corresponding development of corrupt and vicious practices. Such practices are excluded from Neufchatel by virtue of the fact that all commerce takes place between individual Neufchatelians and foreigners, or so we are led to believe. The people may be avaricious, and are certainly dominated by self-interested motives, but these passions have no outlet within Neufchatel itself. Furthermore, although the Neufchatelians may not be virtuous as a people, since they appear to be totally preoccupied with private affairs, they do have what Rousseau would consider to be good moeurs, or good morals and customs. In the first place, the central place of the family in the lives of the people tends to lead to the cultivation of certain of the nobler sentiments, such as conjugal and parental love, while the absence of competition allows the relatively weak sentiment of natural benevolence to manifest itself in the relations between individuals of different families.²⁶ In addition, and as Rousseau noted earlier, the people in a small community tend to be "born censors of one another;" in such a place as Neufchatel, deviations from accepted behavior are readily perceived, and just as readily punished by public opinion. Lastly, the adherence of the people of Neufchatel to traditional practices helps to maintain existing moeurs. This final point is important. The existence of a society such as Rousseau's Neufchatel presupposes a particular set of conditions--approximate equality of condition, mutual independence, etc.--which are extremely difficult to preserve;

Neufchatel, as Rousseau describes it, is in an equilibrium condition, but this equilibrium is fragile, especially as regards the introduction of new practices and desires. Neufchatel does not, in other words, constitute a homeostatic or self-maintaining system; once its equilibrium is disrupted, those elements which Rousseau finds praiseworthy in it are bound to be destroyed.

Rousseau's examination of the effects resulting from the hypothetical establishment of a theater serves to underline the fragility of a society such as that of Neufchatel. In this connection, Rousseau mentions five specific disadvantages which would result from the introduction of a theater. Of these five, the premier place is assigned to the problem of lost time. Time devoted to attending the theater will be subtracted from the time previously devoted to other activities:

I see, in the first place, that their labors will cease to be their amusements as soon as they have another, and this will decrease their taste for the old ones. Zeal will no longer furnish so much leisure nor the same inventions. Besides, each day there will be real time lost by those who attend the theater, and they will not go back to work afterward, since their thoughts will be full of what they have just seen; they will talk about it or think about it. Consequently, slackening of work: first disadvantage.²⁷

Furthermore, attendance at the theater will entail new outlays of both time and money. Not only must the price of admission be paid, both for oneself and frequently one's family, but certain ancillary expenses will arise as well:

What is more, a worker is not going to show himself at an assembly in his working clothes. He must put on his Sunday suit more often, change his linen more often, and powder and shave more often; all this costs time and money. Increase in expenses: second disadvantage.²⁸

The first two disadvantages produce a third. Working less, but with increased expenses, the people of Neufchatel will still desire to live

as well as before. Consequently, they will raise the prices on the products they export. This, in turn, will tend to drive many of their buyers to new suppliers, such as the Swiss, who, "without being less industrious, will have no theater, and will not increase their prices. Diminution of trade: third disadvantage."²⁹

The fourth disadvantage cited by Rousseau is especially significant. As we observed earlier, Rousseau's Neufchatel is essentially apolitical; it is characterized by an absence of both public functionaries and taxes. According to Rousseau, however, the establishment of a theater will certainly result in the introduction of the latter, and probably the former as well:

In bad weather, the roads are not passable; and, since the actors must live during such weather, they will not interrupt their performances. Therefore, making the theater accessible at all times cannot be avoided. In winter, roads must be made through the snow and, perhaps, paved; and God permit that they do not install lanterns. Here we have public expenses and, as a result, contributions from individuals. Establishment of taxes: fourth disadvantage.³⁰

Although Rousseau does not say so explicitly, the introduction of taxes is only a part of the problem. Someone must collect the taxes and someone must decide how they will be spent; this means government of some sort and the creation of a political realm. The introduction of government and the political into Neufchatel, however, breaks down the isolation of the various individual families. This involves a major alteration in the Neufchatelians' mode of existence and, while in itself this may not involve undesirable consequences, in conjunction with certain other effects of the theater it will lead to the corruption of Neufchatel. This corruption is the result of a combination of effects, but the prime cause seems to be the introduction of a taste

for luxury, which Rousseau sees as necessarily resulting from the establishment of a theater:

The wives of the Mountaineers, going first to see and then to be seen, will want to dress, and dress with distinction. The wife of the chief magistrate will not want to show herself at the theater dressed like the schoolmaster's wife, and the schoolmaster's wife will endeavor to be dressed like the chief magistrate's. Out of this will soon be born a competition in dress that will ruin the husbands, perhaps win them over, and which will constantly find new ways to avoid the sumptuary laws.³¹

Neufchatel has already started to degenerate; with the introduction of competition, concern with appearances has come to dominate social life, and this concern is the seedbed of deception.

It is important to note, however, that the Neufchatel which Rousseau describes at this point has already undergone considerable alteration from its original condition. In particular, the equality and mutual independence which previously reigned between the heads of families has disappeared. The equality of condition and self-sufficiency, which were decisive for Neufchatel's good moeurs, have been replaced by titles and a division of labor. Rousseau made no mention of a chief magistrate or a schoolmaster in his original description of Neufchatel; indeed, his emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the various families strongly implied that such functionaries did not exist. An argument could be made, although Rousseau does not choose to make it, that the establishment of a theater is what called forth such occupations as chief magistrate and schoolmaster. As we have already seen, Rousseau does imply that such an act does call into being a political realm, and consequently political offices. In addition, it can be argued that the introduction of a theater would also tend to create a taste for learning about the wider world outside of

Neufchatel, from which the plays are drawn, and for acquiring the social graces displayed in the theater. These new tastes, tastes which cannot be satisfied within the traditional order of Neufchatel, can be satisfied only by bringing in outsiders; hence, the post of schoolmaster is created. With the introduction of new occupations which set their practitioners apart from other men, there comes a corresponding sense of the differential worth of individuals, a worth based solely on their occupations or the titles they hold: the chief magistrate is looked up to more than the schoolmaster, and the schoolmaster more than the farmer. Moreover, this concern with titles diverts attention from the question of the intrinsic worth of the individual; the wife of the schoolmaster wishes to appear like the wife of the chief magistrate in dress. A concern with apparel indicates a certain lack of concern for inner qualities and character. It is not by chance that Rousseau derogates competition in dress; apparel is contained within the realm of appearance, of seeming; a preoccupation with apparel indicates a general preoccupation with appearances. More than this, such a concern presupposes an antecedent inequality; one must have some criteria other than character for judging others, criteria such as wealth, title, and reputation.

Thus, the introduction of inequality is decisive as regards the moeurs of Neufchatel. The introduction of a taste for luxury merely exacerbates the effects of this inequality, in that it provides new modes of expression for it. In fact, the existence of luxury simply indicates that a certain minimum level of inequality is present, according to Rousseau. Luxury is a symptom and not the disease itself. Furthermore, once inequality manifests itself in even a slight degree,

it inevitably and inexorably increases.³² The development of inequality involves a dynamic process; it feeds on itself, ever increasing, until society collapses into barbarism, or until the unlikely event of a revolution restores men to a condition of equality.³³ This process cannot be halted entirely; it can only be delayed.³⁴

The introduction of a theater into Rousseau's Neufchatel thus results in a sort of secular fall from grace; it is the women, after all, who are responsible for the introduction of a taste for luxury. What is puzzling in this, however, is Rousseau's studied avoidance of the problem of increasing inequality. This is especially puzzling in that he points out time after time in his other writings that the extent of inequality present in a society is decisive in determining the nature of that society, and especially in determining the character of the people.³⁵ There is a possible explanation for Rousseau's de-emphasizing the problem of inequality in his discussion of Neufchatel, an explanation which relates to Rousseau's purposes as regards Geneva. If Neufchatel's good morals ultimately depend upon the maintenance of a general equality of condition, then Geneva is already lost; inequality of various sorts, political, economic and social, is already well-rooted there.³⁶ To admit as much, however, would tend to detract from Rousseau's argument against the establishment of a theater at Geneva. If good moeurs are depicted as depending upon the industriousness of a people and the absence of luxury, and if the theater is responsible for altering these conditions, then Genevan moeurs are implied to be good--the people of Geneva are industrious and, for the most part, precluded from developing luxurious tastes by their sumptuary laws³⁷--and they can be maintained by prohibiting the establishment of a

theater. By depicting the introduction of luxury and decline in industriousness as decisive as regards the corruption of Neufchatel, Rousseau holds out the hope that Geneva can be saved from a similar fate. Moreover, a full articulation of the problem of corruption would lead inevitably to the conclusion that Geneva is already well on the way to corruption, and that its movement along this path cannot be halted. Recognition of this by the Genevans, however, could well result in a lack of concern with, and a fatalistic attitude toward, potentially corrupting practices; and this is pernicious, in view of the fact that the rate of decline in moeurs can be reduced. The possibility of effective political action in the interest of staving off corruption may thus depend upon the suppression of Rousseau's complete teaching regarding the normal course of social degeneration.

Rousseau's partial suppression of the problem of inequality is not the only discontinuity or omission in his description of the hypothetical corruption of Neufchatel. A careful reader of Rousseau's other works, and especially the two Discourses, would be surprised by the Letter's praise of commerce and manufacture in small states in general, and Neufchatel in particular. Indeed, Rousseau states elsewhere that extensive commerce and manufacturing are associated with luxury:

From society and the luxury which it engenders are born the liberal and mechanical arts, commerce, letters, and all those useless things which make industry flourish while enriching and destroying states.³⁸

The opposition which Rousseau establishes in the Letter between industriousness and luxury is therefore false; the two go together, although there is no clear-cut order of priority.³⁹ Furthermore, both industry and luxury are associated with the ruin of states. Moreover, while it

is important to remember that it is industry in the sense of manufacturing and commerce which Rousseau explicitly condemns in the Discourses, and not industriousness as such, it is also necessary to bear in mind the central role which the question of motivation plays in his analysis. The development of commerce and industry is motivated by a desire for profit, a desire which can easily get out-of-hand, so that economic self-interest becomes the lodestone of the individual's life, and self-enrichment the sole recognized obligation. Insofar as an individual's industriousness manifests itself in a desire to enrich himself, to make a profit at almost any cost, then industriousness itself is undesirable; a vicious man who is also industrious is much more dangerous than is one who is lethargic.

Rousseau's praise of industry and industriousness in the people of Neufchatel must therefore be reexamined. The first observation to be made is that the industriousness in question is profit oriented. Immediately prior to his discussion of Neufchatel, Rousseau discusses small states in general, explicitly distinguishing between those where the people are industrious and those where they are not. The former are characterized as avaricious and "greedy," and this greed and avarice are explicitly associated with commerce and industry.⁴⁰ The subject of Neufchatel seems to have been broached by Rousseau largely to provide an example of this type of state: the people are industrious and commerce and industry are developed. Consequently, we can conclude that the people of Neufchatel are also avaricious and "greedy." Rousseau's Neufchatel is, however, more or less unique, in that this avarice does not affect internal social relations; it is directed exclusively outward. As a result, Neufchatel is much less corrupt than

other commercial societies, but the possibility remains that this arrangement will be disrupted, especially since its fragility is so apparent. The establishment of a theater would, according to Rousseau, effect such a disruption, releasing the avarice and greed which had formerly been channeled into external trade. From this, we can conclude that Neufchatel, even before the establishment of a theater, was more than potentially corrupt, and that only an accidental concatenation of circumstances had prevented this corruption from manifesting itself in social life. The lesson which Neufchatel teaches is thus that, although a people may have become corrupted, this corruption can, to a certain extent and for a certain time, be prevented from manifesting itself in overt behavior. This points in turn to the possibility that what was achieved in Neufchatel by accident might be achieved elsewhere by design, that is, to the possibility of efficacious political action in the interest of staving off corruption. At the same time, however, it points to the fragility of any arrangement similar to Neufchatel's: in Neufchatel, the introduction of a single new amusement was sufficient to destroy those conditions which had previously held corruption at bay.

The preceding remarks serve to put Rousseau's praise of Neufchatel into partial perspective, but they do not solve the problem of exactly why Rousseau chose to employ Neufchatel as an example of a small city with good moeurs. To be sure, the industriousness of Rousseau's Neufchatelians does provide a contrast with the idleness and corruption of the Parisians, thus seeming to establish a link between industry and good moeurs, but, as we have seen, this link is spurious. It might also be argued that the petit-bourgeois morality of Neufchatel

is the closest thing to ancient virtue that can be realized in the modern world, but this is only speculation. Fortunately, Rousseau himself helps us to resolve the question at issue. After having indicated the disadvantages which would result from the establishment of a theater in Neufchatel, Rousseau calls the reader's attention to the incompleteness of his remarks:

All the rest is easy to imagine. Without cataloging the other disadvantages of which I have spoken or will speak in the following, without regard to the kind of theater and its moral effects, I confine myself solely to arguments relating to work and gain; and I believe I have shown, by an evident inference, how a prosperous people, but one which owes its well-being to its industry, exchanging reality for appearance, ruins itself at the moment it wishes to shine.

Furthermore, one should not protest against the chimerical nature of my suppositions. I only offer them as such, and only wish to render their inevitable consequences more or less apparent. Take away some circumstances and you will find other Mountaineers elsewhere; and, mutatis mutandis, the example has its application.⁴¹

Two points which Rousseau makes in the above passage should be emphasized: he has deliberately confined himself to arguments "relating to work and gain;" and, whether or not the example of Neufchatel is a chimerical one, it does serve to clarify the situation of similar peoples elsewhere. From this, we can infer that Rousseau's arguments concerning Neufchatel were chosen with the end in mind of appealing to a people for whom questions of "work and gain" are important. Who that people might be seems rather obvious, given the audience of the Letter, but Rousseau provides other indications that the example of Neufchatel is intended primarily for the people of Geneva. Most significantly, he opened his discussion of the opposition between idleness and industriousness with the statement that the effects of the theater which he is about to consider are those to which "the previously

mentioned Genevans attribute the taste for luxury, adornment, and dissipation, the introduction of which among us they rightly fear."⁴²

The subsequent argument, including the example of Neufchatel, is thus directed at precisely those points concerning the establishment of a theater which cause the Genevans disquiet. Moreover, this serves to explain Rousseau's treatment of luxury as the ultimate cause of Neufchatel's corruption, while ignoring the real "first cause:" the Genevans fear luxury, not inequality. Rousseau panders to this fear, and to the bourgeois mentality from which it stems, in his recital of the effects of the establishment of a theater in Neufchatel. If, he implies, a theater is established at Geneva, the people will become less hardworking, will acquire a taste for luxurious living, and trade will suffer as a result. Such an argument is calculated to hit the mercantile Genevan where it hurts the most, in his pocketbook.

The section of the Letter under examination opened with an assertion that the theater can only be judged in a relative manner; it is good in some places, and bad in others. Rousseau's discussion of small cities in general, and Neufchatel in particular, is designed to show by an indirect approach that the theater would be bad for Geneva, in that it is a small city and shares certain important characteristics with Neufchatel. Rousseau drives this point home in his concluding remarks on small cities:

Thus, while it may be true that the theater is not bad in itself, one would still have to inquire whether it does not become so in regard to the people for which it is destined. In certain places, it will be useful for attracting foreigners, for increasing the circulation of money, for stimulating artists, for varying fashions, for occupying people who are too rich or who aspire to be so, for rendering them less vicious, for distracting the people from its miseries, for causing it to forget its leaders in seeing its clowns, for maintaining and perfecting taste when decency is lost, for

covering the ugliness of vice with a veneer of etiquette, for preventing, in a word, bad moeurs from degenerating into brigandage. In other places, it would serve only to destroy the love of work, to discourage industry, to ruin individuals, to inspire in them a taste for idleness, to make them seek a way of living without doing anything, to render a people inactive and lax, to keep them from perceiving the public and private objects with which they should occupy themselves, to ridicule wisdom, to substitute a theatrical jargon for the practice of the virtues, to render all morality metaphysical, to transform citizens into wits, housewives into bluestockings, and daughters into lovers out of the drama.⁴³

Here the skill of Rousseau the rhetorician is demonstrated: the choice is put directly to the Genevans, but in such a way that the outcome is predetermined. If the Genevans decide to allow the establishment of a theater, Rousseau tells them in effect, they are admitting that they are already corrupt enough to enjoy the consequences of such an institution. At the same time, he warns them in terms they can easily understand that, if the theater is allowed into Geneva, their existing way of life will be drastically altered, the virtues which they most admire--industry and thrift--will cease to be practiced, and their very families transformed.

Strangely enough, Rousseau refrains at this point from actually exhorting the Genevans. Indeed, he concludes his argument on a somewhat ambivalent note:

It follows from this that, in order to judge whether it is appropriate to establish a theater in a certain town, it is first necessary to know if the moeurs are good or bad there, a question which it is perhaps not for me to answer concerning us. However it may be, all that I can admit in this regard is that it is true that the theater will not do us any harm if nothing can harm us anymore.⁴⁴

The status of Genevan moeurs is left unresolved. Rousseau never states that Genevan moeurs are good, although he seems to imply at times that this is the case. The Genevans themselves will naturally enough draw such a conclusion from what he has said, but Rousseau studiously

avoids committing himself. His refusal to speak out on this matter is due to humility, he suggests: it is not for Jean-Jacques Rousseau to pass judgement on Genevan morality. As has become apparent, however, Rousseau's silence is open to another interpretation: he may consider Geneva to possess something less than good moeurs and, out of a desire to avoid alienating the audience he wishes to influence, maintains a prudent silence rather than pen an overt falsehood. In this connection, it is significant that Rousseau maintains a similar silence in regards to the exact status of the moeurs of Neufchatel, which, as we have seen, functions as something of a surrogate Geneva.

In his discussions of Paris and Neufchatel, Rousseau seems primarily concerned with the material and objective world, with profit and loss and the actions of men. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier portions of the Letter, where he was largely concerned with the effect of the theater on individual character. This difference is suggestive. The case of Neufchatel establishes that it is possible to envision a society of relatively corrupt individuals, but one in which this corruption is not reflected in conduct; the people are corrupt, but for a variety of reasons their behavior is not vicious. Certainly, for Rousseau, a virtuous society is much to be preferred to Neufchatel, but where such is impossible, as he suggests may be the case in the modern world, Neufchatel is infinitely preferable to the other alternative, Paris, where the people are both corrupt and vicious. This, in turn, suggests that it may be prudent under certain circumstances to forget about individual character, and concentrate one's concern on preventing vicious behavior. Specifically, one might employ

the coercive power of the state to control overt behavior, while eschewing all efforts to make men good or virtuous.

Such a program recalls Kant's prescriptions for a "race of devils." At the same time, it suggests the view of the political order held by the majority of modern thinkers. The state, according to this conception, is legitimately concerned only with behavior that threatens harm to others. Whether this position is arrived at as a result of a commitment to individual autonomy or as a result of despair over the possibility of virtue, the end result is the same: an emphasis on law, backed up by the threat of coercion, as the primary means of preventing undesirable behavior. Men, according to this view, can be forced to act as if they were good citizens or good members of society, even if they are not morally good persons.⁴⁵ There are dangers associated with such a position, however, in particular, it is often subject to over-simplification, through a mistaken assessment of the efficacy of legislation. D'Alembert's proposal involves just such an over-simplification, according to Rousseau,⁴⁶ whose remarks on the subject shed considerable light on the problems associated with any attempt to employ political means to effect changes in a people's general behavior and comportment.

In his article for the Encyclopédie, d'Alembert took issue with what he considered to be the Genevans' main objection to the establishment of a theater: the belief that the example of the actors would promote a taste for "adornment, dissipation, and libertinism" in the youth of Geneva. ~~D'Alembert admits that this problem is a real one,~~ but he argues that it is possible to remedy it by means of "severe and well-executed laws" governing the conduct of the actors.⁴⁷ In

this way, he goes on to say, Geneva would retain its existing moeurs while still enjoying the advantages to be derived from an established theater. Thus, according to d'Alembert, in order to prevent the actors from setting a bad example, it suffices to enact and enforce a set of laws prohibiting that conduct which is considered undesirable. For Rousseau, however, this is not an adequate solution: according to him, d'Alembert's proposal is based on a misconception both of the nature and power of the law and of the Genevan people. In the first place, the problem is not, as d'Alembert seems to imply, simply to determine what comportment is undesirable and what desirable, and then X to pass legislation forbidding the former and commanding the latter. The strength of a law or set of laws depends primarily upon the willingness of the people to obey. Although there is an element of coercion in most laws--"Do not do X or you will be punished"--in an important sense the law provides an alternative to naked force. The punishments prescribed by law are intended to be exceptional and unnecessary in the case of most men. This is doubly so in a republic, where the people are supposed to be self-governing and to have in some way consented to the laws which are set over them. Even aside from this, however, practical considerations require that obedience to the law be founded upon something more than fear of punishment. Such fear is only more or less effective, depending as it does both on the likelihood of discovery and subsequent punishment, and on the strength of those tendencies which fear of punishment is meant to hold in check. Where law-abidingness is the product of coercion, when men believe they have little or nothing to fear, that is to say, when they feel that their crimes will go either undiscovered or unpunished, they will

cease to be law-abiding; and, however well conceived a law may be, men with evil intentions will always be able to discover ways to break it with impunity.⁴⁸

Where the only rationale for obedience to the law is fear of punishment, the law itself appears as arbitrary, and men tend to view disobedience to such laws as praiseworthy.⁴⁹ In particular, a law which runs contrary to the existing practices of a people, a law which forbids what a majority sees as either innocuous or desirable, can have only two possible effects: either the law is flagrantly disobeyed and all attempts at enforcement are abandoned, thus undermining the authority of all laws, or the organs of law enforcement are compelled to expend a disproportionate amount of time and resources in attempting to enforce this one law. Obedience to the law is certain only when that obedience is willing, i.e., when it is not coerced:

Well-executed laws? It is a question of knowing whether this is possible; for the force of the law has its measure, and that of the vices which it represses has its measure too. It is only after having compared these two qualities, and found that the former surpasses the latter, that you can be assured of the execution of the laws. Knowledge of these relations constitutes the real science of the legislator. For if it were only a matter of publishing edict upon edict, regulation upon regulation, in order to remedy abuses as they arise, doubtless many fine things would be said, but for the most part they would remain without effect, and would serve more as indications of what should be done than as means for effecting it.⁵⁰

According to Rousseau, what d'Alembert has failed to understand is that the law must be relative. It is not a question of enacting those laws which would be absolutely best if complied with, but rather of enacting those laws which will be both beneficial and obeyed. Of these two criteria, the latter is by far the more important, in that it is the more difficult to satisfy:

At bottom, the institution of laws is not so marvelous a thing that any man of sense and equity could not easily discover those which of themselves, if well-observed, would be the most useful for society. Where is the least student of right who could not draw up a moral code as pure as the laws of Plato? But this is not the only problem. It remains to adapt the code to the people for which it was made, and to the things concerning which it decrees, so that its execution follows from the conjunction of these relations; it is to impose on the people, according to the example of Solon, less the best laws in themselves than the best a given situation admits of.⁵¹

The passage quoted above reflects a radical shift in Rousseau's line of argument. Previously, it seemed he was addressing d'Alembert's proposal to regulate the conduct of actors by means of "severe and well-executed laws," but, with the above remarks, he indicates that his intentions involve something much grander and more important than a simple refutation of d'Alembert's argument. Specifically, it appears that Rousseau's real interests lie in elucidating the relationship between a people and its laws, in laying bare the "real science of the legislator," and in applying the example of Solon to Geneva. The evidence for such a shift is overwhelming. If Rousseau were only concerned with refuting d'Alembert, there would be no need for him to speak of the necessity of matching the laws to the character of a people, no need for him to speak of "the example of Solon," a man who provided laws for an entire people. D'Alembert's proposed legislation would apply only to actors, that is to say, only to a handful of foreigners who would be brought into Geneva to perform in the new theater. The problem of legislating for an entire people isn't an issue for d'Alembert, but it is very much an issue for Rousseau, or so it would seem. To admit this, however, is to raise another question: in what way is the question of legislating for an entire people a problem for Rousseau, and why does it emerge as a problem in the Letter?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to recall the problematic status of Genevan virtue. Rousseau has hinted time and time again in the Letter that Geneva is a less than completely virtuous community, but that, like Neufchatel, it could become a good deal worse. The question of controlling the actor's conduct in order to maintain Geneva as it is--i.e., industrious, thrifty, and sober--is thus subsumed under the more general problem of forestalling the further corruption of Geneva. Indeed, a solution to the more general problem may tend to render the problem of the actors' conduct trivial, in that the very establishment of a theater may alter Genevan moeurs in such a way that early decline is inevitable; if such is the case, then the problem of controlling the actors' conduct either does not arise because the theater will be banned, or it is superfluous. Moreover, Rousseau's remarks to the effect that the laws proposed by d'Alembert might not be obeyed by the Genevans points to the possibility that corruption--that is, licentiousness, dissipation, and luxury--is already a problem for Geneva. Rousseau does not say that d'Alembert's proposed laws will not be obeyed, but he does suggest that this is possible, while simultaneously suggesting that these laws would not be adapted to the people of Geneva. But this necessarily means that, to a certain extent at least, those vices which d'Alembert seeks to control in the actors are already present in Geneva. It is not so much the actors who will flaunt d'Alembert's laws as it is the Genevans themselves.

The issue which Rousseau raises in connection with d'Alembert's proposed legislation is nothing less than the question of the relationship between the laws of a people and its general character. This

relationship is extremely complex. On the one hand, we have already seen that Rousseau believes that the laws of a people should be tailored to fit its character. On the other hand, we shall see that the laws which govern a people help to shape its character. In order to understand these twin propositions, it is useful to consider just exactly what it is Rousseau means by "law." Rousseau's usage borrows a great deal from that of the ancients, in that by "law" he means not only, and not even primarily, particular pieces of legislation which govern conduct, but something approaching the idea of "constitution," the fundamental legislation which apportions power and rights on the one hand, and duties on the other, that is to say, those basic laws which define the essential character of a regime.⁵²

A regime is more or less suited to a particular people, depending upon the extent to which the principles embodied in that regime--aristocratic, democratic, and monarchical, for example--are compatible with that people's way of life.⁵³ Rousseau follows Montesquieu in arguing that the way of life of a people is decisively influenced by certain brute physical facts--i.e., the extent of the state, its geography, climate, population--therefore the appropriateness of a given regime to a particular people depends upon the degree to which it is compatible with these physical facts or "natural relations."⁵⁴ Lacking such compatibility, instability and social and political turmoil result:

That which renders the constitution of a state truly solid and durable is . . . the natural relationships and the laws always meet in concert on the same points, and the latter, so to speak, only affirms, accompanies, and rectifies the former. But if the legislator mistakes his object and adopts a principle different from that which is determined by the nature of things; if the one conduces to servitude and the other to liberty, the one to wealth and the other

to population, the one to peace and the other to conquest, the laws will insensibly become enfeebled, the constitution will be altered, and the state will not cease to be shaken until it is destroyed or changed, and invincible nature has recovered her empire.⁵⁵

A successful body of legislation must thus conform to "the nature of things." Nature, however, in the form of environmental and extra-human forces, does not impose the only constraint on the laws. Man is not completely subject to his physical environment and not completely determined by it. If such were the case, the character of a people would be as changeless as the topography of their land. The physical environment does impose constraints, but within these constraints variation is almost infinite. This variation, in turn, makes political action possible, while simultaneously imposing additional constraints on effective legislation. If a people were absolutely determined by its physical environment, then there would be no point in attempting to alter its character through legislation; the task would be hopeless. This does not, however, mean that the problem of the legislator consists solely of discovering and enacting those laws which, taking into consideration environmental constraints, would be absolutely best for a given people. The task of the legislator is much more difficult, in that he must take the people as they are, with a character already more or less formed, and attempt to reform them. The difficulty inherent in this task results from the limited efficacy of the law: the simple passage of a law does not guarantee that it will be obeyed. The secret of effective legislation is thus in forming laws which will willingly be obeyed, but the existing character of a people imposes limits on such laws.

The use of coercion to compel obedience does not provide an adequate solution to the legislator's problem. As was noted earlier, the threat of punishment does not insure obedience. More important for Rousseau, however, is the fact that the wholesale use of coercion conflicts with the very nature and purpose of the law. In the Second Discourse, the rule of law is presented as an alternative to the "right" of the strongest.⁵⁶ Might does not make right; the possession of superior force does not establish either a right to be obeyed or a corollary duty on the part of others to obey. Rousseau elaborates on this theme in the Social Contract:

Let us grant for the moment this pretended right. I maintain that it results in nothing but meaningless noise. For, as soon as it is force which creates right, the effect changes with the cause; any force which overcomes the first succeeds to its right. As soon as it is possible to disobey with impunity, it is legitimate to do so; and, since the strongest is always right, it is only a question of always acting in such a way as to become the strongest. What is a right which perishes when force ceases? If it is necessary to obey by force, there is no need to obey by duty, and if one is no longer forced to obey, then one is no longer obliged to do so.⁵⁷

On the other hand, law, in the proper sense, establishes obedience as a duty. Given man's natural liberty, however, his moral autonomy,⁵⁸ laws, in the sense of general rules which every member of society has a duty to obey, must be willed by each and every individual. This idea was discussed earlier in Chapter III, but what is important to keep in mind is that Rousseau explicitly equates the rule of law with the rule of the general will, that is, with obedience to a set of general rules which are, in a sense, willed by each and every individual.⁵⁹ The rule of the general will is a necessary condition for political legitimacy--that is, for the establishment of mutual duties and obligations--in that it is the sole type of rule which is compatible

with human autonomy, man's freedom as a moral agent; it is the only form of association in which "each, being united with all, obeys only himself and remains as free as before;"⁶⁰ and it alone makes obedience to the law a duty.

Such a conception of law might seem to deny the possibility of attaching criminal sanctions to particular laws, in that reasonable men do not will their own punishment. Furthermore, it would seem to suggest that only laws which are universally accepted are truly laws, since transgression of a law would seem to imply a withdrawal of consent. Consequently, one might be tempted to argue that not only can a breach of the law never legitimately be punished, but that a breach of the law is itself impossible. This, however, is not the case according to Rousseau. While it may be true that all laws emanating from the general will are willed in a certain sense by each and every individual, this does not mean that the law never conflicts with private interest. It is the peculiar nature of the general will to be both an expression of the points of congruence between the various individual interests in a society, and an abstraction from such interests. The general will must be truly general, according to Rousseau. It must express what is common to the various private interests, but in the form of general laws which take no cognizance of individuals. As a result of this abstraction from particulars, it becomes possible for the general will to come into conflict with private interests. This somewhat murky statement can be clarified by an example. It is obvious that each and every individual has a certain interest in preserving his own life; he wills, in effect, that he be safeguarded from acts of violence perpetrated by others. That a law can take no

cognizance of individuals, however, means that any law which embodies this common interest must apply universally. The prohibition of homicide, for example, can be an act of the general will, that is, can become a legitimate rule of conduct to which all men have consented. But, in willing that the law protect me from violence, I am simultaneously willing the enactment of a law which protects all men; without such universal applicability, other men would not give their consent, and so no law would result. The best situation for me might well be one in which all other men were compelled by duty and the coercive power of the state to refrain from killing me, while I myself was under no such compulsion, but this involves a kind of contradiction: the same is true for all other men and, if I except myself from the ruling prohibiting homicide, so will they, and then no one would be obliged to refrain from killing me. I cannot will my own exemption from the law without granting that same right to other men, who are also autonomous individuals; obversely, I cannot will my own protection without simultaneously willing the protection of all other men, even those whom I might desire to harm.

The idea of the general will thus leads to a distinction between a narrowly conceived, egoistic self-interest and an enlightened self-interest, which essentially involves a novel restatement of the traditional distinction between purely private interest and the common good.⁶¹ Moreover: "Each individual can have, as a man, a private will that is contrary or different from the general will he has as a citizen."⁶² The former prompts the individual to pursue his private desires and passions; the latter tells him that if he wishes others to restrain themselves in such a way as to guarantee his own life and

property, he must restrain himself in the same way. These two types of self-interest can obviously come into conflict. When this happens, and when the individual acts in accordance with his narrow self-interest, then he can be said, according to Rousseau, to act differently than he in fact has willed. In slightly plainer language, the requirement that the law embody the general will simply establishes a criterion of consistency as far as an authentic act of the will is concerned: I cannot legitimately will that others refrain from an action which I permit myself, nor can I legitimately will that others perform an action which I would exempt myself from performing under like circumstances.

The foundation for Rousseau's solution to the problem of punishment has now been laid. The idea of the general will, and of the law, serves to introduce a degree of rationality and consistency into the wills of the individual citizens. Insofar as the individual states his self-interest in the form of general rules which apply equally to all members of society, he is precluded from justly excepting himself from the duty of obedience on the grounds of narrow self-interest. This formal requirement of the general will allows the political order the use of force against recalcitrant individuals, while still maintaining the autonomy of the individual. There are always men who will not listen to the promptings of reason, and hearken instead to their passions, and particularly their amour propre. Coercive sanctions are necessary because of man's tendency to give preference to himself in all things. Without such sanctions, the community would be unprotected from the unjust man described by Rousseau in the Letter, the man who loves to see virtue in others because it makes them easier prey. The

threat of punishment serves in part to hold such men in check and forces them to behave consistently. It is precisely this which Rousseau is referring to when he speaks of "forcing men to be free."⁶³ Moreover, according to Rousseau's reasoning, the criminal himself has willed his own punishment. If, for example, a man wills the protection of his own life, he necessarily wills the protection of the lives of all his fellow citizens. Similarly, if he wills that those who offer him violence should be punished, he wills also and at the same time that he himself should be punished should he offer violence to others:

It is in order not to become the victim of an assassin that one consents to die if he becomes one. In this treaty, far from disposing of our own life, one only thinks of guaranteeing it, and it is not to be thought at the time that any of the contractants plans to have himself hung.⁶⁴

The punishment of criminals can be founded on even more fundamental grounds. The act of civic association, the agreement to abide by the general will, replaces the "right of the strongest." It creates the possibility of duty, of moral obligation between members of the association. It, in effect, takes man out of his natural state, where his relations with others are governed solely by his desires and passions and by naked force, and places him in an "artificial" situation where these relations are governed by duty and the law. The criminal, by his very transgression against the law, places himself outside the community by rupturing the moral bond which linked him with other men. He has placed himself in a position vis à vis the community where only force rules, and so force can without injustice be used against him. Furthermore, by his tacit repudiation of duty, he attacks the very foundation of the community.

Moreover, every criminal, by attacking social right, becomes by his crimes rebel and traitor to the fatherland; he ceases to be a member [of the community] in violating its laws, and even makes war against it. Thus, the conservation of the state is incompatible with his own; one of the two must perish. When one puts to death a criminal, it is less as a citizen than as an enemy. The proceeding and the judgement are proof that he has broken the social treaty and, in consequence, that he is no longer a member of the state. . . . Such an enemy is not a moral being; he is only a man, and the right of war is to kill the vanquished.⁶⁵

The criminal is "only a man;" he has ceased to be a moral being, that is to say, a citizen.

Civic freedom, freedom for all, is possible only as long as one need obey only those general rules which each member of society, as a rational being, would give his consent to. As soon as this generality is lost, either through the enactment of "laws" which are not acceptable in the abstract to all citizens, or through the selective exemption of certain individuals, then the social bond is severed and the regime ceases to be legitimate. Because of this, the wholesale use of coercion is incompatible with Rousseau's conception of what might be called "the spirit of the law." Such coercion becomes necessary only when general consent to the rules which supposedly govern the community is absent, and more particularly when there exists extensive opposition to some or all of those rules; but, according to Rousseau, general consent, at least in the abstract, is a fundamental characteristic of "law" properly understood. Consequently, the rules in question are not laws, but arbitrary decrees of this or that man or group of men. The attempt to enforce such rules is therefore illegitimate, in that it involves a return to a pre-political situation characterized by the right of the strongest, that is to say, to a situation in which obedience is the result of compulsion and fear, rather than consent.

The problem with this conception of the law is that it seems to restrict, if not preclude, the possibility of reform. Relative to any given people, according to Rousseau, there is one set of laws which is best, one set of laws which precisely embodies the common interests of the community.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, it is obviously the case that reality falls far short of this ideal. Rousseau's use of the idea of the general will compels him to locate sovereignty, the right to enact laws, in the people, but the people are prone to error; they often make mistakes as to what is really in the common interest. In particular, the common interest is often obscured by the passions and desires of men. Men naturally seek to promote their private interest, because it is closest to them, and to prefer themselves in all things. Because it is so unnatural, it is difficult for men, who are passionately attached to what is peculiarly their own, to see the necessity of pursuing a common good, and to recognize the desirability of living by any other rule than that which is dictated by egoistic self-interest. Adherence to the principle of the general will may be the only way in which reasoning men can adopt mutually binding duties,⁶⁷ but man is a being which is dominated by irrational passions more often than not. This creates something of a paradox. Man as he is by nature is unfit for civil society: his natural passions and preference for self, his amour propre, both obscure the general will and incline him to pursue his personal interests, regardless of the law; such a man is neither fit to discern the general will nor likely to abide by it once it has been discovered, but it is men such as this which form the raw material of civil society.

Rousseau's solution to this paradox is to demand the "denaturing" of man. The general outline of this solution was discussed in Chapter III above. For our purposes here, what is important to recall is that the denaturing of man depends upon bringing about as complete an identification as possible of the individual with the community as a whole. This "solution," however, only pushes the paradox back a notch, because it is precisely the possibility of bringing about such an identification which is in doubt. An identification with the community, a subordination of private interest to the public good, is characteristic of the good citizen, of an individual who is both receptive and obedient to the general will. But how is such an individual to come into being? Rousseau's answer is that he will be formed by the laws,⁶⁸ but this presupposes good laws, that is to say, laws which educate the individual to virtue. The paradox thus remains: good laws produce good citizens, but enactment of and adherence to good laws would seem to presuppose good citizens.

The laws are, properly speaking, only the conditions of civil association. The people subjected to the laws ought to be their author; it belongs to those who come together to regulate the conditions of the society. But how will they regulate them? Will it be by a common accord, by a sudden inspiration? Has the body politic an organ to announce its will? Who will give it the foresight to formulate and publicize its acts in advance, or how will it announce them in its moment of need? How can a blind multitude which often does not know what it wills, because it rarely knows what is good for it, execute for itself so great and so difficult an enterprise as a system of legislation? . . . The individuals see the good which they reject; the public wants the good which it does not see. All equally need guides. It is necessary to oblige the former to conform their wills to their reason; it is necessary to teach the latter to know what it wants.⁶⁹

Rousseau concludes the argument from which the above passage was excerpted with a statement to the effect that a "legislator" is necessary. The people alone are incapable of formulating a system of good laws;

someone must provide them with an appropriate body of legislation, as Lycurgus did for Sparta, Solon for Athens, and Moses for the Jews. The occurrence of a legislator, a law-giver, is thus a necessary condition for the rule of law. If the rule of law depends upon the prior appearance of a legislator, however, our understanding of "law" is necessarily incomplete if we lack an understanding of the legislator as such, and this is particularly true if we lack an understanding of "the real science of the legislator."

The role of the legislator is decisive as far as civil society is concerned. He forms men into citizens by arranging their social environment into an educational whole, the influence of which transforms an aggregation of individuals, of natural wholes, into a community, an artificial whole:

He who wishes to undertake the formation of a people must feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he receives, in a way, his life and being; to alter the constitution of man in order to strengthen it; to substitute a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature.⁷⁰

On the face of it, however, Rousseau's call for a legislator does not seem to solve the problem of instituting a civil society, but rather seems to be a simple reformulation of that problem. Once again the problem of popular sovereignty presents itself. The legislator cannot simply present a body of laws and expect them to be obeyed; much less can he coerce the people into obeying them. Since only enactments of the general will can be laws, in the sense of morally binding rules governing behavior, the consent of the people as a whole is required to confirm the legislator's proposals as laws. As was previously noted, this consent is difficult to obtain due to the force of private interest

and individual passion, that is, due to the fact that men are natural and independent wholes. The possibility of the people consenting to the work of the legislator would seem to presuppose what that work is intended to create, a virtuous and public-spirited citizenry. The problem thus boils down to this: living under good laws forms virtuous men, men who are willing to subordinate private interest to a conception of the common good, while men who have not lived under good laws are not, in general, so willing; but the very existence of good laws would seem to depend upon the prior existence of virtuous men, since only virtuous men would willingly accept the curtailment of their natural liberty which such laws entail.

In order for a new people to appreciate healthy maxims of politics . . . it would be necessary for the effect to become the cause, for the social spirit, which must be the work of the institution, to preside at the institution itself, and for men to be before the laws exist what they should become by means of them.⁷¹

The difficulty posed by the preceding passage seems insurmountable, but the problems faced by Rousseau's legislator do not end there. The task of the legislator does not end with the simple creation of a community and with the establishment of the sovereignty of the general will. The idea of the general will provides a purely formal criteria of political legitimacy; it specifies the form which laws, qua law, must take, but indicates nothing concerning their specific content. Laws commanding the most vicious practices--cannibalism, human sacrifice, etc.--as well as the most imprudent ones, are compatible with the rule of the general will; it is only necessary that they be accepted in the abstract by all citizens.⁷² To reiterate, no general rule of action is a priori incompatible with the general will as conceived by Rousseau. Some, however, are imprudent or otherwise undesirable, in that they tend

to lead to the destruction of the people as a community, either physically through conquest by foreigners, or morally, through the destruction of those conditions which maintain the civic bond. The task of the legislator thus does not end with the creation of a public-spirited citizenry, with the creation of a people ruled by a common conception of the public good; he must also shape that conception itself. In particular, he must take pains to ensure that enactments of the general will conform to the dictates of prudence and that they do not violate the constraints imposed by nature.

The task of the legislator is further complicated by the fact that it must be carried out in a social context, in a situation in which men have already formed habits and opinions, and where, to a considerable extent, their character has already been formed by imperfect institutions. This character, and the institutions which formed it, is so much dead-weight hindering the task of the legislator. The individual is intimately attached to existing institutions, practices, and beliefs by interest, passion and habit. This attachment must be broken if the legislator is to proceed with the creation of those institutions and practices which alone can transform the individual into a citizen, and an aggregation of such individuals into a community. In a sense, the legislator must erase the past in order to bring the future into existence. The creation of community would thus seem to depend upon an apparent impossibility: a characterless society, a society without institutions or established practices, an aggregation of individuals without habits or preconceived beliefs.

The nature of the difficulties faced by the legislator suggests that he can be no ordinary man:

In order to discover the rules of society best suited to peoples, a superior intelligence would be needed, an intelligence which sees all the passions of men without experiencing any, which is totally unrelated to our nature while knowing it thoroughly, whose happiness is independent of us but which is willing to busy itself with ours. . . . Gods are required to give laws to men.⁷³

Indeed, these difficulties appear so formidable that, without the example of the ancient legislators, one would scoff at the very possibility of such men existing. The possibility of a legitimate political order thus depends upon a very improbable event--the appearance of a demigod among men--but even this is not sufficient in and of itself; there remain the twin problems of obtaining the people's consent and overcoming the influence of the past. These problems are resolvable only under the most improbable of circumstances:

Like some illnesses which confuse the minds of men and deprive them of memory of the past, sometimes there is found in the life of states violent epochs in which revolutions do to peoples what certain crises do to individuals, in which horror of the past takes the place of forgetting, and in which the state, wreathed in civil war, is reborn so to speak from its ashes, and regains the vigor of its youth. . . . Such was Sparta at the time of Lycurgus; such was Rome after the Tarquins; and among us, such were Holland and Switzerland after the expulsion of their tyrants.⁷⁴

Thus--since, "Once customs are established and prejudices rooted, it is a dangerous and vain enterprise to seek to reform them"⁷⁵--the establishment of a truly legitimate political order depends upon the conjunction of a man of remarkable talents, the potential legislator, and a society whose past has been destroyed as a result of revolution, civil war, and the resulting turmoil. The people's attachment to existing institutions must have been undermined; habits, customs, and beliefs must have been completely disrupted, and a period of violence and dislocation must have prepared the people to view change with hope, instead

of suspicion. In effect, the attempt to found a new order can come to fruition only when the old order has been destroyed; the new building can go up only when the old edifice has been cleared away.

The pervasive destruction of the past, however, even coupled with the appearance of a potential legislator, is not sufficient in itself to establish the conditions for a founding. The people must also have retained their vigor, that is to say, they cannot have become so corrupted by advances in civilization and the arts, so enervated by luxury, that they are incapable of bearing up under harsh laws and the rigors of political freedom. A people too old in the ways of civilization, and too steeped in vice, cannot be reformed; only a young, barbarous people, just shaken by revolution, is a fit subject for legislation.

But such events are rare; they are exceptions, the reasons for which are always to be found in the particular constitution of the state concerned. They cannot even occur twice for the same people, for a people can make itself free as long as it is only barbarous, but it cannot do so once the civic impulse has been exhausted. Then disturbances can destroy it, while revolutions cannot restore it. As soon as its chains are struck off, it disperses and ceases to exist. It requires a master and not a liberator. Free peoples, remember this maxim: liberty can be gained, but it can never be recovered.⁷⁶

A people cannot be reformed once "the civic impulse has been exhausted." This statement is somewhat obscure, but it seems to suggest that, for a legislator to be successful, the potential for community of the people he is concerned with must be largely untapped. A sense of community, of a moi commun, can be created, but it cannot be restored once it has degenerated into rampant individualism. Moreover, it seems that, at the very least, there must be a general feeling present in the individuals at whom the legislation is aimed that living together is desirable; a

sense of fellowship or nationhood must be present to some minimal degree. Such a feeling tends to be present in the youth of a people, but not after advances in learning and civilization have taught that nothing is desirable except insofar as it conduces to one's private interest, and that patriotism is for fools. Essentially, Rousseau's requirement that the civic impulse not be exhausted is simply a recognition of the fact that the individuals who are to form a community must have at least an embryonic feeling that such a community is desirable and must already perceive themselves as linked to one another by some bond other than an egoistic calculation of self-interest.

The possibility of founding a legitimate regime is extremely remote, in that it depends upon the highly improbable conjunction of the right man, the potential legislator, with the right moment in the history of a people. Without the man, the opportunity will go to waste. At an unfelicitous moment, even the potential legislator is helpless to effect reform. Thus,

Cato . . . perished with Rome and liberty because he was out of place in his century; the greatest of men could only astonish the world which he would have governed five centuries earlier.⁷⁷

Given the proper raw materials--a young and barbarous people who have become more or less open to new institutions and laws--the would-be legislator still faces the problem of securing a willing acceptance of his proposed legislation. This acceptance is vital, because ultimately it is the consent of the people to the laws which govern them which makes a regime legitimate. How this consent is to be obtained, however, is left entirely open. As regards the founding, Rousseau seems to hold the belief that the end justifies the means. As we have noted several times, the use of force is ruled out, but this is more because consent

and widespread coercion are incompatible, than from any fastidiousness on Rousseau's part. In fact, Rousseau goes so far as to denigrate the use of persuasion as a means of securing the people's consent. The legislator possesses political wisdom and the art of legislation, but this wisdom cannot be conveyed to the many:

Wise men who attempt to speak their own language to the vulgar . . . cannot make themselves understood. For there are a thousand kinds of ideas which it is impossible to translate into the language of the people. Ideas that are too general and objects that are too remote are equally outside of its purview. . . . Thus, the legislator, being unable to employ either force or reason, must of necessity have recourse to an authority of another order, capable of constraining without violence and persuading without convincing.⁷⁸

What Rousseau specifically has in mind is the use of religious authority. By wrapping himself in a religious mantle, by claiming to speak for God or the gods, the legislator can invest his legislation with an aura of sanctity; and this sanctity, in turn, secures the compliance of the credulous many.⁷⁹ But this means that the founding is necessarily based upon deceit and trickery; a legitimate political order and a just regime originates in lies.

The task of the legislator is to transform an aggregation of individuals into a collective whole, into a community. In order to accomplish this, he must "denature" man, must transform him from an individual into a citizen, and must replace his natural independence with a complete dependence on the community as a whole. Since the citizen, as opposed to the independent individual, is unnatural, the legislator must assume total control over the social environment, and must weld that environment into an educational whole which will shape the individual into the desired form. In the absence of such total control, human nature, and particularly the natural tendency to give preference

to oneself in all things, will reassert itself, and the community will fragment.

The establishment of a system of legislation is only the first and, in some ways, the least important task of the legislator. This legislation must be established on a permanent foundation; it must be rendered enduring. The legislator is, after all, an extremely rare human type, and the continued existence of the community cannot be made to depend upon the improbable occurrence of other such men. Moreover, sovereignty is lodged in the people; at all times, they have the right to alter the laws which govern them in any manner they so choose.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, such alterations are almost always for the worse, since it requires an exceptionally wise man to see all the ramifications issuing from a particular law, and an exceptionally prudent one to subordinate short-term benefits to lasting advantages; such qualities belong to the legislator and not the people. Furthermore, tampering with the laws established by a true legislator will inevitably weaken their educational effect; alterations in the law will make it less suited to the people concerned, and less able to effect the denaturing of man so necessary to the maintenance of community. Citizens will be produced who will be less virtuous than before and even more willing to tamper with the laws, resulting in even less virtuous future generations; in the end, the independent, egoistic individual will reemerge, and the community as such will cease to exist. Once such a degeneration has occurred, according to Rousseau, civic freedom can never be reestablished. Even the felicitous appearance of another potential legislator is insufficient to effect a rejuvenation in the community.

The above argument suggests that, in order to maintain a legitimate political order, its laws must remain fundamentally unchanged. Given the sovereignty of the people, which is a necessary part of any legitimate order, however, this is extremely difficult to achieve. In fact, for Rousseau, such stasis in the laws cannot be maintained indefinitely. Ultimately, change, and the consequent corruption of the community, is inevitable. The problem thus seems to become one of delaying changes in the laws. The way to accomplish this delay, according to Rousseau, is to make the citizens love the laws, to inscribe them on the hearts of each and every member of the community, to render them sacred.⁸¹

It is at this point that the idea of "moeurs" assumes great significance. As noted previously, this term refers not only to abstract rules of conduct, but also to the entire constellation of habits, practices, opinions, and prejudices which constitute and determine everyday behavior; it designates the whole complex of characteristics which defines the general nature of a people, a complex which is more or less present in every individual. The moeurs of a people include the common, or public, opinion of what is good and bad, moral and immoral, right and wrong, and just and unjust. These opinions constitute the horizon within which most evaluations and actions take place. In a sense, the moeurs of a people include a set of rules of behavior very similar to law in the formal sense. Indeed, for Rousseau, they constitute a subset of law, differing only from a legal code in being unwritten.⁸² To understand this equation of moeurs with a kind of law, it is only necessary to recall that the law emanates from the general will, and to observe that public opinion is, in many ways, an approximation of

that will. Common opinion defines expected behavior in a given set of circumstances; one behaves in a certain way and expects others to do the same. Furthermore, public opinion does not rely on overt force to secure compliance, but rather employs praise and blame, esteem and disesteem, honor and dishonor.

According to Rousseau, there are essentially three different kinds of laws: the "fundamental" or "political" laws, what modern thinkers would refer to as the "constitution;" civil laws, which regulate relations between citizens and between the individual citizen and the community; and the moeurs of the community.⁸³ Although the political law is fundamental, in the sense that it is prior in time to all the other kinds of law and makes these others possible, the moeurs of a people are also "fundamental," in the sense that all other laws draw their force from them. This point is stressed in the Letter:

Another observation, no less important, is that matters of moeurs and universal justice are not governed, like those of private justice and strict right, by edicts and laws; or, if sometimes the laws influence moeurs, it is when they draw their force from them. They then return to moeurs this same force by a reaction well known to true statesmen.⁸⁴

But it is articulated most completely in the Social Contract:

To these . . . kinds of laws is joined another, the most important of all, which is not graven on marble or brass, but in the hearts of the citizens. It forms the true constitution of the state, restores or takes the place of other laws when they decay or die out, preserves a people in the spirit of its institution, and insensibly substitutes the force of habit for authority. I speak of moeurs, of customs, and especially of public opinion, a part of the law unknown to our statesmen, but upon which depends the success of all the others. With this the great legislator concerns himself in secret, while he seems to confine himself to particular rules; these latter are only the arc of the arch, of which moeurs, slower to develop, form finally the immovable keystone.⁸⁵

The true guarantee of a system of legislation is love of the laws, born of habit and tradition.

Custom, habit, and public opinion are stronger than the formal law, the written law, and it is in this area that the most important work of the legislator takes place. Although, "The law does not regulate moeurs, it is legislation which gives birth to them."⁸⁶ The legislator must introduce institutions and practices which promote habits and opinions conducive to the maintenance of his system of legislation. As time passes, these institutions and practices will become more and more fixed, more and more traditional, thus rendering the law ever more solid and durable. This is the real reason that only a people whose history has been erased, whose traditions have been destroyed, can be formed into a community; the legislator must begin with a *tabula rasa*, upon which new traditions can be inscribed; so that what was originally done out of obedience to divine authority comes to be done out of force of habit, because that is the way things are done and have always been done.

Customs, habits, and traditions come to be loved because they are one's own, and to be revered because of their antiquity. What is peculiarly one's own, however, is not shared with others. Thus, those customs and habits which are most important to a people are those which they do not share with other peoples, those which impart a distinctive flavor to a people's character. This distinctiveness in customs and traditions helps to bind the members of a community together by emphasizing their differences as regards all those outside the community, and helps to build a sense of shared identity, of moi commun. This means, in turn, that the community must be resistant to change for

another reason; change reduces the force of tradition and custom, a force which is born of a sense of changelessness and antiquity. In particular, a community must be resistant to changes which tend to reduce its distinctiveness and make it more like other peoples; such changes attenuate and weaken the social bond.

Moeurs not only support the written laws, but in a well-governed state replace them. A people with good moeurs does not need many laws. The existence of formal laws, particularly those with criminal penalties attached to them, implies that the people need to be told how to behave, and that it is necessary for the organized force of the community to take a hand in regulating their conduct. On the other hand, a people with what Rousseau refers to as good moeurs has need of few laws, because proper behavior is automatic: a society whose members would not even think of stealing from one another has no need of laws forbidding theft; a people which views service to, and the defense of the community as both a duty and an honor has no need of a draft law. Thus, for Rousseau, the proliferation of laws indicates the corruption of a people: "If someone asked me which was the most vicious people, I would respond without hesitation that it is the one which has the most laws."⁸⁷

A well-ordered polity requires both good laws and good moeurs. The former are prior in time, in that they form the ground out of which good moeurs grow. Once moeurs have solidified, however, the laws come to depend upon them, in that willing obedience to the laws can be elicited on a permanent basis only when the laws are loved and respected by the people, and this occurs only when the law has merged almost completely with custom and tradition. It is in this connection that

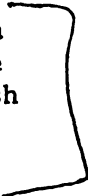
Rousseau cites with approval the practice of the Spartan Ephors:

The first function of the Spartan Ephors upon taking office was a public proclamation in which they enjoined the citizen not to observe the laws but to love them, so that their observation would not be hard. This proclamation was not an empty formula and shows perfectly the spirit of Spartan institutions, in which laws and moeurs, intimately united in the hearts of the citizens, made, so to speak, only a single body.⁸⁸

This constitutes the ideal, where men obey out of love rather than fear, where duty has become internalized, and where, as a consequence of this, individual autonomy and law-abidingness coexist.

Immediately following his praise of the Ephors, Rousseau introduces a discordant note into the Letter:

But let us not flatter ourselves that we will see Sparta reborn in the midst of commerce and love of gain. If we had the same maxims [as the Spartans], we could establish a theater at Geneva without any risk; for never would citizen or burgess set foot in it.⁸⁹



Geneva is not Sparta, and this point, while seemingly trivial, is important for Rousseau. Geneva too had a sort of legislator, John Calvin:

Those who know Calvin only as a theologian are little aware of the extent of his genius. The codification of our wise edicts, in which he played a large part, does him as much honor as his Institute.⁹⁰ Whatever revolution time may bring in our worship, so long as love of country and liberty is not extinguished among us, the memory of this great man will not cease to be revered.⁹¹

Calvin, however, was not only not Lycurgus' equal as a legislator,⁹² but he also was forced to work with inferior material. The laws of Sparta, which approximate the simply best, are not compatible with commerce and "love of gain," but the physical extent of Geneva forced the city to become a commercial center: Geneva consists almost exclusively of the city proper, in which the population is concentrated

without sufficient agricultural land to feed it. Under such conditions, Rousseau admits, the only alternative to starvation are the development of commerce and industry or war:

. . . is the soil niggardly or sterile, or the land insufficient for the inhabitants? You must turn to industry and the arts, the products of which you will exchange for the foodstuffs you lack.⁹³

But a commercial state is inherently unstable and weak:

Every people whose position gives it no alternative except commerce or war is weak in itself; it depends upon its neighbors; it depends upon events; and has only an uncertain and short existence.⁹⁴

Commercial states are more subject to change than are those states, such as Sparta, which are self-sufficient; the former necessarily depend upon the good will of others for their continued existence, and so must accomodate themselves to outsiders. The moeurs of a people so exposed to outside influences are bound to be in a state of flux; in such a situation, even given wise initial legislation, the way of life of a people is bound to alter and, according to Rousseau, this alteration must be for the worse. Over the course of time, Geneva has thus necessarily become corrupt.

The founding of the Republic of Geneva occurred in the relatively distant past. The community then created has since broken down; the artificial whole, upon which the possibility of a legitimate political order depends, has fragmented. Rousseau indicates elsewhere in his works that this fragmentation is irreversible. Moreover, he tells us that a potential legislator can be effective only under certain very limited conditions, conditions which no longer apply in Geneva. Yet, and this is something of a puzzle, he faults d'Alembert's proposal for not being in accord with "the true science of the legislator." If the

occurrence of a legislator is a phenomenon only associated with a founding, what use can his "science" have at a time when a founding is no longer possible? In particular, how can Rousseau employ this "science" as a standard for judging d'Alembert? The answer to this question serves to elucidate Rousseau's purpose in issuing the Letter.

Good moeurs are the ultimate foundation of any continuing community; and it is the "secret" task of the legislator to establish such moeurs at the founding, and to fix them, insofar as is possible, through the creation of institutions and practices which will continue to inculcate good moeurs. A successful founding establishes an educational whole, a whole in which all aspects of community life work together to produce good moeurs, which is to say, good citizens. Once this whole begins to break down, it cannot be restored. This does not mean, however, that the community, in the form of the political order, has lost all control over moeurs. It simply means that this control is no longer total; institutions and practices no longer combined to produce precisely the desired effect, men are brought up to be something less than good citizens, and the community is no longer simply virtuous. At the same time, the political order has not lost its interest in good moeurs. There remains a vast gulf between a community which has begun to degenerate and a thoroughly vicious society, and the preservation of relatively good moeurs, insofar as is possible, delays the transformation of the one into the other. This is by no means a negligible benefit. By the same token, even in a vicious society it is conceivable that certain vicious practices can be suppressed or discouraged; if not good moeurs, at least innocuous ones, can sometimes replace vicious practices in some areas of social life. In such a society, virtue of

the whole is no longer possible, but this does not mean that the amelioration of existing conditions is not possible on a small scale.

For Rousseau, political action is always circumscribed by a horizon of the possible. Under certain rare and transitory conditions, those conditions necessary for a successful founding, this horizon expands immensely. Even in the case of a founding, however, the possibilities of action are more or less limited by Circumstances; the possibilities inherent in Geneva at its founding, for example, were greatly surpassed by those inherent in Sparta at the time of Lycurgus. Under less than ideal conditions, the potential effectiveness of political action is decreased, but it never disappears entirely. In particular, it is always possible for the political order to effect some reform in moeurs through the manipulation of public opinion.

By means of what can the government acquire a hold on moeurs? I answer that it is by means of public opinion. If our habits are born of our own sentiments in retirement, in society they are born of the opinions of others. When we do not live in ourselves, but in others, it is their judgement which regulates everything. Nothing appears good or desirable to individuals except that which the public has judged to be such, and the only happiness which most men know is to be esteemed happy.⁹⁵

Where a legitimate political order is impossible, the force of public opinion can serve as a substitute for true law; properly directed, it can function as an inferior version of the general will. For Rousseau, the law must compel without coercing and, in a sense, public opinion fulfills this requirement. In society, men live in and for the opinions of others; the desire to appear happy, honest, honorable, whatever it is that the public esteems. As a consequence, they generally refrain from those actions which common opinion holds in contempt; similarly, men are led to perform actions, when those actions

are held in high regard or when the failure to perform would result in calumny. Indeed, the practices of a people are largely governed by the ruling opinions. Law, in the commonsense meaning of the term, is helpless in overcoming these opinions; one cannot seek to impose laws contrary to the dominant opinions of a people and expect at the same time to see that law obeyed. One need only think back to the XVIII Amendment to the US Constitution to realize the correctness of this position.

Reform of a people's practices and moeurs would thus seem to depend upon the possibility of influencing public opinion; deliberate alterations in established modes of behavior can be effected only after a prior alteration in common opinion has been achieved. The control of opinion, however, is an extremely difficult task. In the first place, "Force having no power over minds, opinion cannot be compelled."⁹⁶ Since opinion is more or less identical with prejudice, and prejudice is immune to reason, reason itself is helpless:

. . . neither reason, nor virtue, nor laws will vanquish public opinion so long as the art of changing it has not been found. Once again, this art has nothing to do with violence.⁹⁷

The problem of changing public opinion, as described by Rousseau, bears a striking resemblance to the problem of founding a legitimate political order, that is to say, to that problem which only a legislator can solve. These similarities point to a certain similarity between the art required to found a community and the art of changing public opinion, which is the reformer's art. That Rousseau perceives these two arts to be closely related is indicated by his calling d'Alembert to task for proposing to reform Geneva by means of laws which do not conform to the "true science of the legislator."

The art of the reformer differs from the art, or "science," of the founder in at least one crucial respect, however: relative to the founder, a reformer is extremely limited in what he can achieve. True, both attempt to manipulate the moeurs of a people, but the founder begins with something approaching a tabula rasa, while the reformer is confronted with a situation where moeurs and opinion are relatively fixed. Furthermore, the conditions under which a founding takes place allow the legislator to assume a comprehensive perspective; institutions, laws, religion, practices, and opinions are all orchestrated to produce the desired effect on moeurs. Since it is his creation, the work of the founder is supported by the whole social matrix. The reformer, on the other hand, must necessarily limit his efforts to the correction of specific abuses, and this means that his achievements lack the durability of a founder's, in that they tend to be undermined from the very beginning by those elements of a society which have not been reformed. Moreover, reform is not additive. No matter how many specific reforms one undertakes and achieves, their effects cannot be combined so as to approximate a founding. A corrupt society is necessarily inharmonious, and consequently in a state of permanent flux; changes at one point in the society produce unforeseen changes elsewhere, so that the reform of one part of social life often results in a worsening of conditions elsewhere and in the undermining of prior reforms. Without a more or less blank slate to work upon, comprehensive reform, that is to say, a founding, is impossible.

The differences between the founder and the reformer reduce themselves to this. The former creates a whole, albeit an artificial one, the parts of which are mutually reinforcing; the latter is limited to

grappling with particular problems on a more or less ad hoc and piece-meal basis, and is thus never completely sure about the ultimate consequences of his actions.

Rousseau's assertion of the difficulty of effective reform does not, as might be expected, lead him to embrace political quietism when a true founding is impossible. Although reform is difficult, it is not impossible. In particular, it appears that public opinion, and thus moeurs, can be deliberately manipulated by someone with a certain technical expertise:

As to the choice of instruments appropriate to the direction of public opinion, that is another question which it would be superfluous to resolve for you, and which it would be inappropriate here for me to resolve for the multitude. I will content myself with showing, by an evident example, that these instruments are neither laws nor punishments, nor any kind of coercive means.⁹⁸

The "evident example" which Rousseau adduces in support of his contention is the past effort on the part of the French government to eliminate the practice of dueling. This example is an extreme one.

Dueling is supported by

. . . the wildest and most barbarous opinion which ever entered the human mind; namely, that bravery can take the place of all social duties; that a man is no longer a cheat, rogue, or slanderer, and that he is civil, humane, and polite, when he knows how to fight; that lies are changed into truth, that theft becomes legitimate, perfidy decency, and infidelity praiseworthy, as soon as all this is maintained sword in hand; that an affront is always repaired with a sword thrust; and that a man is never in the wrong as regards another, provided that he kills him.⁹⁹

Despite the extreme unreasonableness of the popular opinions which support dueling, indeed because of this unreasonableness, Rousseau's example forcefully illustrates the intransigence of public opinion and the difficulties associated with any attempt to modify it: the best efforts of the King of France failed to end the practice of dueling,

and it remains firmly entrenched within French society. Nevertheless, Rousseau contends, the case is not hopeless. The efforts of the French king failed because they relied upon coercion--i.e., laws were enacted which made dueling a punishable offense--whereas they should have been directed toward the "peaceful" modification of public opinion. Rousseau himself suggests a means by which this could have been achieved, that is, by which dueling could have been curtailed or ended by rendering it contemptible in the eyes of the public.¹⁰⁰ What is interesting, and more than a little puzzling, is that Rousseau tacitly admits that his suggested means is "chimerical." It depends upon the creation of a "Court of Honor," to which even the King would be subject, and such a subjection is "entirely contrary to the spirit of monarchy."¹⁰¹ The instrument by means of which Rousseau suggests that public opinion on the subject of dueling might be changed, is thus defective; its nature is such that it cannot be employed in that place, France, where it is most needed. Moreover, one cannot even respond that a "Court of Honor" would be effective in controlling dueling in a state which was not monarchical. Dueling is a pressing problem only in those societies in which "honor" is held in high regard, that is, in those societies with a titled nobility,¹⁰² and a titled nobility generally implies a king.

Rousseau's proposal for ending the practice of dueling suggests that the "instruments appropriate to the direction of public opinion" are essentially institutions of one sort or another which can, because of the respect accorded them, influence the common opinion as to what is praiseworthy and what is blameable. Although he claims to show how such an institution, in the form of a Court of Honor, might be created,

he actually demonstrates the practical impossibility of this: to eliminate dueling in France, the King would not only have to follow the advice of someone who possesses something resembling "the true science of the legislator," but he would also have to violate the very spirit of monarchy and renounce his sovereignty, that is, France would have to become something other than what it is; indeed, according to Rousseau's reasoning, the problem of dueling can only be solved for those kinds of societies in which that problem would never have arisen in the first place. Moreover, the creation of such an institution as a "Court of Honor" requires time, but public opinion is subject to change; by the time a newly created institution acquires sufficient influence and prestige to divert public opinion from its established channels, that opinion has already been transformed. The creation of a Court of Honor in France would have been useless, even if it had been feasible: the practice of dueling has declined in France in spite of the failure of government efforts, not because of them. Public opinion has an inner dynamic of its own and is in constant flux; thus, any attempt to alter public opinion on a given issue from this to that faces the overwhelming difficulty of having no fixed starting point. Dueling declined in France because of changes in public opinion, but these changes could not have been anticipated; hence, they could not have been taken into account by the would-be reformer.

In direct opposition to his stated purpose, Rousseau's chosen example demonstrates the existence of seemingly insurmountable barriers to the manipulation of public opinion by the political order. Common opinion appears as a force which is not subject to human control. Furthermore, since the possibility of deliberate reform depends upon the

ability to manipulate opinion, reform itself is shown to be "chimerical." This conclusion has a direct bearing on Geneva and on d'Alembert's proposal to regulate the theater there by means of "severe and well-administered laws:"

One of the inevitable effects of a theater established in as small a town as ours will be to change our maxims or, if you will, our prejudices and common opinions, which will necessarily alter our moeurs; for better or worse I do not yet say, but assuredly to a form less appropriate to our constitution. I ask, Sir, by what efficacious law will you change this? If the government can do much as regards moeurs, it is only at its primitive institution; once it has formed them, it not only does not have the power to change them without itself changing, but it has great difficulty maintaining them against the inevitable accidents which attack them, and against the natural inclinations which corrupt them. Public opinion, although so difficult to govern, is nevertheless in itself very mobile and unsettled. Chance, a thousand fortuitous causes, countless unforeseen circumstances do what force and reason cannot; or rather, it is precisely because chance directs [public opinion] that force and reason can do nothing. Like the dice which leave the hand, whatever impulsion they are given, the desired point is not brought up any more easily.¹⁰³

In Rousseau's thought, the impossibility of reform creates a presumption against change. Significant change, such as the establishment of a new and popular amusement, inevitably produces alterations in moeurs. One cannot say in advance whether these alterations will be for the better or the worse, but the odds lie with the latter. This is especially true in regard to a people which is not completely corrupt, and which can look back to a legislator who established good moeurs on a relatively firm basis. These moeurs may have degenerated somewhat, as is the case with Geneva, but, where this degeneration has not been total, there is a strong presumption in favor of existing moeurs; further change can only mean further decline. In a completely corrupt and vicious society, the situation is vastly different: where things are as bad as they can be, then change becomes more attractive; where

conditions can become no worse, then change holds out the possibility of improvement.¹⁰⁴

Once again, Rousseau's teachings regarding the possibility of reform do not lead to political quietism. If even the best political community eventually begins to degenerate due to the random effects of inevitable changes, then political action is salutary insofar as it is capable of retarding these effects and limiting change: "All that human wisdom can do is to forestall changes, and to arrest from afar all that leads to them."¹⁰⁵ In most circumstances, political action must be conservative, rather than innovative; the act of founding is an exception to this, but an exception which proves the rule. The legislator creates an island of legitimacy and relative stability in a sea of corruption and change; the task of succeeding statesmen is to maintain the integrity of this island in the face of a sea which is continually eating away at its foundations.

Rousseau's earlier reference to d'Alembert's failure to make use of "the true science of the legislator" is also explained. This science does not cease to be necessary once a community has been founded, but the object of its concern does change; the founder creates and his successors preserve. That d'Alembert does not understand the science of the legislator, that his proposal is undesirable, is demonstrated by the simple fact that, if acted upon, his proposal would introduce changes with unforeseen consequences into Geneva. D'Alembert's ignorance in this regard is profound, because what he proposes is the introduction of conscious and deliberate change, that kind of change which is most easily prevented. Rousseau takes d'Alembert to task for this ignorance, accusing him of being entirely too sanguine in his attitude toward deliberately induced change:

How then shall we prevent those [changes], the causes of which we have voluntarily introduced? In imitation of that institution [i.e., the Court of Honor] of which I have just spoken, will you propose to institute censors? We already have them;¹⁰⁶ and, if the whole force of this tribunal scarcely suffices to maintain us as we are, what will it do to halt this progress when we have added a new inclination to our moeurs? It is clear that it will no longer suffice. The first sign of its powerlessness to forestall the abuses of the drama will be to allow its establishment. For it is easy to see that these two institutions cannot long exist together, and that the drama will reduce the censors to ridiculousness or the censors will drive out the actors.¹⁰⁷

In the passage quoted above, Rousseau's chastisement of d'Alembert is largely a contrived one. D'Alembert did not suggest creating a body of censors to oversee the theater; Rousseau simply imputes that suggestion to d'Alembert, and then ridicules it. The purpose of the passage, in fact, seems to be not so much to refute d'Alembert as to establish the necessity of censors, and to designate the natural limits of their power.

Rousseau notes in the Social Contract that the idea of a censorship, in the sense of an institution charged with preserving good moeurs, is a subject which he treats at much greater length in the Letter to D'Alembert.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in the Social Contract, the censorship is treated as a key institution; it is charged with the task of maintaining the work of the founder, and gives its name to an entire chapter. In the Letter, on the other hand, where we have been told to expect a more comprehensive treatment of the censorship, it is mentioned only in passing, and even then just a single time. The censorship as an institution thus becomes a problem for us by virtue of the fact that Rousseau largely disregards it in the Letter, or at least appears to do so. Specifically, the seeming contradiction between Rousseau's note to the Social Contract and a surface reading of the

Letter suggests three possibilities: either he made a mistake or is deliberately untruthful in his note to the former work, or else it is necessary, for some reason, for him to obscure the idea of censorship as a theme or subtheme of the Letter, within the Letter itself. Given the nature of our inquiry, the decision between these alternatives can perhaps be facilitated by seeking an answer to the related questions of whether or not the practice of censorship is a problem in the Letter and whether Rousseau, as the author of the Letter, would have any reason for deliberately obscuring this problem. These questions can best be answered by examining the institution of censorship as Rousseau himself has described it.

As far as the Letter is concerned, Rousseau's reference to establishing censors at Geneva in "imitation" of the proposed Court of Honor indicates, on the one hand, that the censorship as an institution is related in some ways to the Court of Honor, and that, on the other, it too is devoted to the manipulation of public opinion. These ideas require clarification, however, and in order to obtain this, we must turn to certain of Rousseau's other works, particularly the Social Contract. There we learn that the censorship gives expression to a particular kind of law, the law of public opinion:

In the same way that the law declares the general will, the public judgement is declared by the censorship: public opinion is the kind of law which the censor administers . . .¹⁰⁹

In particular, the censor judges questions of honor in terms of common opinion and, in the process, modifies that opinion: "Whosoever judges moeurs, judges honor, and whosoever judges questions of honor, gives the law to public opinion."¹¹⁰ The censor, in something of a symbiotic relationship with common opinion, thus determines what actions are

praiseworthy and what actions are ignoble or blameworthy. Seen in this light, the Court of Honor, as discussed by Rousseau in the Letter, would perform certain of the functions of a censor, in that it would judge those questions of honor which threaten to lead to duels. A censor proper, on the other hand, judges questions of honor in general. Despite its immense jurisdiction, however, the power of the censorship is by no means absolute:

The censorial tribunal, far from being the arbiter of the people's opinion, only declares it; and, insofar as the two part company, its decisions are in vain and without effect.¹¹¹

The judgement of the censor follows public opinion or, at the most, serves to fix it when it is still uncertain on a given issue. The censorship functions more or less as a public conscience, and its influence thus depends upon the existing moeurs of a people, that is to say, upon existing opinions. Where these are good, the influence of the censorship is greatest and most effective in maintaining good moeurs; where the people has become lax and corrupt, where nothing is commonly regarded as forbidden, this influence disappears. Moreover, the censorship is dependent upon opinion in yet another way; its influence depends upon the people's willingness to accept its judgements as definitive in questions of honor, which is to say, upon the respect which it itself, as an institution, enjoys in common opinion.

The purpose of the censorship is to fix and defend good moeurs by sustaining those opinions which support them. It is a conservative institution by its very nature; it preserves what is old and good in the face of potentially disruptive changes. As we have seen, for Rousseau, good moeurs serve as both the ultimate foundation of a legitimate political order, and as the basis for public and individual

happiness. Thus, insofar as it is the task of the censorship to preserve such moeurs, the censorship is of decisive importance. This importance is underscored by Rousseau's transformation of the "quarrel" between the philosophers and the poets, which is central to Plato's teaching in the Republic, into a quarrel between the censors, on the one hand, and the poets and actors, who are the poets' minions, on the other. In this transformation, Rousseau deviates in a radical manner from the teachings of Plato. For Plato, the realization of a simply just regime depends upon the rule of wisdom, i.e., of philosophers, and the defeat of those false claimants to wisdom, such as the poets, who actually purvey only a form of opinion. For Rousseau, however, while the founding of a just regime may depend upon a kind of transitory rule by the wise, i.e., the legislator, its continued existence depends upon the rule of salutary opinion. Even imperfect regimes, insofar as they are not completely corrupt, depend upon the people as a whole holding salutary opinions, and these opinions depend in turn upon the existence of effective censors. The poets, the dramatists, threaten and undermine the censorship because they are in competition with it. They too judge of honor and dishonor; they too award praise and blame, but they do so not with an eye to the maintenance of good moeurs, but in the interest of winning applause. The poets thus threaten to supplant the censors and, for this reason, it is often a question of who will drive out whom: "either the drama will reduce the censors to ridiculousness, or the censors will drive out the actors." In this respect, the philosopher is very much like the poet: he too is a threat to existing opinion; he too embodies a standard of judgement, reason, which conflicts by its very nature with the standard

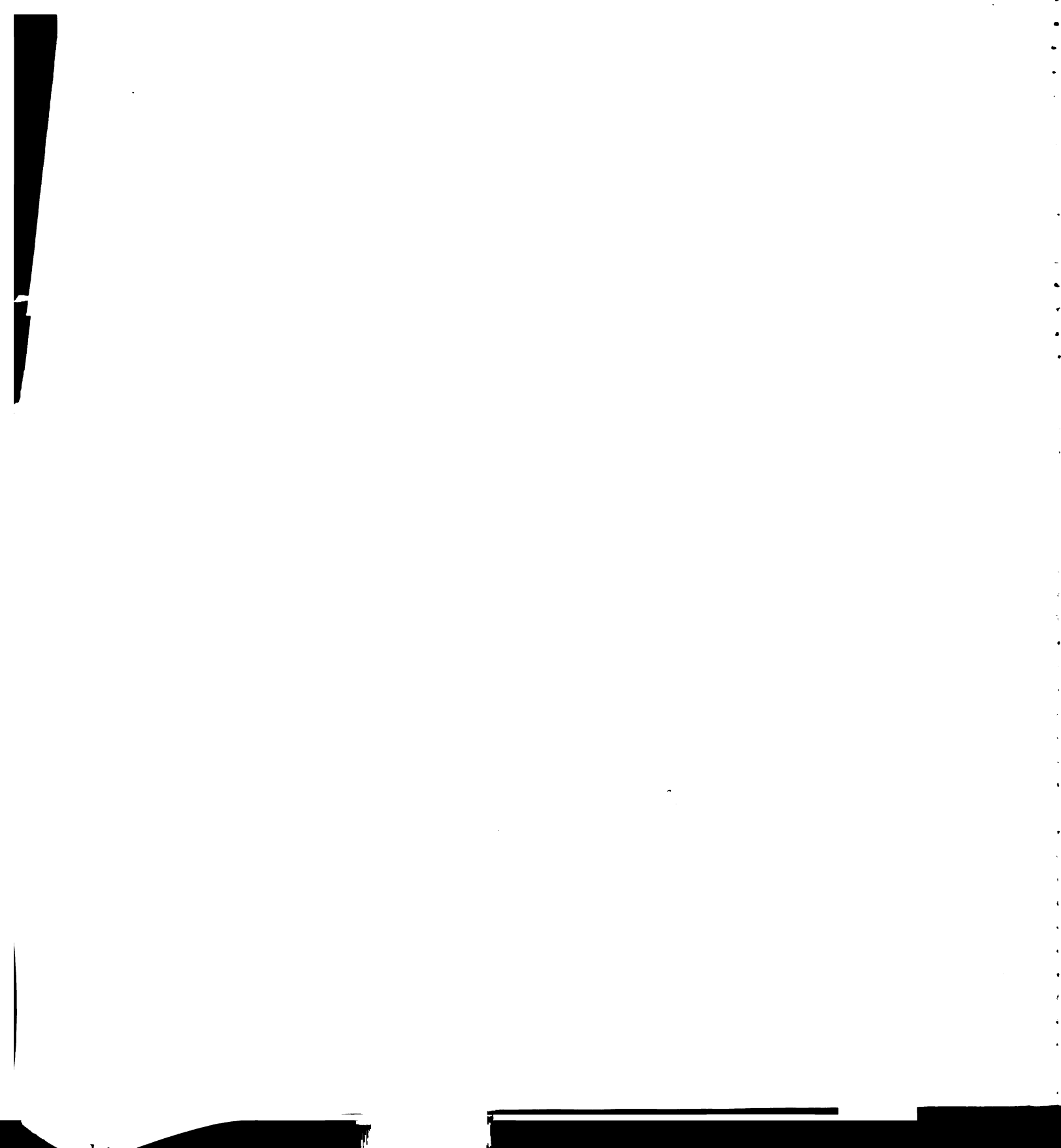
which the censor seeks to uphold. The censor must thus drive out not only the poets and actors, but the philosopher as well. This banishment is only provisional, however. Just as Plato was willing to readmit the poets into the city, once they had been properly educated,¹¹² so too can the censor tolerate plays, or "spectacles" in general, which are subordinated to the needs of the community, and so too can a censor tolerate a philosopher, when he presents himself in the guise of a citizen whose only concern is the welfare of the community.

Permanent resolution of the conflict between the philosopher and the censor requires something more than an act of deception of the philosopher's part. Paradoxically, the best solution to this conflict occurs if the philosophers themselves act as censors, if their wisdom is directed toward the maintenance of salutary opinion.¹¹³ In the Letter, Rousseau in effect demonstrates that such a solution is possible: as the following will make clear, he himself assumes the mantle of Cato. If this is the case, however, our earlier problem reemerges: if the Letter does deal with the question of censorship, why does Rousseau refrain from explicitly stating this and, if Rousseau is actually acting as a censor, why does he not openly acknowledge it?

Rousseau himself has already suggested a possible answer to these questions. In the first place, he has admitted that Geneva already has censors, the Consistory and the Chamber of the Reformation are mentioned by name,¹¹⁴ and so to assert a claim to that title would be to infringe on existing institutions and to weaken their authority, an authority which already "scarcely suffices to maintain us as we are." Furthermore, any prejudice in favor of these bodies is precisely the sort of prejudice which is conducive to good moeurs, and is thus

the sort of prejudice which Rousseau, qua censor, is obliged to preserve. For these reasons, then, Rousseau cannot openly set himself up as a Genevan Cato; he must remain a simple citizen. In addition, the nature of the task he has set himself requires that he pursue a somewhat devious course. A censor, according to Rousseau, can legitimately operate in two distinct ways, under two distinct sets of circumstances: he can sometimes forestall disruptive changes by appealing to popular opinions or prejudices which, when aroused, will act to hinder that change; or, in a situation where public opinion is too unformed or unstable to permit such an appeal, the censor can sometimes act to fix that opinion.¹¹⁵ Rousseau is faced with the latter, and much the more difficult, situation: if it were merely a question of mobilizing latent prejudices against the theater, the existing censorial bodies in Geneva would be equal to the task. Unable to employ either coercion or reason, since prejudice is immune to both force and argument, Rousseau must attempt to enlist existing passions and prejudices against the theater, but passions and prejudices which are not, prima facie, in automatic opposition to the theater. In attempting to work on men's prejudices in this manner, however, it is seldom wise to openly acknowledge what one is about; the art of rhetoric, of appealing to men's prejudices, is most successful when it disguises itself, and especially when it mimics reasoned argument. In other words, men are most easily manipulated when they do not realize such manipulation is taking place. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Rousseau chose dueling in France and not a Genevan subject, although such was readily available in the form of the problem of preventing the establishment of a theater, to illustrate the ways in

which public opinion can sometimes be manipulated. Moreover, he argued at the time that his proposals were unsuited to a monarchical order, thus perhaps implying that similar proposals could be implemented in a more or less republican order, such as Geneva. Rousseau's failure to address the question of manipulating public opinion in republics, in a context in which it would be natural to do so--the Letter after all ostensibly focuses on a more or less republican order--is thus suggestive: it may be that the manipulation of opinion in republics is best achieved, or can only be achieved, when that manipulation is surreptitious.





3 1293 10493 0163



2072066
~~15 05~~

~~19 04 10~~
861205
~~29 05~~

41 R 287
~~05 05 05~~
~~23 05~~ 004

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

6107943
2V

NOTES

Chapter VI

¹In the first edition of the Letter, this silence extends from page 14 through page 97, inclusive.

²Letter, 77 (B., 57).

³Ibid., 77 (B., 57-8).

⁴Ibid., 77 (B., 58).

⁵First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19). This idea of time as a precious resource, not to be wasted, occurs several times in Rousseau's writings; cf. Letter, 20 (B., 16).

⁶Letter, 77 (B., 58).

⁷Ibid., 78 (B., 58).

⁸Ibid., 78-9 (B., 58-9).

⁹Cf. Corsica (O.C., III, 911-12); Social Contract, III, xiii (O.C., III, 427); and Political Economy (O.C., III, 258-9).

¹⁰First Discourse, I (O.C., III, 8); cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 193).

¹¹See Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 169-93).

¹²Cf. "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 968-9).

¹³Rousseau's praise of Molière and of Voltaire's Mahomet thus becomes more explicable.

¹⁴See "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 959-74) for Rousseau's response to this attack.

¹⁵"Police" refers to that branch of government which has to do with the maintenance of both public order and morality. According to Bloom, "Our narrower usage of the word is a strict result of a narrowed conception of the functions of government; for Rousseau, the word still maintains its broader significance:" Politics and the Arts, 151, note 38.

22
23
24

35

36
37
38

39

40

- ¹⁶Letter, 79 (B., 59).
- ¹⁷Loc. cit.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 20-1 (B., 16-7).
- ¹⁹Ibid., 21 (B., 16).
- ²⁰Ibid., 20-1 (B., 16).
- ²¹Ibid., 21 (B., 17).
- ²²Ibid., 80-2 (B., 60-1).
- ²³Ibid., 82 (B., 61-2).
- ²⁴Ibid., 83 (B., 62).
- ²⁵See Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 173-5), where Rousseau argues, in effect, that most social ills can be traced to the division of labor.
- ²⁶Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 168 and 171).
- ²⁷Letter, 83-4 (B., 62-3).
- ²⁸Ibid., 84 (B., 63).
- ²⁹Loc. cit.
- ³⁰Ibid., 84-5 (B., 63).
- ³¹Ibid., 85 (B., 63).
- ³²Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 174).
- ³³Ibid., II (187).
- ³⁴Letter, 155 (B., 115-6); Social Contract, II, xi (O.C., III, 392); cf. Social Contract, III, xi (424).
- ³⁵Cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 258-9); Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 186-7); Social Contract, III, iv (O.C., III, 405); and Letter, 154-5 (B., 115).
- ³⁶Cf. Letter, 124, 152-55, 164, and 173n (B., 93, 113-16, 122, and 129n).
- ³⁷Ibid., 124 (B., 93); cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19); and Government of Poland, III (O.C., III, 965).
- ³⁸Second Discourse, note IX (O.C., III, 206).

³⁹Cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19); and Second Discourse, note IX (O.C., III, 206).

⁴⁰See Letter, 79 (B., 59).

⁴¹Ibid., 85 (B., 63-4).

⁴²Ibid., 77 (B., 57).

⁴³Ibid., 86 (B., 64).

⁴⁴Ibid., 87 (B., 65).

⁴⁵See Kant, "Perpetual Peace," 112.

⁴⁶Letter, 87-8 (B., 65-6).

⁴⁷See Rousseau's reproduction of the relevant argument in Letter, 4 (B., 4).

⁴⁸"Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 495).

⁴⁹One need only recall the experiment with prohibition in this country.

⁵⁰Letter, 88 (B., 66). The awkward way in which the translated passage reads reflects a similar awkwardness in the original french.

⁵¹Ibid., 88-9 (B., 66); cf. Social Contract, II, viii and IV, iv (O.C., III, 384-5 and 452-3); and Emile, Preface (O.C., IV, 243).

⁵²See Social Contract, II, xii.

⁵³Ibid., II, viii-xi and III, iii-viii; cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1288b10-89a25.

⁵⁴Social Contract, II, xi (O.C., III, 392-3).

⁵⁵Ibid., II, xi (393).

⁵⁶Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 176-7 and 184-5).

⁵⁷Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 379).

⁵⁸Ibid., I, ii and viii (352 and 364-5); Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 141-2).

⁵⁹Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 379).

⁶⁰Ibid., I, vi (360).

⁶¹Ibid., II, i (368).

⁶²Ibid., I, vii (363).

⁶³Ibid., I, vii (364).

⁶⁴Ibid., II, v (376).

⁶⁵Ibid., II, v (376-7).

⁶⁶Ibid., II, xii (393).

⁶⁷Masters, The Political Philosophy of Rousseau, 332.

⁶⁸Cf. Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 381-2); Political Economy (O.C., III, 251-61); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 499); and Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 956-7).

⁶⁹Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 380); cf. Political Economy (O.C., III, 250-1).

⁷⁰Ibid., II, vii (381).

⁷¹Ibid., II, vii (383).

⁷²See Roger Masters, "The Structure of Rousseau's Political Thought," in Hobbes and Rousseau, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 401-36, for a discussion of the distinction between Rousseau's "principles of political right" and his "maxims of politics."

⁷³Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 381).

⁷⁴Ibid., II, viii (385).

⁷⁵Loc. cit.; cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 180).

⁷⁶Loc. cit.; cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 187) and note IX (207-8).

⁷⁷Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 192).

⁷⁸Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 383).

⁷⁹Cf. Machiavelli, Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy, I, xi; and Plato, Republic, 414b-5d.

⁸⁰Social Contract, II, xii (O.C., III, 393-4).

⁸¹Ibid., II, xii (394); Letter, 89 (B., 66-7).

⁸²Social Contract, II, xii (O.C., III, 394).

⁸³Ibid., II, xii (393-4). According to Rousseau, while the criminal law, the law specifying certain punishments for specific acts, can be thought of as a fourth kind of law, it is less a separate category in itself than a necessary part of all other kinds of law.

⁸⁴Letter, 89 (B., 66).

⁸⁵Social Contract, II, xii (O.C., III, 394).

⁸⁶Ibid., IV, vii (459).

⁸⁷"Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 493).

⁸⁸Letter, 89 (B., 66-7).

⁸⁹Ibid., 89 (B., 67).

⁹⁰The reference is to Calvin's Institution de la Religion Chrétienne.

⁹¹Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 382n).

⁹²In the Social Contract, for example, Calvin is mentioned only in a single footnote, while Lycurgus is praised a number of times in the body of the text. The influence of Lycurgus was decisive as far as Sparta was concerned, while Calvin only "played a large part" in the founding of Geneva: compare Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 382n) with Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 957). Moreover, in certain of his later works, Rousseau seems to question Calvin's claim to the title of "legislator:" Letters Written from the Mountain, II (O.C., III, 715 and 726n).

⁹³Social Contract, II, xi (O.C., III, 392).

⁹⁴Ibid., II, x (389).

⁹⁵Letter, 89-90 (B., 67).

⁹⁶Ibid., 90 (B., 67).

⁹⁷Ibid., 93 (B., 69).

⁹⁸Ibid., 90 (B., 67).

⁹⁹Ibid., 98 (B., 73).

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 90-7 (B., 67-73).

¹⁰¹Ibid., 97 (B., 73).

¹⁰²Cf. Letter, 95-8 (B., 71-3).

¹⁰³Ibid., 98-9 (B., 74).

¹⁰⁴Cf. "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 971-2): Social Contract, III, xviii (O.C., III, 435).

¹⁰⁵Letter, 99 (B., 75).

¹⁰⁶Rousseau indicates in a note that he is referring to the Consistory and the Chamber of the Reformation: Letter, 99n (B., 74n). For an example of the workings of the Consistory, see Letters Written from the Mountain, IV (O.C., III, 759-61).

¹⁰⁷Letter, 99-100 (B., 74-5).

¹⁰⁸Social Contract, IV, vii (O.C., III, 459n).

¹⁰⁹Ibid., IV, vii (458).

¹¹⁰Loc. cit.

¹¹¹Loc. cit.; cf. Second Discourse, note XIX (O.C., III, 222-3).

¹¹²Cf. Republic, 398a-b, 401b, and 607b-c.

¹¹³Moreover, once this is recognized, as we have noted, many of the seeming contradictions in Rousseau's works disappear.

¹¹⁴Letter, 99n (B., 74n).

¹¹⁵Social Contract, IV, vii (O.C., III, 459).

However, out of respect for the sentiments of those of my compatriots who see no other danger in the theater than the bad example of the actors, I still want to advise it, even on the basis of their supposition, this expedient is practicable . . .²

Be this as it may, Rousseau opens his examination with a comment directly attacking the morality of the acting profession:

To begin by observing the facts before representing others their causes, I see in general that the actor's artifice is one of

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

CHAPTER VII

Immediately following his statement that either the censors or the actors must triumph, Rousseau turns to the question of whether it is possible to have actors who are decent men and women. Ostensibly, he raises this question in order "to respond precisely . . . to the expedient" proposed by d'Alembert, that is, in order to respond to the belief that it is possible to forestall the potential abuses associated with the introduction of a theater into Geneva by regulating the conduct of the actors in such a way as to prevent them from setting a bad example for the populace as a whole. Such an inquiry is not really necessary, we are told, because it has already been demonstrated that, "the effects of the drama being independent of the moeurs of the actors," these effects would manifest themselves even if it were possible to turn actors into "so many models of virtue."¹ The question of the morality of the actors is thus irrelevant to the case which Rousseau has made against the theater. It seems, nevertheless, that Rousseau must address this question because everyone will not be persuaded by his preceding arguments:

However, out of respect for the sentiments of those of my compatriots who see no other danger in the theater than the bad example of the actors, I still want to examine if, even on the basis of their supposition, this expedient is practicable . . .²

Be this as it may, Rousseau opens his examination with a statement directly attacking the morality of the acting profession:

To begin by observing the facts before reasoning about their causes, I see in general that the actor's estate is one of

1
i
ti
e
D
O
th
ho
be
ple
was
ho
gen
the
Gen
atto
the

license and bad moeurs; that the men are given to disorder; that the women lead scandalous lives; that both the one and the other, avaricious and prodigal at the same time, always overwhelmed by debts and always spending money freely, are as little restrained in their dissipations as they are scrupulous about how they provide for them. I see, furthermore, that in every country their profession dishonors, that those who exercise it, excommunicated or not, are everywhere despised; and that even in Paris, where they are more respected and better behaved than anywhere else, a man of the middle-class would fear to frequent those same comedians who are seen every day at the tables of the great. A third observation, no less important, is that this disdain is strongest wherever the moeurs are most pure, and that there are innocent and simple countries where the actor's profession is held almost in horror.³

These "facts" which Rousseau cites are questionable, as he himself indicates: if the acting profession everywhere confers dishonor on those who practice it, how is it that in France actors can be "seen every day at the tables of the great"? Furthermore, he tells us in a note that the English buried their most celebrated actress, Anne Oldfield, at the side of their king. Admittedly, he also tells us that it "was not her profession but her talent that they wished to honor," but this distinction is largely irrelevant to the question of honor: as in any profession, the most talented are the most honored.

It seems that Rousseau's statement of the "facts" is not completely truthful. If this is so, then we must ask why the statement was made at all. One possible reason immediately suggests itself. Rousseau's statement places him directly on the side of the Genevan censors; the passage under consideration constitutes a direct blow at the actors, who are, according to Rousseau, the natural enemy of the Genevan censors. Moreover, Rousseau's attack may help to drive the actors out of Geneva or even prevent them from establishing themselves there in the first place. In this vein, it is significant that Geneva

is a middle-class, bourgeois state, and that Rousseau illustrates the dishonorable nature of the acting profession in France by referring to the middle-class man's fear of associating with actors. Similarly, the vices which the actors are accused of are precisely those traits which are most abhorred by the bourgeois Genevans: licentiousness, dissipation, profligacy, and indebtedness.⁴ It would thus seem that Rousseau's characterization of the acting profession is both deliberately exaggerated and intentionally misleading, and that his purpose in this is to incite Genevan opinion against the actors, and, ultimately, against the establishment of a theater.

Rousseau's derogation of the acting profession is explicitly based upon an appeal to universal practice. Actors are everywhere held in contempt, and this is explicable, he tells us, only if the profession itself is inherently contemptible; even if this contempt is only the result of prejudice, such a universal effect must have a universal cause, and the nature of the profession is the most plausible. Such an appeal to universal practice and judgement is suspect, however. In the first place, in isolating the nature of the acting profession as the cause of the dishonor in which actors are everywhere held, Rousseau seems to imply that the only thing which is common across all societies is this profession. To be sure, he acknowledges that these prejudices could be imputed to "the declamations of the priests," that is to say, to Christianity, which is the common religion of Europe, and so a potentially "universal cause," but this possibility is refuted by the example of the ancient Romans, who "declared actors disreputable, deprived them of the rights of Roman citizens, and put actresses in the class of prostitutes."⁵ This, however, implies in turn that not only

i

b

i

i

3

2

to

cc

at

1

st

in

se

pe

is

ch

at

st

st

to

cas

the

the

is the nature of the acting profession more universal than Christianity, but also that that profession defines one of the few points of similarity between modern societies and those of antiquity.

The example of the Romans is apparently decisive: not only does it establish that the contempt in which actors are held is not a purely modern prejudice, and thus cannot be an artifact of the rise of Christianity, but it also serves to link the prejudice against actors to ancient virtue. Moreover, the example of the Romans seems to show conclusively that it is the nature of the acting profession as such which is dishonorable:

Here every other reason is absent except that drawn from the nature of the thing. The pagan priests and the devout, more in favor than otherwise of the theatricals which made up a part of the games consecrated to religion, had no interest in disparaging them, and in fact did not do so.⁶

A closer examination of this example, however, leads to the conclusion that it is not nearly so decisive as Rousseau initially seems to indicate. In the first place, Rousseau admits that many people would see an inconsistency in the Roman practice of dishonoring the very people they "paid, protected, and pensioned." This, he goes on to say, is really not all that inconsistent: "for it is sometimes proper for the state to encourage and protect dishonorable but useful professions, without those who practice them being more highly considered for that."⁷ But, to say this is to admit that acting is sometimes a "useful" profession, and that it is sometimes in a community's interests to maintain and encourage actors and a theater. Furthermore, in the case of Rome, the usefulness of the actors derived from the fact that theatrical performances were associated with religious festivals, and Roman religious practices, according to Rousseau, were the true

foundation of the state.⁸ Roman theatricals served as precisely one of those "frivolous" institutions which the wise legislator founds in order to attach the individual more closely to the community.

The Roman example is subversive of Rousseau's teaching concerning the contemptible nature of the acting profession in yet another way:

It is true that this opprobrium fell less on acting as such than on the estate of those making a profession of it, in that the youth of Rome publicly performed the Atellanæ or Exodia at the end of the longer plays without dishonor. Except for this, it can be seen in a thousand places that the actors were, without exception, slaves, and were treated as such when the public was not satisfied with them.⁹

This passage is cited by Rousseau as supporting the contention that the Romans held actors as such in contempt, but it is susceptible to another interpretation. Perhaps the acting profession was held in contempt because the actors were slaves. Acting as such was not dishonorable, as is demonstrated by the example of the Roman youths, but those who made it their profession were, not because they were actors, but because they were slaves, and slavery was dishonoring.

If the example of the Romans subverts Rousseau's original statement concerning the universal contempt in which the acting profession is and has been held, the example of the Greeks destroys it utterly. Rousseau admits from the first that the Greeks are an exception to the general rule he has formulated:

I have known of only one other people which did not have the maxims of all the others in this regard; this was the Greeks. It is certain that among them the profession of actor was so little indecent that Greece furnishes examples of actors charged with certain public functions, both within the state and in embassies.¹⁰

The exceptional character of the Greeks in this regard is easily explicable, Rousseau argues, and then goes on to cite six reasons for

the atypical treatment of actors in ancient Greece. These reasons are important enough to be quoted at some length:

(1) Since the tragedy, as well as the comedy, was invented by the Greeks, they could not in advance put a mark of contempt on an estate, the effects of which were yet unknown, and, when these effects began to be known, public opinion had already taken form. (2) Since the tragedy had something of the sacred in its origin, at first its actors were regarded as priests rather than buffoons. (3) Since the subjects of the plays were only drawn from national antiquities which the Greeks idolized, they saw in these same actors less men who portrayed fables, than educated citizens who performed the history of their country for the eyes of their compatriots. (4) This people, enthusiastic in its liberty to the extent of believing that the Greeks were the only men free by nature, recalled with a lively sentiment of pleasure its old misfortunes and the crimes of its masters. These tableaux ceaselessly instructed them, and they could not keep themselves from feeling some respect for the organs of this instruction. (5) The tragedy being at first played only by men, there was not seen in their theaters the scandalous mixture of men and women which makes ours so many schools of bad moeurs. (6) Finally, their performances had none of the meanness of today's. Their theaters were not erected by interest and avarice; they were not closed up in dark prisons; their actors had no need to take contributions from the spectators, nor to count, out of the corner of their eye, the number of people coming through the door, in order to be sure of their supper.¹¹

Several important observations can be made concerning the above passage. Firstly, just as in the case of the Romans, the Greek theater played an important part in both the religious and political life of the community. It served as a bond linking the present generation of citizens both to the past, through its presentation of traditional stories, and to each other, by providing a form of entertainment which they shared in common. Secondly, the Greek theater was itself an educational institution; more specifically, it served to instruct the people in their "ancient misfortunes and the crimes of their masters," and so taught them to love their freedom and hate tyranny the more. In this respect, the Greek theater was a bastion of liberty, providing

lessons in freedom to the populace at large. For these reasons, the actor was honored as performing a highly useful civic function. Furthermore, the theater, in addition to serving to attach men more firmly to the traditional order, was itself a part of that order, that is to say, was an integral part of that complex of institutions which gave the Greek community its character. The theater was an important part of the community; hence, the Greek's love and respect for his community also included love and respect for the theater and, by extension, for the actors.

What seems to be the cause of the Greeks' atypical failure to treat actors with contempt is the fact that the Greek theater was not a "school of bad moeurs," but rather quite the opposite, together with the fact that public opinion on the subject was itself formed in a milieu in which actors were traditionally honored. Indeed, it appears that the Greek theater differs primarily from the modern in its institutional character, and only incidentally and derivatively in the way its actors were regarded by the public. If this is so, then it suggests that the relative esteem in which actors are held depends upon the particular institutional attributes of the theater in which they perform, attributes which vary from people to people, and that the contempt in which modern actors are held may not be due so much to the nature of the profession as it is to the nature of the modern theater.

In the Letter, Rousseau obscures the differences between the ancient and modern theaters by focusing on the actors, and by arguing that the nature of their profession is constant across time and space, thus diverting attention from variations in the theater as an

institution. Moreover, his argument concerning the constant and uniform nature of the acting profession is in itself misleading. In the first place, his reasoning is more than a little circular. The argument that the acting profession is constant in all decisive respects explicitly rests on the supposed fact that acting is everywhere held to be a dishonorable profession; yet, at the same time, the idea that the acting profession is intrinsically dishonorable is implicitly derived from the assumption that the nature of the profession is the same everywhere, together with the supposition that it is everywhere held in contempt. Moreover, Rousseau himself has cast suspicion on these generalizations and "facts." In the first place, the relative esteem in which actors are held has been shown to depend, in the case of France, on one's social class, and, as regards the ancients, on whether one was a Greek or a Roman. Secondly, in forming his generalizations, Rousseau abstracted from a number of questions which would seem to point to crucial differences between actors at one time and place and those at another: What subjects are portrayed for the most part? For what audience? Do the actors receive payment and from whom? Is the theater in which they perform a public or a private institution? Rousseau himself strongly suggests that the differences between modern French actors and those of ancient Greece, which these questions point to, are extremely important. Once again, the implied contrast between Greece and France is instructive:

These great and proud entertainments [of the Greeks], given under the sky before a whole nation, presented on all sides nothing but combats, victories, and prizes, objects capable of inspiring the Greeks with an ardent emulation and firing their hearts with sentiments of honor. It is in the midst of this imposing display, so fitted to elevate and move the soul, that the actors, animated with the same zeal, shared

according to their talents, the honors rendered to the victors of the Games, often the first men of the nation. I am not surprised that, far from debasing them, their profession, exercised in this manner, gave them that courageous pride and that noble disinterest which seemed sometimes to raise the actor to the level of his role.¹²

The profession of actor in ancient Greece would thus seem to be qualitatively different from the same profession in Paris or Rome. Rousseau, indeed, almost seems to suggest that the profession of actor in ancient Greece was intrinsically honorable, in that the high regard in which the actor was held depended less upon who he was as a man, than what he did as an actor.

In light of the above, it seems almost a case of sour grapes when Rousseau remarks that

With all of this, except for Sparta, Greece was never cited as an example of good moeurs; and Sparta, which did not tolerate a theater, was not concerned with honoring those who performed in it.¹³

That Rousseau is wrong in asserting that Sparta "did not tolerate a theater," as he indicates in a note appended to a later edition of the Letter, is irrelevant here: the fact that he retained this error in the body of the text implies that, even if Sparta had a theater, according to Rousseau it had no need of one. What is significant is Rousseau's statement that only Sparta, of all Greece, was ever credited with good moeurs. This is an obvious exaggeration, if not a deliberate

falsehood designed to obfuscate the issue. Good moeurs are the work of a legislator, and Lycurgus was not the only legislator of ancient Greece, although he was the most successful, according to Rousseau. Furthermore, the theater, outside Sparta at least, often played an important role in the formation of good moeurs, as Rousseau explicitly states in a later work:

The same spirit guided all the ancient legislators in their foundings. All sought bonds which would attach the citizens to the fatherland and to one another; and they found them in distinct customs, in religious ceremonies which were by their nature exclusive and national . . . in entertainments which, recalling to them the history of their ancestors, their misfortunes, their virtues, their victories, touched their hearts, inflaming them with a lively emulation, solidly attaching them to the fatherland, with which they never ceased to concern themselves. Such was the poetry of Homer, recited to the solemnly assembled Greeks, not closed up in wooden boxes with money in their hands, but in the open air and as a nation. Such were the tragedies of Aeschylus, of Sophocles, and of Euripides . . .¹⁴

All the ancient legislators, including Lycurgus, necessarily employed such institutions. Sparta had no need of a theater, then, only because it already had equivalent institutions, institutions which served the same purpose, and because the importation of a new institution after the founding would have been disruptive. Others of the ancient legislators, however, did make use of the theater, and so of actors, to further the greatest of human achievements, the formation of a people. Why then, we are led to ask, if the theater can serve to inculcate good moeurs, and if actors are not necessarily debased, does Rousseau attack both so vehemently in the Letter? Why does he treat the Greeks as a special case, when all the ancient legislators, including the legislator of Rome,¹⁵ made use of entertainments such as the theater?

The above questions have already been implicitly answered in the course of our inquiry. In the first place, we have established that there exist, for Rousseau, decisive differences between the modern theater and that of the ancients, and that, as a result of these differences, the modern theater enjoys a distinctly different status than the ancient.¹⁶ Secondly, entertainments such as the theater are

highly useful to legislators, to founders; however, for Rousseau, the problem as regards Geneva is not that of founding a people or creating good moeurs, but rather preserving that which remains of a previous founder's work. Rousseau is acting as a censor and not as a legislator, and this difference is crucial. The legislator is the architect of change, while the censor is the opponent of change. The former creates institutions; the latter only endeavors to preserve, and Geneva has no theater. Thus, the establishment of a theater in Geneva would involve the introduction of a new influence on moeurs, and this would, in turn, lead to a change in existing moeurs, those very moeurs which Rousseau in the capacity of censor is pledged to preserve.

It is in order to dissuade the Genevans from such a course of action that Rousseau attacks the acting profession as universally dishonored and inherently dishonorable. If he can convince the Genevans that such is the case, that acting is by its very nature dishonorable, then this in itself will serve to make actors objects of contempt, creating an effective prejudice against the theater in Geneva. Rousseau is thus interested in persuading the people of Geneva, the many, to a particular point of view, and this task is better served by a simple but fallacious argument than by the truth as such. The truth in this instance is complex, as the preceding discussion has shown. Such truth can only be disclosed as such by means of a relatively intricate and sophisticated presentation, and such a presentation is incapable of persuading most men, the many who lack either the time, the inclination, or the capacity to follow and understand it. Furthermore, a complex truth can be conveyed to others only if they give their assent to each step in the argument or presentation, and common opinion,

prejudice, and ignorance often stand in the way of such assent. In order to persuade, Rousseau is compelled to oversimplify and, in effect, lie. In contrast to the complexity of a complete articulation of the relationship between the esteem in which actors are held and the habits, customs, and institutions of a people, the lie which Rousseau tells is quite simple: actors are everywhere regarded with contempt. In contrast to a complete categorization of the variations in the acting profession, Rousseau's over-simplification is easy to grasp: the acting profession is everywhere the same. This "lie" and this over-simplification, when combined with the commonsensical, but suspect, generalization that a universal effect can only be explained by reference to a universal cause, provides a simple and consequently compelling argument: the acting profession is everywhere held to be contemptible because it is inherently so. For Rousseau, the employment of such a fallacious argument is justified by the fact that, if this argument is accepted by the Genevans, the same practical result is achieved as would have been the case if the Genevans as a people had a complete understanding of the nature of the acting profession; in either case, there would be strong opposition to admitting the actors into Geneva. At the same time, the use of such an argument is necessary because the attempt to convey the whole truth concerning the acting profession is ineffective as a means of mobilizing public opinion. Rousseau obscures and distorts the truth only because, in this instance, the truth as such is inaccessible to most Genevans and, if articulated, would serve only to confuse them.

The need to persuade and convince a mass audience, which is to say, a nonphilosophic one, informs Rousseau's entire argument in the

6
C
a
t
S
CC
W
W
be
an
the

Letter, but this need becomes most pressing, and so most dominates the Letter, at the point where the question of the nature of the acting profession is raised. The reasons for this are fairly obvious. The Letter is, at least in part, a partisan work, a broadside in what amounts to a battle between the censors, on the one hand, and the poets and actors, on the other; the winner of this battle will be that side which succeeds in turning public opinion against its opponents and driving them from the field. The battle is thus to extinction, but this does not become apparent until well into the Letter. When the issue does manifest itself in this way, however, Rousseau's argument becomes more heated and intense, and rhetoric replaces what had previously been a more or less disinterested inquiry and discussion.

From the point of view of Rousseau and the censors, the most effective tactic is to mobilize opinion against actors as such, to convince the people of Geneva that actors are by nature contemptible, and to persuade them that this rule admits of no exceptions. By attacking actors in general, Rousseau closes off at the onset any possibility of an effective appeal to the peculiarities of the Genevan context; he claims to be presenting a universal truth, in terms of which Geneva is only a particular case. Rousseau has already presented what he claims is a demonstration that actors are everywhere held to be dishonorable. It only remains for him to show why this is the case, and most especially for him to locate the cause of this phenomenon in the nature of the acting profession:

What is the talent of the actor? It is the art of counterfeiting himself, of assuming another character than his own, of appearing as other than he is, of being passionate in cold blood, of speaking other than he thinks as naturally indeed,

as if he really thought it, of forgetting his own place in assuming that of another. What is the profession of the actor? It is a vocation in which he performs for money, submits himself to the ignominy and affronts that one buys the rights to give him, and publicly puts his person on sale. . . . What then, at bottom, is the spirit which the actor receives from his estate? A mixture of baseness, falsity, ridiculous conceit, and disgraceful abasement, which renders him suitable for all sorts of roles except the most noble of all, that of a man, which he abandons.¹⁷

The acting profession is thus dishonorable, according to Rousseau, because: (1) It is founded on deception, on men appearing as other than they really are; (2) It is akin to slavery, in that it involves a public trafficking in persons, a trafficking which is ignominious, disgraceful, and abasing; (3) It is a profession in which the individual forgets himself and annihilates his own identity, and thus a profession in which one ceases to be a man, while becoming many men.

In connection with the preceding, three points must be made immediately. In the first place, even if Rousseau's characterization of the acting profession has adequately revealed the nature of that profession, and this question is still open, he is still very far from establishing that that profession dishonors by its very nature. The assertion of such a connection may, in fact, involve Rousseau in something of a contradiction. Judgements of "honor" and "dishonor," he tells us elsewhere,¹⁸ are identical with common opinion concerning how men should act, and are thus purely conventional in nature. But, for Rousseau, acceptance of convention means an abandonment of nature as a standard of judgement;¹⁹ and, if this is true, it becomes apparent that the honor or contempt in which actors are held, even if one or the other is universal, bears no necessary connection to the nature of acting as such. Secondly, Rousseau's characterization of the actor may very well be irrelevant to the problem faced by Geneva and, indeed,

to any actual social order. The question of the nature of something, of the thing in esse, falls within the province of philosophic inquiry and, as we have seen, Rousseau rejects this mode of inquiry early in the Letter as "unseasonable," as inappropriate to his purposes, dismissing the question of the theater in and of itself in the process.²⁰

This dismissal resulted from a disjunction between the practice of philosophy and the requirements of action: the question of the nature of something in and of itself can only be answered by abstracting from consideration of time and place, while particular societies always exist at a particular time and in a particular place, and their requirements are conditioned by this. The nature of the acting profession may be such as Rousseau describes it, but this tells us nothing about how actors should be treated in Athens, in Rome, in Paris, or in Geneva.

Despite the fact that Rousseau's characterization of the actor, even if accurate, provides an insufficient guide to action, it presents itself to the casual reader, that is to say, to the public at large, in a very different light. If the actor is by nature slavish, deceitful, and incapable of being a man, then he is a very contemptible creature indeed; and, as far as the people of Geneva is concerned, this description is calculated to produce an antipathy to actors, an antipathy which could very well result in their being denied admission to the city. Rousseau is here devoting his considerable rhetorical talents to creating a prejudice against actors, and to fixing, in the manner of a censor, public opinion on the subject. Once this is recognized, the purpose of the following passage, together with the note appended to it, becomes understandable:

I know that the actor's performance is not that of the scoundrel who wants to inspire respect, that he doesn't intend to be actually taken for the person he portrays, or to be believed affected by the passions he imitates, and that, in presenting this imitation for what it is, he is completely innocent. Also, I do not precisely accuse him of being a deceiver, but of cultivating by profession the talent of deceiving men, and of training himself in skills which can be innocent only in the theater, and which can serve everywhere else only to do harm. These men, so well adorned, so practiced in the tones of gallantry and in the accents of passion, will they never abuse this art to seduce young people? Those thieving valets, so subtle of tongue and hand on the stage, will they never make a useful application of this in the interests of a profession more expensive than lucrative? Will they never take the purse of a prodigal son or of an avaricious father for that of Leander or Argan? Everywhere the temptation to do evil increases with the facility; and actors must be more virtuous than other men if they are not to be more corrupt.²¹

The actor, Rousseau tells the reader, is not necessarily a scoundrel and a thief, but his talents are precisely those which a successful scoundrel or thief must possess. On the surface, this argument appears unobjectionable; the actor and the thief both make use of deception and concealment in plying their trades and, in this sense, their skills are similar, but a more detailed consideration of Rousseau's argument reveals it to be fundamentally misleading. What Rousseau is apparently attempting is to bring about an equation in the reader's mind between the art of the actor and that of the thief, and, by extension, between the two professions. In order to see the deception inherent in this argument, we need only recall Socrates' teaching concerning the various arts. According to the Platonic Socrates, the arts in themselves are neither good nor bad; art (technē) is simply the mastery of some skill, and how that skill is put into practice, whether for good or ill, is a matter about which the art can say nothing. The art of the physician, for example, can be employed either to heal or kill; the most skilled healer is, in fact, also the man with

the most talent for murder.²² To condemn the actor because his art can also be employed by the thief would thus entail condemning the physician because his art can be employed to do murder. Similar arguments can also be made in regard to many, if not all, of the other arts.²³ To banish the actor because his art is potentially harmful would thus entail the banishment of the practitioners of many other arts as well, arts which are considered needful. The fact that the actors' art can be misused is not a sufficient argument for their exclusion from Geneva; however, it may, because of the inflammatory way in which Rousseau presents this fact, result in their exclusion. Rousseau admits, in a note appended to a later edition of the Letter, that his language and argument at this point are "extravagant and ridiculous:"

There is no vice of which actors are less accused than thievery. Their vocation, which keeps them very busy and even gives them sentiments of honor in certain regards, removes them from such baseness. I leave this passage because I have made it a law for myself to delete nothing, but I openly disavow it as a very great injustice.²⁴

It is significant that Rousseau only disavows his accusations after the damage has been done, after the idea of a similarity between the actor and the thief has been firmly planted in the reader's mind. Furthermore, when confronted with the injustice of his accusations against the acting profession, Rousseau refuses to delete or alter them, on the grounds that he has made it a "law" to delete nothing from his writings. To persist in injustice on the basis of what amounts to a whim is unreasonable for a writer of Rousseau's stature, and most especially when the effect of such persistence is to compound the original injustice. This, in turn, suggests that the accusation

in question may be necessary to the purposes of the Letter, and that the injustice is intentional.

The language which Rousseau employs in stating his reason for not deleting the accusations in question point to possible grounds for his "injustice" toward the actors. The injustice he does them is supported by a law, albeit a self-made one; but, even more than this, it is supported by reference to the nature of law and of political justice. Effective justice originates in the same series of acts which constitute the political community. While, for Rousseau, there may be a form of justice which is universal, which ideally should govern the relations between all men, in practice this type of justice is ineffective, in that it speaks only to a very few "cosmopolitan spirits who . . . include the whole human race in their benevolence."²⁵ For the vast majority of men, justice must be much more exclusive; the possibility of justice between men depends upon a feeling of commonness and identification with others and, for most men, the possible scope of such a feeling is extremely limited. In fact, it is coterminous with the political community; and the rules of justice become the commands of law, together with the informal rules which the members of the community adhere to in their relations with one another.²⁶ Justice thus becomes a force within the world only insofar as it is made manifest within particular communities, while between communities, or where community is lacking, it is ineffective in the extreme. It is for this reason that the first rules of justice must be the preservation of the community, since it is the existence of the community which makes justice possible at all. Moreover, the justice of the political community requires adherence to a sort of double standard: the

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28
 29
 30
 31
 32
 33
 34
 35
 36
 37
 38
 39
 40
 41
 42
 43
 44
 45
 46
 47
 48
 49
 50
 51
 52
 53
 54
 55
 56
 57
 58
 59
 60
 61
 62
 63
 64
 65
 66
 67
 68
 69
 70
 71
 72
 73
 74
 75
 76
 77
 78
 79
 80
 81
 82
 83
 84
 85
 86
 87
 88
 89
 90
 91
 92
 93
 94
 95
 96
 97
 98
 99
 100
 101
 102
 103
 104
 105
 106
 107
 108
 109
 110
 111
 112
 113
 114
 115
 116
 117
 118
 119
 120
 121
 122
 123
 124
 125
 126
 127
 128
 129
 130
 131
 132
 133
 134
 135
 136
 137
 138
 139
 140
 141
 142
 143
 144
 145
 146
 147
 148
 149
 150
 151
 152
 153
 154
 155
 156
 157
 158
 159
 160
 161
 162
 163
 164
 165
 166
 167
 168
 169
 170
 171
 172
 173
 174
 175
 176
 177
 178
 179
 180
 181
 182
 183
 184
 185
 186
 187
 188
 189
 190
 191
 192
 193
 194
 195
 196
 197
 198
 199
 200
 201
 202
 203
 204
 205
 206
 207
 208
 209
 210
 211
 212
 213
 214
 215
 216
 217
 218
 219
 220
 221
 222
 223
 224
 225
 226
 227
 228
 229
 230
 231
 232
 233
 234
 235
 236
 237
 238
 239
 240
 241
 242
 243
 244
 245
 246
 247
 248
 249
 250
 251
 252
 253
 254
 255
 256
 257
 258
 259
 260
 261
 262
 263
 264
 265
 266
 267
 268
 269
 270
 271
 272
 273
 274
 275
 276
 277
 278
 279
 280
 281
 282
 283
 284
 285
 286
 287
 288
 289
 290
 291
 292
 293
 294
 295
 296
 297
 298
 299
 300
 301
 302
 303
 304
 305
 306
 307
 308
 309
 310
 311
 312
 313
 314
 315
 316
 317
 318
 319
 320
 321
 322
 323
 324
 325
 326
 327
 328
 329
 330
 331
 332
 333
 334
 335
 336
 337
 338
 339
 340
 341
 342
 343
 344
 345
 346
 347
 348
 349
 350
 351
 352
 353
 354
 355
 356
 357
 358
 359
 360
 361
 362
 363
 364
 365
 366
 367
 368
 369
 370
 371
 372
 373
 374
 375
 376
 377
 378
 379
 380
 381
 382
 383
 384
 385
 386
 387
 388
 389
 390
 391
 392
 393
 394
 395
 396
 397
 398
 399
 400
 401
 402
 403
 404
 405
 406
 407
 408
 409
 410
 411
 412
 413
 414
 415
 416
 417
 418
 419
 420
 421
 422
 423
 424
 425
 426
 427
 428
 429
 430
 431
 432
 433
 434
 435
 436
 437
 438
 439
 440
 441
 442
 443
 444
 445
 446
 447
 448
 449
 450
 451
 452
 453
 454
 455
 456
 457
 458
 459
 460
 461
 462
 463
 464
 465
 466
 467
 468
 469
 470
 471
 472
 473
 474
 475
 476
 477
 478
 479
 480
 481
 482
 483
 484
 485
 486
 487
 488
 489
 490
 491
 492
 493
 494
 495
 496
 497
 498
 499
 500
 501
 502
 503
 504
 505
 506
 507
 508
 509
 510
 511
 512
 513
 514
 515
 516
 517
 518
 519
 520
 521
 522
 523
 524
 525

relations between citizens are governed by law, benevolence, and thus justice, while those between citizens and foreigners are not so governed, because every foreigner is both outside the bonds of community and a potential enemy to one's own community.²⁷

The preceding serves to explain Rousseau's "unjust" treatment of the actors. His treatment of them is unjust in terms of that universal justice which speaks to "a few cosmopolitan spirits" and commands that all men be treated with equal fairness and probity, a form of justice very different from that of the citizen, and Rousseau is explicitly writing as a "citizen of Geneva." His treatment of the actors is thus justified, and even rendered just, by the maxim that "every patriot is hard on strangers," and particularly hard on those who pose a threat to the fatherland. The actors are enemies of Geneva in the most basic sense: they threaten its moeurs, which form the foundation of its laws, its institutions, and its way of life in general; the capacity of the actors to transform it into something else entirely poses a very real threat to the existing Geneva. Furthermore, the actors are outsiders, strangers, and so not included with the justice of the city. Rousseau, as a citizen, must therefore treat them as he would any foreign enemy; he must defeat them without any regard to the means employed and, as a citizen, he can do so without injustice. At the same time, however, Rousseau the philosopher, Rousseau the cosmopolitan spirit, may decry the necessity of the tactics employed by Rousseau the citizen, and the note appended to the Letter should be read with this in mind.

Following his aside relating the similarity between the talents of the actor and those of the thief, Rousseau resumes his analysis of

acting, this time comparing the actor to the orator and the preacher:

The orator and the preacher, it could be said, expose themselves in the same manner as the actor, but the difference is very great. When the orator appears, it is to speak and not to show himself off; he portrays only himself; he fills only his own role, speaks only in his own name, says, or should say, only what he thinks. The man and the role being the same, he is in his place; he is in the situation of any citizen who fulfills the functions of his estate. But an actor on the stage, displaying other sentiments than his own, saying only what he is made to say, often portraying a chimerical being, annihilates himself, so to speak, and loses himself in his hero. In this forgetting of the man, if something remains, it is only as the plaything of the spectators.²⁸

This passage suggests a number of points. Perhaps the most obvious is that, while Rousseau asserts that there are great differences between the orator and the preacher, on the one hand, and the actor, on the other, he addresses himself only to the question of the difference between the orator and the actor; he remains completely silent as far as the difference between the preacher and the actor is concerned, and this seems rather strange, given the importance which he ascribed to the Genevan clergy early in the Letter.²⁹ There are several possible reasons for this silence: it might be the result of an oversight, although this is unlikely, given the care with which the Letter was written; it might be intended to imply a certain similarity between the actor and the preacher; or it might reflect an unwillingness on Rousseau's part to connect, even if only for the purpose of comparison, the actor with the man of God. Dismissing the first of these possibilities for the moment as unfruitful, it is immediately apparent that the other two possibilities are mutually compatible, that is to say, Rousseau may feel that there is a certain similarity between the profession of actor and that of preacher, while he is at the

are as op be in cr a l t o s

same time loath to reveal this similarity because, on the one hand, it might undermine the case he is making against the actors, and, on the other, it would involve a disservice to the preachers, given the previously remarked similarity between the talents of the actor and those of the thief. This, in turn, leads to the question of what these hypothetical similarities between the actor and the preacher might be, a question which can best be answered by looking at Rousseau's treatment of the supposed differences between the actor and the orator.

Before dealing with the differences which Rousseau sees between the actor and the orator, however, it is necessary to point out that these two professions are identical in at least one significant respect: like the actor, both the orator and the preacher appear before large audiences; they too provide "spectacles," something one goes to see and hear in order to be entertained, for the public.³⁰ It is this which Rousseau is referring to when he speaks of the preacher and the orator exposing themselves in the same way as the actor. According to Rousseau, the crucial difference between the actor and the orator lies in the fact that the orator maintains his identity, whereas the actor does not. As far as the former is concerned, the man and the orator are one. The actor, however, is not the same as the character he portrays, and is, indeed, subservient to that character. Furthermore, the orator is free in a sense that the actor is not. Although both are dependent upon their audiences, the orator at least has the opportunity to say what he himself thinks, whereas the actor, insofar as he is an actor, does not: what the actor says and how he says it are determined by the playwright. As far as his profession is

concerned, the actor is a slave; his actions and speech are the product of another's will.

A possible reason for Rousseau's silence concerning the preachers has now emerged. The decisive difference between the actor and the orator points to a similarity between the actor and the preacher: the speech of each is determined by the will of another. In the case of the actor, it is the playwright's will; in that of the preacher, it is God's. Like the actor, too, the preacher becomes something other than a man. The actor, in submerging his identity in that of a "chimerical being," becomes something less than a man; the preacher, on the other hand, insofar as he is thought to act as a spokesman for God and to share in divine grace, becomes something more than a man, at least as far as common opinion is concerned. Rousseau must, however, obscure these similarities between the actor and the preacher. At least part of the Letter's purpose is to discredit actors in Geneva, and this purpose is not served by revealing the existence of certain similarities between the actor and one of Geneva's most honored professions. At the same time, Rousseau has already portrayed the Genevan clergy as one of the mainstays of the state, and to reveal that their profession shares certain characteristics with the acting profession, characteristics which have just been attacked, would be to launch an attack against the clergy as well, something which Rousseau, as a good "citizen of Geneva," is loath to do.

If the similarities between the actor and the preacher must be suppressed, however, why does Rousseau introduce the subject of the preachers at all? Why doesn't he speak only of the differences between the actor and the orator? Indeed, one might well ask, why does

Rousseau discuss the orator at all? The subject was introduced in order to respond to a hypothetical and unlikely objection. Moreover, Rousseau's discussion of the orator and the actor adds little to what he has already said concerning the nature of the acting profession, while it does render the issue more complex. Looking at this problem in another light, however, Rousseau's behavior becomes more explicable if, despite what he says, he is actually more interested in the similarities between the actor, on the one hand, and the preacher and orator, on the other, than he is in the dissimilarities. In particular, the fact that all three professions depend upon attracting an audience is highly significant, in that it points to the existence of a competitive relationship between them. The people of Geneva are a relatively industrious lot, generally preoccupied with private affairs, and the time they have available to devote to concerns other than those of family and making a living is strictly limited.³¹ The orator and the preacher are already entrenched in Geneva and have, so to speak, divided the potential audience between them; the introduction of a new competitor capable of attracting an audience would thus detract from the size of theirs. Furthermore, the actor is in a favored position as far as attracting an audience is concerned: his sole purpose is to please and entertain, whereas the orator and the preacher supposedly have other purposes as well, purposes which sometimes interfere with the entertainment value of their "performances." In a fair competition, the actor will win out over his opponents. Thus, as a competitor for the free time of the people of Geneva, the actor should be feared by both the orator and the preacher. For this reason, these two professions would seem to provide a possible source of allies for

Rousseau in his fight to exclude the theater from Geneva. By raising the question of the differences between these two professions and that of the actor, Rousseau is subtly pointing to their similarities; and, once the orator and the preacher recognize these similarities for what they are, a source of potential danger, they will naturally exert themselves against the actor and the theater. In the process, Rousseau will have acquired powerful allies, allies skilled in speaking to the public and influencing its thinking, and allies who enjoy considerable respect and prestige within Geneva.

As far as the preachers and orators of Geneva are concerned, the former group is much more important to Rousseau's purposes. He described them earlier as "a body of officers of morality and ministers of virtue," and noted that "It is important for us to preserve them as they are."³² The Genevan ministers perform at least some of the functions of a censor; in particular, they are the judges of Genevan morality. This means that the question of the place of the ministers in Geneva is not one Rousseau can be indifferent about. They play an important role in maintaining Genevan moeurs as they are. Consequently, since Rousseau is himself interested in preserving Geneva as it is, he must seek to preserve the position of the clergy there, both as a constituent element in the end he is pursuing, and as a means to that end. The position of the ministers is an important element in the life of Geneva, and to alter that position would be to introduce precisely those changes which Rousseau is seeking to prevent. Furthermore, the nature of their position makes the Genevan clergy an important bulwark against these same changes, and to preserve their position

oral. Actors, however, are naturally divided from the public.

is,

in

for

of

to

the

that

be

by

to

on

in

of

the

of

the

is, for Rousseau, to preserve an extremely useful ally, one committed, in part at least, to the same ends as he is.

Securing an alliance with the Genevan clergy may be important for Rousseau in yet another way. As we have seen, the effectiveness of a censor depends upon his ability to guide or express common opinion; but this, in turn, depends in large part upon the public's willingness to follow the censor's lead, its willingness to refer questions of moeurs to the censor for an authoritative decision. This can be brought about only through the mediation of tradition: the public must have become thoroughly habituated to regarding the decisions of the censor as definitive on questions of moeurs, and this means that only an institutionalized censorship can be really effective. Rousseau is thus laboring at a severe disadvantage. He is speaking as a simple citizen, and one who has not even resided in Geneva for much of his life; in sum, he has very little standing in the city. Above all, he does not have the standing of a true censor: he cannot issue judgments which the public will accept for the simple reason that they emanate from him. The preachers, on the other hand, do have such standing. Thus, only insofar as Rousseau can persuade the preachers that his purposes and theirs coincide, that his teachings are in their interests, and that these teachings should be relayed to the public with the full authority of the clergy behind them, will he have any hope of effectively functioning as a censor, even at one remove. Rousseau can become Geneva's Cato only by allying himself with the preachers and speaking through them.

Rousseau has hitherto dealt with the acting profession in general. Actors, however, are naturally divided into two distinct

b

t

c

o

o

qu

do

th

so

vo

ha

but

classes, male and female, actors in the narrow sense and actresses, and this distinction comes to assume a central place in Rousseau's campaign against the theater. Specifically, he argues that the existence of actresses serves as "another source of bad moeurs which compels and carries in its wake dissoluteness amongst the actors."

The actresses necessarily lead a life of licentiousness and dissipation. The dissoluteness of the actors, on the other hand, emerges as something of a contingent phenomenon; if it were not for the actresses, actors might lead more regular, decent, and less blameable lives. At any other time in human history, Rousseau argues, this judgement would be accepted as incontestable:

But why is this dissoluteness inevitable? Oh, why! In any other time there would be no need to ask; but, in this century, when prejudices and errors reign so proudly under the name of philosophy, men, besotted with their vain learning, have closed their minds to the voice of reason and their hearts to that of nature.³³

Both reason and sentiment, Rousseau implies, support his contention that actresses must necessarily lead a dissolute life. It is only because his contemporaries have been seduced by the specious reasoning of the pseudophilosophers, and have accepted a false standard in place of true reason and the teachings of nature, that they are deluded into questioning him on this point. Because he is writing in such a time, however, Rousseau must prove his contention; he must show his readers why the opposing opinion is a prejudice and an error. In order to do so, he apparently must in some way open his readers' "minds to the voice of reason and their hearts to that of nature;" on the other hand, it might suffice if he opened either their minds or their hearts, but not necessarily both. As we shall see, however, this opening of

minds and hearts will not be--nor, given Rousseau's purpose, can it. It be--complete.

Rousseau's first step is to secure the assent of his audience to the proposition that

In every station, in every country, in every class, the two sexes have between them so strong and natural a connection with one another that the moeurs of the one always determine those of the other. Not that these moeurs are always the same, but they always have the same degree of goodness.³⁴

Rousseau indicates that he expects no difficulty in securing universal agreement on this point;³⁵ nevertheless, he seeks to buttress it by recourse to the example of the English, "because they are, of all the nations of the world, the one in which the moeurs of the two sexes appear at first sight to be most contrary." In showing that this appearance is deceptive, Rousseau takes on what he implies is the most persuasive and difficult possible objection based upon an appeal to experience, and refutes it. Consequently, any objection to his point of departure which is based on an appeal to what appears to be a contrary instance is, in effect, precluded. These contrary appearances must, however, be explained, and Rousseau attempts to do so in an unusual way. The entire observable difference in the moeurs of the two sexes, he argues, rests on the fact that ". . . the life of women is a continual development of their moeurs, while, since those of men disappear in the uniformity of business, it is necessary to see them at their pleasures in order to judge them."³⁶ This statement is somewhat disconcerting, in that nothing Rousseau has said previously has prepared the ground for it. Furthermore, it is not subsequently supported by explicit argument. It presents itself, in fact, as something hanging in the air. This is not to say, however, that this statement

is a

appe

asse

It

the

soo

the

deve.

case,

which

"disa

not, a

is the

who r

deed,

perm

acte

The

of

con

the

is a

has

known

ures" i

private or

is not important. Its very lack of support points to its importance; it appears to be something Rousseau is attempting to secure his readers' assent to almost in passing, without alerting them to its importance. It is, in fact, the first step in what amounts to an effort to change the focus of his argument concerning the moeurs of a people from the social and political realms to that of the family.

The differences between the moeurs of women and those of men are the result of the fact that those of the former undergo a "continual development," while those of the latter do not. To see why this is the case, it is necessary to look at the other half of the disjunction which Rousseau establishes between the two sexes. The moeurs of men "disappear into the uniformity of business," while those of women do not, and this is the result of the simple fact that, in most cases, it is the man who goes out into the world to make a living, and the woman who remains behind to look after the children, keep house, etc.³⁷ Indeed, it seems to be the woman's preoccupation with domesticity which permits the continual development of her moeurs, and thus of her character: within the confines of the household, she is free to be herself. The man, on the other hand, must spend a good deal of his time outside of the house and, so to speak, in society, where he is subjected to the continual necessity of conforming to approved modes of behavior, and this is especially true insofar as economic matters are concerned. It is only when he is at his pleasures, that is to say, relaxing, when he has left the need to keep up appearances behind, that he can be himself. Moreover, Rousseau's discussion of the English indicates that the "pleasures" in which the true moeurs of men are best expressed are primarily private or domestic ones: "the pleasures of the table," games, love,

SO

EX

to

na

en

Dr

sa

in

de

"

de

w

ch

i

W

i

h

S

F

C

w

W

solitary walks, etc.³⁸ If, however, one's actual moeurs are more truly expressed in domestic life, then women, with their more intimate ties to that life, come to assume a tremendous importance as far as the formation and conservation of good moeurs are concerned. It is only upon entering that world which women continuously inhabit that the true moeurs of men can manifest themselves. Furthermore, it seems that this same domestic world is the primary locus for the development of moeurs in the first place;³⁹ and women would appear, prima facie, to play a dominant role in this development, since the household is primarily "theirs." The inculcation and maintenance of good moeurs in a society depend upon the proper internal ordering of the various households within that society; and this, in turn, ultimately depends upon the character of the women who dominate those households.

The above argument is derived from Rousseau's statement concerning the cause of the differences between the moeurs of men and those of women; it is implicit in that statement. Furthermore, since it is only implicit, Rousseau never having explicitly stated it, it remains partly hidden. Despite its obscurity, perhaps even because of it, this argument is important, in that it serves as a necessary foundation for much of what is to follow in the Letter: it provides the basis for a crucial assertion which Rousseau wishes to make concerning the place of women in society, an assertion which he regards as extremely controversial:

Do you want to know men? Study women. This maxim is general, and up to here everyone will agree with me. But if I add that there are no good moeurs for women outside of a retiring and domestic life, if I say that the peaceful care of the family and of the household are their lot, that the dignity of their sex is in its modesty, that in their shame and chasteness are inseparable from decency, that for them to seek the eyes of

men is already to have allowed themselves to be corrupted by them, and that any woman who shows herself off is dishonored: immediately there will be raised against me that faddish philosophy, which is born and dies in the corner of a big city, and which wishes to stifle the cry of nature and the unanimous voice of mankind.⁴⁰

It is easy to see how Rousseau's earlier statement paves the way for this one; the former implicitly places women in the household, in the privacy of which the novel is supposed to be written. But Rousseau's private realm; the latter only renders this placement more or less explicit. It is necessary, however, to make two points concerning the relationship between these two statements. In the first place, Rousseau's initial statement concerning the place of women is noncontroversial, largely because it is obscure, while the latter, according to Rousseau himself, will elicit opposition. But, if the second statement can be deduced from the first, and it can be, then Rousseau has already accomplished a good deal in the way of securing his readers' assent to it, in that they have already tacitly assented to the more general statement: following Rousseau's first statement of the place of women in society, in the same paragraph and tied to it by bonds of proximity, is the assertion that "up to here everyone will agree with me." The casual reader, the reader who fails to challenge this assertion will already have had his resistance to the controversial statement, which is to follow, weakened. By hiding his initial formulation of a controversial position in a seemingly innocuous comment, and then linking that comment to something everyone will agree to, Rousseau breaches the exception: as we shall see, Rousseau's discussion of the place of women must be disguised for yet another, but related, reason. Despite its brevity, his initial formulation is the more general and fundamental one. It sets forth the most compelling reason for consigning women to

Rousseau's initial formulation of his position on the place of women must be disguised for yet another, but related, reason. Despite its brevity, his initial formulation is the more general and fundamental one. It sets forth the most compelling reason for consigning women to

private life: the private is that part of life in which moeurs are formed and develop, and that part of life in which they are most truly displayed. The private, insofar as the question of moeurs is concerned, is thus superior to the nonprivate, to the public and social realms. In particular, it is superior to the world of business, into the uniformity of which the moeurs of men disappear. But Geneva is a bourgeois state, a state oriented around trade and industry and business in general.⁴¹ To attack "business" is thus to attack Geneva. Rousseau, however, is not interested in attacking Geneva or in subverting its way of life, but in saving it.

Beginning with a discussion of the moeurs of actresses, Rousseau has subtly changed the question at issue to that of the moeurs of women in general. His discussion of this question seems at first glance to be nothing more than a digression. Not only is it sandwiched in between two sections dealing with actresses, thus disturbing the continuity of the Letter, but Rousseau himself seems to assign it the status of a digression: the paragraph immediately following this discussion begins with the sentence, "Let us return now to our actresses;"⁴² but, in order to "return" to this subject, one must have left it at some point. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, Rousseau's "digressions" frequently point beyond the surface teachings of the Letter or reveal a new dimension in a multi-level teaching. The instance at issue is no exception. As we shall see, Rousseau's discussion of the moeurs of women serves as an integral component in his campaign to "save" Geneva, and, in addition, provides an insight into certain important philosophical problems as well.

P
t
w
D
h
t
f
b
a
w
s
s
t
t
V
e

Rousseau's discussion of the moeurs of women consists of two parts: an assertion that the moeurs of women differ from, but are intimately related to, those of men, combined with a statement that woman's place is in the home and that the primary female virtues are modesty, shame, and chasteness; and a defense of this position. We have already noted some of the implications of Rousseau's position on the question of the moeurs of women, but, leaving this issue in abeyance for the moment, let us consider Rousseau's defense of his position. To begin with, he states that the position he has taken is controversial, and that he will immediately be attacked by "that faddish philosophy, which is born and dies in the corner of a big city, and which wishes to stifle the cry of nature and the unanimous voice of mankind." At the same time, he implies that he has on his side "the cry of nature and the unanimous voice of mankind," that is, that his opinion on the question of female moeurs is in accord with both the natural order and universal opinion. The rest of his argument consists of an ostensible effort to show that this is indeed the case.

Rousseau begins by setting out what he claims is the position of the pseudo-philosophers:

Popular prejudices. . . . Petty errors of childhood. Deceit of the laws and of education. Chasteness is nothing. It is only a contrivance of the social laws to protect the rights of fathers and husbands, and to maintain some order in the family. Why should we blush at the needs nature gave us? Why should we find a motive for shame in an act so indifferent in itself, and so useful in its effects, as that one which leads to the perpetuation of the species? Why, the desires being equal on both sides, should their manifestations be different? Why should one of the sexes deny itself more than the other of the penchants which are common to both? Why should man have different laws on this point than the animals?⁴³

The battlelines have thus been drawn. Both Rousseau and his opponents

appeal to nature to establish the truth of their respective positions. This, however, places Rousseau in a rather difficult situation. On the one hand, he must acknowledge that sexual desire is natural, it being the means by which the species reproduces itself. On the other hand, he must show that in half the human race this desire should be hidden and suppressed, while in the other half it can openly manifest itself; and this too must be shown to be according to nature. He must show, in other words, why it is that women must control their natural desires, while men are free from such a natural duty. This would seem to involve a contradiction, if what is natural is either good or authorized by nature. Rousseau attempts to escape from this contradiction by arguing that both shame and desire are natural in women, and that it is not necessary that this be reasonable:

But it is not to man, but to his Author, that these [questions] should be addressed. Is it not ridiculous that he should have to say why he is ashamed of a natural sentiment, if this shame is no less natural to him than the desire itself? I might as well ask myself why I have this sentiment. Is it for me to account for what nature has done? According to this way of reasoning, those who do not know why man exists ought to deny that he does so.⁴⁴

Rousseau thus does not have to explain why shame and chasteness are natural to women; he only has to show that they exist. His efforts along this line take two forms: what might be called an argument from the animals, and an argument from universal human practice and opinion. As we shall see later, however, both of these arguments will prove to be defective, and necessarily so.

Despite Rousseau's argument that he need only demonstrate that shame and chasteness are natural to women, and that he need not put forward reasons for this, he does suggest such reasons: "I, who do not pretend to know these reasons, believe that I see some which have

escaped [the philosophers]."⁴⁵ "Shame" is a defense which nature has given the two sexes when they are in "a state of weakness and forgetfulness of themselves which leaves them at the mercy of the first comer." Shame is thus a defense mechanism similar to that which causes man to sleep at night in order that, in his exposed state, he is hidden from the attack of others, and similar to that which "causes every hurt animal to seek isolation and deserted places, so that it can suffer and die in peace, away from the blows which it can no longer fend off."⁴⁶ This argument, however, is less than completely convincing; it is based upon an appeal to nature, while at the same time pointing to the insufficiency of nature as a standard for civilized man. A man and a woman, hiding the sex act from the eyes of others as a means of self-protection, are acting from motives similar to those which lead men to sleep alone and at night, and which lead animals to withdraw into isolation when they are sick or injured. Men, however, no longer sleep alone, or even always at night; and they do not withdraw from others in times of poor health, but rather call in doctors and nurses. Furthermore, it is questionable whether a withdrawal from the eyes of others, out of motives of self-preservation, is the same as what is meant by "shame." Even if it is the same, this would imply that shame is equally natural to both the sexes, and that the shame which nature instills can play no part in establishing a natural foundation for differences between the moeurs of women and those of men. In addition, it cannot serve as grounds for arguing that chasteness is natural: the sex act can be performed between any man and any woman, as long as it is hidden from others. It even implies that adultery is more natural than chasteness in a married woman, because more effort is generally

expended to keep it hidden; the location of the marriage bed is known to all one's friends and acquaintances, while the act of adultery most often takes place at a location known only to those most intimately concerned.

Rousseau adds other "reasons" to the one adduced above in his efforts to show that shame and chasteness are natural to women, but these arguments can also be shown to be defective.⁴⁷ In fact, it may be that they are necessarily so. Rousseau's "scientific" study of human nature in the Second Discourse denies that there is any essential difference between men and women, except that the latter are subject to pregnancy and childbirth, and even this is of very little importance in distinguishing the one from the other.⁴⁸ Certainly, there is no apparent difference in their sentiments regarding the sex act.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Second Discourse explicitly contradicts one of Rousseau's arguments in the Letter concerning the natural chasteness of women:

Why, they ask, should what is not shameful to the man be so for the woman? Why should one of the sexes make a crime for itself out of what the other believes is permitted to it? As if the consequences were the same on both sides! As if all the austere duties of the woman were not derived from the simple fact that a child ought to have a father.⁵⁰

But, in man's natural state, Rousseau also tells us in the Second Discourse, a child has no need of a father, except insofar as the procreative act is concerned, and the father cannot even recognize his own children.⁵¹ The family itself is not natural, and moral sentiments, including the sentiment of "duty," emerge only with the establishment of the family.

"au

are

ack

At f

that

natur

socio

socio

is by

or a

fair'

mals

such

tha

and

caus

rous

c

I

are

If this is so, however, how can women be, by nature, subject to "austere duties," such as chasteness? Chasteness, shame, and modesty are all products of society. Even in the Letter, Rousseau implicitly acknowledges that this is the case:

The argument drawn from the example of the beasts proves nothing and is not true. Man is not a dog or a wolf. It is only necessary to establish in his species the first relations of society to give his sentiments a morality forever unknowable to the beasts. The animal has a heart and passions, but the holy image of the decent and fair enters only into the heart of man.⁵²

At first glance, this passage seems to support Rousseau's contention that decency--and chasteness, which is a part of female decency--is natural to man, but this is only true if man is a social animal and society itself is natural, but, according to the Second Discourse, society is not natural and man is not a social animal.⁵³ Indeed, man is by nature simply an animal, like the others, differing from a dog or a wolf only in his potential.⁵⁴ The "holy image of the decent and fair" is thus no more natural to man than to any of the other animals.⁵⁵

If the above is true, why then, we must ask, does Rousseau go to such great lengths in attempting to convince the readers of the Letter that shame, chasteness, and modesty are natural sentiments in a woman, and that "every woman lacking in chasteness is guilty and depraved, because she tramples under foot a sentiment natural to her sex."⁵⁶ Rousseau's "argument from experience" can help to answer this question:

Let us pass from reasoning to experience. If chasteness were a product of society and education, that sentiment ought to be heightened in those places where education is the greatest care and where the social laws have been ceaselessly refined; it ought to be weaker everywhere that man has remained closest to his primitive estate. It is all to the contrary. In our mountains, the women are timid and modest; a word makes them blush; they do

the
Roy
co
is
co
a
r
R
t
R

not dare raise their eyes to men, and keep silent in front of them. In the large cities, chasteness is ignoble and base; it is the only thing that will cause a well brought up woman to feel shame.⁵⁷

Viewed in light of Rousseau's other works, the above argument is defective. He makes clear in the Second Discourse, for example, that, while the so-called "moral sentiments" are the product of society, the development of society does not lead to the corresponding development and perfection of these sentiments, but to their decay and perversion. Indeed, Rousseau strongly implies that, in general, the moral sentiments present themselves in their purest form at the primitive institution of society.⁵⁸ What it is important to note in the above quotation, however, is that chasteness seems to be characteristic of noncorrupt societies: the Letter has already established the corruption of "large cities," while, in the First Discourse, the "Mountaineers" are referred to as a virtuous people.⁵⁹ Thus, although chasteness may not be natural, it may well be requisite to good moeurs and civic virtue. If this is the case, then it goes a long way toward explaining Rousseau's defense of chasteness. What is natural enjoys, in certain respects, a higher dignity than what is not natural or what is unnatural; it can, for example, be ascribed to a god or gods, as opposed to men, and so is sanctioned by the divine order.⁶⁰ What is the result of convention is, on the other hand, the work of man; not only does what is conventional partake of human fallibility, but its status is further lowered by the mere fact that it could be otherwise than what it is: conventions can be altered, while nature always is.

By arguing that chasteness in women is according to nature, Rousseau attempts to establish it on a firmer foundation than would be the case if its conventional status were made known. Rousseau himself

admits that it is not nature, but the requirements of society, which ultimately vindicates chasteness:

Even if one could deny that a special sentiment of chasteness was natural to women, it would be no less true that, in society, their life ought to be a domestic and retiring one, and that they ought to be raised under principles appropriate to it. If the timidity, chasteness, and modesty which are proper to them are social inventions, it is in society's interests that women acquire these qualities; it is important that they cultivate them, and every woman who disdains them offends against good moeurs.⁶¹

Exactly what social need chasteness in women serves is never made clear in the Letter. Elsewhere, however, Rousseau does speak to this issue.

Chasteness, he indicates in the Second Discourse, is an invention of society, designed to check the terrible excesses of sexual passion. In the state of nature, sexual encounters are purely physical. For man as he is by nature, any woman is sufficient to satisfy his needs, and the same is true of woman as she is by nature. This is so because natural man has no conception of relative beauty or merit, and so no basis for preferring one sexual partner to another; above all, the idea of "love," and the passion and possessiveness associated with it, is not a part of natural man's make-up.⁶² Man in society, however, is a very different proposition. Not only has the development of social intercourse fostered ideas of beauty and merit, but it has also led to the development of certain passions unknown to natural man, passions which threaten to tear society apart:

Among the passions which agitate the heart of man, there is an ardent and impetuous one which renders one sex necessary to the other; a terrible passion, which braves all dangers, overcomes all obstacles, and, in its fury, seems fitted to destroy the race which it is intended to preserve. What would become of men, prey to this unrestrained and brutal rage, without chasteness, without modesty, constantly disputing their loves at the cost of their blood?⁶⁴

Unbridled, sexual passion is a threat to society; it leads to competition, conflict, and murder. Chasteness in women, if it is regarded as a virtue, as the mark of a "decent" woman, serves to limit this passion and hold it within bounds. It promotes sexual exclusivity; a woman only gives herself to one man and on a permanent basis. Because she has irrevocably committed herself to one man, this settles the matter, and competition for her favor ceases. Modesty and timidity in women, together with chasteness, also help to restrain sexual passion: where these traits are regarded as virtues and are practiced as such, women are less bold and thus less provocative, even before they have committed themselves to one man. Furthermore, a society which practices such virtues tends to confine women to the home and to forbid them entrance into the public and social realms; thus, they are generally neither seen nor heard, except by their relations, and so cannot incite men to competition over them.

The sexual exclusivity which is fostered by chasteness is important to society in another respect as well: it strengthens the bonds between man and woman, and thus helps to promote an enduring family life. As was indicated in Chapter V above, Rousseau considers the family to be crucial to society. It provides the training in prevailing social moeurs which society requires, and love of family serves as the necessary foundation of love of country.⁶⁵ In addition, sexual exclusivity provides the husband with the only possible guarantee that he is the father of his wife's offspring; and, in society, "every child ought to have a father" to provide for and educate him. The promotion of timidity, chasteness, and modesty is thus in society's interests, and Rousseau is promulgating a highly useful, if not strictly truthful, teaching when he argues that these are natural sentiments.

Rousseau's teaching concerning chasteness is useful in another way. It allows him to come to the defense of "decent women:"

Is there anywhere in the world a sight as touching, as respectable, as that of a mother surrounded by her children, directing the work of her domestics, procuring a happy life for her husband, and wisely governing her home? It is in this that she shows herself in all the dignity of a decent woman; it is in this that she truly commands respect, and beauty shares with honor the homage rendered virtue. . . . Whatever she may do there, one feels that in public she is not in her place.⁶⁶

Even more than this, Rousseau's praise of chasteness allows him to contrast the decent woman with the actress, whose "sole object" is to show herself off in public. This contrast is laden with importance. It is the bad moeurs of the actresses which in large part causes the bad moeurs of their male counterparts. In developing this point, Rousseau depicts the acting company as a miniature society, the corruption of which the bad moeurs of the actresses exacerbates:

I do not need to show how, from an estate which dishonors, there arises indecent sentiments, nor how the vices divide those whom a common interest ought to unite. I shall not expand on the innumerable subjects for discord and quarrels that the distribution of roles, the division of receipts, the choice of plays, the jealousy over applause, must constantly incite, principally between the actresses, and shall not even speak of the intrigues of gallantry. It is even more useless that I expose the effects which the association of luxury and misery, inevitable among such people, must naturally produce.⁶⁷

In the above passage, Rousseau's subject is not so much actors and actresses, as it is society, any society. The problems he attributes to acting companies are the problems of any society which is characterized by a division of labor, differentials in wealth and honor, and political conflict. Similarly, the conclusion to be derived from the above passage applies to any such society: bad moeurs in the

women will produce a similar result in the men, while decent women, women with good moeurs, act as a check on corruption.

In his dedication to the Second Discourse, Rousseau expresses a belief that it is the women of Geneva who are largely responsible for what virtue the Republic has retained:

Could I forget that precious half of the Republic which creates the happiness of the other, and whose sweetness and wisdom maintain peace and good moeurs? Amiable and virtuous countrywomen, the fate of your sex will always be to govern ours. It is fortunate when your chaste power, exercised only in conjugal union, makes itself felt only for the glory of the state and the public happiness. It is thus that women commanded in Sparta; and thus do you deserve to command in Geneva. . . . It is for you to maintain always, by your amiable and innocent empire and your insinuating wit, love of the laws in the state and concord among the citizens; to reunite, by happy marriages, divided families; and especially, to correct, by the persuasive gentleness of your lessons and the modest grace of your conversation, the bad habits which our young people acquire in other countries, whence, instead of the useful things from which they could profit, they bring back, with a childish tone and ridiculous air acquired among fallen women, only admiration for I know not what pretended grandeurs, frivolous recompense for a servitude which will never be worth as much as august liberty. Be always, therefore, what you are, the chaste guardians of moeurs and the gentle bonds of peace, and continue on every occasion to make use of the rights of the heart and of nature for the benefit of duty and virtue.⁶⁸

The role of the Genevan women, as described by Rousseau, is the obverse of that of the actresses. In fact, the former, "the chaste guardians of moeurs," seem to form something like a group of censors, whose task it is to maintain good moeurs and a sense of duty and virtue in Geneva. Particularly, they are charged by Rousseau with preventing the young people from being corrupted by foreign manners and ideas. Like the aforementioned preachers, whom they resemble in this respect, the decent women of Geneva constitute a source of potential allies for Rousseau. Like the preachers, too, they are threatened by the theater. The

theater will draw men away from the home, the realm of the woman, the realm in which her salutary influence on moeurs makes itself felt. The influence and position of the women of Geneva are threatened in another way as well. The appearance of actresses in the theater will detract from their claim to virtue, upon which their "innocent empire" is properly founded. The actresses lack chasteness, modesty, shame, and timidity. Their very appearance on the stage shows them to be unchaste, immodest, shameless, and bold; yet, people will go to see them and they will be applauded. The admission of actresses into Geneva, concomitant with the establishment of a theater, will thus result in the introduction of a new model of womanhood, one which is in direct opposition to that which has formerly prevailed in Geneva. This new model already dominates the large cities and has contributed to their corruption;⁶⁹ in view of its past victories, Rousseau in effect asks, is there any reason to doubt that this model will soon come to prevail in Geneva as well?

If Rousseau is right concerning the actresses, the ascendancy of women will continue in Geneva, but it will be a different kind of ascendancy, exercised by a different kind of woman, the same kind of woman whose nature Rousseau revealed in his discussion of the romantic theater. It will be the rule of the mistress, rather than of the wife and mother. It will be a rule founded upon the all-consuming passion of romantic love, rather than a rule founded upon the respect which one "owes to virtue." It will be a tyrannical rule, rather than one based upon "sweet and gentle persuasion." Women will no longer be confined to the home, and their rule will pervade not only private life, but public and social life as well. The family will be fatally undermined, and society as a whole will suffer as a result. The position of

the women of Geneva will be drastically altered: their former rule over their husbands will have ended and, either they must consent to becoming someone's mistress, assuming they are young and comely enough, or they will lose all position whatsoever. They must become something they were taught to abhor, assuming such a transformation could be effected: either they must become like the actresses, or the actresses will supplant them. Whatever the outcome in this regard, Geneva and the place of women within it will never be the same again. It will have transformed itself into a little Paris, and corruption and viciousness will have entered with this transformation: although a "virtuous and amiable woman" may be the most capable of "touching a sensitive heart and leading it toward the good," a woman who is herself corrupt is the best and most effective teacher of vice.⁷⁰

Rousseau's attack on the actresses in the name of decency and feminine virtue is thus also a defense of the women of Geneva. Furthermore, since he is acting partially on their behalf, Rousseau can reasonably expect the women of Geneva to aid him in his fight against the theater, exerting their influence to persuade their husbands and sons that the theater is undesirable. Moreover, Rousseau's rhetoric concerning the actresses may not only win him allies from among the distaff "censors" of Geneva, but from among their men as well. His argument will obviously appeal to the women of Geneva; he praises them, although not by name, exalts their role in society, and leaps to their defense against the shameless hussies who threaten their homes. At the same time, his rhetoric appeals to certain male prejudices as well. The bourgeois male, and the Genevan is supremely bourgeois, is something of a prude; he places great emphasis on the family, on marital fidelity,

and on "proper" sexual conduct in general, at least insofar as the conduct of women is concerned. He looks askance at promiscuity, adultery, and prostitution. Rousseau openly presents himself as the opponent of these qualities and the defender of feminine virtue. He suggests that actresses are promiscuous and, because they show themselves for money, the equivalent of prostitutes.⁷¹ Furthermore, he strongly suggests that the introduction of actresses into Geneva will produce a transformation in the women there; the boundary between the public and the private realms, which also divides the world of men from that of women, will have been erased, with no telling what consequences as far as the behavior of wives and daughters is concerned.⁷² In a more or less subtle manner, Rousseau is threatening the Genevan *paterfamilias* with a cuckold's horns and debauched daughters. Thus, if Rousseau succeeds in convincing his male, and perhaps female, readers that "feminine morality," particularly as regards chasteness, will suffer as the result of the introduction of actresses into Geneva, he will have succeeded in establishing a powerful prejudice against the theater, a prejudice all the more powerful because it is founded upon a mixture of righteous indignation and sexual possessiveness.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 100 (B., 79).

⁷²*Government of Poland*, II (O.C., III, 332).

⁷³*Loc. cit.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, II (958-9).

⁷⁵*Letter*, 101 (B., 79-80).

⁷⁶*Compare Social Contract*, IV, vii (O.C., III, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000).

⁷⁷*See Second Discourse*, II (O.C., III, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000).

NOTES

Chapter VII

¹Letter, 100 (B., 75).

²Loc. cit.

³Letter, 100 (B., 75-6).

⁴Compare the portion of d'Alembert's article reproduced by Rousseau in the Preface with Letter, 124 (B., 93).

⁵Letter, 102 (B., 76).

⁶Ibid., 102 (B., 76-7).

⁷Loc. cit.

⁸Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 957-8).

⁹Letter, 103 (B., 77).

¹⁰Ibid., 103 (B., 77-8).

¹¹Ibid., 103-5 (B., 78). Cf. Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 958); that Rousseau abstracts from Greek comedy may or may not be significant.

¹²Letter, 105 (B., 78-9).

¹³Ibid., 100 (B., 79).

¹⁴Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 958).

¹⁵Loc. cit.

¹⁶Ibid., II (958-9).

¹⁷Letter, 102 (B., 79-80).

¹⁸Compare Social Contract, IV, vii (O.C., III, 458) with Letter 90-3 (B., 67-70).

¹⁹Cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 178); Social Contract, I, vi and viii; Emile, I (O.C., IV, 245-52).

²⁰See the beginning of Chapter III, above.

²¹Letter, 107 (B., 80).

²²Cf. Republic, 332d-e and 333e4a.

²³Cf. Republic, 334a.

²⁴Letter, 107n (B., 80n).

²⁵Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 178); cf. Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 378).

²⁶Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 378); Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 177-8).

²⁷See Polemarchus' definition of justice, which emerges as the form of justice peculiar to the city, and Socrates' description of the warrior class of the just city: Republic, 332d and 375c; cf. 332d-6a.

²⁸Letter, 108 (B., 80-1).

²⁹Ibid., 17-9 (B., 14-5); cf. Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 119).

³⁰See Bloom, Politics and the Arts, 150, note 12, for a fairly comprehensive discussion of "spectacle" and Rousseau's use of it.

³¹Cf. Letter, 20-1 and 124-6 (B., 16-7 and 93-4), particularly the references to industriousness and time.

³²Letter, 18-9 (B., 14).

³³Ibid., 108-9 (B., 81).

³⁴Ibid., 109 (B., 81).

³⁵Ibid., 110 (B., 82).

³⁶Loc. cit.

³⁷See Chapter VI, above.

³⁸Letter, 109-10 (B., 82).

³⁹There are strong indications in the Second Discourse that Rousseau believes the moral sentiments to have had their origin, historically speaking, in the family: II (O.C., III, 168-70).

⁴⁰Letter, 110-1 (B., 82-3).

⁴¹Letter, 124-5 (B., 93); see also Rousseau's comparison of the Genevans to bees: Letter, 178 (B., 132-3). In connection with this, it

is important to bear in mind that Rousseau considered Mandeville's Republic of the Bees to be one of the most pernicious works produced in modern times: cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 27); Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 153-4); and "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 965-6).

⁴²Letter, 120 (B., 90).

⁴³Ibid., 111 (B., 83).

⁴⁴Loc. cit.

⁴⁵Ibid., 112 (B., 83).

⁴⁶Ibid., 112 (B., 84).

⁴⁷Compare Rousseau's argument for the necessity of chasteness in women with his description of the courting behavior of white pigeons, where his assertion that the male animal must be the aggressor because his sexual capacity is more limited is subverted by the fact that it is the female pigeon which is the pursuer: Letter, 112-4 and 116-7 (B., 84-6 and 87).

⁴⁸Compare Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 146-7) and note XII (214-8) with II (168).

⁴⁹Ibid., I (146-7).

⁵⁰Letter, 113 (B., 85).

⁵¹Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 160) and note XII (214-8).

⁵²Letter, 116 (B., 86-7).

⁵³Cf. Second Discourse, Preface (O.C., III, 125-6); I (139); and II (178).

⁵⁴Ibid., I (134-5, 142-3, and 151-2).

⁵⁵Cf. Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 157-8) and II (169-70).

⁵⁶Letter, 114 (B., 85).

⁵⁷Ibid., 115-6 (B., 86).

⁵⁸Second Discourse, II, passim.

⁵⁹First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 20).

⁶⁰Cf. Letter, 111-2 (B., 83).

⁶¹Ibid., 117 (B., 87).

⁶²Cf. Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 157-8) and note XII (218).

⁶³Ibid., II (169-70).

⁶⁴Ibid., I (157).

⁶⁵See Chapter VI, above.

⁶⁶Letter, 117 (B., 87-8).

⁶⁷Ibid., 122 (B., 91-2).

⁶⁸Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 119-20).

⁶⁹Letter, 63-76 (B., 47-57).

⁷⁰Ibid., 63-4 (B., 47-8).

⁷¹Ibid., 120-1 (B., 90-1).

⁷²Ibid., 86 (B., 64).

CHAPTER VIII

There is a striking incongruity in the Letter, an incongruity which the preceding discussion may have obscured. The Letter ostensibly deals with the question of the desirability of establishing a theater at Geneva, and its author proudly proclaims himself a citizen of that city on the title page; yet, for almost two-thirds of the text,¹ Geneva is mentioned only rarely, and even then only in passing. Within this lacuna, there are only three explicit references to Geneva.² D'Alembert, in his brief article, conveys much more information concerning Geneva than does Rousseau in almost a hundred pages. To be sure, Geneva is never far from Rousseau's mind, as our analysis has shown: his rhetoric is directed at certain audiences within the city; he employs Neufchatel as a surrogate for Geneva; and so on. Nevertheless, Rousseau remains curiously silent insofar as Geneva itself is concerned. He himself admits that this is the case, but in a manner which serves only to increase our perplexity:

If I have remained so long with the terms of the general proposition, it is not because I would not have had even more advantage in directly applying it to the city of Geneva; but repugnance at putting my fellow citizens on the stage has caused me to postpone speaking of us as long as I could.³

There is no problem in understanding what Rousseau means by the "general proposition:" he is referring to the question of the general worth of the theater, a question which has tended to dominate the Letter to the exclusion of the specific problems which the theater poses for Geneva. What is really puzzling, however, is Rousseau's reference to his

"repugnance at putting [his] fellow citizens on the stage." What does he mean by "on the stage," and why does he feel this "repugnance?"

One's first thought is that Rousseau is speaking metaphorically, that he is simply referring to the act of writing about Geneva. Obviously, he is not writing and/or producing a play in which his fellow citizens are to appear as actors. Or is he? It is helpful here to recall Rousseau's chastisement of d'Alembert for his imputation of Socinianism to the Genevan clergy. At that time, Rousseau made the point that certain things are better left unsaid. In this instance, a public discussion of Geneva may be undesirable for some reason. In particular, the question of the status of Genevan moeurs must come up in any inquiry into the possible effects resulting from the establishment of a theater there. A rigorous inquiry into this question might have undesirable consequences. If Geneva is more or less corrupt, and Rousseau discloses this fact, it could have an adverse effect on what virtue remains. At the very least, it would prove embarrassing for the Republic, and Rousseau would be a very poor citizen indeed if he were to reveal, not only to his fellow citizens, but to outsiders as well, the failings of his country. Rousseau, however, is forced by the nature of the task he has undertaken to discuss Geneva: "Nevertheless, I must come to it at last; I would have fulfilled my task only imperfectly if I did not attempt to confirm what would result in our own situation from the establishment of a theater."⁴ But, if it is undesirable to look too closely at Geneva as it really is, it might be less so for a more or less fictional Geneva. When an actor appears on the stage, he does so in a persona other than his own. When Rousseau puts Geneva "on the stage," the parts he has written for his cast may dictate that

they appear as other than they really are, as more virtuous or less corrupt.

The above is, of course, only speculation. It can be transformed into something more than this in only two ways: by testing Rousseau's description of Geneva against the "facts," that is, by comparing Geneva as he describes it to Geneva as it really was at the time of the Letter; or, by looking to the Letter itself for additional information regarding Rousseau's treatment of Geneva. These two approaches, in fact, are really only one. Even if we could gain access to an objective account of Geneva, and even if this account is markedly at variance with Rousseau's, we cannot legitimately argue that this is a result of a deliberate policy of obfuscation on Rousseau's part; his perceptions of Geneva, or those of the author of the "objective" account, might simply have been inaccurate. Rousseau himself must thus provide the evidence necessary to make our speculation more tenable. If our suspicions are correct, there is good reason to think that Rousseau will have provided such evidence. In the Preface to the Letter, he indicated that he is not writing solely in the interests of Geneva, but for both "humanity and country."⁵ To conceal Geneva's shortcomings may benefit "country," but "humanity," or mankind in general, can only benefit if, in some way, the reasons which make such concealment necessary are disclosed to those who need to know them, that is, only if Rousseau's treatment of Geneva can provide guide-lines for dealing with other states in like circumstances; this, in turn, means that Geneva's true condition must be revealed in some manner.

The above points to a problem which is central to the theme of the Letter and to the question of censorship. If the Letter is indeed,

as we earlier concluded, both a treatise on the problem of censorship and an example of the censor in action, then Rousseau cannot limit himself to simply suppressing certain ideas or facts. He must also demonstrate, if only implicitly, why such suppression is necessary. Perfect censorship of an idea or fact consigns that idea or fact to oblivion; it will be as if it never existed. Such total suppression is not Rousseau's goal. Once again, we must distinguish between the various audiences of the Letter. On the one hand, we have the "vulgar" reader, and specifically the citizenry of Geneva, whom Rousseau is attempting to protect. On the other, we have the philosopher, or proto-philosopher, and the censor, or potential censor, whom he is interested in teaching. The philosopher can be trusted with the truth because the truly wise know that it is dangerous to "unblock access to the temple of the muses," that is, to reveal certain truths to the ignorant many. The censor, or potential censor, must be trusted with dangerous truths so that he will know what must be suppressed and why. Indeed, we are led to suspect that the philosopher and the censor are one and the same, as is true in the case of Rousseau. Be this as it may, the complete concealment of Geneva's status would frustrate Rousseau's purpose as regards his nonvulgar readers; he would have taught them nothing. For this reason, we are led to suspect that Rousseau may have conveyed his definitive teaching concerning Geneva, assuming it is potentially dangerous, in such a way as to make it inaccessible to the casual or vulgar reader, while at the same time providing clues to that teaching which only the more diligent and discerning reader can appreciate.

The question now arises as to what these clues to Rousseau's complete teaching regarding Geneva might be, or, even more primordially, whether such are present in the Letter at all. We must not forget that we are working here with a hypothesis, the assumption that Rousseau, for some reason, wishes to obscure the true character and status of Genevan moeurs. The above line of reasoning stands or falls according to the correctness of this assumption.

One possible way to approach the questions raised above is to refer back to the three explicit references to Geneva which do occur between the opening discussion of the Socinianism of the Genevan clergy and Rousseau's remarks concerning his repugnance at putting his fellow citizens on the stage, on the theory that, when Rousseau breaks his self-imposed silence concerning Geneva, he does so for a reason. In the process of inquiring into why Rousseau speaks out concerning Geneva at these three points, we may learn why he is elsewhere silent on the subject.

In looking back at the relevant references to Geneva, one is immediately struck by the way in which those references naturally combine to make up a more or less unified argument. The following are the passages in question:

(1) Beyond these effects of the theater, which are relative to what is performed, there are others no less necessary, which pertain directly to the stage and to the persons performing; and it is to these that the previously mentioned Genevans attribute the taste for luxury, adornment, and dissipation, the introduction of which among us they so rightly fear.⁶

(2) But let us not flatter ourselves that we will see Sparta reborn in the lap of commerce and love of gain. If we had the same maxims, a theater could be established at Geneva without any risk; for never would a citizen or burgess set foot in it.⁷

(3) All that human wisdom can do is to forestall changes, to arrest from afar all that brings them on; but, as soon as they are tolerated and authorized, one is rarely master of their effects and cannot be held responsible for them. How then shall we prevent those [changes], the causes of which we have already introduced? In imitation of that institution [i.e., the Court of Honor], . . . will you propose to introduce censors? We already have them;* and if the whole force of this tribunal scarcely suffices to maintain us as we are, what will it do to halt this progress when we have added a new inclination to our moeurs? It is clear that it will no longer suffice. The first sign of its powerlessness to forestall the abuses of the drama will be to allow its establishment.⁸

The asterisk in passage (3) refers the reader to a note, in which Rousseau explains that the Consistory and the Chamber of the Reformation, both Genevan institutions, are what he is referring to when he speaks of already having censors.

Taking the above passages in order, the first indicates that luxury, adornment, and dissipation are feared, and rightly so, by the Genevans. The second, coming as it does hard on the heels of Rousseau's praise of Spartan moeurs and laws, establishes that Genevan moeurs are far from perfect. Moreover, it implicitly condemns Geneva for already having been corrupted by luxury and "love of gain," that is to say, by avariciousness. Lastly, the third passage indicates that Genevan moeurs, even in their relatively corrupt state, are in danger of becoming worse. The reference to forestalling changes and arresting them from afar is ironic: the Genevan's opposition to the theater is, according to Rousseau, based upon a desire to prevent the introduction of luxury and its attendant vices, but luxury is already present in the life of the city, as is indicated by the second passage. The third passage is ironic in another way as well: if "the first sign of the powerlessness [of the censors] to forestall the abuses of the drama will be to allow its establishment," then the first sign of their

powerlessness to forestall the abuses of luxury has already manifested itself.

The problem of luxury thus emerges as more immediate than the problem of the theater. Indeed, Rousseau elsewhere tells us that the arts, including that of the drama, are never cultivated to any significant extent where luxury is not present.⁹ Even more than this, for Rousseau, the prevention or limitation of luxury is the problem for the well-constituted state, that is to say, for a legitimate political order. Political legitimacy depends upon the rule of law, which is the rule of the general will. As we have seen, the law, conceived of in this way, is no respecter of persons: it must bear on all citizens equally. To this criterion of political legitimacy, Rousseau adds another, that each and every citizen be completely dependent on the community as a whole and independent of one another. Complete dependence on the community as a whole, in fact, guarantees the citizen of freedom from any personal dependence, but only if all his fellows have similarly submitted themselves.¹⁰ The existence of luxury, however, tends to subvert both the rule of law and the equal, because total, dependence of each and every citizen upon the community. Luxury, for Rousseau, implies the existence of rich and poor.¹¹ Where there is an excess of resources over what is necessary to maintain life, that excess will tend to gravitate to those who are more industrious, more talented, or more avaricious.¹² The economic inequality resulting from this will call "rich" and "poor" into being, "poor" being understood as referring to relative deprivation. The greater the gulf between these two classes, the greater the strain on the rule of law and sense of community. Where some men have much more than they need to sustain a decent life, while

others have much less, relations of dependence between man and man come into being. The rich come to wield tyrannical power over the poor, who are willing to sell their freedom for the price of bread.¹³ The poor come to hate the rich, the rich to despise the poor, thus destroying the sense of community upon which the rule of the general will depends. Furthermore, the rule of law is subverted not only because there are two distinct interests in the state, that of the rich and that of the poor, which cannot be reconciled in the general will, but also because both great wealth and great poverty tend to confer immunity from the law:

It is on the middle class alone that the whole force of the laws is exerted. The laws are equally powerless against the treasures of the rich and the misery of the poor. . . . The one breaks the meshes, the other passes between them.¹⁴

The wealth of the rich tends to place them above the law, while the desperation of the very poor places them outside it. Thus, according to Rousseau, one of the most important tasks of the political order is to prevent the development of extreme inequality of fortune. This is to be accomplished not by confiscating wealth, but by closing off all means by which great wealth can be accumulated, and not by providing relief for the poor, but by keeping men from becoming so.¹⁵

The introduction of luxury tends to undermine political legitimacy in more subtle ways as well. In particular, it results in the degeneration of moeurs. Men become preoccupied with making money, turning a blind eye on how it is acquired, and wealth is substituted for virtue as the standard for judging a man. The public interest is subordinated to private interest, since it is only through constant attention to the latter that great wealth can be accumulated.¹⁶ In a

word, what was a community, united by common concerns, becomes so many individuals pursuing their own individual interests, often at the expense of their fellows. Furthermore, history shows that the introduction of luxury into a society leads to the loss of political freedom, to either the rise of a tyrant or to conquest by foreigners, and often to both.¹⁷ The former is promoted by the abandonment of the public realm by most men, the better to pursue private interests; the latter by the loss of those warlike qualities which are the best deterrent to foreign aggression, and which are incompatible with a life of ease and luxury.¹⁸

Luxury is fatal to political freedom and, if the above three passages have been interpreted correctly, luxury has already been admitted into Geneva. This, then, may explain Rousseau's aversion to a public discussion of Geneva. It is already too late for the Republic; once it has taken hold, luxury cannot be rooted out; the most one can hope to achieve is to slow its inevitable progress, and this task is not best advanced by calling attention to the fact that Geneva has already been partially corrupted. Thus, when he is forced to speak about Geneva, Rousseau attempts to disguise or obscure the truth. It is much better to treat the city as if it were still virtuous, instead of rubbing its collective nose in the truth; in the interest of preventing the introduction of new luxuries and of new corrupting influences, such as the theater, it is much more fruitful to appeal to ancient customs and prejudices, rather than to acknowledge that these customs are honored in the breach more often than not.

As we have noted, however, if the problems faced by Geneva and the solution advanced by Rousseau are to serve as a lesson for other

philosophers and/or censors, the truth concerning Geneva's deficiencies cannot be completely suppressed. We can thus expect Rousseau's discussion of Geneva to operate on two levels, corresponding to his two distinct audiences. On a surface level, he will praise the city and attempt to rally its inhabitants against the theater. At the same time, and on a less accessible level, he will provide hints as to the true status of Genevan moeurs and to the ways in which a censor might go about limiting or temporarily arresting their further decline. To see how this multi-level teaching is conveyed in practice, it is necessary to consider closely Rousseau's treatment of Geneva in the last third or so of the Letter, that portion of the Letter in which Rousseau seemingly overcomes his self-styled "repugnance" and speaks of Geneva at some length.

Rousseau's earlier references to Geneva pointed to the existence of luxury as lying at the foundation of the city's problems. In keeping with this, he begins his discussion of Geneva with an inquiry into the wealth of the city and the way in which that wealth is distributed:

Geneva is rich, it is true; but, although one does not see there those enormous disproportions of fortune, which impoverish a whole country in order to enrich a few inhabitants and sow misery around opulence, it is certain that, if some Genevans possess great wealth, many live in sufficiently harsh poverty, and that the comfortable circumstances of the greatest number come from assiduous labor, from economy, and from moderation, rather than positive wealth.¹⁹

Rousseau's point is somewhat obscure, perhaps intentionally so. He denies that Geneva is characterized by enormous disproportions in wealth; yet, he admits that some Genevans possess "great wealth," while others live in "sufficiently harsh poverty." There is an implicit

contradiction here, but one which will largely pass unnoticed because "the greatest number" enjoy "comfortable circumstances;" the opulence of the rich and the misery of the poor are lost to sight in the midst of the comfortable circumstances of the mass of middle-class Genevans. This does not mean, however, that this opulence and misery do not exist, nor does it mean that the existence of such does not constitute a problem. At the very least, the unity of the state has been destroyed. Rather than a community, Geneva consists of three distinct classes: the rich, the poor, and those who occupy an intermediate position between these two extremes.

Rousseau, however, chooses to ignore the divisions within Geneva, and to treat the city as homogeneous. He can do so because the largest class, the bourgeoisie, is still imbued with an approximation of civic virtue, as the Letters Written from the Mountain indicate:

That order, comprised of men approximately equal in fortune, in estate, in intelligence, is neither so elevated as to have pretensions, nor so low as to have nothing to lose. Their great interest, their common interest, is that the laws be observed, the magistrates respected, the constitution upheld, and the state tranquil. . . . It is the healthiest part of the Republic, the only part that one can be assured cannot, in its conduct, aim at any other object than the good of all. Also, one always sees in their common conduct a decency, a modesty, a respectful firmness, that peculiar gravity of men who feel themselves to be in the right and who do their duty. You see, on the contrary, of what the other party consists: men immersed in opulence and the most abject of the people. Is it in these two extremes, the one made to sell itself and the other ready to buy, that we should seek love of justice and of the laws? It is always through them that the state declines. The rich man keeps the law in his purse, and the poor man loves bread more than liberty.²⁰

For the present at least, the bourgeoisie, the middle-class, dominates Genevan politics, and it is to this class that Rousseau must address himself.

It is important to note that Rousseau is not seeking to institute or preserve a perfected political order. The Genevan middle-class, as we shall see, lacks true civic virtue; the burgesses do not place the welfare of the community above their own personal interests. Thus, since the bourgeoisie is the state, in the sense that this class dominates political life, the state itself is defective. Rousseau is concerned with preserving those elements of the present regime which are salutary and, in this respect, his purposes and the interests of the bourgeoisie coincide: both desire that the laws be observed, the magistrates respected, the constitution upheld, and the state tranquil.²¹ Furthermore, the realization of Rousseau's purposes depends upon the continued existence of the bourgeoisie as a moderating force in public life. The middle-class constitutes the bulwark of the Republic as it is, and for this reason Rousseau chooses to concern himself exclusively with them. Rousseau's discussion of Geneva must thus be understood as encompassing only bourgeois Geneva. In contrast to his usual practice in speaking of republics, in the Letter Rousseau devotes little attention to the city's magistrates, who were generally drawn from the more well-to-do segments of the population.²²

Bourgeois Geneva is founded on commerce and industry, and the livelihood of its people depends upon hard work, economy, and moderation. This is necessarily so because Geneva lacks agricultural lands:

There are many cities much poorer than ours where the burgess can give much more to his pleasures because the land which feeds him is never exhausted and, since his time is of no value, he can waste it without loss. It is not so with us, who, without lands to subsist by, have only our industry. The people of Geneva supports itself only by dint of labor, and has necessities only insofar as it denies itself all superfluities. This is one of the reasons for our sumptuary laws.²³

Several points should be made concerning the preceding passage. In the first place, Rousseau overstates the case for the Genevan bourgeoisie's dependence on labor by arguing that their dependence in this respect distinguishes them from those who follow like occupations elsewhere. This is not strictly true. The merchant or artisan of Paris, or of any other city, no more lives off the land than do his Genevan counterparts; he is no more an agriculturalist than they; he too must buy and sell or fabricate in order to eat. It is not the people of Geneva who are singular in this respect, but the country as a whole. If the merchants and artisans of Paris were to work less diligently or spend their money on luxuries, they might become impoverished or even starve, but the French state would continue to exist as before, as would the vast majority of the French people; and the same is true of most, if not all, modern states. Geneva is unique in the sense that it must import all of its food in order to survive. Unlike Neufchatel, it is absolutely dependent on foreign exchange; and, if its merchants became less active or its artisans less productive, the state would collapse.

Geneva is the very opposite of a self-sufficient state, and this points to a fundamental problem. In the Social Contract, Rousseau indicates that a state with insufficient agricultural land to feed its inhabitants has only two alternative courses of action if it is to survive: commerce and war. In any case, such a state is intrinsically weak: "It depends on its neighbors; it depends on events; it never has anything other than an uncertain and brief existence. It conquers and changes its situation or is conquered and is nothing."²⁴ Geneva is too weak to engage in conquest; hence, its independence is precarious.²⁵ Even more than this, because it must engage in trade in order to survive,

it is continually subject to disturbing external influences. Geneva imports not only food, but new ideas and practices as well, ideas and practices which, in the nature of things, have a disturbing effect on existing moeurs. This cannot be avoided; either foreign traders must be allowed in or Genevan merchants must go abroad, and probably both. In either event, the Republic is exposed to foreign influences, such influences as led to the movement to establish a theater. The problem posed by the theater is thus not an isolated case; it simply serves to dramatize the essentially precarious nature of Geneva's situation and way of life.²⁶

Another observation is also in order. Rousseau's reference to the necessity of the Genevans denying themselves "every superfluity," because of their lack of self-sufficiency, is not accurate, or at least does not accurately reflect Genevan practices. Rousseau cites this as one of the reasons for Geneva's sumptuary laws, and such laws were in effect, but in the Letter they are implicitly shown to be ineffective. The Genevans smoke and drink;²⁷ many of them own "country retreats;"²⁸ there is an "odor of the orient and spices" about the city;²⁹ the people spend a good part of their day at such idle and unproductive amusements as cardplaying.³⁰ All these are "superfluities," and point to the existence of luxury, even in the day-to-day activities of the middle-class Genevans, for it is their pastimes that Rousseau is describing. Although the Genevans may not always be at their labors, however, it is their industriousness which has made such amusements as those described possible: "all the watch-making in Europe seems centered there; its calico and linen mills rival those of Zurich;" "one thinks he is at a seaport;" "the city appears, as it were, multiplied

by its labors."³¹ The Genevans' commercial success allows them to import luxuries, and to while away much of their time in idle amusements.

Genevan moeurs contain the seeds of their own destruction. Hard work, industriousness, economy, and moderation have paid off, but in such a way as to make these traits no longer necessary. The same reasoning is applicable to the Republic as a whole. Geneva depends upon trade and industry for its survival, but the success which its people have met with makes its survival as a republic problematic: the old bourgeois values, which are the ultimate support of the Genevan constitution, are disappearing precisely because they were so pronounced to begin with. The problem which Rousseau faces as a "citizen of Geneva," as someone intensely interested in the Republic's preservation, is thus to slow down the self-liquidation of the old virtues. Any solution, however, must necessarily be temporary: it is wealth which is corrupting Geneva and which is destroying its peculiar moeurs, but it is those same moeurs which called that wealth into being in the first place. Republican Geneva is doomed by reason of a kind of paradox: those virtues which the Republic is based upon are also its destroyers. Thus, Rousseau is speaking with considerable irony when he says: ". . . its use of time, its vigilance, its austere parsimony, are the treasures of Geneva. This is with what we await an amusement of idle people which, in depriving us simultaneously of time and money, will truly double our loss."³²

The traditional bourgeois character of Geneva may be changing, and for the worse, but this does not stop Rousseau from appealing to those prejudices and virtues which are characteristic of the bourgeoisie as a class, and which are still ingrained in the people. At the same

time as he is appealing to these prejudices and virtues in an effort to mobilize public opinion, however, he is also engaged in criticizing them. The passage quoted at the end of the preceding paragraph is a case in point. There, Rousseau accuses the theater of depriving the people who attend of both time and money, and so doubling their loss. He is appealing to the bourgeois tendency to think predominantly in economic terms, in terms of profit and loss. At the same time, the reader is led to recall the passage early in the Letter where Rousseau spoke of every useless amusement as being "an evil for a being whose life is so short and whose time is so precious," but there the theater was characterized as useless and an evil because time spent there could have been better employed by the individual in fulfilling the duties of father, son, husband, neighbor, and citizen.³³ Rousseau omits this argument when speaking to the Genevans. It is the loss of money associated with idle amusements, not an appeal to duty, which will move them, and this is the core of Rousseau's criticism of the Genevans and the bourgeois virtues in general: for bourgeois man, duty, particularly civic duty, is subordinated to economic self-interest. Even the bourgeoisie's support of the Republic is derived from motives of economic self-interest: "their greatest interest, their common interest, is that the laws be observed, the magistrates respected, the constitution upheld, and the state tranquil," but these are simply the conditions necessary if business is to flourish.³⁴ In this connection, it is useful to note that, while Rousseau ironically asks whether one can expect "love of justice and of the laws" from the very poor and the very rich, he nowhere states that these qualities are to be found in the Genevan middle-class.

Rousseau continues in a cost-accounting vein for some time, purporting to prove that, as a business enterprise, a theater will inevitably fail in Geneva. In general, his argument falls under two main headings: Geneva is intrinsically too small to support a resident theater; and, even if its size were sufficient in the abstract, too few Genevans would attend to keep a theater solvent. The first point requires little elaboration. According to Rousseau, cities much larger than Geneva have proven unable, or only barely able, to support a resident theater, while Paris, with approximately twenty-five times the population of Geneva, can only support four. Thus, he concludes, it is unreasonable to expect Geneva to support even one permanent theater. It is in connection with this argument that the business orientation which Rousseau has assumed becomes obtrusive: he deals with such questions as the price of tickets, the probable number of paying customers, the cost of costuming, the cost of board for the actors, the effect of a small company of actors, as opposed to a large company, on receipts, and so on.³⁵

The second part of Rousseau's business oriented analysis is directed toward the question of the theater's ability to attract an audience in Geneva. For a variety of reasons, he concludes that the people of Geneva will be generally unwilling to attend the theater. The arguments Rousseau marshalls to support this contention, however, transcend the context in which they appear. These arguments are not important only because they serve to establish that a Genevan theater is not economically feasible, but also because they reveal Geneva's lack of true civic virtue.

Rousseau's argument concerning the potential audience available to a Genevan theater begins in a seemingly innocuous manner:

The Genevans are exceedingly fond of the country; one can judge this by the number of homes scattered round about the city. The attraction of the hunt and the beauty of the surroundings supports this salutary taste. Since the gates, closed before nightfall, deprive one of the liberty of strolling outdoors, and since the country homes are so near, very few of those people in comfortable circumstances sleep in town during the summer. Each, having spent the day at his business, leaves at the evening closing of the gates, and goes to his little retreat to breathe in the purest air and to enjoy the most charming countryside under the sky. There are even many citizens and burgesses who reside there year around, and have no dwelling in Geneva. All of this is so much lost to the theater; and, during the whole season of good weather, almost all that will remain to support it will be people who never go.³⁶

This argument seems straightforward enough. The Genevans prefer the country to the city, especially in summer, and this results in a large subtraction from the theater's potential audience. At another level, however, the Genevans' attachment to the city, or at least that of those "in comfortable circumstances," is called into question. Very few of these people sleep in town during the summer; "There are even many citizens and burgesses who reside [in the country] the year around, and have no dwelling in Geneva." Shuttling between their "business" and their "retreats," they have no time for civic affairs. Indeed, for them, the city is only a place where they make a living, where they buy and sell, a place where necessity forces them to go for a certain period every workday. One suspects that these people would, if it were possible, prefer to remain permanently outside the city. In this connection, the closing of the city's gates at nightfall is laden with symbolic meaning. Not only are those individuals with homes in the country nightly shut out of the city in a physical sense, but in a moral sense as well. They are bound to the city only by the need to make a living there; they have cut themselves off from the life of the community by choosing to live

outside its walls. They seem, in other words, to lack those ties of affection which bind the individual irrevocably to the community and which serve to inculcate that love of country upon which civic virtue ultimately depends.

The general lack of patriotic feeling is reflected in Geneva's defenses and military establishment. Geneva is a "fortress," and "nothing is easier than to assemble troops in its vicinity."³⁷ Furthermore, Geneva has already "learned too well the use which can be made of this" ease of assembly, that is, Geneva has often been subject to attack. Despite Rousseau's disclaimer that "no one would come to besiege us," Geneva is in a vulnerable position, and its wealth and commercial position make it a tempting prize. The people who live outside the city are thus exposed to foreign attack. That they are willing to accept this reveals a good deal regarding their attitude toward the city: Geneva does not have enough troops as it is to defend the city, and those citizens outside the walls will be worse than useless in its defense, since they are self-selected hostages to any aggressor. Such individuals can be, at best, only fair weather citizens, since they have voluntarily rendered themselves incapable of aiding the state at its time of greatest peril, foreign attack. This uncaring attitude toward the city's defense is general, and not just limited to those Genevans who own homes outside the city. Mercenaries are employed to guard the city, but, Rousseau tells us elsewhere,³⁸ the use of mercenaries is indicative of a people's lack of concern for the community and is associated with the time of a people's decline; it reveals that they no longer care enough for the community to be willing to defend it with

their lives, but would rather run the risk of employing foreign, hence unreliable, troops.

Geneva is thus shown to be deficient in military virtue. Its people are by nature tradesmen and not soldiers; they prefer to purchase guardians for their city, rather than to perform the task themselves. The maintenance of civic virtue and of republican government, however, are dependent upon the presence of military virtue, according to Rousseau. Military training fosters patriotism. One who is willing to die for his country in time of war will hold that country very dear, but the converse holds as well: one who holds his country dear will be willing to die for it in time of war. Furthermore, a warlike citizenry, one possessing the military virtues of strength, fortitude, courage, and loyalty, is indispensable to a republic, in that such a citizenry renders it relatively immune to both foreign conquest and to that internal tyranny which characterizes all other forms of government.³⁹ Thus, we are not surprised to hear in the Government of Poland that the Genevan bourgeoisie's lack of military virtue and warlike spirit played into the hands of, and was to a certain extent caused by, certain of the city's magistrates, who were bent on subverting the Republic and acquiring absolute power for themselves.⁴⁰

Our conclusions concerning the civic virtue, or lack thereof, of those Genevans who reside outside the city can be arrived at in another way. As we have seen, that such individuals would be extremely unlikely to attend the theater in summer led Rousseau to conclude that the potential audience for the theater during that season would consist largely of those who "would never go." This implies that there is a good deal of overlap between those individuals who do not own a country

home and those who would under no circumstances attend the theater. It is the summer season which Rousseau sees as posing extreme problems for the theater, and it is only during that season that most of the Genevans who own country homes actually live outside the city and so find it inconvenient to attend evening performances. The remainder of the year is not spoken of; hence, we can tentatively conclude that many of those individuals who would not attend the theater in summer, those with country homes, would do so during the rest of the year. The extensive overlap between those citizens who would never attend the theater and those who reside permanently in Geneva might be, in part, a consequence of purely economic factors--those who are too poor to pay for theater tickets are also too poor to own a home in the country--but only partially so, since there is a considerable difference between the price of a ticket and that of a home and piece of land. Rousseau himself suggests that some Genevans will not attend the theater, if one is established, "because the good of their country is dearer to them than their amusement,"⁴¹ that is to say, because they are good citizens. Furthermore, this same group looks upon the theater as a monument of "luxury and softness . . . raised up on the ruins of ancient simplicity." Such men might attend the theater when in Paris, but they would never do so in Geneva, precisely because it is Geneva, because it is their country and not some corrupt foreign capital whose "luxury and softness" is a matter of indifference to them. But is not a country home also emblematic of luxury? It is something that a man or a citizen can do without quite easily. Indeed, the ownership of a house in the country may also be a departure from the "ancient simplicity" and traditional moeurs of Geneva.⁴² If this is true, then those citizens who condemn

the theater in the name of the common good and of traditional Geneva will also be among those who do not reside in the country, because in both instances they place the needs and traditions of the community above their personal comfort and amusement. This argument would not be undermined even if all those individuals who could afford to own country homes actually did so. For Rousseau, wealth, and especially wealth devoted to luxury, corrupts. Thus, those Genevans who are less wealthy are also, all other things being equal, apt to be better citizens and, because of this, would be unlikely to attend the theater.

Rousseau's discussion of the potential audience for an established theater in Geneva is extremely ambivalent. On the surface, he seems to be arguing that the people of Geneva are, for the most part, too virtuous to attend:

. . . it is impossible that an establishment so contrary to our ancient maxims should be generally applauded. How many generous citizens will look with indignation on this monument of luxury and softness being raised up on the ruins of our ancient simplicity and menacing from afar the public liberty? Do you think that they are going to authorize this innovation with their presence after having openly disapproved of it? Be sure that a number, who go to the theater without scruple in Paris, will never set foot in it in Geneva because the good of their country is dearer to them than their amusement. Where is the imprudent mother who will desire to take her daughter to this dangerous school? And how many respectable women will think they are dishonoring themselves in going there? If, in Paris, some people abstain from going to the theater, it is solely from religious principle, and this will scarcely be less strong among us; and, what is more, we will have motives of moeurs, of virtue, and of patriotism, which will restrain those whom religion does not.⁴³

This argument is not as strong as it seems. In the first place, if what Rousseau says above is true, then the Letter is no more than a polemical exercise, writing for the sake of writing; such a people as he describes would never even consider introducing a theater into their city. The problem of the theater is obviously a very real one for Geneva, however;

hence, we can conclude that some Genevans, even a large number, are not dominated by "motives of moeurs, of virtue, and of patriotism," or by "religious principles." Furthermore, we have seen that the lack of success which Rousseau predicts for the theater during the summer months depends upon the absence from Geneva at night of a particular class of citizens, a class whose civic virtue is problematic, to say the least.

Thus, if we begin from either the fact that there is a movement to establish a theater in Geneva or from the fact that the success of the theater depends upon the presence or absence of a certain class of citizens in Geneva at night, we are led to the conclusion that Geneva is significantly lacking in civic virtue. That Rousseau chooses to appeal primarily to the Genevan's business sense, rather than to their love of country, in arguing against the establishment of a theater adds additional support to this conclusion.

Still more support for the foregoing proposition is provided by Rousseau in the culmination of his economic argument against the theater. Having shown that a theater is incapable of surviving in Geneva as a private enterprise, he turns to the question of public or semi-public financing:

One of two things is therefore necessary: either the rich subscribe to support it, an onerous burden which they will assuredly not be of a mind to bear for long; or the state steps in and supports the theater at its own expense.⁴⁴

The former possibility Rousseau dismisses immediately; the rich will simply not stand for it. The second also involves certain difficulties:

But how will the state support a theater? Will it be by diminishing necessary expenses, for which its modest revenue barely suffices, and, if so, how will this be provided
 * for? Or, for this important use, will it assign the sums which economy and integrity of administration sometimes

permit to be placed in reserve for the most pressing needs? Will it be necessary to discharge our little garrison and guard the state ourselves? Must we reduce the miniscule honoraria of our magistrates, or shall we deprive ourselves for this of every resource against the least unforeseen accident?⁴⁵

The above passages suggest several interesting points. In the first place, Rousseau continues to confine himself to a cost-benefit argument, and one in which all costs, at least, are couched in purely economic terms. In one sense, this approach is eminently practical: if the theater cannot be financed in some way, then there is no point in worrying about its establishment. In another sense, however, it reveals certain important facts about Rousseau's Genevan audience: economic considerations are of primary importance for them; the welfare of the state and preservation of good moeurs are only of secondary importance, if that. This is underlined by Rousseau's reference to discharging Geneva's garrison of mercenaries; even national defense is subordinated to economic considerations. What is most significant, however, is that Rousseau seems to consider the question of financing the theater out of existing revenues settled, when he asks if the Genevans would rather have a theater or discharge their mercenaries and guard the city's gates themselves. Time is money in Geneva, as we have seen, and the Genevans would rather place their fate in the hands of a small number of foreign mercenaries than lose time to military service.

It is also important to note the implication that, while the existing resources of the state are too slender to support a theater, the richer elements of the population could manage this quite well, although they are unwilling to do so. Furthermore, it is implied that, if the state decides that the establishment of a theater would be in

the public interest, financing would have to come directly from public coffers. This immediately brings to mind the contrasting practice of ancient Athens, where the rich regarded it as an honor to subsidize the drama, and were expected to do so. Even in "corrupt" Athens, the rich were more public spirited than in Geneva, in that their wealth was at the disposal of the state.⁴⁶

The portrait of the Genevans which emerges from the Letter is far from flattering. Preoccupied with private affairs, obsessed with money, unwilling to sacrifice either time, wealth, or comfort to the needs of the community, the richer elements appear decidedly lacking in civic virtue. But it is not just the very wealthy at whom Rousseau levels such charges. A significant proportion of the Genevans, for example, must own country homes; the size of the theater's potential audience is, after all, decisively influenced by the fact that those who own such property are not likely to attend the theater, and this bespeaks a large nightly migration to the country during the summer. Furthermore, the miniscule revenues enjoyed by the state are a consequence of decisions reached by a majority of the citizens, in whose hands the taxing power is lodged. As d'Alembert noted in his article on Geneva, "Although the city is rich, the state is poor because of the repugnance the people manifest for new taxes, even the least onerous ones."⁴⁷ Rousseau indicates his tacit agreement with this conclusion in several places in the section of the Letter under consideration, but most openly when he states simply that the possibility of supporting a theater through new taxation can be judged in terms of what d'Alembert has to say on the subject.⁴⁸ "Geneva is rich it is true," as both d'Alembert and Rousseau agree, but the state is poor, while the wealth which is in

the hands of the citizenry is used almost exclusively for private purposes. The only "extravagant" public expenditures at Geneva, the only expenditures above the bare minimum, are those for the mercenaries who guard the city, and this simply reflects the Genevans' lack of civic virtue. At the same time, these expenditures are typically those of the bourgeoisie, who see time as money and who regard time spent on military service as so much money lost.

Since it is the bourgeoisie which dominates Genevan politics, we can conclude that it is the bourgeoisie as a class which is lacking in civic virtue and a sense of civic responsibility. It is not just the very wealthy who begrudge the state both time and money; it is not just these few who refuse to guard the city's gates themselves and who cut themselves off from public affairs by shuttling back and forth between home and business, but the citizen body as a whole, or at least the bourgeoisie, who constitute the predominant element.

After having dealt with the question of the theater as a business proposition, Rousseau turns to that problem which, while it constitutes the dominant theme of the Letter, is treated as secondary with reference to Geneva. Even if it were possible to solve the economic problems associated with establishing a theater at Geneva, Rousseau tells us, even if actors were introduced who could be controlled by the laws, the fact remains that "The first noticeable effect of this establishment will be . . . a revolution in our practices, which will necessarily produce one in our moeurs."⁴⁹ The question thus becomes one of determining whether this revolution will be beneficial or harmful, and, he goes on to say, "It is time to examine this." This statement implies that the question of the effect of the theater on Genevan practices and moeurs

could not be appropriately dealt with earlier in the Letter, and this serves to reinforce our belief that Rousseau considered the economic problems associated with the theater to have priority over its moral effects. Rousseau himself, however, was not one to subordinate morals to economics: early in the Letter, for example, in discussing the general problem of the theater, he pays no attention whatsoever to the question of the theater as an ongoing business, except to note that this imposes certain constraints on what an author can write; he was concerned solely with the general effect of the theater on moeurs. When dealing with Geneva, then, his postponing discussion of the moral effects of the theater until after having dealt with the theater as a business would seem to be an artifact of the specific nature of his subject matter and of the audience which he is addressing. In appealing to the Genevans not to establish a theater, Rousseau must, although he himself is primarily interested in the effect of the theater on moeurs, focus his argument on questions of economics; economic self-interest, money, is more important to the Genevans than good moeurs.

Rousseau chooses to center his inquiry into the impact of the theater on Genevan moeurs on the question of the effect of an established theater on the private clubs known as "circles." This choice is somewhat strange, as we shall see, and in this strangeness there is considerable significance.

Rousseau begins his discussion with the observation that, "There is no well-constituted state in which one cannot find practices which are linked to the form of government and help to maintain it."⁵⁰ As regards Geneva, he indicates that one such practice or institution can be found in the circles. This institution has long existed in Geneva;

thus, it forms a part of those ancient moeurs which Rousseau is defending. In recent years, the institution has changed somewhat: its name has been changed from "society" to "circle;" the various clubs no longer meet in taverns and are, in general, more "decent" associations than hitherto. This change, moreover, was politically motivated:

Our civil discords, during which the necessity of affairs obliged us to meet more often and to deliberate calmly, changed these tumultuous societies into more decent assemblies. These meetings took the name of "circles" and, from an extremely sad cause, issued very good effects.⁵¹

Rousseau seems to be praising the circles: the "societies" were transformed into "circles" in order to quiet "civil discord;" the societies were "tumultuous," while the circles are "decent." This, however, is deceptive. The "discord" which led to the disbanding of the societies, and so to the formation of the circles, was a popular protest against the increasingly oligarchical tone of the Genevan magistrates.⁵² The societies were hot beds of republicanism; they were tumultuous, in part, because they were political clubs. The circles, on the other hand, are "decent" precisely because they are apolitical. What Rousseau is actually describing when he speaks of the transformation of the societies into circles is the depolitization of the Genevan clubs, an action which resulted in the weakening of the popular cause and a strengthening of the oligarchical elements in Geneva.⁵³

Not only did the transformation of societies into circles eliminate the "club" as a vehicle for popular participation in politics, but it also led to a qualitative change in Genevan social life. Rousseau's description of the contrasting activities engaged in by the societies and by the circles points to this. The societies resulted from, and continued to focus on, activities of a more or less public nature:

The exercise of arms which brings us together every spring, the various prizes that are awarded during a part of the year, the military festivals that these prizes occasion, the taste for the hunt common to all Genevans, bringing the men frequently together, gave them occasion to form among themselves dining societies, country outings, and finally ties of friendship.⁵⁴

In the circles, on the other hand, ". . . each commits himself to the amusements of his taste: they gamble, chat, read, drink, and smoke. Sometimes they eat together, but only rarely, because the Genevan is regular in his habits and likes to dine with his family."⁵⁵ The contrast is striking. The societies had their origin in civic activities, especially those of a military nature; they brought the citizens together and forged bonds between them. The circles are a place where each amuses himself according to his individual taste; if men come together there, it is only briefly, and not for any civic purpose.

The public nature of the societies, as opposed to the essentially private nature of the circles, is manifest in their respective places of meeting: the former met in public taverns, the latter in rented, private quarters. Furthermore, the circles emerge as bastions of that very idleness which Rousseau earlier condemned as alien to Geneva; they are places where men "gamble, chat, read, drink, and smoke." Thus, Rousseau's praise of the circles for providing exercise "fit to form and maintain a robust body" is certainly ironic. True, the members of the circles sometimes go walking together, but this contrasts unfavorably with the "military exercises" and "country outings" of the societies. It may even be that the Genevans' deficiency in military virtue and warlike qualities can be, in part, attributed to the transformation of the societies into circles. This may have been, in fact,

the reason for the depolitization of the clubs; the military spirit which they fostered provided a check on the would-be oligarchs of Geneva.⁵⁶

If nothing else, Rousseau's description of the circles subverts his earlier praise of Geneva for "its use of time, its vigilance, and its austere parsimony." The Genevans emerge as idlers, as overly fond of gambling, and with a taste for such luxuries as tobacco and alcohol. Far from serving as "vigilant" guardians of liberty, the participation of the circles in public affairs is not even mentioned; rather, their members are described as shutting themselves up in little club rooms, and leaving only to go home to their families. Moreover, the Genevan women are not devoted to their husbands in the way in which, according to Rousseau's earlier argument, women should be. The male circles have their female counterparts:

The women and girls, for their part, meet together, sometimes at the home of one, sometimes at that of another. The object of these gatherings is a little social card-playing, refreshment, and, as might be expected, inexhaustible gossiping.⁵⁷

Like their men, the women of Geneva emerge as less than paragons of virtue. They too appear addicted to cards; they too neglect their special duties, although these duties are private, rather than public, in nature.

The defective character of Genevan moeurs appears, however, only when Rousseau's remarks concerning the Genevans are viewed from the perspective of his other works and with earlier portions of the Letter firmly in mind. On the surface, his description of Genevan life is a paean to the city, but irony lurks beneath this surface praise: "Such are the daily amusements of the Genevan bourgeoisie. Not devoid of pleasure and gaiety, these amusements have something simple and innocent

about them which suits republican moeurs."⁵⁸ If not completely corrupt, there is nothing "simple and innocent" about the Genevans' amusements, except perhaps in contrast to those of wealthy Parisians. Neither do they appear compatible with Rousseau's idea of the moeurs appropriate to republics.⁵⁹

We have already indicated, in a general way, why Rousseau whitewashes Geneva, but his treatment of the circles sheds further light on this question. As we have seen, the contrast which is established between the societies and the circles points to the inferiority of the latter. This implicit teaching, however, is coupled with explicit praise of the circles: they are said to suit republican moeurs; they are "good effects" resulting from a "very sad cause;" the amusements associated with them are "fit to form and maintain a robust body." True, there is considerable irony in this praise, but the praise itself is nonetheless there, and will be taken at face value by many readers. Both the praise and the irony are intentional. Our problem is to determine the reasons for each.

As far as Rousseau's treatment of the circles is concerned, what is decisive is that the theater threatens to supplant them: "But the instant there is a drama, goodbye to the circles . . ." Furthermore, he tells us, this is the "revolution" which he spoke of earlier, the revolution in Genevan moeurs which the Letter was written to forestall. This strikes one as both anticlimactic and incongruous. What the Letter has led up to after such lengthy preliminaries, the threat to Geneva which forced Rousseau to speak out in the first place, is the possibility that the establishment of a theater in Geneva might cause the extinction of certain male clubs devoted to such amusements as drinking

and gambling, and to the decline of certain female gatherings devoted to cardplaying and gossiping. That a major philosopher would devote a lengthy work to combatting such an eventuality appears absurd. The demise of the circles hardly seems worthy of being designated a "revolution." Surely Rousseau's opposition to the theater must be based on its potential for effecting a much more significant change in Genevan life.

Rousseau's defense of the circles is a serious one, however. He has already described the circles as "practices . . . linked to the form of government [of Geneva] and which help to preserve it." Moreover, a true philosopher cannot view the circles with indifference. Above all, he would not question the worth of the circles: ". . . that question will not come from a philosopher."⁶⁰ The preceding statement is addressed to d'Alembert, and recalls his earlier chastisement by Rousseau for openly imputing Socinian tendencies to the Genevan clergy. D'Alembert is being cautioned once again that certain things are better left unsaid, better kept from the people, and is being told that, if he were really a philosopher, he would know this without being told. In particular, he is being warned against attacking the circles or calling their value into question. Rousseau thus implies that, while it may be possible to discredit the circles, a philosopher would consider this to be undesirable. Moreover, he implies that he himself will be less than open on this issue:

. . . for, this time, although I address myself to you [i.e., to d'Alembert], I write for the people, and doubtless it is apparent that I do so, but you have forced me to it.⁶¹

What Rousseau would say to d'Alembert, whom he has addressed as a

"philosopher," however ironic this term of address may be, is thus distinguishable from what he is going to say to the people; and this implies that his discussion of the circles will be devoted to the presentation of a practical truth, something which it is useful for the people to believe, rather than to the presentation of the truth as such. In slightly plainer language, Rousseau, as a philosopher, considers the circles important enough that he is willing to shade the truth to protect them.

The imperfect nature of Rousseau's defense of the circles is immediately apparent, in that his starting point is a position which our inquiry has already revealed to be defective: that men and women are by nature so different that they ought to lead radically different lives.⁶² Previously, Rousseau raised this issue in connection with his defense of the feminine virtues.⁶³ Now, however, he raises it in connection with what could be termed the masculine virtues. The proposition which he wishes to convince his readers of is that "the two sexes ought to come together sometimes and live separately ordinarily."⁶⁴ This proposition, we are told, is supported by both "the indications of nature" and "the good of society." As we have seen, however, nature does not really provide such support, but is cited by Rousseau in order to increase the persuasiveness of his argument. Once this is recognized, the problem becomes one of determining whether the good of society requires that men and women live separately.

Rousseau begins his argument in support of the contention that the good of society requires that men and women live separately with a statement to the effect that excessive contact with women renders men not only less virtuous, but less hardy as well:

[Men] are affected as much, and more, than women by a too intimate commerce. They lose only their moeurs, while we lose both our moeurs and our constitution; for this weaker sex, unable to adopt our way of life, which is too hard for them, forces us to adopt theirs, which is too soft for us. No longer willing to tolerate separation, incapable of making themselves men, the women form us into women.⁶⁵

On the surface, this argument would seem to be one "from the nature of things," but this is not really the case. Women can take on the physical hardness of men.⁶⁶ It is just that the requirements of society make this undesirable. Certainly the life of women in society does render them less strong than would otherwise be the case.⁶⁷ Their duties as regards the family confine them to the home; hence, they have little opportunity to engage in strenuous exercise. In the above passage, Rousseau is simply stating the obvious: because women in society generally lead a sedentary life, those men who are always in the company of women are also forced to lead such a life; it is easier for a man, even an active man, to sit or stand still, than it is for a woman to overcome a lifetime of lack of exercise. Rousseau seems to argue that this type of association between men and women is unnatural. It may be so, but not in the sense that Rousseau implies. He argues that it imposes unnatural constraints on the man only, but the fact of the matter is that neither women nor men lead a sedentary life by nature. It is simply that the division of labor in society tends to assign the more physical and strenuous pursuits to men. Thus, too close an association with women could very well render men more sedentary, less strong, and less hardy than would be the case if they kept to strictly masculine society. A more important question, however, and one which lies at the core of Rousseau's argument, is whether association

with women renders men less fit to perform the duties which society assigns them.

The problems resulting from men leading lives more appropriate to women are "very important everywhere," according to Rousseau, but he immediately qualifies this statement. Such problems are especially important "in states like ours," that is to say, in republics. At the same time, the further removed a society is from a republican form of government, the more irrelevant such problems become until, at the furthest remove, they become completely unimportant:

That a monarch governs men or women ought to be relatively indifferent to him, provided that he is obeyed; but, in a republic, men are needed.⁶⁸

In a monarchy, the question of whether men lead a sedentary life, similar to that of women, is irrelevant; subjects need only obey, and this does not require a hardy and robust physique. Indeed, a monarch might very well prefer to rule over women and womanish men, since such subjects are unlikely to rebel. It is, however, precisely because a republic requires something more from its citizens than mere obedience that sedentary lives are inappropriate to its male citizens. A sedentary life renders men slavish and fit only to be ruled. In the first instance, they are ruled by women, as the example of french society demonstrates: "abjectly devoted to the wills of the sex we should protect and not serve, we have learned to despise it in obeying it . . . to render all sorts of homage to beauty, excepting that of the heart, which is its due."⁶⁹ It is important to notice how political Rousseau's language is here, but it is political in a special way. He speaks of "obeying," of serving, and of "rendering homage," political terms to be sure, but they are terms drawn from the political vocabulary of monarchy.

The problem seems to be that, where men lead a sedentary life due to a too intimate association with women, they lose their independence of spirit, become subservient, and so are fit only to obey. It is thus no accident that the French are slaves both to their women and to their king; men subject to the one will soon become subject to the other.

It seems that the political order mirrors, in a sense, the private realm. Where men are slavish in their private affairs, they will be so in public and social life as well. At the very least, we can conclude that monarchies tend to be strongest in those societies which are characterized by a certain kind of male-female relationship.

Republics require quite a different sort of man than do monarchies, and once again the ancients provide the model:

The ancients spent almost their whole lives in the open air, either dispatching their own business, or taking care of that of the state in the public place, or walking in the country, in the gardens, at the seaside, in the rain, in the sun, and almost always bareheaded. For all this, no women; but they were quite able to find them at need, and we see by their writings, and the samples of their conversation which remain to us, that neither intelligence, nor taste, nor even love, lost anything by this reserve.⁷⁰

Unlike the sedentary French, the ancients did not shut themselves up inside. They were always out and about, tending to both their own and the public business. The ancients lived public lives;⁷¹ they were constantly in the res publica, or "public place," from which term our own "republic" is derived. This derivation is not accidental; republics require, and are characterized by, a "public place." What is public is, in a certain sense, common to all citizens; similarly, a life lived in public is a common life, a life which is shared with one's fellow citizens. Such a sharing fosters that sense of community, of identification with others, which is a precondition for republican freedom.

Only by identifying with the community as a whole can the individual learn to subordinate his private interests to the needs of the collective body; only through identification with the community can amour propre be transformed from a disruptive force, which isolates the individual and brings him into conflict with others, into a cohesive force. It is this general identification with the community which makes a republic a moral whole, something more than a mere aggregation of self-interested individuals.

Political freedom, the end of republican government, depends upon a union of wills, upon each and every individual willing the public good.⁷² This, in turn, depends upon the existence of a sense of community, and a common life, a public way of life, is indispensable to the development of such a feeling. The ancients' way of life is thus identical with that way of life appropriate to the citizens of a republic; it is what made them citizens of Athens, of Sparta, or of Rome.

Not only did the ancients' way of life foster a sense of community and of citizenship, but it also provided the minimum conditions for judicious rule by the citizen body as a whole. It gave the individual an intimate acquaintance with the whole of his country, the city itself, the countryside, and the seashore. It kept him in constant contact with his fellow citizens and with their problems, and so provided him with that experience and knowledge of community affairs upon which wise political decisions depend. The daily life of the ancients was thus an education in citizenship; it fostered those qualities necessary for republican government, those qualities which went together to make up the ancient ideal of citizenship, the capacity to rule and be ruled in turn.

It is thus not an active life per se which Rousseau is praising when he speaks of the ancients, but an active public life. A physically active life, spent largely in isolation, is no more appropriate to the citizen of a republic than is a sedentary life. An active life is a necessary, but certainly not a sufficient, condition for republican virtue.

The preceding is true only for men, however. The needs of society require that women spend most of their time in the home, and this is ultimately why too close and frequent an association of the sexes is, according to Rousseau, undesirable. It keeps the citizen away from the "public place," from seeing and being seen, from speaking and being heard; it privatizes his life by cutting him off from the greater life of the community. Moreover, such association fosters the development of private interests, interests which are often opposed to those of the community as a whole, and thus serves to decrease the force of the general will, upon the rule of which political freedom is predicated. The ancients' seclusion of women, praised by Rousseau earlier, presents itself, at least in part, as an attempt to preserve the public realm from subversion by what is essentially private. Seen in this light, Rousseau's condemnation of a "womanish" life is contingent, in that it applies only to republics. In those states which are not republics, it is a matter of indifference, politically speaking, how men live: there is no public realm with boundaries to defend.

The ancients' way of life also produced a physical hardiness which is a useful quality in warriors. For Rousseau, however, this is only a by-product. Although he treats this quality as being useful in war, and the survival of republics, like that of all other states,

depends upon their ability to obtain victory over their enemies, this is not Rousseau's main reason for undertaking a discussion of ancient hardiness. In the first place, superior hardiness does not guarantee victory in war, although it is helpful.⁷³ In the second place, such hardiness was found in ancient times not only in free peoples, but also in those peoples which had lost their freedom, as is witnessed by Rousseau's reference to the hard skulls of the Egyptians, which resulted from their always going bareheaded. Furthermore, hardiness was found not only in the two Catos, but also in "the effeminate Otho," a hanger-on of Nero's and himself a short-lived Emperor of Rome.⁷⁴ This reflects an important difference between modern man and the ancients in general: "If one compares the strength of the men of antiquity to that of the men of today, no sort of equality is found;" "The marches of the Greek and Roman armies can no longer be conceived;" "Our painters and our sculptors complain at not finding models comparable to those of antiquity;" "Let one find today a single fighting man capable of doing as much [as the effeminate Otho]." This disproportion between ancient and modern men is all the more surprising since the ancestors of the latter, "the northern barbarians who have . . . peopled Europe with a new race, were larger and stronger than the Romans whom they vanquished and subjugated."⁷⁵ Modern man thus, all other things being equal, ought to be stronger than the Romans, since he is largely descended from these same barbarians. That he is not, however, points to one of the major problems of modernity, the fact that the vigorous way of life of the ancients has been replaced by a life of indolence and softness.⁷⁶ This problem is a universal one for modern man; no fighting man can be found capable of matching the feats of Otho, let alone those of the two

Catos.⁷⁷ Moreover, this problem does not manifest itself only, or even primarily, in warfare. The physical decrepitude of modern man is symptomatic also of a moral and political decrepitude. As we have seen, the ancients' way of life was important in the development of civic virtue and, indeed, was a precondition for republican government. This way of life, however, has been abandoned by modern man, as is witnessed by the poor showing which the modern warrior makes in comparison with those of Greece and Rome. This physical disproportion points to a political disproportion as well: just as the modern soldier is inferior to those of Greece and Rome, the modern "citizen" is inferior to those of Sparta, republican Rome, and even Athens; and a truly republican government may no longer be possible for this very reason.

In the Letter, Rousseau attributes the physical decrepitude of modern man to his leading a sedentary life, and his political decrepitude would seem to largely spring from the same source. This sedentary life is, however, only an effect or by-product of a more fundamental problem, a problem which Rousseau hints at several times in the Letter and which is openly articulated in the Social Contract. Modern man is both a poor warrior and a poor citizen because private concerns absorb all his attention; he is preoccupied with self-interest and personal comfort; he prefers not to serve his country in a civic or military capacity because this would take him away from his business and his comforts, and, besides, there is no profit in it; he prefers to pay mercenaries and to have rulers or representatives, rather than to discharge public business in conjunction with his fellows:

It is the bustle of commerce and the arts, it is the avid desire for profit, it is effeminacy and love of comfort, that commute personal service into money. Men give up a

part of their profit in order to increase their ease. . . .
 In a truly free state, the citizens do everything with
 their own hands, and nothing by means of money. Far from
 paying in order to be exempted from their duties, they
 would pay to discharge them themselves.⁷⁸

Modern man has thus abandoned the public realm and, with it, his liberty. This was inevitable, in part, because of the rise of the bourgeoisie, but also because many modern states, and this includes Geneva, enjoy a climate which is antithetical to the maintenance of a public realm:

Among the Greeks, all that the people had to do, it did itself; they were continually assembled in the square. They lived in a mild climate, and were not avaricious; slaves did the work; their great concern was their freedom. Not having the same advantages, how can we preserve the same rights? Your harsher climate creates more needs; six months of the year the public place is not tenable; your muffled tongues cannot make themselves understood in the open air; you are more concerned with your profit than with your liberty, and you fear slavery less than poverty.⁷⁹

The above passage makes several important points. In the first place, modern man's lack of civic virtue, when compared with the ancients, is not attributable to any one cause, but is rather the result of the operation of a number of causes, some human and man-made, and some extra-human and natural. Indeed, it appears that, as far as certain states are concerned, there are insurmountable natural barriers to the modern citizen's attaining to the republican virtue of the ancients. Equally important is the fact that this teaching is presented in the Social Contract and not in the Letter.

The preceding has set the stage for Rousseau's defense of the circles and of Geneva in general. It has brought home the realization that there exists a vast gulf between the ideal republic, as exemplified by those of antiquity, and what is possible in the modern world. As far as practice is concerned, our sights must be lowered. It is not

reasonable to measure modern republics against Sparta, for example, as a guide for action. If one is to move beyond mere criticism of what is, less exalted and more practical standards must be employed. Rousseau's defense of the circles is tacitly based on precisely this point: "Our circles still preserve among us some image of ancient moeurs."⁸⁰ The civic virtue of antiquity is no longer possible in its complete and pure form, but some vestiges of it remain, and these vestiges are worthy of preservation, if only because the other alternatives are so much less attractive.

The circles are thus of only relative worth; their defects, when compared with the model of antiquity, are obvious. They foster a sedentary life; men sit around, gambling, chatting, reading, smoking and drinking. They provide private, rather than public amusements, amusements which men engage in behind closed doors. They are politically sterile, even when compared with the "societies" of Rousseau's youth. But, and this is an important but, the alternatives to the circles, particularly the theater, are a good deal more undesirable. The circles at least maintain the separation of men and women, and so hinder the development of certain of those effeminate traits which characterize the men of France. They provide for the semi-public gathering of "twelve to fifteen persons," and so prevent the complete isolation of the citizen from his fellows, and this is crucial:

The citizens of the same state, the inhabitants of the same city, are not anchorites. They cannot live always alone and separated; if they could, it would not be necessary to force them to do so. It is only the most savage despotism which is alarmed at the sight of seven or eight men together, always fearing that their conversation will turn to their miseries.⁸¹

If the circles are not amusements fit for the citizens of a republic in the strict sense, they at least serve as a check on "the most savage despotism." As long as men meet and talk together, as long as they do not subsist totally as isolated individuals, those in positions of authority will be wary about attempting to extend their power too far, out of fear that men who talk together frequently will compare grievances and unite to do something about them. The theater, on the other hand, separates men. It shuts them up in a dark room, where they neither see nor speak to each other during the course of a performance. In contrast to the circles, it does not promote even a limited intercourse among men, but rather isolates them from one another, leaving each alone and helpless before a government with despotic inclinations. In this connection, one aspect of Rousseau's earlier praise of the ancient theater is suggestive: "[the ancients] were not closed up in dark prisons;" "these great and proud entertainments [were] given under the sky and before the whole nation."⁸² Even the ancient theater escapes Rousseau's condemnation because it constituted a part of the public realm, because it brought men together, and because its performances were held "under the sky" and not in a dark room.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between two different arguments made by Rousseau in defense of the circles. On the one hand, he defends them against the threat posed by the theater. At the same time, however, he also attempts to defend them from change in general. Let us, for the moment, shift our scrutiny from the first to the second of these lines of defense. Two passages are particularly important in this regard. In the first, Rousseau argues that the circles are useful. They bring men together, and so are superior to all

forms of amusement which tend to isolate the individual. Even more than this, he argues, they are the best possible means for bringing the Genevans out of isolation:

Now, of all the kinds of relations which can bring individuals together in a city such as ours, the circles undoubtedly form the most reasonable, the most decent, and the least dangerous, because they are public and permitted, and because order and rule prevail in them.⁸³

It is important to note that the above praise of the circles is qualified from the start: it is "a city such as ours" which Rousseau is speaking of, and not cities in general; thus, the circles might not be appropriate for other peoples. Moreover, that the circles are "the most reasonable, the most decent, and the least dangerous" form of association implies that, if the circles ceased to exist, the Genevans would turn to other, less reasonable, less decent, and more dangerous forms of association. One is reminded of Rousseau's judgement concerning the French theater: it is beneficial because it occupies the time of corrupt and vicious men in an innocuous way, and so keeps them from engaging, for a time, in less desirable activities. Seen in this light, the above passage appears to call Genevan virtue into question in a fundamental way, in a way similar to that employed earlier to call the virtue of the French into question.

That Genevan virtue is defective is made even clearer in the second of the two passages crucial to Rousseau's general defense of the circles:

Let us therefore preserve the circles, even with their faults. For these faults are not in the circles, but in the men who comprise them, and there is no imaginable form of social life in which these same faults would not produce more harmful effects.⁸⁴

The character of the Genevans is fundamentally defective according to Rousseau, and the circles serve to limit the effects resulting from this. This situation is peculiar to "cities such as ours," and by this it is likely that Rousseau is referring to those states in which "some image of ancient moeurs" has been preserved, that is to say, to those states in which the people are not yet completely corrupt. There are certain peoples to whom Rousseau admits he would say, "Destroy your circles and clubs, remove all barriers of decency between the sexes, and ascend, if it is possible, to being only corrupt."⁸⁵ Geneva, however, is almost unique in that it still has something to lose, and Rousseau's counsel to them is to "avoid becoming corrupt if there is still time." The qualifying phrase, "if there is still time," is extremely important. It points to the precarious position which Geneva finds itself in, a situation so precarious that any change at all in its institutions and practices is bound to be harmful.

Rousseau's essential pessimism here stands revealed. The primary political problem, as far as modern "republics" are concerned, is not reform, but preservation, and this is true despite obvious faults or imperfections in their constitution or moeurs. Rousseau's treatment of the circles illustrates this: the choice with which the Genevans are confronted is not between an imperfect status quo and change, but between an imperfect status quo and corruption. It is for this reason that Rousseau is committed to defending the circles, which are an important part of the status quo, despite his awareness of their failings. This explains his sometimes fulsome praise of the circles as an institution for inculcating republican moeurs.⁸⁶ It explains as well why he obscures the superiority of the societies of his youth over the circles

of the present; to portray the societies as superior would be to provide others with a possible argument for reform. To preserve the circles from criticism and efforts at reform, it is necessary to portray all alternative forms of amusement as less desirable, although in the abstract they may not be, or not to mention them at all.

Rousseau's approach to the problem posed by the circles is best illustrated by his treatment of drunkenness, which is one of the major "disadvantages" associated with the circles:

The circles of the men have their disadvantages, without doubt, but what that is human does not? They gamble, they drink, they get drunk, they spend the night; all this may be true, all this may be exaggerated.⁸⁷

This is the common opinion concerning the circles and not necessarily Rousseau's own: ". . . it may be true, it may be exaggerated." Moreover, it is an opinion which must be combatted and corrected, because it places the circles under a moral cloud. Rousseau, however, does not attempt to prove that the above opinion is wrong--if the circles really are centers of drunkenness and dissipation, such a proof would be impossible, since the Genevans would have evidence to the contrary before their eyes--rather, he attempts to show that, even if this opinion is correct, one should not conclude that the circles should be abolished or that their preservation is a matter of indifference. Once again, he argues that the circles should not be measured against some abstract ideal, but should be judged in terms of their relative worth to Geneva:

There is everywhere a mixture of good and evil, but in different measures. Everything is abused, a trivial axiom, on the basis of which one should neither reject everything nor admit everything. The rule for choosing is simple. When the good surpasses the bad, the thing should be accepted despite its disadvantages; when the bad surpasses the good, it must be rejected even with its advantages.⁸⁸

Drunkenness, and the circles in general, must be judged solely in terms of the Genevan context, in terms of their utility for Geneva.

This caution is especially directed at those who would introduce change:

Before thinking of destroying an established practice, one should have weighed well those which will be introduced in its place. Whoever can propose one which would be practicable, and from which no abuse will result, let him propose it, and then let the circles be abolished; good enough. Meanwhile, let us, if necessary, allow those men to spend the night drinking who, without that, might spend it doing worse.⁸⁹

The burden of proving that the circles should be abolished, and something else established in their stead, is thus placed on the reader. Rousseau makes this burden as heavy as possible: he insists that the new institutions be "without abuses," for example, although he has already established that the abuses associated with the circles result not from the circles as such, but from inherent defects in the Genevan character. Moreover, he denies the opponents of the circles any appeal to religion or to abstract moral codes; the question at issue is political in nature, and politics aims not at perfection, but at the possible:

I repeat, it would be better to be sober and true, not only for oneself, but also for society; for everything which is bad in morality is also bad in politics. But the preacher stops at personal evil, the magistrate sees only the public consequences; the one has as his object only human perfection, to which man never attains; the other, only the good of the state, to the extent that it can be attained. Thus, all that can be blamed from the pulpit ought not to be punished by the laws.⁹⁰

Insofar as the law is concerned, the needs of society should take precedence over religious or moral ends; the possible should take precedence over the ideal.

The effect of this argument is to free the circles from what Giovanni Sartori has called "deontological pressure," the pressure of

the ideal on the real.⁹¹ The question becomes one of determining what is the best that can be realized in practice. Any tampering with the status quo, in the name of an unattainable perfection, will only succeed in worsening the lot of Geneva. The proponents of change are thus driven into silence; they are left with no appeal from what is.

Having established himself in a theoretically unassailable position, Rousseau is now able to make an argument which would earlier have left him open to intense criticism: that drunkenness, while it may be a vice, is sometimes also a relative virtue. Certainly, he tells us, drunkenness degrades man, "alienates his reason for a time, and, in the long run, brutalizes it." But, he continues, "this is not a crime and rarely causes such to be committed." Furthermore:

For each passing quarrel that it causes, it forms a hundred durable attachments. Generally speaking, drinkers are cordial and frank. They are almost all good, upstanding, just, faithful, brave, and decent men . . .⁹²

Except of course for their single fault, drinkers would appear to be paragons of virtue. Such praise is obviously excessive, but it does point to a kind of virtue associated with drunkenness, especially in corrupt and vicious societies. The actions and speech of someone who is intoxicated often reveal the individual's character more fully than is the case when he is sober. Drink shows men for what they are. Most especially, it reveals the evil man: ". . . be sure that whoever does evil deeds under the influence of wine is hatching evil plots when not in his cups."⁹³ Drunkenness is thus a vice which serves to reveal the presence of other vices; but, where vice is revealed for what it really is, it is much less of a threat to other men and to society in general. It is the secret vices which are really dangerous; the enemy who seems a friend is more dangerous than the enemy who declares himself. Modern

practices, urbanity, politeness, good manners, all tend to disguise men's true character and true feelings, and the consequences of the uncertainty which this engenders are extremely undesirable:

What a parade of vices must accompany this uncertainty!
No more sincere friendship; no more true esteem; no more confidence. Suspicion, offense, fear, coldness, reserve, hate, and betrayal will be constantly hidden under that uniform and false mask of politeness.⁹⁴

Drink strips away this mask. Thus an evil man or one who is ill-disposed toward others will, according to Rousseau, tend to avoid excessive drink, out of fear of revealing himself. Other men, the good and the innocent, need have no such fear. Thus,

In countries of bad moeurs, of intrigues, treasons, and adulteries, they fear a state of indiscretion, where the heart is revealed without thinking. Everywhere, the people who most abhor drunkenness are those who have the greatest interest in protecting themselves from it.⁹⁵

A people which drinks a good deal, as the Genevans do in their circles, is thus generally more virtuous, or at least less inclined to evil, than those peoples which are habitually sober. Their drunkenness proves that they have nothing to hide and forestalls them from doing so, even if they did.

Rousseau is engaged in something much more radical than a simple defense of drunkenness. In effect, he is putting drunkenness forward as a substitute for virtue. The virtuous man, such as Alceste, is always himself; he does not seek to appear as other than he is; the drunken man, on the other hand, finds it almost impossible to do so, even if the desire was there. In an important sense, then, the drunk can be thought of as an inferior version of the virtuous man; neither dissembles his true character, although the one refrains from doing so

as a matter of principle and out of choice, the other because alcohol makes him indiscrete.

In a country such as Geneva, where virtue has become impossible except for a few, but where corruption and viciousness are not total, institutionalized and public drunkenness can perform an important function. It serves to expose viciousness before it has a chance to develop fully, and viciousness, when exposed for what it is, tends to wither. The drunkenness of the Genevan circles, in fact, may be the best defense the city has against the development of more undesirable vices.

Rousseau's qualified praise of drunkenness is paralleled by his praise of the women's circles. Like their male counterparts, these associations have obvious failings:

The women's societies are blamed for one failing; they make the women scandalmongers and satirists; and one can readily understand that the anecdotes of a small place do not escape these female meetings. One can also believe that the absent husbands are little spared, and that no pretty and popular woman has an easy time of it in her neighbor's circle.⁹⁶

When the Genevan women get together, they engage in gossip of the most petty and spiteful kind. Yet, Rousseau goes on to say, things could be much worse: "for which is better, that a woman speak ill of her husband with her friends or that she do it with a man in a private conversation, that she criticize the disorder of her neighbor or that she imitate it?" Moreover, this gossip, although petty and spiteful, is generally based on fact, and this renders it relatively praiseworthy:

Although the Genevans speak rather freely about what they know, and sometimes about what they conjecture, they have a real horror of calumny, and they will never be heard to level accusations against another which they believe to be false; while, in other countries, the women, equally guilty

by their silence and by their speech, hide the ill that they know out of fear of reprisal, and publish for vengeance that which they have invented.⁹⁷

In the male circles, drink serves as a partial remedy for the decay of civic and individual virtue, in that it tends to reveal men as they really are. The gossip of the female circles serves a similar function: it makes the failings of the individual a matter of common knowledge. This is true even of those failings which are most private, those which are displayed in the privacy of one's home, with only one's wife as a witness. The revelatory function of the women's circles makes them indispensable to the maintenance of good moeurs in Geneva:

How many public scandals are prevented out of fear of these severe observers? They almost perform the function of censors in our city. It is thus that in the great days of Rome the citizens, watching one another, accused each other out of their zeal for justice.⁹⁸

There is a good deal of irony in Rousseau's reference to Rome. The Catos of Geneva are gossip-mongering women. These are not "almost censors," although they may partially fill the void left by the absence of true censors. This absence, moreover, is a necessary one according to the Second Discourse: "Only moeurs as pure as those of ancient Rome can bear censors; among us, such tribunals would disrupt everything."⁹⁹ The censors in ancient Rome were public functionaries, magistrates; but the power of regulating moeurs is so open to abuse that it can be entrusted to the state only when the state is served by virtuous men, that is, only when the moeurs are already relatively pure.¹⁰⁰ Such is not the case in Geneva, however, where more informal arrangements for regulating moeurs must be employed. Once again, Rousseau rejects an abstract ideal, as articulated in the Social Contract's chapter on the censorship, for example,¹⁰¹ in favor of what is practicable for Geneva. In the

process, he attempts to obscure the difference between the possible and the ideal, as far as the casual reader is concerned, so as to avoid subverting the former through comparison with the latter. The women of Geneva are not so many Catos, but they must sometimes be treated as if they were, precisely because true Catos, true censors, are no longer possible.

Before moving on, it is useful to reconsider Rousseau's insistence on the preservation of the circles. Earlier, we indicated that his isolation of the circles as that institution most worth saving in Geneva seemed somewhat incongruous and anticlimactic, but is this really the case? By focusing on the circles, Rousseau is conveying an important teaching. Rousseau's conservatism, his general opposition to change, except in regard to the most corrupt of societies or at a special moment in time, has already been described; his concern over the circles both reflects this conservative bias and provides a powerful argument in support of such a position. The circle is not a grand and imposing institution; yet, Rousseau tells us that changes here will produce repercussions throughout the Republic. But what is true in this regard of one seemingly minor institution may be true of any institution or practice. A society is an intricate web of interrelationships; changes in any part of this web affect the entire structure, sometimes directly, but more often, as in the case of the circles, only indirectly. Furthermore, the difficulty, if not impossibility, of predicting in advance all the consequences resulting from a given change creates a presumption against change in a society which has something to lose. The proponents of the theater, for example, did not take the circles into consideration in their calculations of relative advantages and

disadvantages which would result from the establishment of a theater in Geneva. This oversight was only natural, to be sure, but its very naturalness makes it symbolic of almost all efforts to consciously reshape a society. Such oversights, Rousseau implies, are inevitable in any attempt at reform; the complexity and interrelatedness of all social and political phenomena, together with the fallibility of human reason, guarantees this. Hence, such attempts should always be viewed with extreme scepticism.

NOTES

Chapter VIII

¹Excluding the Preface, this "gap" spans 104 pages out of a total of 174 in Fuchs's edition of the Letter, and 78 out of a total of 128 in Bloom's.

²See Letter, 77, 89, and 99 (B., 57, 67, and 74).

³Ibid., 123 (B., 92).

⁴Ibid., 124 (B., 92).

⁵Ibid., 3 (B., 3).

⁶Ibid., 77 (B., 57).

⁷Ibid., 89 (B., 67).

⁸Ibid., 99 (B., 74).

⁹Cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19).

¹⁰Social Contract, I, vi (O.C., III, 360-1) and I, vii (364).

¹¹Cf. "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 521-2).

¹²Cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 174).

¹³Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 175-6).

¹⁴Political Economy (O.C., III, 258). Cf. Emile, IV (O.C., IV, 524n); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 522-3); Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 175-6); and Letters Written from the Mountain, IX (O.C., III, 889-90).

¹⁵Political Economy (O.C., III, 259); Corsica (O.C., III, 931); cf. Social Contract, II, xi (O.C., III, 593-4); Letters Written from the Mountain, IX (O.C., III, 889-90).

¹⁶Political Economy (O.C., III, 259); cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19-20).

¹⁷Cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 19-20) with I (10-11); particular attention should be paid to the pattern of poor, virtuous

republics versus rich and corrupt monarchies and empires, which is manifested in Rousseau's choice of examples.

¹⁸First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 22-3).

¹⁹Letter, 124 (B., 93).

²⁰Letters Written from the Mountain, IX (O.C., III, 889-90); cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1295b.

²¹Cf. the appeal which Rousseau addresses to the "sovereign" people of Geneva: Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 115-7).

²²See Second Discourse, Dedication (O.C., III, 115-20) and Letters Written from the Mountain, VII (O.C., III, 814-35) and VIII (888-9), where references to Geneva's magistrates as a group distinct from and, in the latter work, opposed to, the people as a whole abound.

²³Letter, 124 (B., 93).

²⁴Social Contract, II, x (O.C., III, 389).

²⁵Cf. Letter, 129 and n. (B., 96 and n).

²⁶In this connection, it is interesting to note that a theater was finally forced on Geneva by the French, when they, in conjunction with several other nations, imposed a settlement on Geneva's warring factions in 1766. Such interventions were all too common in Geneva's history, and serve to underline its lack of self-sufficiency and openness to foreign influences. See Letters Written from the Mountain, passim, for a discussion of those interventions which antedate the Letter.

²⁷Letter, 133 (B., 99); cf. 144-8 (B., 108-10).

²⁸Ibid., 128 (B., 95-6).

²⁹Ibid., 125 (B., 93).

³⁰Ibid., 133 (B., 99).

³¹Ibid., 125 (B., 93).

³²Loc. cit.

³³Ibid., 20 (B., 16).

³⁴Cf. Hobbes, Leviathan, XIII, where "the desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them," together with a fear of violent death, are portrayed as the motives which lead men to form civil society.

³⁵Letter, 126-8 (B., 94-5).

³⁶Ibid., 128 (B., 95-6).

³⁷Ibid., 129n (B., 96n).

³⁸Government of Poland, XII (O.C., III, 1012-6); cf. Letters Written from the Mountain, VII (O.C., III, 821n) and VIII (856).

³⁹On the importance of military virtue for a republic, see First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 22-4); Government of Poland, XII (O.C., III, 1012-20).

⁴⁰Cf. Government of Poland, XII (O.C., III, 1016).

⁴¹Letter, 129 (B., 97).

⁴²That the Genevans seem to feel less threatened by the possibility of foreign attack than in former times appears to have induced them to leave the protection of the city's walls, and this in itself is something of an innovation in Genevan life: cf. Letter, 129n and 130 (B., 96n and 97).

⁴³Ibid., 129-30 (B., 96-7).

⁴⁴Ibid., 130 (B., 97).

⁴⁵Ibid., 130-1 (B., 97).

⁴⁶They, for example, outfitted warships at their own expense and staged plays and other public festivals: see Herodotus, History, VIII, xvii.

⁴⁷The taxing power was lodged in the General Council, which was made up of the entire citizen body twenty-five years of age and older: see d'Alembert's article on Geneva, Politics and the Arts, Bloom trans., 142.

⁴⁸Letter, 131 (B., 98).

⁴⁹Loc. cit.

⁵⁰Ibid., 132 (B., 98).

⁵¹Ibid., 132 (B., 99).

⁵²Letters Written from the Mountain, VIII, passim.

⁵³See also the references at note 22, above.

⁵⁴Letter, 132 (B., 99).

⁵⁵Ibid., 133 (B., 99).

⁵⁶Government of Poland, XII (O.C., III, 1016).

⁵⁷Letter, 133 (B., 99).

⁵⁸Ibid., 133 (B., 99-100).

⁵⁹Indeed, at the end of the Letter, Rousseau verbally "reforms" Genevan amusements in order to render them conformable with republican principles: Letter, 166-end (B., 124-end).

⁶⁰Ibid., 134 (B., 100).

⁶¹Loc. cit.

⁶²As regards the defective character of this argument, see Chapter VI, above.

⁶³Letter, 66, 111-7, and 120 (B., 49-50, 83-7, and 90).

⁶⁴Ibid., 134 (B., 100).

⁶⁵Ibid., 135 (B., 100).

⁶⁶Cf. Second Discourse, Preface (O.C., III, 123); I (134-41); II (168); and Letter, 138 (B., 103).

⁶⁷Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 168).

⁶⁸Letter, 135 (B., 100-1).

⁶⁹Ibid., 136 (B., 101).

⁷⁰Ibid., 135-6 (B., 101).

⁷¹The philosopher is an exception to this, however: cf. Apology, 31c and 32e-3a.

⁷²See Chap. III, above.

⁷³Rousseau recounts a story told by Herodotus (Histories, III, 12-3), in which the Egyptians, whose practice it was to always go bare-headed, are said to have much harder skulls than the Persians, who always wore large tiaras. Herodotus discovered this by examining the skeletons left over after a battle between these two peoples, a battle which the Persians won: Letter, 136n (B., 101n).

⁷⁴Letter, 136n and 137 (B., 101n and 102).

⁷⁵Ibid., 137 (B., 102).

⁷⁶Ibid., 138 (B., 102-3).

⁷⁷Cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 22-4).

⁷⁸Social Contract, III, xv (O.C., III, 429).

⁷⁹Ibid., III, xv (430); cf. III, viii (414): "Freedom not being the fruit of every clime, is not within the reach of all peoples."

⁸⁰Letter, 140 (B., 104-5).

⁸¹Ibid., 145 (B., 108).

⁸²Ibid., 105 (B., 78).

⁸³Ibid., 145 (B., 108).

⁸⁴Ibid., 148 (B., 110).

⁸⁵Loc. cit.

⁸⁶I.e., "Finally, these decent and innocent institutions bring together everything which can contribute to forming friends, citizens, and soldiers out of the same men, and thus everything which is most appropriate to a free people:" Letter, 142 (B., 105).

⁸⁷Ibid., 144 (B., 107).

⁸⁸Loc. cit.

⁸⁹Ibid., 145 (B., 108).

⁹⁰Ibid., 147 (B., 109).

⁹¹Democratic Theory (New York: Praeger, 1965), Chap. IV.

⁹²Letter, 146 (B., 108-9).

⁹³Ibid., 146n (B., 108n).

⁹⁴First Discourse, I (O.C., III, 8).

⁹⁵Letter, 146 (B., 109).

⁹⁶Ibid., 142 (B., 105-6).

⁹⁷Ibid., 142 (B., 106).

⁹⁸Ibid., 142-3 (B., 106).

⁹⁹Second Discourse, note XIX (O.C., III, 222). It is important to bear in mind that the Second Discourse was dedicated to the Republic of Geneva.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., note XIX (222-3).

¹⁰¹Social Contract, IV, vii.

CHAPTER IX

As the Letter progresses, Rousseau reveals more and more of the problem confronting Geneva. That problem is not exhausted by reference to the question of the theater, although this question is both symptom and symbol of the more general problem. Geneva is threatened by Paris, that is, by the spirit of modernity, by the Enlightenment, and by the "chimera" of progress, and Rousseau's final defense of the circles rests on precisely this point:

. . . the hour of the theater, being that of the circles, will cause them to dissolve. . . . The two sexes gathered daily in the same place; the groups which will be formed for going there; the ways of life which they will see depicted there and which they will be eager to imitate; the exhibition of women and girls, arrayed in their very best, and placed on display in the boxes as if they were in front of a shop waiting for purchasers; the affluence of the handsome young who, for their part, will come to show themselves off, and who will soon find it preferable to cavort at the theater than to exercise at the Plain-Palais; the little suppers with women, though they may be only actresses, which will be arranged for upon leaving; finally, the contempt for old practices, which will result from the adoption of new ones; all this will soon substitute the pleasant life of Paris and the fine airs of France for our old simplicity. And I doubt that Parisians in Geneva will long preserve a taste for our government.¹

It is thus not so much the demise of the circles which is to be feared, as it is the transformations of Genevans into pseudo-Parisians. This transformation involves an alteration in moeurs, and this is not a matter of indifference to the political order: the existing form of government is suitable to Genevans, not Parisians, and will inevitably be altered if such a transformation takes place.

It is thus not so much the theater itself which is undesirable, but rather its effect on Genevan institutions and practices. The theater is not alone in producing this effect; other agencies are also at work, as is demonstrated by the fact that the people of Geneva have already begun to change, to alter their character, to become more "Parisian:" "One must not dissemble; the intentions are still correct, but already the moeurs incline toward decadence, and we follow from afar in the footsteps of that same people whose fate we cannot help but fear."² The theater is undesirable precisely because it would exacerbate Genevan decadence, and push the Genevans further along the path already taken by the French. It is, after all, the French theater which the Genevans are being urged to imitate.

Geneva has been seduced by Paris, but in a subtle manner. It is Paris as a symbol of the Enlightenment, progress, and the advance of civilization, rather than Paris the city, which has such an appeal for the Genevans. The Genevans follow the example of Paris in order to become better; they have become imbued with the idea of progress, and this is the root of the problem facing the Republic. Progress is a false ideal, according to Rousseau, and those peoples which pursue it as a goal tend to become worse, more corrupt and vicious, rather than better. Genevan education provides a case in point. It was a central teaching of the Enlightenment that education, in the sense of the dissemination of knowledge and "culture," is the key to progress; progress and certain educational reforms thus go hand in hand. In keeping with this, some Genevans have departed from traditional child-rearing practices, under the impression that they are being progressive: ". . . I am assured that the education of the young is much better than it was

formerly." This belief is false, according to Rousseau. It is false because the new educational practices are not producing better citizens.³ If anything, the future citizens now being educated will be worse than their predecessors.

The principal emphasis of the "new" education is on politeness and good manners. The children are taught to bow with more facility, "to offer their hands to ladies more gallantly, and to say an infinity of charming things for which I would take the strap to them." They are, moreover, taught little respect for age, and thus little reverence for the traditional order; they learn how to "decide, solve, interrogate, interrupt the speech of men, and to pester everyone without modesty or discretion." Most damning of all, in light of Rousseau's praise of the ancients, the boys are raised in a manner appropriate only to females, that is to say, in a way which precludes the development of the masculine virtues:

They are protected from the sun, from the wind, from the rain, from the dust, so that they will not be able to support any of them. . . . They are deprived of all exercise.⁴

In fact, certain Genevan youths appear to have become more women than men: "On my last trip to Geneva, I saw already several of these young ladies in pants,⁵ with white teeth, plump hands, fluting voices, and pretty green parasols in their hands, rather maladroitly counterfeiting men."⁶

Although Rousseau refers to his discussion of Genevan education as a mere "example" of the ways in which the Republic is tending toward decadence, it is much more than this. It lays bare the cause of this tendency: Geneva is becoming decadent and corrupt precisely because the education it provides its youth is deficient. What Rousseau is

portraying in his discussion of Geneva is the disintegration of a way of life which, while not up to the high standards of antiquity, still represents something better than is to be found elsewhere. The institutions and practices of Geneva, particularly those related to the rearing of children, are changing, and this change will inevitably have a profound effect on Genevan life in general. Individuals are being formed with a character more suited to Paris than to Geneva.

This change in educational practices prefigures a general transformation in Genevan life: as Rousseau earlier indicated, Parisians in Geneva will not long preserve a taste for the existing form of government. Changes in the character of a people will inevitably produce changes throughout the social order, so as to bring that order into conformity with the people's new tastes and proclivities. The most immediate effect of the new educational practice is a further decline in civic virtue: Rousseau's praise of antiquity has shown us the form which a civic education, the education appropriate to citizens of a republic, should take, and the new educational practices being introduced into Geneva directly conflict with such a civic education. In this respect, Genevan education has already degenerated, according to Rousseau. Children were raised differently in his day, he tells the reader: they had no complexions to preserve; they did not fear the outdoors; they accompanied their fathers to the country, on the hunt, and to military exercises; ". . . timid and modest in front of aged people, they were hardy, proud, and quarrelsome among themselves;" they wrestled, ran, and boxed, and even fought with one another. Rousseau must not be misunderstood. He is not simply indulging in that adult practice which is as old as humanity, complaining of the

shortcomings of the younger generation and comparing it disadvantageously with his own. He is not simply asking what the youth of Geneva is coming to. He knows: they are becoming other than fit citizens. Admittedly, the educational practices of his own youth produced "real rascals," but these rascals were capable of becoming citizens: "these rascals made men who have zeal to serve their country in their hearts, and blood to shed for it."⁷ The educational practices of latter day Geneva, on the other hand, seem more suited to produce "vile slaves" than citizens.

Rousseau's praise of the educational practices of his youth is equivalent to praising the adult population of Geneva as virtuous. As we have seen, however, the adult population of Geneva is not, strictly speaking, virtuous. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that they are not completely corrupt either, and this is due principally to their having preserved "some image of ancient moeurs." They are not as physically soft as most other peoples and, above all, they have retained the ancients' practice of keeping the daily lives of men and women largely separate. Consequently, the people of Geneva are generally less debased than those to be found elsewhere; although not precisely "good" citizens, they are not completely unsuited for the role of citizen of a republic. This situation is changing, according to Rousseau. The new generations are becoming ever more unfit as citizens. Thus, what is at issue here is the question of civic education, and its relationship to republican government: if Geneva is no longer educating citizens, how long will it be before the last vestige of republican liberty disappears, and Geneva ceases to be anything more than a miniature Paris.

The above problem admits of only a limited solution. It is not possible to mold the Genevans into ideal citizens, into Spartans. The most that can be hoped for is that the coming generation will become "what their ancestors were, or at least what their fathers are today." This, in turn, depends upon the perpetuation of those moeurs which typified Geneva in the immediate past: ". . . let us not flatter ourselves that we can preserve our liberty while renouncing the moeurs by which we acquired it."⁸

For Rousseau, the problem of education is the problem, both for philosophy and practice. He follows the ancients in regarding education as being equivalent to "nurture," as encompassing any and all of those influences which affect the formation of character.⁹ Ultimately, there are two pure forms of education, according to Rousseau: that which trains man to live for himself, and that which trains him to live for others. The former results in the good man, the latter in the good citizen; the one is based on nature, the other "denatures" man; the one is private or domestic, the other public.¹⁰ These two forms of education are mutually incompatible.¹¹ Much of the malaise associated with modern life is, in fact, a result of the failure to realize and act upon this: men are raised neither as citizens nor as independent individuals; they are taught to live neither wholly for themselves nor wholly for others; they are self-interested, but the self which they are concerned with is that which is found in the opinions of others.¹²

A whole man, a man whose character is without internal contradiction, can only be produced by an education without contradiction, that is, by an education which always aims at the same goal, either

the good man or the good citizen, but not both.¹³ Thus, since the Letter is written from the perspective of the citizen, and since the problem at issue is the formation of Genevan citizens, it is only the public form of education which is of immediate interest to Rousseau and to us. In keeping with this, the Letter either ignores or dismisses nature as a standard, although it is nature which is the foundation of "private" education. To be sure, Rousseau frequently refers to "nature," and appeals to it as a standard for judging, but we have seen that the "nature" he appeals to is not nature as such, but rather the conventional understanding of "nature," an understanding which Rousseau's other works show to be incorrect,¹⁴ but which is useful in buttressing the argument of the Letter and in winning over the less than careful reader, that reader who uncritically accepts conventional opinion.

The problem of civic education has been touched upon earlier in connection with our discussion of the general will and of the legislator.¹⁵ Essentially, a civic or public education involves the inculcation of civic virtue, that is to say, a close identification with the community as a whole and a willingness to subordinate one's private interests to the common good. A republic stands or falls according to the virtue of its people:

The fatherland cannot subsist without liberty; nor liberty without virtue, nor virtue without citizens. You will have all if you form citizens; without this, you will have only miserable slaves . . .¹⁶

In particular, the rule of the general will, which is the sine qua non of political liberty, is impossible lacking a citizen body, each and every member of which is imbued with love of country. At the same time, the inculcation of love of country and of one's countrymen in the heart

of each citizen is the best guarantee of the rule of the general will:
 ". . . any man is virtuous when his individual will is completely conformable with the general will, and we readily will that which those we love will."¹⁷

The inculcation of civic virtue is by no means an easy task. One must begin early: "For to form citizens is not the business of a day; and to have men, it is necessary to instruct children."¹⁸ The denaturing of man, the substitution of civic duty for the promptings of nature, cannot be achieved if contrary habits and traits have already taken root. From birth, the individual must be trained to love his country more than himself, for it is only upon such a foundation that a virtuous citizen character can be erected. At the same time, the individual must be insulated from those influences which tend to encourage the development of character traits opposed to those of the citizen. The education of citizens thus presupposes a harmonious social environment, an environment where institutions, practices and moeurs all work together to promote love of country and identification with the community as a whole.

Broadly speaking, the problem of civic education can be viewed as an institutional problem, and Rousseau frequently speaks of it as such. Social institutions, such as the family, the laws, amusements, economic arrangements, and so on, decisively influence the formation of individual habits and character. This is why the task of the legislator is of such importance: he is a law-giver not only in the narrow sense, but in a more general sense as well; he creates and arranges those institutions which will later mold a people's character. This is also why a true act of founding is all too rare. The formation of citizens

generally begins at infancy, before the individual has acquired habits and traits at variance with civic virtue; yet, the legislator must perform his initial, and most crucial work, upon an adult population, before the effect of his newly created institutions can make itself felt. Thus, it is only when, through the agency of some cataclysmic event, a people has had all its engrained habits disrupted and has, so to speak, become child-like again, that a true act of founding can take place. At all other times, because the legislator is faced with an adult population with an already fixed character, he can do little.

The act of founding aside, the institutions of a people both reflect and determine its character. Good institutions form good citizens, but only good citizens can and will preserve good institutions; as a people becomes corrupt, so too do its institutions. This is why the transformation of Genevan character into something approximating the Parisian is so much to be feared; sooner or later, Genevan institutions will come to reflect this change; sooner or later, Genevan institutions will lose their republican character and come to resemble those of monarchical France.

The relationship between the character of a people and its institutions is complex, given their mutual interdependence. Civic virtue, for example, is not to be equated with the possession, at a certain point in time, of a particular set of institutions. In part, this is due to the influence of such factors as climate, geography, population density, and the fertility of the soil on a people's character. A people can be said to have good institutions when its institutions not only aim at producing good citizens, but are also suited to the conditions of its physical existence.¹⁹ Spartan virtue thus differed

from Roman virtue, just as Spartan institutions differed from those of Rome. Though a particular type of civic education, those where children are raised in common,²⁰ may be best in absolute terms, such an education may not be possible, or even desirable, everywhere. Thus, while public education, in its purest form, has only been practiced by three peoples in all of history--the Cretans, ancient Persians, and Spartans²¹--other peoples have also attained a high degree of civic virtue. The Romans, in particular, "were for five hundred years a continual miracle," despite the fact that they had to make do without a public education, properly speaking, that is to say, despite the fact that the responsibility for child-rearing rested with the family, rather than with the state;²² and the Jews were and are even more astonishing in this respect.²³

The appropriate education for citizens varies from place to place and from time to time, but such an education must everywhere exhibit certain qualities. In the first place, it always aims at inculcating a love of country and of one's fellow citizens, which is to say, a love of the community. This love is best fostered at an early age; thus, civic education must begin at infancy. In the second place, the possibility of a civic education depends upon the size of the state. All else being equal, the larger the state, the weaker is the sense of community, and the weaker is the identification of the individual with the whole. The problem when forming citizens, however, is to inculcate a love of the community which is stronger than the individual's love of self. It would thus seem that a true and effective civic education is possible only in small states. This is one of the reasons for Rousseau's frequent references to "small states" and "small cities" in

the Letter as a class apart,²⁴ as well as his preoccupation with Geneva's size;²⁵ Geneva's preservation of "some image of ancient moeurs," referred to earlier, may be due to the fact that it is one of the few remaining states whose size is commensurable with those of the ancient republics.

Lastly, exclusive national institutions, institutions which serve not only to bring the members of the community together, but which also serve to differentiate them from all other men, are necessary to a civic education. Love of country and identification with the community are both inclusive and exclusive phenomena. One loves one's fellows, but "one's fellows" are not all mankind, but rather a severely delimited group. The more that group is distinguished from the rest of the world by national peculiarities, the more intense does the members' identification with it tend to be. National institutions thus serve not only to bring the members of the community together, but also to divide them off from all other men and to give the community an aura of moi commun.

We will return to the general question of civic education, but for the moment it is useful to consider Geneva in the light of the preceding discussion. To begin with, Rousseau himself explicitly raised the question of civic education in connection with Geneva: educational "reforms" there, he tells the reader, must be judged only in terms of whether or not they produce "better citizens," and he has established that, judged according to this criterion, Genevan education is deteriorating. Moreover, this seems to be indicative of a general decline in Genevan institutions. This decline was hinted at earlier in Rousseau's reference to the transformation of the "societies" of his youth into "circles." However this may be, there is a disproportion

between Rousseau's youthful fellows and the youth of contemporary Geneva. In large part, this disproportion is due to the fact that the latter lead a sedentary life, while the former were "rustically raised." In former times, "The fathers took their children with them on the hunt, in the country, to all their exercises, and to all the societies."²⁶ This practice, however, is no longer followed; modern day Genevan children spend most of their time in the company of women and engaged in womanish occupations. One might well ask why this change has occurred. It is not simply a matter of a change in pedagogical theory, as Rousseau seems to suggest; rather, it is a by-product of a change in those Genevan institutions devoted to amusement. It was at the meetings of their societies that the men of Rousseau's youth engaged in those activities with their children cited above. Present day Genevans, however, find their amusement in the circles, with their more sedentary diversions, diversions which are, moreover, completely unsuited to young people. The decline in Genevan education is thus due, in large part, to an alteration in those institutions which provide amusement for the adult population.

The educational problem faced by Geneva can be traced to a more fundamental source, the predominantly bourgeois character of the Republic. The bourgeoisie are the backbone of the state and its most stalwart support. As was noted earlier,²⁷ however, this support is founded upon self-interest, and not upon a love for and identification with the community. Indeed, the predominance of bourgeois man in Geneva is symptomatic of the failure of modern education: he is neither fish nor fowl, neither a self-sufficient individual, nor a citizen in the true sense.²⁸ It is thus Geneva's bourgeois character which

ultimately precludes the rearing of citizens, and not some isolated institutional change. That change, in fact, is itself indicative of the waxing of bourgeois values in Geneva. The abandonment of the public realm is characteristic of bourgeois man; he sees little profit in it when compared to the world of business; as long as his interests and "rights" are not threatened, he is perfectly content to leave the conduct of public affairs entirely to the discretion of the magistrates, and military defense to the mercenaries. Moreover, the bourgeois man prefers private to public amusements, and was quite willing to see the "societies" transformed into "circles."

Given Rousseau's pessimism regarding reform, the fundamental problem of Geneva, its bourgeois character, is insoluble; Geneva cannot become virtuous, and the people of Geneva cannot be transformed in mass into good citizens. But, and this is a large "but," things could be much worse. Geneva could become a scale-model of Paris, for instance, and this must be avoided. Rousseau's concern with Genevan "education" is thus not a sterile, academic inquiry. If that education cannot produce perfect citizens, it can at least be shored up in such a way that it does not produce Parisians. It is still possible to form the youth of Geneva into "what their fathers are today," that is to say, to prevent Geneva from degenerating further, at least as far as the immediate future is concerned. It is in light of this limited goal that Rousseau's treatment of the question of the desirability of establishing a theater at Geneva must be understood.

The question of the theater does not exist in isolation. The establishment of a theater at Geneva will add a new institution to those already there, and its effect on these institutions, as well as

its impact upon moeurs, must be taken into consideration:

I return to our actors, and, already supposing them a success, which seems to me impossible, I find that this success will attack our constitution, not only in an indirect manner by attacking our moeurs, but directly, by disrupting the equilibrium which ought to rule between the various parts of the state if the stability of the whole body is to be maintained.²⁹

A number of points need to be made concerning this passage. Firstly, while Rousseau earlier approached the question of the theater from the point of view of its effects on a particular institution, the circles, and while the above passage is also concerned with the effect of the theater on Genevan institutions, Rousseau is not simply repeating his earlier argument; rather, he is engaged in something much more important. The earlier argument dealt with a limited subject matter, the effect of the theater on the circles. The argument presently under consideration is much broader in scope; it deals with the effect of the theater on the relationships between the various parts of the state, that is, on Genevan institutions taken as a whole. Even more than this, however, there is implicit in Rousseau's treatment of Genevan institutions a general and extremely important teaching regarding the possibility of political and social innovation.

The introduction of a theater into Geneva is undesirable because it will disturb the balance between existing parts of the whole which is the Genevan social order. Given Rousseau's tacit acceptance of Genevan decadence, the equilibrium which is said to reign in existing arrangements enjoys a problematic status, but this does not vitiate the argument that such an equilibrium is necessary "if the stability of the whole body is to be maintained." This is an extremely conservative argument. A healthy state is a complex whole, and not simply

an aggregation of individuals, and it is the relationship between the parts of this whole, and not the parts as such, which is definitive as far as the nature of the whole is concerned. The attempt to introduce a new part or parts, i.e., the establishment of a theater where a theater had not previously existed, will disturb the preexisting relationships upon which the character of the whole depends, and two possible outcomes will result: a new equilibrium may or may not be established. In the former and much less probable case, a new whole will result, but a whole the exact character of which cannot be predicted in advance. In the latter case, the result will be a state of flux brought on by the destruction of the social whole. The various parts of the state will no longer be defined by their place in the whole, since they have no fixed place and there is no whole. Furthermore, because the relationship between these parts is no longer fixed, disorder will result; harmony degenerates into cacophony. Each of the former parts of the state will tend to take on the status of an independent whole with its own institutional purposes, and these purposes will often conflict. The term "state," in fact, loses its former meaning and comes to serve only as a convenient label for grouping a collection of disparate entities.

The preceding is highly salient to the problem of education. A people's way of life, institutions, and character also constitute a complex whole. The character of a people both molds and is molded by its institutions and way of life in general. When the institutions of a society form men who are adapted to and compatible with those institutions, then there exists what one might call an educational equilibrium: the institutions form men who will be suited for, and who will

preserve, those institutions, so that they can form future generations of men who, in turn, will be suited to them and who will seek to preserve them.

The de novo grafting of an institution onto a society introduces new formative influences, and thus tends to alter a people's character in ways that are more often than not unforeseen and unforeseeable. Moreover, one has no reason to expect that the new totality of influences on the formation of character will constitute a unified whole. It is much more likely that "education" will fragment; the various formative influences will operate at cross-purposes, and this will tend to produce contradictions within the character of the individual.³⁰ Such a fragmented education is the antithesis of that of the citizen; the citizen is "denatured" man, and this denaturing is so difficult, and must necessarily be so complete, that success is possible only when all formative influences on individual character are harmoniously directed toward this goal. Nature can be held in check only by a supreme effort; and, when such effort ceases due to the fragmentation of education, nature will reassert herself.³¹

The above argument appears on the surface to be largely irrelevant to the particular case of Geneva. We have already concluded that Genevan education is deficient and no longer forms citizens. This is not the whole story, however. While a society characterized by a sense of community and a virtuous citizenry, and which is governed by principles of political right, is the most desirable, this does not mean that all societies which do not attain this ideal are equally undesirable places to live. The degree of deviation is obviously important in judging the relative merits of a given social order, but so

too is another, related standard to which Rousseau appeals in the Letter. Certain of his remarks concerning the effect of the theater on Geneva implicitly assert the value of social equilibrium.³²

A society which is in equilibrium is more or less stable and, in that it shields both the individual and society from the many misfortunes which change tends to produce, stability is a good.³³ Furthermore, even a society which is not virtuous may achieve a state of equilibrium; and, while such a society is not good simply, it is so relative to those which are neither virtuous nor stable.

Rousseau's remarks suggest that the various parts of the Genevan state are in equilibrium with each other and, if this is so, Rousseau's task, as far as its rhetorical component is concerned, would seem to be reduced to demonstrating that the establishment of a theater would disturb this balance in a way which his readers would regard as highly undesirable. What one would thus expect would be a close and searching examination of the effect of the theater on Genevan institutions taken as a whole, coupled with a highly emotional argument that this effect is necessarily pernicious. This does not prove to be the case, however. Rousseau begins well enough:

From among the many reasons which I could give, I shall content myself with choosing one which is most appropriate to the greatest number, because it is limited to considerations of interest and money, always more sensible to the vulgar than moral effects, of which they are not capable of seeing either the connections with their causes or their influence on the destiny of the state.³⁴

At first glance, this statement seems to be in keeping with the tendency which we have already remarked in Rousseau to use primarily economic arguments when speaking to the Genevans against the establishment of a theater there, but this appearance is deceptive. To be

sure, Rousseau has frequently employed economic arguments in the Letter, but this time he is breaking new ground; in the past, his reasons for employing economic arguments were never made explicit. Indeed, we would expect him to remain silent on this point. If such arguments are designed to win over "the vulgar," it is not wise to reveal this. Most especially, if Rousseau's economic arguments are geared to appeal to the bourgeoisie, then the above statement is self-defeating; bourgeois man does not like to think of himself as one of "the vulgar," and so will tend to dismiss any argument explicitly directed to such an audience.

- Why, one is compelled to ask, is Rousseau suddenly so frank, when frankness at this point undermines the persuasive effect of his subsequent argument on precisely those he claims to be addressing?
- There are a number of possible responses to this question, but the one which immediately suggests itself is that Rousseau's "frankness" is designed to divert attention away from his subsequent argument. Most men can be expected to pass rapidly over, as something having nothing to do with them, an argument openly labeled as appertaining to "the vulgar." Furthermore, most men would expect such an argument to be superficial, and, more than likely, poorly reasoned, hence unworthy of close attention. An argument prefaced by the announcement that it is intended for the vulgar would thus be an ideal vehicle for conveying a teaching which one does not wish to impart to all of one's readers, but only to those few careful readers who realize that a rhetorician of Rousseau's caliber does not openly repudiate his own argument, before it is even made, without good reason. Rousseau's frankness functions as a sign post, pointing to the need to pay extremely

close attention to what is to follow. This is only supposition, however. Confirmation awaits upon a careful analysis of Rousseau's "vulgar" argument.

Rousseau's argument revolves around the assertion that the theater partakes of the nature of a tax. This "tax" is a bad one for two reasons: firstly, none of it, Rousseau asserts, is returned to the sovereign, that is to say, to the people as a whole; secondly, it falls disproportionately on the poorer classes. The first of these criticisms appears to refer to the foreign backing of the proposed theater; for it is only if the proceeds are removed entirely from the country that none would be returned to the people in some way. The essential foreignness of the proposed theater will play a significant role in Rousseau's later arguments, but for the time being he drops this approach and concentrates on the second criticism.

Relative to their means, the poor would pay more to attend the theater than would the rich, even if the seats were differentially priced. Furthermore, the theater provides the wealthy with an amusement which is much less costly than those that, lacking a theater, they would be forced to provide for themselves. To be fair or just, Rousseau seems to be saying, the cost of attending the theater should be the same, relative to their means, for rich and poor. It is impossible, however, to strike such a balance,³⁵ even if the cost of the better seats is greatly increased. The disproportion between rich and poor is infinite: "Generally speaking, the former are of an excessive opulence and most of the others have nothing."³⁶ For the very poor, the price of admission, no matter how low, is a real hardship. Thus, to bring the relative cost to rich and poor into line, it would appear necessary to

either charge the poor nothing or the rich almost all that they possess. Even this is not sufficient, however. The rich can afford to be idle, in that their income is not dependent on their own labor, while the poor cannot; time devoted to the theater is so much money lost to the latter. Moreover, if certain seats are set aside, free of cost, for the poor, and the remainder priced at various rates, there will be a tendency for the former to be left vacant and for men to gravitate toward the more expensive seats. It becomes a question of honor, pride, and appearance: "Everyone would always spend beyond their means to occupy the more honorable seats."

The above argument is less than convincing. Why, one might well ask, need the poor attend the theater at all if it is such a burden to them? Attendance is, after all, a matter of choice. Rousseau's answer to the objection that attendance is optional is that it is and it is not: ". . . although voluntary, [attendance at the theater] is no less onerous to the people, in that it furnishes a continual occasion for expenditures which it cannot resist;" the choice of whether or not to attend the theater is a choice in name only. This theme is continued:

It is with [the theater] as with the taxes on wheat, on wine, on salt, and on everything necessary to life, which at first glance have an appearance of justice and which are, at bottom, very iniquitous; for the poor, who can only spend for what is necessary, are forced to throw away three-quarters of their expenditures in taxes, while, the same necessity forming only the least part of the expenditures of the rich, the tax is practically insensible to them. In this way, those who have little pay much, and those who have much pay little. I do not see what justice can be found in this.³⁷

Here we see the theater compared to the necessities of life, that is to say, those commodities which man cannot do without and continue to live. On the surface, this seems farfetched: few men die from not

being able to attend the theater. Such a quick dismissal of Rousseau's argument, however, does him an injustice. What he is attempting to convey is a fundamental truth of human nature: men regard as necessary many things which do not in themselves directly contribute to the maintenance of human life, and believe that a life deprived of such is not worth living. The following serves to clarify this point:

I will be asked who forces the poor to go to the theater. I will respond: firstly, those who establish it and provide them with the temptation; secondly, their poverty itself, which, condemning them to labor without hope of seeing its end, makes some relaxation necessary in order for them to bear it. They do not consider themselves unhappy because they work without respite, when everyone does the same; but is it not cruel to him who works to be deprived of the recreations of the idle? He shares them, then; and this same amusement, which furnishes a means of economy to the rich, doubly weakens the poor, either by a real increase in expenditures or by a lessened zeal for work. . .³⁸

For social man, happiness and contentment, insofar as they are possible, do not depend exclusively or even primarily upon the satisfaction of physical and bodily needs, but rather upon the satisfaction of felt needs. These latter are not fixed; they vary from time to time and from place to place, and can even be deliberately manufactured. In particular, social man tends to judge his own happiness and well-being in terms of that which he perceives is enjoyed by others; if he sees his life as deficient in some respect, he feels envious, discontented, and seeks to remedy that deficiency. Poverty is thus relative; the most hand-to-mouth existence is tolerable if one's fellows are perceived as no better off. The working man is content if there are no idle rich or if he is not continually reminded of them.

The disadvantage of the theater in this regard is that it tends to bring the disparity between rich and poor out into the open; it renders the amusements of the rich no longer private. What was

previously hidden, or partially so, from the poor is now revealed. The result is discontent, jealousy, and a desire to emulate, to acquire some part of the supposed happiness of the rich for oneself; hence, the poor attend the theater. Moreover, there is a question of honor and prestige involved. If those men who are well-thought-of and deferred to, and command respect, attend the theater, those who desire to be well-thought-of and respected, which is to say, most men, will do so also. Furthermore, in modern societies, and especially in bourgeois societies such as Geneva, where wealth is honor and the lack of wealth renders one base, no man likes to appear poor or to consider himself to be so. Even if he is in fact poor, he will attempt to appear as a man of some means; he will become a sort of counterfeitor, aping the ways of the rich, insofar as is possible, in order to appear as something other than what he in fact is. He will attend the theater, although it is beyond his means, because not to do so would be to admit to both himself and the world that he lacks that commodity, money, which modern men, and especially the bourgeoisie, hold in highest regard. As we have seen, Rousseau traces the relative corruption of modern society to the pervasiveness of deception. Thus, insofar as the theater tends to exacerbate such deception, especially among the poor, it is pernicious.

Although important, the above is not the main point in Rousseau's address to "the vulgar." He gives the preeminent place to the assertion that the theater "tends everywhere to increase the inequality of fortunes," that is to say, to increase the disproportion between rich and poor, and he, for the time at least, treats this as decisive as regards the question of the theater. The observed tendency is most

marked in "small cities such as ours." Inequality, however, should be most limited "in small states, and especially in republics." This leads us to the heart of Rousseau's teaching concerning republican liberty:

. . . in a democracy, where the subjects and sovereign are only the same men considered in different relations, as soon as the smaller number prevails in wealth over the greater number, the state must perish or change its form. Whether the rich become more wealthy or the poor more indigent, the difference in fortunes is not increased in one way more than in the other; and this difference, carried beyond its measure, is what destroys the equilibrium of which I have spoken.³⁹

Great inequalities in wealth subvert republican government in a most insidious manner. On the one hand, such inequality promotes envy and hatred among the poorer classes; on the other, since wealth is power, it tends to place the rich above the law, or, rather, to make the law their servant and an instrument for holding the poor in check.⁴⁰ In both cases, the community of interests, upon which republican government is founded, is destroyed, the general will supplanted by class interests, "and the rich are always the true sovereigns."

Republican government thus cannot survive without a high degree of equality.⁴¹ Although absolute equality is neither feasible nor desirable,⁴² there is a clearly defined limit beyond which inequality is always fatal to a republic. This limit is delineated in the Social Contract:

. . . as regards equality, this word must not be understood to imply that the degree of power and wealth should be absolutely the same, but rather that power should stop short of violence . . . and, as regards wealth, that no citizen should be so opulent as to be able to buy another and none so poor as to be constrained to sell himself. This implies, on the side of the great, moderation in regard to goods and influence, and, on the side of the humble, moderation in avariciousness and covetousness.⁴³

Moderation is thus an important republican virtue, a virtue which is necessary to political stability. This virtue, in turn, itself depends in part upon the degree of inequality present: the closer the two extremes of rich and poor are to each other, the less of a threat will the one's need and the other's power and influence be to the existing order.⁴⁴ Extreme inequality is incompatible with moderate citizenry: the extreme wealth, and resultant power and influence, of the few breeds in them a disdain both for the law and for the rights of those less fortunate; the extreme poverty of the many produces hatred and envy, and an immoderate desire for the good things of life which their poverty denies them. The end result is a society divided into two hostile camps.

The portion of the above argument which appears in the Letter is couched in abstract terms. Geneva is mentioned only at the end, and even then Rousseau studiously avoids coming to a conclusion as regards the Republic:

On the basis of these incontestable maxims, it remains to be considered whether inequality has not reached among us the last stages it can attain without shaking the Republic. I rely here on those who know our constitution and division of wealth better than I do. What I do know is that, since time itself imparts to the order of things a natural inclination towards this inequality, and a successive progress up to its last stages, it is a great imprudence to accelerate it still more by establishments which promote it.⁴⁵

Rousseau's decision to remain silent concerning the stage of inequality to which Geneva has attained is significant. By calling attention to this question, and then refusing to speak to it, he suggests that inequality has reached an extremely dangerous level, without directly committing himself to this position. Rousseau's silence here may be an act of prudence in several senses. On the one hand, to call attention

to what he implies is an extreme inequality of condition in Geneva would be to provide a basis for dissension within the state, and to incite, if only in an indirect manner, the poor against the rich; and this would disturb the very equilibrium which he previously cited as indispensable to stability. On the other hand, Rousseau's silence may also be prudent because inequality has already become so great, and power and wealth so concentrated, that to speak out against it directly and unequivocally would be to risk running afoul of the authorities. Even if the rich have not already become "the true sovereigns," it is almost a certainty that at some future time they will become so; this is, afterall, a "natural inclination" which "time itself imparts to the order of things."

The preceding also sheds considerable light on Rousseau's previously remarked reference to the argument under consideration being intended for "the vulgar." "The vulgar" is synonymous with "the many," and the rule of the many is synonymous with "democracy,"⁴⁶ with "popular sovereignty." But it is precisely popular sovereignty which is threatened by the growing concentration of political and economic power which Rousseau's analysis points to. Rousseau's remarks may thus be intended to convey to discerning readers the idea that the most fundamental interest of the many, political freedom, is endangered, while simultaneously pointing to the nature of that danger. The argument that the establishment of a theater in Geneva will so increase the disproportion in wealth between rich and poor as to undermine the Republic is more than a little strained, but the argument that the theater would constitute a simple addition to an already pronounced tendency in such a direction is not. This latter argument, furthermore, suggests itself

as a correction to the former. From the point of view of the prudent man, there is an obvious advantage to openly articulating the former argument and merely suggesting the latter. The latter argument is both a radical critique of Geneva and quite possibly true, hence dangerous, while the former, much less radical argument is so patently exaggerated that most readers will tend to follow Rousseau's lead and dismiss it as being intended for "the vulgar," and thus no concern of theirs.

One other aspect of Rousseau's "vulgar" argument deserves mention. The problem of the rich and the poor which it articulates, albeit incompletely, transcends the Genevan context. The tendency of the rich to grow richer and the poor poorer is a universal one derived from the nature of things;⁴⁷ it is present in all human societies, including those of a republican nature. Indeed, this tendency constitutes a special danger for republics, in that it strikes at both political freedom, which is their defining principle, and at equality, upon which that freedom is founded. The natural inclination toward greater and greater inequality can be held in check for a time and an equilibrium established, but, because it is a natural inclination and republics are the work of men, nature will ultimately prevail. Knowledge of this tendency and its ramifications is necessary to a comprehensive understanding of society and, a fortiori, to those men whose purposes require such an understanding. In particular, such knowledge is necessary to the philosopher, the legislator, and the censor. The former's needs are of a theoretical nature, and require no elaboration, but the legislator's and the censor's are eminently practical. The task of the legislator is the construction of a stable republican

edifice; that of the censor is the maintenance, insofar as is possible, of that edifice. In order to accomplish these twin tasks, the legislator and the censor must know the disequilibrating influences which affect republics, and the natural tendency toward an ever increasing disproportion between rich and poor is, perhaps, the most powerful such influence.

The proto-philosopher, legislator, and censor are necessarily superior men, who possess a more than common insight into the problems of political life and human nature. They can thus be expected to piece together Rousseau's complete teaching in the Letter regarding rich and poor from the hints which he drops. Furthermore, and this is decisive, such men are unlikely to fall victim to the pessimism inherent in the teaching that all republics must necessarily become corrupt and that political freedom is at best transitory. The fear of infecting common men, "the vulgar," with this pessimistic outlook may have contributed to Rousseau's presenting his teaching concerning inequality in a fragmentary form and, in particular, to his silence regarding the problem of inequality in Geneva. If Geneva is approaching the last limits of inequality, and if nothing can be done to halt this, then a full revelation of the nature of the situation could well encourage the development of apathy and a feeling of resignation, and thus lead to inaction, with the end of the Republic coming earlier than would have been the case if such measures as forbidding the establishment of a theater had been taken. Moreover, what is true of the people of Geneva in this regard is true of the citizens of republics in general: a man will be a much better citizen, more active in the service of the community, if he believes that that community is

potentially immortal than if he does not. The demand that the individual subordinate his interests to those of the community is founded upon the community's claim to be something more than the individuals who compose it, and this claim is based in part on the belief that, though each and every citizen now living will eventually die, the community will continue, and that any sacrifice which the individual makes for the community is justified in terms of the greater life of the whole. If this supposedly greater life is revealed to be radically defective and necessarily finite, the rationale for self-sacrifice is eliminated, the citizenry will tend to become less scrupulous in preferring the public good to private advantage, and the lifetime of the community will be shortened.

Rousseau's "vulgar" argument is followed by a section of the Letter devoted to what appears to be a recapitulation of a number of his earlier points. He returns to the question of the moral effect of various kinds of plays on the spectator, and repeats his earlier attacks on the tragic, comedic, and romantic genres. There is not, however, a simple identity between Rousseau's earlier and later attacks. To be sure, these separate attacks appear very similar on the surface--in both, for example, Rousseau first deals with the tragedy, then the comedy, and then the romance--but there is a crucial difference: the first attack was directed at the tragedy, comedy, and romance as such, while the second is directed at the effect of these genres on Genevan moeurs. This is not a trivial difference; it is not simply a consequence of the movement from an abstract to a specific perspective. Rousseau has not simply applied the general principles articulated in his earlier argument to a particular context, but is

engaged in expanding and completing those principles. Indeed, the initial articulation was incomplete precisely because it was abstract in nature.

To see why this is so, it is necessary to pay close attention to the way in which Rousseau's second attack on the theater's subject matter develops. The following passages are illustrative of this development:

(1) If the mere establishment of the theater is so harmful to us, what fruit will we harvest from the plays which are performed in it? The very advantages which they might procure for the people for whom they were composed will redound to our prejudice, in giving us for instruction what was given to them for censure, or, at the least, in directing our tastes and inclinations towards those things of the world which suit us least.⁴⁸

(2) Tragedy will portray tyrants and heroes for us. What do we have to do with such? Are we made to have them or become them? It will give us a vain admiration for power and grandeur. Of what use will this be? Will we be greater or more powerful for it? Of what importance is it for us to go and study the duties of kings on the stage, while neglecting to fulfill our own? Sterile admiration for the virtues of the theater will deprive us of the simple and modest virtues which make the good citizen.⁴⁹

(3) Instead of curing us of our ridiculousness, the comedy will bring us that of others; it will persuade us that we are wrong to despise the vices which are so greatly esteemed elsewhere.⁵⁰

(4) However foolish a marquis is, he is still a marquis. Imagine how this title sounds in a place so happy as not to have any; and who knows how many clerks will believe themselves fashionable in imitating the marquis of the last century?⁵¹

(5) What! Plato banished Homer from his Republic and we will suffer Molière in ours! What worse could happen to us than to resemble those people whom he depicts, even those whom he makes us like!⁵²

The emphasis is on "we Genevans" and on Geneva as a special place.

The theater is inappropriate to Geneva precisely because its subject matter is foreign, that is to say, because Geneva has no tyrants,

heroes, or marquis. To admit the theater would thus be to admit foreignness, that which is alien to Genevan life. Even Rousseau's reference to Homer and Molière points in this direction. To allow the work of Molière into Geneva is an extreme violation of the principle established by Plato when he forbade the reading of Homer in the good state. Moreover, admitting Molière into Geneva is more unthinkable than Plato's toleration of Homer would have been. This is not necessarily because Molière is inferior to Homer as a poet, since Rousseau has asserted that Molière is "the most perfect comic poet whose works are known to us."⁵³ Although this may be an intentional exaggeration, it does indicate that Rousseau does not consider the problem of Molière vis à vis Geneva to be more extreme than the problem of Homer vis à vis Plato's republic simply because the talent of the former is inferior to that of the latter. The crucial difference between Molière and Homer is that the former is more alien to Geneva than the latter was to Plato's hypothetical citizenry. Homer was not only a Greek himself, but his writings were part, indeed the most important part, of the Greek literary tradition; Molière, on the other hand, is not only a complete foreigner, but his works themselves are alien to Geneva and its traditions.

Following his reference to Molière and Homer, Rousseau moves on to a discussion of the romantic theater, in which his reasons for rejecting that which is foreign to Geneva are implicitly presented. Once again the argument evokes a feeling of having been over this ground before:

The entire French theater breathes only tenderness: it is the great virtue to which all the others are sacrificed, or, at least, which is rendered most dear to the spectators. I

do not say this is wrong, as far as the poet's object is concerned; I know that the man without passion is a chimera, that the appeal of the theater is founded only on the passions, that the heart does not interest itself in those which are foreign to it nor in those which one does not like to see in others, although one may be subject to them himself. The love of humanity and of one's fatherland are the sentiments the depiction of which most touches those who are affected by them; but, when these two passions are extinguished, there remains only love, strictly speaking, to take their place, because its charm is more natural and more difficult to erase from the heart than all the others. Nevertheless, it is not equally appropriate to all men; it is as a supplement to good sentiments, rather than as a good sentiment itself, that it can be admitted; not that it is not praiseworthy in itself, like every well-regulated passion, but because its excesses are dangerous and inevitable.⁵⁴

In the preceding, Rousseau distinguishes between three kinds of "love:" for humanity as a whole, for one's country, and romantic love. These three forms of love differ quantitatively, i.e., in scope, but this quantitative difference also implies a qualitative one; the greater the scope, the nobler the love. At the same time, the worth of a man is determined in part by the scope of his love:

The most vicious man is he who most isolates himself, who most concentrates his heart in himself; the best is he who divides his affections most equally between all his kind. It is much better to love a mistress than to love, in all the world, oneself alone. But whoever tenderly loves his parents, his friends, his fatherland, and the human race, degrades himself by a dissolute attachment which soon injures all the others and is infallibly preferred to them.⁵⁵

Rousseau's general point is quite clear. The possible forms of love can be conceived of as a continuum, ranging from complete self-centeredness to benevolence toward mankind in general, with as many points between these two extremes as there are men in the world; and, the greater the scope of the individual's love, the better man he is.

There is a covert tension, however, in Rousseau's articulation of this position, a tension which has a qualifying effect on the position as a whole. It is only necessary to recall our previous discussion of the phenomenon of romantic love⁵⁶ to see wherein this tension lies. A man who "divides his affections . . . equally between all his kind" may love his parents, his friends, and his fatherland, but he loves them no better than the foreigner or the declared enemy of his country. The problem with love of humanity, as far as most men are concerned, is that it is a love which is so extended as to be almost meaningless; it is only the extremely rare individual, according to Rousseau, who is capable of feeling such love in an intense form.⁵⁷ It is for this reason that one must beware of those who profess to love humanity as a whole; this is most often merely an excuse to avoid exerting oneself on behalf of those nearer home.⁵⁸ Indeed, the best man and the worst are similar in an important respect: neither parents, nor friends, nor fatherland, as such, have a special place in their hearts; the one loves them to the same degree as he loves all of humanity, the other not at all; the former recognizes no duties except those to humanity, the latter no duties except those to himself, which is to say that the only duty he recognizes is that of self-interest.

The vast majority of men are incapable of feeling a true love for humanity, and are thus condemned to being something less than simply good. If they are not to be completely vicious, then, they must be imbued with a kind of love which, while it is not so general as to have humanity as a whole for its object, is more general than the solipsism of the completely isolated individual. Love of country,

or "patriotism," provides such an alternative. It is the most general love which most men are capable of experiencing and which is, at the same time, powerful enough to bring the individual out of himself and to foster a sense of moral duty in him. This alternative, however, is still not open to every people. There are certain countries, for example, which would benefit from the infusion of a strong sentiment of romantic love, countries where men are so isolated, and moeurs so bad as a result of this, that any extension of the affections would constitute a marked improvement. On the other hand, there are countries, and Geneva is one of these according to Rousseau, where the cultivation of romantic love would involve a descent, a worsening of moeurs, because it would result in both a narrowing of the scope of the affections and the excitation of certain ungovernable passions. It is the intensity with which romantic love is felt, its preoccupation with its object, that ultimately condemns it as far as Geneva is concerned. Such love is a great leveler; it overshadows all other forms of love and reduces them to impotence. Thus, while not precisely foreign to Geneva--the Genevans "have only too much of a natural penchant" in this direction⁵⁹--the large scale introduction of romantic love into the city will tend to result in the demise of existing affections, thus destroying one of the sources of Geneva's uniqueness and transforming it into a miniature copy of Paris.

Rousseau's second treatment of the three dramatic forms thus focuses on their essential alienness to Geneva. In the last analysis, the plays which are to be presented in the new theater will be French, and this condemns them: "All the utility which theatrical plays might have as regards those for whom they were made will become prejudicial

for us. . . ."60 Not only are the plays foreign in origin, but foreign in subject matter as well. They will thus serve to acquaint the Genevans with foreign tastes, habits, and morals, and encourage the introduction of such into Geneva; it will become fashionable to imitate the french nobility, for example, not to mention "the man of the world." This, in turn, means that Genevan moeurs will be altered in the direction of those of France, and especially Paris.

Rousseau's second attack on the three dramatic forms is thus part and parcel of his essential conservatism, but it also serves to add a new dimension to that conservatism. He is not attacking innovation per se, but innovation derived from foreign sources. The introduction of what is foreign is presented as undesirable in itself. The reasons for this are not difficult to determine. Patriotism is the foundation of republican liberty, but patriotism is first and foremost love of one's country, and is exclusive in nature. One's own country may be loved in an exclusive manner, however, only insofar as it differs from all others; Tweedledum and Tweedledee are equally lovable. The admixture of foreign elements decreases the distinctiveness of a state, and reduces the basis for preferring it to all others; thus, it undermines the foundation of patriotism, and so of republican liberty.

The preceding conclusion can be reached by a slightly different path as well. Republican liberty is coincident with the rule of the general will. The rule of general will, however, can be realized in practice only when there is a strong sense of community within the state, a sense of community powerful enough to subdue the natural inclination of the individual to give preference to himself and his own interests in all things. A community is defined in both exclusive and

inclusive terms, that is, in terms of both what it is and what it is not. The sentiment of community is most intense when it is based upon the feeling that one and one's fellows are different in some way from all other men; the greater this felt difference, all else being equal, the greater the sense of sharing a set of common interests and a common destiny, which is to say, the greater the sense of community. Conversely, when the difference which separates a given people from all others is decreased, so too is that people's sense of community. In a republic, the result is that the general will becomes less powerful, private wills and interests gain strength, and, insofar as these private wills triumph over the general will, liberty, which is obedience only to those laws which one has willed oneself, is destroyed. This is the problem to which Rousseau's second attack on the forms of the drama implicitly points.

Republican liberty is dependent upon national exclusiveness. One means, the most important, of fostering such exclusiveness is through the provision of exclusively national institutions. Conversely, institutions of a cosmopolitan nature undermine this exclusiveness. The distinction between national and transnational, or cosmopolitan, institutions explains many seeming contradictions within the Letter. Rousseau could attack the theater in general, while praising that of the Greeks, for example, precisely because the Greek theater was pre-eminently national in character, while the modern theater is not. Indeed, no modern theater can be "national" in the same sense as that of the Greeks: the ancient Greeks made the theater peculiarly their own by originating both the comedy and the tragedy. The proposal to establish a theater in Geneva is thus twice damned: not only will it be

derivative, in the sense that the theater is a Greek invention, but derivative also in the sense that it will be imported, so to speak, directly from France.

The foreign nature of the theater is decisive for Rousseau's deliberation over the desirability of establishing a theater at Geneva. All other considerations are of secondary importance. That this is so is demonstrated by Rousseau's assertion that there is a remedy for all the disadvantages associated with the theater as theater, and that this remedy involves the assimilation of the theater to Geneva as a national and republican institution:

I see only one remedy for so many disadvantages: in order to make the plays of our theater suitable to us, we must compose them ourselves; we must have authors before we have actors. For it is not good that we be shown all kinds of imitations, but only those of decent things which are appropriate to free men.⁶¹

In the above passage, Rousseau establishes several criteria which must be met if the theater's disadvantages are to be overcome. For one thing, Geneva must have authors before it has actors, that is, the plays presented must be written by Genevans. In and of itself, however, this criterion is not sufficient to guarantee Geneva against the possible disadvantages resulting from the establishment of a theater; the subject matter of the plays, the things imitated, must also be decent and appropriate to free men. It is this second criterion which is the more important, as is witnessed by the note appended to it:

"Then, it seems, if a man who is able, by wisdom, to take on all sorts of forms and to imitate all things should come to the city and wish to make a display of himself and his poems, we would get down on our knees in worship before him as one who is holy, wondrous, and sweet; but we would say that it is not lawful for such a man to arise in our city,

and we would send him away, pouring myrrh over his head and crowning him with wool; and we ourselves would make use of the more austere and less sweet poet and story-teller for our benefit, the one who would imitate the diction of the decent man and would speak the things which are said according to the patterns that we set down as law when we undertook to educate the soldiers."⁶²

This quotation is from the Republic, and thus serves to suggest a certain identity at this point between Rousseau's position and that articulated by Plato. In particular, it suggests the possibility of purifying the theater in a way similar to Plato's reformation of poetry. This purification will not result simply from relying on native authors, however. The translation from the Republic is somewhat misleading on this point:⁶³ according to Plato, not only is it unlawful for such an imitator as that described to enter the city from outside, but also to be born there; whether foreigner or citizen, such a man is pernicious. The nature of the subject matter, as opposed to who the author is, is thus controlling as far as the worth of poetry and the drama are concerned.

It is the lack of a suitable subject matter which ultimately precludes the establishment of a purified theater at Geneva. The ancient Greeks serve as the standard here: "It is certain that plays drawn, like those of the Greeks, from the past misfortunes or present shortcomings of the fatherland or people could offer useful lessons to the spectator. . . ."⁶⁴ Reliance on such a subject matter would not only provide "useful lessons" in the more obvious sense of warnings and criticisms, but would also serve to assimilate the theater fully to Geneva, to transform it into something resembling a national institution which would set the Genevans apart from other men, while simultaneously teaching love for, and identification with, the city.

The requisite subject matter is unfortunately lacking, and this points to a fundamental defect in Geneva:

Who then will be the heroes of our tragedies? Bertheliers? Lévrerys? Ah, worthy citizens! You were doubtless heroes, but your obscurity abases you, your common names dishonor your great souls, and we are no longer great enough ourselves to be able to admire you. Who will be our tyrants? The Gentlemen of the Spoon, the Bishops of Geneva, the Counts of Savoy, ancestors of a house with whom we have just treated and to whom we owe respect? Fifty years earlier, I could not have answered that the Devil and the AntiChrist would not have their roles as well.⁶⁵

There are several points of interest in the above passage. Firstly, Rousseau suggests that the tragedy portrays, or can portray, the "decent things appropriate to free men," and this would seem to contradict his earlier objection that tragedy portrays only sterile virtues which are not suitable to men as they really are. This contradiction is more apparent than real, but it can be eliminated only by calling Genevan virtue and liberty into question. Tragedy portrays "greatness," great heroes and great villains, but this greatness is suitable to free men only when it is drawn from a national tradition, as is witnessed by Rousseau's "search" for heroes and tyrants in Genevan history. This brings us to our second point. Geneva has had "heroes" and "tyrants," but heroes and tyrants who are not a suitable subject for a Genevan tragedy. In the case of the heroes--Berthelier, "the Cato of our country," and Lévrery, "Berthelier's Favonius"--Rousseau seems to suggest that the fault lies with them, with their obscurity and common names. This is merely misdirection, however. The real fault lies with the Genevan people, who fail to appreciate them as heroes and who do not recognize their greatness, and this is simply a consequence of Geneva's own lack of greatness. Indeed, the Genevans tend to look upon these men with derision precisely because they are

Genevan "heroes" and not French, because neither they nor their country is powerful, and only power commands respect.

If the Genevans do not treat their heroes with the respect due them, they tend to the opposite extreme as regards their enemies, the Counts of Savoy, Bishops of Geneva, and Gentlemen of the Spoon, those whom Rousseau suggests are suitable for the role of tyrants in a Genevan tragedy. The Gentlemen of the Spoon are Savoyards, who swore a vow of brigandage against the city; the Counts of Savoy attacked the city several times in an effort to restore the ousted Bishops of Geneva, and out of opposition to the Republic's Calvinism. These facts are not mentioned in the Letter, but they were well known at the time and form a background to Rousseau's observation that Geneva owes respect to the House of Savoy. This respect is owed because Geneva is impotent, powerless, and does not control its own destiny. The Genevans, in other words, are not "free men" in a crucial sense of the term.

Geneva's treatment of its heroes, on the one hand, and its tyrants, on the other, is indicative of a fundamental corruption. The Genevans value what is foreign and ridicule what is their own, thus demonstrating a lack of reverence for their country:

With the Greeks, a people otherwise quite jocular, everything was grave and serious as soon as their country was at issue; but, in this trifling century, when nothing besides power escapes ridicule, one dares to speak of heroism only in large states, although it is to be found only in the small.⁶⁶

A purified Genevan tragedy, one depicting things appropriate to free men, would necessarily involve an imitation of the ancient Greeks, but the Genevans fall short of the ancient Greeks in a most important respect; they are not patriotic. As we have seen, however, patriotism or love of country is indispensable to political freedom. From this

we can conclude that Rousseau dismisses the possibility of developing a tragedy suitable to Geneva not because there is no subject matter appropriate to such a tragedy--the stories of Berthelier and Lévrery are available, for example--but because the Genevans themselves have been found wanting. That subject matter which is suitable to free men is not suitable for those who are not free.

After having rejected the possibility of establishing a purified tragic theater at Geneva, Rousseau turns to the comedy, but his treatment of that genre differs significantly from his treatment of the tragedy. The comedy, he tells his readers, ". . . ought not to be dreamed of in Geneva." There is no mention of a "remedy" for the disadvantages of the comedy, no mention of limiting it to "decent things which are appropriate to free men," and no mention of the Greek comedy as a model to be followed. The comedy may be inherently indecent, as Rousseau earlier suggested, in that its subject matter is human weakness and absurdity, but it is its political consequences which are decisive for Rousseau: "Among us it would cause the most frightful disorders; it would serve as an instrument for factions, parties, and private vengeance." Once again, the Greeks are appealed to, but this time as a warning example, an example which Geneva must not follow:

Our city is so small that the most general depiction of moeurs would soon degenerate into satires and attacks on individuals. The example of Athens, a city incomparably more populous than Geneva, offers us a striking lesson: it was in the theater that the exile of many great men and the death of Socrates were prepared; it was through the violence of the theater that Athens perished, and its disasters only too well justified the chagrin to which Solon testified at the first performance of Thespis.⁶⁷

The above passage articulates, albeit in a highly abbreviated and symbolic form, Rousseau's final position on the comedy. The comedy

is antithetical not only to the philosopher, as we saw earlier,⁶⁸ but to the political realm as such. The responsibility attached to the comedy for Socrates' death expresses the judgement of philosophy; the chagrin of Solon, Athens' "legislator," at the first performance of Thespis, the archetypal actor, carries with it the judgement of the political realm. Indeed, Rousseau indicts the comedy as a murderer twice over: it bears responsibility for both the death of Socrates and the "death" of Athens. Furthermore, Athens is explicitly presented as an example to other peoples, and particularly to Geneva; the excesses of the comedy are not limited to Athens; in a small state, by virtue of its smallness, such excesses are inevitable once the comedy has been allowed entrance.⁶⁹

The comedy is thus the enemy of both Rousseau the philosopher and Rousseau the citizen. This goes a long way toward explaining the almost unremitting hostility with which he treats the comedy in the Letter, a treatment which is markedly at odds with his ambivalent approach to the tragedy. Although both the comedy and the tragedy are highly charged with implications for the political realm, the effect of the former on that realm is always pernicious, while that of the latter can be, under the proper circumstances, extremely beneficial. The comedy is always divisive because its art rests upon ridicule and the fomenting of derisive laughter; thus, it is a natural tool of partisan, that is to say, divisive, politics. The tragedy, on the other hand, can imitate "decent things appropriate to free men," while simultaneously promoting a sense of community and patriotism within the spectators. Moreover, as we observed earlier,⁷⁰ the philosopher is a natural butt for the comedy, while, because of his

lack of an imitable passion, he is an object of indifference as far as the tragedy is concerned. For these reasons, the comedy stands unequivocally condemned in terms of the two major perspectives assumed by Rousseau in the Letter.

Rousseau follows up his attack on the comedy by once more considering the theater as an institution. This is Rousseau's final word on the problem of the theater as such. Because it is his final statement, we would expect him to summarize his arguments against the theater, bringing them all together so as to influence, by their combined weight and number, the thinking of his Genevan audience. Upon examination, however, we find something entirely different. Instead of recapitulating his earlier arguments, Rousseau initiates two new ones, or at least two arguments which appear to be new. These arguments are quite brief, hence undeveloped; one is, for example, only a paragraph in length, and a fairly short paragraph at that. Moreover, the longer of the two is so obviously exaggerated that it is easily dismissed. Yet, because these arguments conclude Rousseau's attack on the theater as such, if for no other reason, they would seem to demand a careful reading. Besides, in the course of our analysis, we have surely become aware that Rousseau's departures from the expected are almost always deliberate and, in addition, are employed to point to something not intended for the generality of his readers. We are thus led to suspect that there is more to these arguments than appears on the surface.

In the case of the first argument, our suspicions are amply justified. It begins with what seems to be a simple appeal that the arguments developed in the Letter be taken into consideration by the

Genevans in reaching a decision on the theater: "I would be of the opinion that one should carefully weigh all these reflections before taking into consideration the taste for adornment and dissipation which the example of the actors must produce in our youth."⁷¹ It is important to recall in this connection that both d'Alembert and Rousseau cited the fear that the youth of Geneva will develop a taste for adornment and dissipation as the primary reason for Genevan opposition to the establishment of a theater.⁷² Rousseau tacitly dismisses this reason as insufficient: the reflections contained in the Letter should take precedence over this fear as far as the question of the theater is concerned. Immediately after having dismissed the Genevans' fear, however, Rousseau acknowledges that it is not groundless: "But finally, that example [i.e., of the actors on the youth of Geneva] will have its effect too." Rousseau resolves this minor inconsistency in a statement which, when read carefully, completely destroys any residual belief that the problem of the theater has arisen as a result of causes external to Geneva:

For it will not be, properly speaking, they [i.e., the actors] who will have introduced this taste for dissipation: to the contrary, this same taste will have preceded them, will have introduced them; they will only fortify a penchant already formed, which, having caused them to be admitted, will so much the more cause them to be maintained, even with their faults.⁷³

The Genevans' fear is not groundless precisely because it has already been realized: there is a movement for the establishment of a theater in Geneva, and this in itself is indicative of a taste there for adornment and dissipation. The theater will not corrupt Genevan moeurs; it will merely serve to extend and "fortify" an already existing corruption.

Rousseau conceals the above conclusion somewhat by arguing that it will be the establishment of a theater, and not the mere existence of a movement with that goal in mind, which will indicate a corruption in Genevan moeurs:

. . . and if, in general, the laws are everywhere insufficient to curb vices born from the nature of things, as I believe I have shown, how much more so will they be among us, where the first sign of their weakness will be the establishment of the actors?⁷⁴

The laws are everywhere incapable of restraining those vices which have already taken root, and such are present in Geneva. These vices are already in the process of preparing the way for the actors by creating a climate of opinion favorable to, and insistent upon, the establishment of a theater. Furthermore, since the political order is incapable of correcting or rooting out these vices, the eventual entrance of the actors into Geneva is a foregone conclusion, although it may be delayed somewhat.

The fight against the theater is thus doomed to eventual failure, if not today, then tomorrow or next year or ten years from now. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Although the good fight is necessarily a losing fight, however, it must nonetheless be fought. To delay the spread of corruption within Geneva is in itself a positive accomplishment. We have spoken of this before in connection with Rousseau's essential pessimism concerning the efficaciousness of political action: barring extremely unusual circumstances, the most that one can achieve, no matter how great the effort, is the temporary preservation of the status quo. That this teaching is considered by Rousseau to be important enough to be included in his "summation" should come as no surprise. Similarly, that he chooses to down-play

and, indeed, to obscure it by treating it in an extremely brief and cursory fashion is completely in keeping with his practice throughout the Letter; to reveal and dwell upon the limits of political action as such would be to discourage the very people Rousseau wishes to take a stand.

The second of Rousseau's concluding arguments on the subject of the theater is, as has already been mentioned, extravagant. The gist of it is that, once actors are established in Geneva, it will be only a short while before they have succeeded in placing themselves above the law. In fact: ". . . if they join a little intrigue to their success, I do not give them thirty years before they are the arbiters of the state."⁷⁵ Rousseau cites a chain of causes leading, at the very least, to the actors occupying a privileged position vis à vis the laws. For the theater to be a financial success in as small a place as Geneva, it must become a rage. This must be assumed because, without it, the theater would not attract enough paying customers to survive. Furthermore, "in a country where everyone is pretty much equal," the actors would be the equals of everyone else from the start, and their favored place in the public eye would provide them with protection and indulgences, even from the magistrates, who would have been private men in the past and so subject to the rage for the theater in the same way as everyone else. The actors, "sure of impunity, will procure it also for their imitators." "The women, the young, the rich, the idle, all will be for them." Innumerable factors will thus contribute to both the licentiousness of the actors and to their eluding the laws. Eventually, their favor will be sought in influencing elections, which will be decided "in the dressing rooms of actresses,

and the leaders of a free people will become the creatures of a band of histrions."

"The pen," Rousseau says, "falls from my hand at this idea." And well it might. The argument is extreme, lacks rigor, and would seem to be directed at the most credulous of his Genevan audience. Nevertheless, there is more than a grain of truth in it. The theater can acquire considerable political influence, as the Athenian comedy's role in "the exile of many great men and the death of Socrates" indicates. The argument in question, however, does more than recall the example of Athens to mind again. It also serves to underline the extreme fragility of small states in general, and republics in particular. Such states are much more subject than large ones to collective irrationality. The passions of the people as a whole are easily aroused there precisely because of the smallness of the state. Sheer weight of numbers and extent of territory tends to insulate larger states from this phenomenon: it takes time to infect a large population, spread out over considerable territory, with a common passion, and, the longer the period involved, the more likely that those first infected have burnt themselves out or become less passionately committed. This tends to prevent the state as a whole from falling under the influence of a particular passion; the preponderance of numbers is generally on the side of normalcy, if not always of reason.⁷⁶

In small states, on the other hand, fewer individuals are involved, and they live in much more intimate contact with one another; thus, they are much more prone to be swayed by the same passion simultaneously, with potentially disastrous results. This is especially true, as Rousseau notes, in a republic, where men are largely equal;

such men are likely to react in much the same way to a given stimulus, and, while this is often desirable, there are times when it most decidedly is not. Unwise political decisions, for example, might be made which, in the normal course of events, would have been rejected out of hand.⁷⁷ States characterized by a diversity of conditions and interests, as large states tend to be, are less likely to fall prey to such a stampeding effect. In the first place, the people as a whole generally do not control public affairs; and, in the second place, the great and the powerful tend to act as a check on what they regard as "the excesses of the mob." Paradoxically, that very sense of community which makes political freedom ultimately accessible only to small states also makes such states more susceptible to collective passions, disorder, and imprudent decisions: "The general will is always right, but the judgement which guides it is not always enlightened."⁷⁸

NOTES

Chapter IX

¹Letter, 149 (B., 111).

²Ibid., 149-50 (B., 111).

³Ibid., 150 (B., 111).

⁴Loc. cit. Cf. Emile, I (O.C., IV, 259-61 and 268-72), II (299-300, 313-14 and 419-20), and III (476-7).

⁵Literally, "young ladies in jerkins."

⁶Letter, 150-1 (B., 112).

⁷Loc. cit. Cf. Emile, II (O.C., IV, 362).

⁸Letter, 151-2 (B., 113).

⁹Emile, Pref.; Political Economy (O.C., III, 260-1); First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 24 and note).

¹⁰Emile, I (O.C., IV, 249-51).

¹¹Ibid., I (248).

¹²Ibid., I (249-50); Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 174-5 and 188); First Discourse, I (O.C., III, 8-9).

¹³Rousseau does suggest in the Emile that it may be possible to reconcile the good man with the good citizen: I (O.C., IV, 250). This is misleading, however. What Rousseau appears to have in mind is not an individual who lives for himself and who is also, for example, a true Spartan, but rather an individual who, although he lives for himself, can also live with others: see Emile, I (251).

¹⁴Cf. Second Discourse, Preface and Proemium (O.C., III, 122-32).

¹⁵See Chap. III, above.

¹⁶Political Economy (O.C., III, 259).

¹⁷Ibid., (254).

¹⁸Ibid., (259).

¹⁹Social Contract, II, viii and xi (O.C., III, 384-5 and 392-3); cf. Montesquieu, Spirit of the Laws, XI, v.

²⁰Plato's Republic is, for Rousseau, the "best treatise" on "public education:" Emile, I (O.C., IV, 250). Rousseau sees himself as following Plato in making the rearing of children in common the characteristic feature of the public education: Political Economy (O.C., III, 260-1).

²¹Political Economy (261-2).

²²Ibid., (257-8 and 262).

²³"Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 498-500) and Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 956-7).

²⁴Letter, 19, 77-80, 142, 154-55, 160 and 165 (B., 15, 58-60, 105-6, 115-16, 119, 123).

²⁵Ibid., 19, 125-8, 131, 142, 154-55, 160, 164 and 165 (B., 15, 93-5, 98, 105-06, 115-16, 119, 122 and 123).

²⁶Ibid., 151 (B., 112).

²⁷See Chap. IX, above.

²⁸Emile, I (O.C., IV, 249-50).

²⁹Letter, 152 (B., 113).

³⁰Cf. Emile, I (O.C., IV, 245-49).

³¹Cf. Social Contract, III, xi and IV, i (O.C., III, 424 and 438) with Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques, III (O.C., I, 972).

³²Letter, 99 and 152 (B., 74 and 113).

³³Cf. Emile, I (O.C., IV, 251-2); Social Contract, III, xi (O.C., III, 424-25) and III, xviii (435).

³⁴Letter, 152 (B., 113).

³⁵Rousseau employs the term "equilibrium" to describe this balance.

³⁶Letter, 153 (B., 114).

³⁷Letter, 153 (B., 114).

³⁸Ibid., 154 (B., 114-15).

³⁹Ibid., 155 (B., 115).

⁴⁰"In truth, the laws are always useful to those who possess something and harmful to those who have nothing; from which it follows that the state is advantageous to men only insofar as they all have something and none of them has too much: Social Contract, I, ix (O.C., III, 367n).

⁴¹Ibid., II, xi (391).

⁴²Ibid., II, xi (392). Men in society are markedly unequal in certain respects--i.e., strength, intelligence, industriousness--and, because this is a consequence of the nature of things, nothing can be done to eliminate such inequality completely: Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 174). This natural inequality, however, provides no legitimate basis for political inequality: Social Contract, I, vi and ix (O.C., III, 361 and 367); cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 177).

⁴³Social Contract, II, xi (O.C., III, 391-2).

⁴⁴Ibid., II, xi (392n); cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1295a25-96b.

⁴⁵Letter, 155 (B., 115-16).

⁴⁶The term "democracy" seems to have undergone a transformation in Rousseau's system of thought between the writing of the Letter and the final draft of the Social Contract. In the former work, he uses the term to refer to a political order in which sovereignty is vested in the people. By the time of the Social Contract, the term has narrowed in meaning, having come to refer to only those states in which the executive power is wielded by the people as a whole. In the latter work, it is asserted that "democracies," "aristocracies" and "monarchies" can legitimately bear the title of "republic," as long as the legislative power is vested in the people, while in the former "democracy" and "republic" seem to be employed synonymously. Thus, in the Letter, Geneva is treated as a democracy, while in the Social Contract it is explicitly labeled as an "aristocracy." Cf. Letter, 154 and context (B., 115 and context) with Social Contract, III, iv and IV, iii (O.C., III, 404 and 442-3).

⁴⁷Admittedly, this tendency is most marked where both natural inequality and conventional signs for wealth, i.e., "money," are present, but natural inequality in and of itself necessarily leads to a certain disproportion in wealth: Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 174-5). Furthermore, if Rousseau's treatment of the origins of civil society in the Second Discourse is correct, then the invention of money and the consequent development of rich and poor antedates civil society, and are, indeed, the direct cause of its foundation: II (175-8).

⁴⁸Letter, 155-6 (B., 116).

⁴⁹Ibid., 156 (B., 116).

⁵⁰Loc. cit.

⁵¹Loc. cit.

⁵²Ibid., 156-7 (B., 116-7).

⁵³Ibid., 45 (B., 34).

⁵⁴Ibid., 157-8 (B., 117).

⁵⁵Ibid., 157 (B., 117). Cf. Emile, II (O.C., IV, 340n-41), where Rousseau asserts the superiority of the solitary man, because such a man harms no one.

⁵⁶See Chap. VI, above.

⁵⁷Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 178).

⁵⁸Emile, I (O.C., IV, 249).

⁵⁹Letter, 158 (B., 118).

⁶⁰Ibid., 159 (B., 119).

⁶¹Ibid., 160-1 (B., 120).

⁶²Ibid., 161n (B., 120n). The translation is from Allan Bloom's Politics and the Arts, 153. The passage is itself a paraphrase from Plato's Republic, 398a-b.

⁶³See The Republic of Plato, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 76, for a less misleading translation of the passage in question.

⁶⁴Letter, 161 (B., 120).

⁶⁵Ibid., 161-2 (B., 120-1).

⁶⁶Ibid., 162 (B., 121).

⁶⁷Ibid., 163 (B., 121).

⁶⁸See Chap. V, above.

⁶⁹Cf. Letter, 164-5 (B., 122-3).

⁷⁰See Chap. V, above.

⁷¹Letter, 163 (B., 122).

⁷²Ibid., 4 and 77 (B., 4 and 57).

⁷³Ibid., 163-4 (B., 122).

⁷⁴Ibid., 163 (B., 122).

⁷⁵Ibid., 164-5 (B., 123).

⁷⁶Cf. the discussion of factions in Federalist X.

⁷⁷See Thucydides' account of the Athenian decision to invade Sicily, and of the decision regarding Mitylene: The Peloponnesian War, Crawley trans., 341-53 and 163-72.

⁷⁸Social Contract, II, vi (O.C., III, 380).

I have been alone on the earth; in the midst of a numerous people, I have been alone. Lycurgus, Solon and Numa are my brothers.

"Political Fragments"¹

CHAPTER X

The Letter has both a beginning and an end. It begins with a "Preface." In general, prefaces are, like the god Janus, both forward and backward looking. The author attempts to explain his reasons for writing and to prepare the reader for what is to follow; because an author's reasons for writing antedate that writing, the former task is necessarily backward gazing, while the latter is anticipatory. Similarly, the end of a polemic or treatise such as the Letter is also both backward and forward looking. Whether a particular author rises to the occasion or not, the conclusion of a book is like the capstone of an arch; it completes the work, leaving it to stand alone and as is in the future. The conclusion of a book thus points to what has gone before, to the body of the work, since this is the foundation upon which it rests. At the same time, it also points to the future, and thus beyond itself. It is at the end of a work that the author and the reader directly confront the world as it exists apart from the written word, as something which enjoys an intransigently independent existence of its own. The author is figuratively taking leave of his readers and sending them off into the world to fend for themselves.

Although separated from each other by the bulk of the work, the Letter's preface and conclusion are similarly situated; each points

both beyond the Letter and to its interior argument. This similarity between preface and conclusion goes even deeper. Rousseau concludes the Letter by reflecting on what has gone before. The subject matter dealt with at the end of the Letter is, in a sense, identical with the subject matter of its beginning: the subject matter of the preface is Rousseau's intentions in the Letter, or what he claims are his intentions, while the subject matter of his concluding remarks is what he has accomplished or claims to have accomplished; and both subject matters can be subsumed under the more general heading of the purposes served by the Letter.

Earlier, our analysis of the preface suggested that Rousseau's purposes in the Letter are not perfectly transparent, and that he could not reveal certain of his purposes in a public manner without simultaneously subverting those same purposes.² In particular, insofar as Rousseau is speaking not only as a "citizen of Geneva," but also as a rhetorician and as a philosopher, he is compelled to dissimulate. The goal of the rhetorician is persuasion; he seeks to persuade his audience to a particular course of action or to a particular set of beliefs. The rhetorician as such is indifferent to the truth; he chooses truthfulness over mendaciousness only when the persuasive power of the truth is greater than the persuasive power of a lie. But to acknowledge that one is a rhetorician is to admit that one sometimes lies, and the persuasiveness of a known liar is less than that of a man who is presumed to speak the truth as he sees it. The rhetorician necessarily dons a disguise; in the case of the Letter, Rousseau the rhetorician's disguise is that of a "citizen of Geneva" who has "spoken the truth coldly."³

The situation of the philosopher is somewhat different. The philosopher is much more concerned than the rhetorician with the truth, but he too must dissimulate. The philosopher as such, or the "true philosopher," recognizes that certain truths are highly volatile and dangerous, and should be kept from those who are unfitted by nature and training to deal with them, which is to say, certain truths should be made simply inaccessible to most men. At the same time, the philosopher is interested in placing the truth before those who are equipped to handle it. This duality of purpose requires that the philosopher who is also an author present dangerous truths in such a way as to make them accessible to certain of his readers, while rendering them inaccessible to others. For Rousseau, the man who is fitted to gaze upon the unadorned truth is the philosopher or potential philosopher, the man of superior insight, understanding, and knowledge, while it is the careless, the ignorant, and the undiscerning who must be spared this danger. This in turn means that the solution to the philosophic author's problem is so to disguise and confuse his true teaching that only those careful and patient readers of a philosophic bent can untangle it, or even see the need for an untangling. The philosopher, too, must appear as something other than what he is, as less profound and original in his thinking. Thus, Rousseau the philosopher presents himself in the Letter as a knowledgeable citizen of Geneva to be sure, but one who is interested only in "practical," as opposed to "philosophic," truth, and as the purveyor of a kind of truth which is readily accessible to any and all men.

Once again, Rousseau's purposes in the Letter are not perfectly transparent. There is considerable difficulty in discerning those

purposes. Hitherto, we have viewed Rousseau's purposes largely in the light of the preface, in terms both of what is explicitly said there and in terms of what is implied. This approach has been fruitful, but it is incomplete. It is incomplete because the preface presents only a part, and perhaps the lesser part, of Rousseau's discussion of the purposes and objectives of the Letter. Rousseau also discusses the purposes of the Letter in his concluding remarks. These remarks thus complete both the Letter in general and the preface in particular. Furthermore, a potentially greater comprehensiveness concerning the purposes of the Letter can be ascribed to Rousseau's concluding remarks. The preface is anticipatory, and these anticipations may not have been realized, while in his concluding remarks Rousseau reflects on what has actually been achieved, or at least gives the appearance of seriously reflecting on this matter. The perspective of the preface is like the view from the foot of a mountain before one has begun to climb, while that of the conclusion is like the view from the summit, from which vantage point one can, informed by experience, survey the path traversed and one's own situation.

The end of the Letter is only potentially more revelatory of Rousseau's purposes than the preface. The same reasons which led Rousseau to refrain from openly speaking the complete truth concerning his intentions in the preface still hold good at the conclusion of the Letter. Nevertheless, it is the case that the conclusion of any work is fundamentally different from the beginning. Thus, one can hope that Rousseau's discussion of his purposes in the two places will also be different, and that this difference will cast light on his actual, as opposed to his stated, intentions in the Letter. The tension

between the two statements may, in other words, lead the careful reader along a dialectical path of discovery. At the very least, any understanding of Rousseau's purposes in the Letter which claims to be comprehensive must take cognizance of both the beginning and the end of this work. This means that, since we have already examined the preface, we must turn our attention to Rousseau's concluding remarks and compare them with those of the preface.

The end of the Letter is dominated by a discussion of those amusements which are appropriate to republics. In the sense that this constitutes Rousseau's parting gift to the reader, it might be argued that this is the teaching which he regards as most important; since it is generally easier to remember that which is nearer in time than that which is more remote, Rousseau's teaching concerning republican amusements will, all other things being equal, be more apt to stay with the reader than those teachings which preceded it. All other things are not equal, however. The Letter does not actually end with Rousseau's teaching concerning republican amusements, but with a concluding paragraph which seems to assign that teaching the status of a digression.

It is useful at this point to reproduce the Letter's concluding paragraph in full:

Here you have, Sir, the entertainments⁴ which are necessary to republics. As to the one which your article on Geneva forced me to treat of in this essay, if ever private interest succeeds in establishing it within our walls, I foresee unhappy effects; I have shown some of these and could show more, but that would be to fear too much an imaginary misfortune which the vigilance of our magistrates will be able to prevent. I do not pretend to instruct men wiser than myself. It suffices for me to have said enough to console the youth of my country for being deprived of an amusement which would cost the country so much. I exhort this happy youth to profit from the opinion with which your article ends. May it recognize and merit its fate! May it always sense how much solid happiness is preferable to the vain

pleasures which destroy it. May it transmit to its descendants the virtues, the liberty, and the peace which it has from its fathers! This is the last wish with which I end my writings; it is the one with which my life will end.⁵

In the above, Rousseau distinguishes between that amusement which d'Alembert's article "forced" him to deal with and those amusements which are appropriate to republics. The former is the subject of the Letter, and Rousseau's purpose is to prevent the entry of this amusement into Geneva, or at least this seemed to be his stated purpose in the Letter's preface, where he spoke of "fending off" the theater, and in the body of the work, the bulk of which was devoted to arguments directed against the theater. Nevertheless, Rousseau repudiates this purpose in his concluding remarks. His aid in combatting the theater, he tells the reader, is unnecessary as far as Geneva is concerned; the "vigilance" of the Genevan magistrates will prevent its establishment. Moreover, Rousseau denies possessing any intention to inform; the Genevans, or at least the magistrates, are wiser than he is, and so do not require him to teach them about Geneva or about the theater. Rousseau in fact reduces the purpose of the Letter to one of consoling the youth of Geneva for having been deprived of theatrical amusements, while exhorting them to profit from the opinion with which d'Alembert's article ends.

Rousseau does not reproduce the relevant "opinion" of d'Alembert's in the Letter. Therefore, only those who have read, or who will read, d'Alembert's article can benefit from Rousseau's exhortation. The final paragraph of d'Alembert's article on Geneva ends with the following statement:

We will perhaps not give such long articles to the vaster monarchies; but, in the eyes of the philosopher, the republic of the bees is not less interesting than the history of great empires; it is perhaps only in little states that one can find the model for a perfect political administration. If religion does not permit us to think that the Genevans have effectively worked toward their happiness in the other world, reason obliges us to believe that they are pretty nearly as happy as anyone can be in this one:⁶
O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint.⁷

What opinion it is that Rousseau exhorts the youth of Geneva to profit from is not completely clear, although it would seem to be some variant on the idea that the Genevans, as they are, are as fortunate as any people, and that they need only recognize this and accept their situation in order to be truly happy. Rousseau thus uses d'Alembert's own words against him; if the Genevans were to become content with their lives, they would cease to agitate for the introduction of foreign amusements.

If one compares the concluding paragraph of the Letter to its preface, a number of incongruities emerge. In both, Rousseau speaks of the purpose of the Letter, but his purpose appears much more circumscribed and reduced in stature at the end of the Letter than at the beginning. In the preface, Rousseau speaks of his writing of the Letter as fulfilling a duty to both "justice" and "truth," and as motivated by an affection for both "humanity" and "country." In his concluding remarks, however, he is silent concerning "humanity;" these remarks create the impression that the Letter is intended to benefit only Geneva, and only the youth of Geneva at that. Far from affirming a duty to the truth, Rousseau exhorts the youth of Geneva to profit from an "opinion" expressed by d'Alembert. He must "exhort" them to this because he has presented no argument for the truthfulness of this

opinion. Indeed, he ignores the question of its truth or falsity in favor of an assertion of its usefulness. Moreover, Rousseau does not say whether the youth of Geneva can in fact profit from this opinion, but only expresses a wish that they might do so. The fulfillment of this wish is associated with the maintenance of Genevan virtue and liberty; Rousseau's wish is thus that of a good citizen. In consoling and exhorting the Genevan youth, then, Rousseau is acting justly, insofar as the justice of the citizen is something like acting in accordance with the public good.

The conclusion of the Letter is anticlimactic. On the basis of Rousseau's concluding remarks, the Letter appears as a much less grand and important undertaking than it did in the preface. It takes on something of the character of a children's story: Rousseau characterizes it as a consolatory piece of writing aimed at reconciling the youth of Geneva to the absence of a theater. It is, according to Rousseau, intended primarily for the young Genevans who will be disappointed over the loss of another potential source of amusement, and is thus presented to the reader as nothing more than a sop to youthful disappointment. The Letter is not even useful for helping to forestall the establishment of a theater at Geneva or for presenting the case against the theater: the "vigilance" of the Genevan magistrates will take care of the former, and those same magistrates are wiser than Rousseau and so do not need his help in coming to a conclusion about the theater.

If we take Rousseau's concluding remarks seriously and at face value, the question arises of why he bothered to publish the Letter at all. Certainly, the time and energy expended seem out of all proportion

to his expressed purpose. This leads naturally to the conclusion that Rousseau's statement of purpose in the preface is more accurate and more comprehensive than his statement of purpose at the end of the Letter, but that his concern with "truth" and "humanity" must be obfuscated, and that he seeks to leave the reader, or at least the casual reader, with the impression that the Letter is considerably more frivolous than it actually is.

Rousseau's assessment of the Letter in his concluding remarks may be partially true. It is necessary to recall the first two sentences of the Letter's final paragraph: "Here you have, Sir, the entertainments which are necessary to republics. As to the one which your article on Geneva forced me to treat of in this essay, if ever private interest succeeds in establishing it within our walls, I foresee unhappy effects. . . ." These remarks are addressed directly to d'Alembert, and they distinguish between two subjects dealt with in the Letter: those amusements which are appropriate to republics, on the one hand, and that amusement which d'Alembert's article forced Rousseau to deal with, on the other. These subject matters are to a considerable degree independent of one another. At the very least, the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics is not exhausted after the status of one particular amusement has been determined. D'Alembert's article forced the question of the theater on Rousseau. Thus, in the above, Rousseau tacitly acknowledges that the subject matter of the Letter is not confined to the theater. Rousseau's summation of his purposes at the end of the Letter, however, refers only to his treatment of the proposal to establish a theater in Geneva: it is for the loss of the theater as a source of amusement

that he "consoles" the youth of Geneva. Once this is recognized, the possibility arises that Rousseau's concluding remarks may reflect a sub-set, but only a sub-set, of his purposes in the Letter.

In his concluding remarks, Rousseau states that he was "forced" by d'Alembert to deal with the subject of the theater. To this extent, his concluding remarks agree with the preface, where he ascribed the writing of the Letter to a kind of compulsion.⁸ What Rousseau says about d'Alembert's proposal, and perhaps about the theater in general, is thus coerced speech. What he says about those amusements appropriate to republics appears, on the other hand, to have been spoken freely: he was under no compulsion to address this particular subject. This suggests that Rousseau's final assessment of the value of the Letter may be accurate to the extent that the Letter is viewed as nothing more than a response to d'Alembert's article on Geneva. As we know, however, the Letter is not simply a reply to d'Alembert's article. The question of what amusements are appropriate to republics, for example, was not raised by d'Alembert's article, where the question was the desirability of a Genevan theater. To answer this latter question, it is not necessary to answer the former; yet, Rousseau does so. The Letter is pockmarked with such departures from a strict concern with d'Alembert's proposal. Indeed, in the preface, Rousseau warns the reader that such departures will be frequent, speaking of them as "digressions."⁹ The status of these digressions, and their place in terms of Rousseau's purposes in the Letter, has never been made completely clear. In the preface, Rousseau suggests that they are intended merely to relieve his boredom with the work of writing the Letter.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is these digressions which are responsible

for extending the length of the Letter from "one or two printed pages at the very most," which Rousseau indicates he originally anticipated, to well over a hundred pages. Rousseau's digressions thus dominate the Letter, and, insofar as this is the case, the general worth of the Letter cannot be ascertained without assessing the value of these digressions. In particular, Rousseau's deprecation of the Letter's worth in his concluding remarks cannot be taken too seriously, because those remarks apply only to that portion of the Letter which was "forced," which is to say, to that part of the Letter which deals with d'Alembert's proposal, and the bulk of the Letter, according to Rousseau's own admission, digresses from what is required by this subject.

There may be a connection between Rousseau's silence concerning his duty to truth and affection for humanity in the concluding paragraph of the Letter and the division of the Letter into forced and unforced parts. If Rousseau's concluding remarks apply only to that portion of the Letter which was dictated by the appearance of d'Alembert's article, and if the Letter digresses any number of times from a strict concern with d'Alembert's article, then Rousseau's self-acknowledged duty to truth and affection for humanity may have informed those digressions and only those digressions. Rousseau's reply to d'Alembert and his discussion of the theater are of primary concern to Geneva, and are conditioned by the requirements of the Republic. These requirements may not include the truth and are certainly separable from that which humanity as a whole requires; what is good for Geneva may not be good simply, which is to say, what is good for Geneva may not be what is good for humanity as a whole and in

the abstract. In his digressions, Rousseau transcends the context of Geneva; he escapes for the moment the duties incumbent upon the good citizen and the compulsion which Geneva's specific needs impose upon him, and in these "digressions" he fulfills his duty to truth and concerns himself with humanity as a whole. We are thus led to suspect that Rousseau's digressions in the Letter more fully express his true thinking than do those parts where he more or less keeps to the main line of argument, and this suspicion receives added weight from Rousseau's labeling the latter as "forced" or constrained speech.

Rousseau's "digressions" culminate in his discussion of those amusements appropriate to republics. The relative importance of this "digression" is further underlined by Rousseau's reference to it in his concluding paragraph, and by the distinction which he draws there between his discussion of republican amusements and his "forced" discussion of the theater. If the question of the theater, as posed by d'Alembert and answered by Rousseau, constitutes one of the thematic questions of the Letter, the preceding suggests that the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics constitutes yet another. This latter question also informs the entire Letter, and not just the later portions. Indeed, the question of the desirability of establishing a theater at Geneva can itself be subsumed under the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics, assuming of course that Geneva is a republic properly speaking. This leads, in turn, to the conclusion that the climax of Rousseau's argument occurs when he openly and self-consciously begins to discuss republican amusements, that is to say, at the end of the Letter.

The preceding considerations compel the conclusion that a comprehensive understanding of the Letter and of Rousseau's purposes in it cannot be attained without a close and careful examination of his final argument concerning those amusements which are appropriate to republics.

Insofar as the Letter culminates in a discussion of those amusements appropriate to republics, Rousseau turns his attention from the particular to the general and from the concrete to the abstract, but he does so in such a way that the introduction of a more general and abstract perspective is obscured. He continues to couch his argument in terms of Geneva, but it is a Geneva in name only; the label remains, but the entity to which that label is applied has been so drastically altered that Rousseau's fellow Genevans would find it almost unrecognizable. The tension between a true republic and Geneva as it is, a tension which permeates the Letter, is resolved by transforming Geneva, through the medium of speech, into a closer approximation of a true republic. At the end of the Letter, Geneva undergoes a new founding, but this time with Rousseau rather than Calvin as legislator.

Rousseau makes use of d'Alembert himself to prepare the way for an act of legislation. From time to time in the Letter, Rousseau speaks directly to d'Alembert.¹¹ Usually, this takes the form of a pseudo-interrogation, in which Rousseau "asks" d'Alembert a question, supplies the answer himself, and then refutes that answer. Such passages would seem to belong to that part of the Letter which Rousseau speaks of as having been "forced;" Rousseau is simply responding to d'Alembert and not initiating anything new. This is more fiction than fact, however. It is Rousseau who specifies the grounds for discussion, although he

seeks to assign the responsibility to d'Alembert. The d'Alembert of the Letter is thus compelled to serve Rousseau's purposes, and the opening of Rousseau's discussion of those amusements appropriate to republics conforms to this practice.

Rousseau begins his discussion of republican amusements by referring to the Letter as a response to d'Alembert's article on Geneva, then specifies an area of agreement between the two writers, and finally poses several wholly rhetorical questions to which d'Alembert is invited to reply:

These, Sir, are the considerations which I had to propose to the public and to you on the question which it pleased you to discuss in an article to which it was, in my opinion, completely alien. If my reasons, less strong than they appear to me, should not have sufficient weight to counter-balance yours, you will at least agree that, in a state as small as the Republic of Geneva, all innovations are dangerous and that they should never be made without urgent and grave motives. Let the pressing necessity of this one then be shown to us. Where are the disorders which force us to resort to so suspect an expedient? Is all lost without this? Is our city so large, have vice and idleness already made such progress, that it can henceforth not subsist without the theater?¹²

After interrogating d'Alembert in the above manner, Rousseau allows him to reply, or, rather, replies for him. Two points should be made here. In the first place, by assuming d'Alembert's agreement with the proposition that, "in a state as small as the Republic of Geneva, all innovations are dangerous" and "should never be made without urgent and grave motives," Rousseau cavalierly sets aside the bulk of d'Alembert's argument supporting the establishment of a theater. In his article on Geneva, far from adhering to the position that any innovation in Genevan life must be justified by "urgent and grave motives," d'Alembert's outlook is progressive; where he sees a fault, no matter how small, in Genevan society, he is more than willing to

propose "innovations" to remedy that fault. Secondly, it should be noted that the reply which is made by Rousseau in d'Alembert's name is not an arbitrary or capricious one; while Rousseau puts words into d'Alembert's mouth, they are words which are to be found in the latter's article on Geneva or which are implied in that article. Nevertheless, because Rousseau has repudiated, in assumed agreement with d'Alembert, the major part of that worthy's argument, that which remains, and upon which d'Alembert's "reply" is based, is distorted to suit Rousseau's purposes.

The d'Alembert who speaks in the Letter is a creature of Rousseau. Although Rousseau plays fair, in the sense that the arguments put into d'Alembert's mouth are in character, he is nevertheless in complete control: d'Alembert speaks when Rousseau wishes him to speak, is silent when Rousseau desires such silence, and, when he does speak, says only what Rousseau wishes him to say. Rousseau, however, maintains the fiction of d'Alembert's freedom. This fiction is directly related to another fiction of the Letter, that Rousseau is writing only in response to d'Alembert's article on Geneva, that, in this sense, Rousseau's argument is "forced," and that it is thus d'Alembert and not Rousseau who is responsible for the content of the Letter.

The above fictions are important to Rousseau's purposes. Paradoxically, it is the appearance of being forced which allows Rousseau to speak freely, or at least more freely than would otherwise be prudent. An illusion is created that what Rousseau says in the Letter he must say in order to respond to d'Alembert; the responsibility is not his. Consequently, Rousseau can raise certain questions which he could not raise on his own initiative without appearing to be impious or a

poor citizen or a dangerous subversive. Rousseau's discussion of the Socinian tendencies imputed to the Genevan clergy by d'Alembert provides perhaps the best example of the freedom which the illusion of being forced gives to him; such a discussion is "least appropriate" for him, but, because d'Alembert broached the subject, "silence is not permitted."¹³ Similarly, when Rousseau speaks of the vast gulf between rich and poor in Geneva, a gulf which clearly violates the idea of republican equality, he maintains the illusion that he does so only in order to refute a possible argument of d'Alembert's.¹⁴ For the same reason, Rousseau can criticize Genevan social life. Because the realization of d'Alembert's proposal would destroy the Genevan circles, Rousseau can discuss the value of these circles; he can say that the men's circles are centers of idleness and individual vice, and that the women's are centers of vicious gossip, because he is ostensibly engaged in proving that, despite this, the circles are superior to what d'Alembert would replace them with.¹⁵ As long as d'Alembert appears as the subverter of traditional Genevan institutions, and Rousseau as the defender, Rousseau can speak almost with impunity.

Rousseau uses d'Alembert to raise the question of those amusements appropriate to republics. The vehicle for this is an argument derived from the latter's article on Geneva. There, d'Alembert argued that "course and silly farces, as contrary to good taste as to good moeurs," are permitted in Geneva, and that such are much less desirable a form of amusement than "a decorous and decent theater."¹⁶ Although this point would seem relatively minor, there is some truth in it, according to Rousseau. Therefore, according to him, it requires a

response. Rousseau's subsequent speech thus gives the appearance of having been forced upon him as a defender of Geneva.

Rousseau responds to d'Alembert's point in what is initially a very reasonable and straightforward manner. While the farces referred to by d'Alembert certainly do exist and are tolerated by the Genevan authorities, they are less of a threat to good moeurs than an established theater would be. Although these farces "shock both taste and moeurs," they are precisely what they appear to be, a rude and tasteless ridiculing of ordinary decency and common morality. They are so patently offensive that no one takes them very seriously, and they thus have little if any adverse effect on Genevan moeurs. The legitimate theater, however, is an entirely different proposition. As Rousseau indicates, it does not so much attack good moeurs as it presents bad moeurs in a favorable light. Moreover, it does so in a highly civilized and decorous manner, and this is the crux of the problem. The theater, unlike the disreputable farces, corrupts in a subtle and devious way. Indeed, like Satan in the Garden of Eden, the corruptor appears in the guise of a benefactor; the theater claims to instruct those who attend, to improve their taste and manners and to expose them to new and valuable ideas. It is precisely because the credulous and unreflective many accept this claim at its face value that the theater is so pernicious. The theater is a place where "decent people think they are being instructed." Such people accept the behavior which is sympathetically depicted as that which characterizes refined men and women, and are thus moved to emulation; that the behavior imitated is corrupt and vicious, or at least potentially so, completely escapes them.

The moral effect of the farces is qualitatively different from the effect of an established theater, and it is this difference which allows Rousseau to turn a relatively tolerant eye on the former's presence in Geneva, while vehemently opposing the introduction of the latter. Although Rousseau may be willing to see the farces tolerated, however, he does not approve of them. As was noted earlier, Rousseau expresses agreement with d'Alembert's observation that the Genevan farces are tasteless and shocking, and an example of bad moeurs. Rousseau goes even further than d'Alembert by suggesting that he would prefer to do away with the farces altogether.¹⁷ Rousseau thus disapproves of both certain existing Genevan amusements and of that new amusement which d'Alembert proposes to introduce. This, in turn, suggests that his opposition to the theater is not based upon any great liking for those Genevan amusements which it would tend to replace, but upon a simple preference for the lesser of two evils. In a well-ordered republic, neither the farces nor the theater would be present. Rousseau's argument thus points to the question of what amusements, if any, are appropriate to republics as such. The remainder of the Letter is devoted, in one way or another, to answering this question.

Before examining Rousseau's answer to the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics, several points should be noted concerning the preceding discussion. In the first place, it should be apparent that Rousseau has deliberately maneuvered his argument to place this question on the agenda. That this question appears as a natural by-product of d'Alembert's reference to the existence of farcical productions in Geneva does not in any way contradict this. Rousseau maintains the illusion of being compelled, by the interplay

between the Letter and d'Alembert's argument, to consider the question of republican amusements as such, but this compulsion is a matter of his own arranging. It was, after all, Rousseau who plucked d'Alembert's reference to the farces out of his article on Geneva and inserted it in the Letter. Moreover, it was Rousseau who figuratively painted himself into a corner by criticizing both the theater and the existing amusements of the Genevans, thus more or less thrusting the question of precisely what amusements are appropriate to republics on his readers. In addition, it should be noted that the question to be considered is, in practical terms, irrelevant to Geneva. Early in the Letter, Rousseau dismissed the question of the nature of the theater in and of itself as "unseasonable;" yet, the question of the nature of republican amusements is unseasonable in the same way as the earlier question, and Rousseau does not dismiss it. Moreover, as we have seen, although the Genevan status quo is defective in several important respects, nothing better can be hoped for, according to Rousseau, let alone deliberately brought about; the conditions for effective political action are absent, and any effort at reform can only make matters worse. Thus, in raising the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics, Rousseau is not speaking primarily to Geneva; Geneva cannot make use of this information.

Rousseau does continue to speak about Geneva. Indeed, his answer to the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics is couched in terms of what amusements would, ideally, be most appropriate to Geneva, and this constitutes something of a problem. A truthful answer to the question of what amusements are most appropriate to republics in general, or to Geneva in particular, can only serve to

embarrass and discredit Geneva as it is, and to make the Genevan people dissatisfied with existing arrangements. The discussion which Rousseau has maneuvered into the Letter is thus not only useless to the republic, but positively subversive of it. Who then is this discussion intended for if not Geneva, and to what end? One suspects that, where Rousseau the citizen falls silent, Rousseau the philosopher continues to speak, and that, where the good of Geneva is disregarded, the good of humanity as a whole is attended to.

The problem of determining what kinds of amusements are suitable for republics is not a trivial one:

What! Ought there, then, not be any entertainments¹⁸ in a republic? On the contrary, there ought to be many. It is in republics that they were born, and it is in their bosom that they seem to flourish with a truly festive air. To what peoples is it more appropriate to assemble often and to form among themselves sweet ties of pleasure than to those who have so many reasons to love one another and to remain forever united?¹⁹

Rousseau's choice of language in the above passage must not be lost to sight in translation. The french term translated as "entertainments" is "spectacles." "Spectacle" is another of those multi-purpose french terms which, like "moeurs," are difficult to translate consistently. Up to this point, the term has been rendered, and justifiably so, as "theater." This is certainly one of its meanings, its specialized meaning, but it has a more general meaning as well: generically, "spectacle" can refer to anything which visually thrusts itself on one's attention or which one goes to see for the purpose of entertainment, and has, in addition, connotations of a gathering of people for the purpose of seeing something and being entertained by that seeing. In this connection, it should be noted that the title of the

work under consideration is, in part, "Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Spectacles. . . ." That Rousseau chose to employ "spectacles," and not "théâtre," in the title suggests from the very first that the subject of the Letter is not confined to the question of the desirability of establishing a theater at Geneva, but it is not until the end of the Letter that this broader subject matter emerges fully into view.

Entertainments, spectacles in the broad sense, are preeminently associated with republics. Their origin, according to Rousseau, is republican, and here one is reminded that the Greek polis gave birth to both the comedy and the tragedy. Moreover, entertainments are most suited to republics, in the sense that a republican atmosphere is most conducive to their growth and development. This is not to say that other kinds of societies do not have spectacles. As is indicated in the First Discourse, rulers often make use of art and culture, including popular entertainments, to make their subjects more contented by providing them with diversions and so taking their minds off the injustices of the established order.²⁰ According to Rousseau, however, this constitutes a perverted use of the spectacle. The republican origin of the spectacle points to its highest use or function. In republics, spectacles serve to bring people together and to foster bonds of amity between them, which is to say, to foster a spirit of community through the provision of shared experiences and pleasures. Raised to its highest pitch, this sense of community constitutes the defining characteristic of republics. This is why the question of what amusements are appropriate to republics is not a trivial one; a sense of community is that one thing which is most needful for

republics, and the provision of appropriate amusements is one way, if not the only way, by which such a sense of community can be brought into being. At the same time, the question raised by Rousseau is one which it is crucial that the would-be legislator be able to answer, and, to this extent, its solution is to be found within the "science of the legislator."

Those entertainments most suited to republics are those which most contribute to the promotion of a sense of community amongst the people as a whole, and Rousseau's final argument against the theater rests on precisely these grounds:

But let us not adopt the exclusive entertainments which cheerlessly close up a small number of people in a dim cave, which hold them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction, which offer nothing to the eye except compartments, iron weapons, soldiers, and afflicting images of servitude and inequality. It is in the open air and under the sky that you ought to assemble and give yourselves up to the sweet sentiment of your happiness. Let your pleasures be neither effeminate nor mercenary; let nothing that has the odor of constraint and selfishness poison them.²¹

The theater isolates men, rather than bringing them together. The spectators are exactly that, and not participants in a common experience; each sits alone and in the dark, with all his attention focused on a few actors, neither seeing nor hearing his fellows. Moreover, even the rudimentary sense of community resulting from having attended the same plays, at the same time, and in the same place is severely limited in scope due to the fact that the modern theater is presented indoors, within a building with limited seating capacity; only a relatively few men can be brought together at any one time. In addition, the subject matter presented in the modern theater is itself

inappropriate to republics, a contention which has already been dealt with at some length.

Although the passage quoted above is seemingly critical of the theater as such, it recalls to mind Rousseau's praise of the ancient theater. That theater was held in the open air; its subject matter was appropriate to republics; and it constituted both a national institution and a form of civic celebration.²² Rousseau's criticism of the theater as inappropriate to republics thus applies only to the modern theater. Furthermore, it would seem that, as far as republics are concerned, his opposition to the establishment of a theater would extend only to the modern theater, and that he would applaud the establishment of a theater modeled after that of the ancient Greeks. This is to forget, however, the vast gulf which Rousseau sees as existing between modern men and the men of antiquity.²³ What was once suitable no longer is so. Indeed, it is questionable whether a true republic is even still possible in the modern age, and, if it is not, the whole question of what kinds of amusements would be appropriate to such a republic becomes moot, at least as far as practice is concerned. Rousseau, however, chooses to ignore this fundamental question, or seems to, and instead turns from criticism to constructive suggestion, from a denial that the modern theater is an appropriate form of entertainment for a republic to a discussion of those amusements which are appropriate for such.

Rousseau's general statement concerning what kinds of entertainments or spectacles are suitable for republics is somewhat paradoxical:

But what then will be the subject of those spectacles?
What will be shown in them? Nothing, if you please.²⁴

Those spectacles which are appropriate to republics "show" nothing, but, since all spectacles by their very nature involve a seeing of something, there would appear to be no spectacles which are compatible with a republican way of life. Such is not the case, however, as Rousseau demonstrates by going on to describe certain spectacles which are suitable to republics:

With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, there also does well-being reign. In the middle of a square, set up a pole crowned with flowers, assemble the people, and you will have a festival. Do better yet: give the spectators over to the spectacle; make them actors themselves; do it in such a way that each sees himself in all of the others, in order that all might be better united.²⁵

For Rousseau, there is a crucial difference between passive and active forms of entertainment, between passively watching a spectacle and seeing it as an active participant. The active kind of spectacle is that which is appropriate to republics, and Rousseau can assert that nothing is "shown" at such spectacles, because a pure act of "showing" implies passivity on the part of the spectators, and there is nothing passive about those who would attend the hypothetical spectacles he describes; the spectators themselves are actors in the spectacle, and see things, so to speak, from the inside. This is an important point for Rousseau. It is when all barriers between participants (or actors) and the spectators, and between the spectators themselves, are broken down that a spectacle acquires a republican character.

A republic for Rousseau is, as we have seen, a complex whole, the various parts of which should be in equilibrium with one another, with each contributing in some way to the maintenance of the whole. Moreover, republics are artificial, hence created by man; they are each the product of a legislator, whose task it is to arrange things so

that the various institutions which make up the social order fit together smoothly and, most importantly, contribute to the education of citizens suited to republics. Each of a republic's institutions has a part to play in this educational process, and amusements are no exception. Their primary function is to foster that sense of community which in large part serves to distinguish the citizen of a republic from the subjects of all other kinds of regimes. Institutionalized amusements accomplish this by frequently bringing the citizenry as a whole together for relaxation and entertainment, by dissolving the barriers between them in an atmosphere of festivity, and by making the happiness of each depend upon the festive spirit which permeates the whole. The shared pleasures which result from such amusements form one of the strongest possible bonds between large groups of men, and the more such amusements are proliferated, the stronger this bond becomes.

After having described in rather abstract terms the nature of those amusements most suited to republics, Rousseau turns to the task of identifying concrete examples of such amusements, purporting to find them in Geneva:

I do not have to go back to the games of the ancient Greeks; there are more modern ones still in existence, and I find them precisely among us. Every year, we have reviews, public prizes, kings of the harquebus, of the cannon, and of sailing. One cannot too much multiply institutions so pleasant and so useful; one cannot have too many such kings.²⁶

It is not at all surprising that, when seeking for examples of those amusements appropriate to republics, Rousseau should turn to the ancient Greeks, but it is more than a little surprising that he should also find such examples "precisely among us." That Geneva has such institutions as those described cannot be seriously doubted: it is

unthinkable that Rousseau should lie about a matter of this nature, a matter on which even the least intelligent and educated of his Genevan audience can be expected to be fully informed. Nevertheless, although Geneva almost certainly has such institutions, their importance in Genevan life would seem to be minimal. Rousseau after all chose to defend the circles, and not the public prizes and etc., against the threat posed by the theater. It is time devoted to the circles which would be lost to the theater, and not time devoted to these other amusements, and this is so because the time expended on the latter is so negligible. The Genevan festivals described by Rousseau thus do not serve as a good example of those amusements appropriate to republics. Their relative unimportance in the organized life of the community denies them the status of republican amusements; while they may be republican in form, they are not so in spirit.

Why does Rousseau raise the question of the Genevan festivals if they do not provide the kind of example he claims to be seeking? Moreover, why does he contend that these festivals exemplify those amusements appropriate to republics when they are radically deficient in this regard? Rousseau's reasons are at least three-fold. At the most superficial level, he is simply fulfilling his duty as a citizen of Geneva: Geneva lays claim to the title of "Republic," and to suggest openly that Genevan amusements are not republican would be to call this claim into question. At a deeper level, however, Rousseau's praise of the Genevan festivals subtly prepares the ground for his assumption of two very different roles, neither of which is completely compatible with his claim to be writing as a defender of the existing Geneva; as we shall see, it provides him with an opportunity to tender

a bit of advice to rulers, while it also opens the way for him to assume the guise of a legislator.

The advice which Rousseau offers to rulers is instructive. The vehicle for this advice is a rather lengthy footnote appended to the passage praising Genevan amusements for their republican character; appropriately enough, Rousseau's advice to rulers is separated from the body of his text, which deals with republics, while, at the same time, by appending this advice to a passage referring to Geneva, he suggests that Geneva too may have rulers. That Rousseau is addressing himself in this footnote to the rich and powerful in other than republican regimes is apparent from the first line: he speaks of "le peuple," which has connotations of "mob" or "rabble," and of the need to keep this class in its place; but, in a republic, where equality reigns, no such need exists.

The gist of Rousseau's counsel is that it is in a ruler's self-interest to provide his subjects with amusements and opportunities for relaxation:

It does not suffice that the people have bread and live in their stations; they must live pleasantly in them, so that they fulfill their duties better, so that they torment themselves less about improving their station, and so that public order might be better established. . . . Wiles and the spirit of intrigue come from uneasiness and discontent; everything goes badly when one aspires to the place of another. One must love one's trade in order to do it well. The foundation of the state is only good and solid when, each feeling himself in his place, the individual forces are united and cooperate for the public good, rather than spending themselves one against the other as they do in every poorly constituted state. Given this, what ought one to think of those who would wish to deprive the people of festivals, pleasures, and every form of amusement, as so many distractions which turn them away from their work? This maxim is barbarous and false. So much the worse if the people have only the time to earn their bread; they must still have some in which to eat it with joy; otherwise, they

will not earn it for long. . . . Do you want, then, to make a people active and laborious? Give them festivals: offer them amusements which will cause them to love their station and prevent them from coveting a sweeter one. Days thus lost will make all the others worth more. Preside at their pleasures in order to render them decent; this is the true means to animate their labors.²⁷

It is in the interest of the privileged members of society to render the life of those beneath them as pleasant as possible; the contentment of the lower classes is the surest guarantee of the status quo, and this contentment can be best achieved by providing the laboring classes with numerous opportunities for amusement and relaxation, opportunities which the more privileged can then take credit for providing. Moreover, Rousseau suggests that a populace which is able to relax from its labors from time to time will be that much more industrious when it does work, thus further benefiting those who live off the labor of others.

Rousseau appears to be speaking as the friend of rulers and the privileged in general; yet, there are reasons to doubt that this friendliness is anything more than a sham to gain their ear and eventual cooperation. Rousseau advises rulers to provide numerous amusements for their peoples. This advice is set forth in a footnote occasioned by a discussion of those amusements appropriate to republics, thus tacitly suggesting that the same amusements may be appropriate to both republics and nonrepublics. This is more than a little surprising, given Rousseau's obvious republican sympathies. In this connection, it is important to note that what is presented by Rousseau as a proposal for solidifying the position and increasing the wealth of the privileged benefits them only indirectly, while immediate benefits devolve upon "le peuple." On the face of it, Rousseau's proposal, if

put into effect, would benefit all segments of society, the rich and powerful included, but the benefit to these latter is more than a little problematic. It must be remembered that this is not the first time in the Letter that Rousseau has had occasion to tender advice to rulers on the subject of popular amusements. Earlier, he stated in no uncertain terms that, particularly in small cities, "princes" should endeavor to limit the number and attractiveness of amusements available to the populace: where a people is already hard-working, care must be taken "against offering distractions which relax the greedy interest that takes pleasure in its efforts and enriches the prince from the avarice of his subjects;" if the people are inclined to idleness, on the other hand, they must be deprived of all amusements, so that they will turn to work as the only available escape from boredom.²⁸

Rousseau's counsel to rulers is contradictory: at one point, he tells them that it is in their interest to deprive their people, insofar as is possible, of all forms of amusement; at another, he tells them that their interest lies in making the lives of their people as pleasant as possible through the provision of numerous amusements and opportunities for relaxation. This contradiction cannot be eliminated by arguing that, since the earlier advice was explicitly directed to the rulers of small cities and rural areas, the latter must be directed to those who rule over large, urbanized populations. The later advice is presented in the form of a note to a section of the Letter which deals with Geneva in particular and republics in general, and we know that not only is Geneva a small city, but that Rousseau believes that all republics must be of a relatively small size if they are to retain their republican character. Thus, the context in which this later

advice to rulers appears suggests that, although obviously not intended to be applicable to true republics, where the question of keeping the people in their place cannot be an issue, this advice is intended for the rulers of small cities. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that Geneva itself has both a privileged class and rulers.²⁹

Why does Rousseau proffer such contradictory advice at different places in the Letter? The answer is that it is not the rulers and the privileged with whom he is concerned: because they are couched in universal terms and because they are mutually contradictory, both pieces of advice cannot be directed toward meeting the interest of the same class of individuals. In both instances, Rousseau's counsel is self-serving, in the sense that his advice, if acted upon, would directly further his own purposes, and only indirectly, if at all, the purposes of those to whom the advice is given. The first piece of advice occurs in a context where Rousseau is arguing against the establishment of a theater; thus, he takes care to foster in those with the power to suppress the theater a belief that it is in their own interest to do so. The later advice is articulated in a quite different context, a context in which Rousseau has expressed a desire to see certain kinds of amusements preserved and/or expanded; thus, he takes care to suggest to those in positions of power that their interests will be served if they encourage such amusements.

Our analysis of Rousseau's advice to rulers provides an important insight into the limitations of philosophy. Rousseau the philosopher is powerless as far as practical affairs are concerned; although he is a "knower," his knowledge as such is politically impotent. Insofar as knowledge is divorced from power, he who knows cannot act effectively,

while those who have the power to act do not know how to employ that power wisely and effectively.³⁰ Paradoxically, however, it is this separation of political power and knowledge which sometimes permits the knower surreptitiously to make use of power. According to Rousseau, an example of this occurs at a successful founding: although the people cannot perceive their true interests, the legislator guides them to the implementation of those interests by playing upon their credulity and ignorance; by disguising his purposes, he makes use of a people's power for ends which that people neither sees nor would accept if seen.³¹ Similarly, in the Letter, Rousseau makes use of the credulity and ignorance of rulers; by persuading them that it is in their interest to make use of their power in a certain way, even when it is not, he makes them instruments of his own purposes.

Once again, we see Rousseau the rhetorician at work. It is rhetoric which, as an adjunct to philosophy, allows the knower to act upon the world, although politically impotent in his own person. The relationship between the two personas, that of philosopher and that of rhetorician, is a complex one. Rhetoric can be a tool of philosophy, but it is not a part of philosophy as such. Rhetoric distorts the truth and may even lie, and is thus necessarily nonphilosophic. Yet, rhetoric is at the same time perfected by philosophy; it is the philosopher who best knows what to say, to whom, and in what manner in order to achieve a desired effect.³² Philosophy also perfects rhetoric by informing it with purpose. Rhetoric by itself is a means in search of an end; it seeks only to persuade, and can argue either side of a question with equal facility and commitment. Rhetoric informed by philosophy, however, acquires the status of a true art or

technē, in the sense that it aims at certain clearly defined and well-specified ends, ends which are provided by the philosopher's knowledge of the good.³³ Similarly, rhetoric completes philosophy by bridging the gap between the knower and the doer. This is not to say that philosophy united with rhetoric is omnipotent. The power of rhetoric is limited, and the bridge between theory and practice is thus temporary. These limits, however, are known to the philosopher as such, who will consequently not attempt to employ rhetoric for tasks beyond its means. Accordingly, Rousseau's rhetoric in the Letter is not directed toward effecting a radical transformation in the political world, or even in Geneva, but to achieving certain limited ends, preventing the establishment of a theater at Geneva and encouraging the proliferation of certain other amusements, ends which are within the competence of rhetoric to achieve.

Rousseau's "advice" to rulers does not monopolize or even dominate the end of the Letter. Because it is set aside in a footnote, the casual reader might miss it altogether, but even the careful reader should be wary of overrating its importance. The Letter continues on for a number of pages after this "advice" is given.³⁴ Rousseau thus has something more to say. His subject is seemingly innocuous enough, the question of how Genevan amusements could be improved. His choice of subject with which to conclude the Letter, indeed, might be interpreted as an effort on his part to balance his opposition to the theater with some constructive suggestions. Moreover, what could be more natural than that Rousseau, who, while searching for examples of those amusements appropriate to republics, had discovered some such amusements in Geneva, should consider the possibility of bringing

Genevan amusements in general more into line with republican principles?

To accept Rousseau's proposal for reforming Genevan amusements at the value he sets upon it, however, is to allow oneself to be misled. Rousseau is concerned with much more than a few forms of amusements which, however important, are yet only a portion of Genevan life. Indeed, as we shall see, Rousseau ends the Letter by verbally making over Geneva as a whole, by transforming it in speech into a closer approximation of a true republic. This is not to say that he examines each of Geneva's institutions in turn and indicates how they should be altered in order to make them conform with republican principles. Far from it. On the surface, he appears to be dealing only with "spectacles," with forms of amusement. Nevertheless, like Socrates and his interlocutors in the Republic, Rousseau is engaged in founding a city in speech.

From the beginning, Rousseau implies that the adoption of the amusements which he proposes would transform Geneva. The few amusements similar to those proposed by Rousseau which Geneva already has are more than a little alien to the city's everyday life:

. . . it is necessary to have been there with the Genevans to understand the ardor with which they devote themselves to [these festivals]. One no longer recognizes them; they are no longer that sober people which never departs from its economic rules; they are no longer those slow reasoners who weigh everything, including jokes, in the scale of judgement. They are lively, gay, and tender. . . . All the societies make up but one; all become common to all. . . . It would be the image of Lacedaemon if a little too much lavishness did not reign there, but even this lavishness is now in its place, and the sight of abundance renders that of the liberty which produced it more moving.³⁵

In participating in those amusements which are appropriate to republics, the Genevans acquire a different character from that which they normally display; they become unrecognizable. But they become unrecognizable precisely because they have more or less taken on the character of a republican citizenry, because they have become transformed into something resembling Spartans. Even allowing for exaggeration, Rousseau's point would seem clear enough. A city which provides frequent and varied amusements of the kind which he describes would possess a civic character radically different from that normally displayed by Geneva as it is; and, if Geneva could and would adopt such institutions on a large scale, it would become something other than Geneva. Rousseau might continue to refer to this hypothetical city as "Geneva," and he might go to considerable lengths to suggest that it differs from the existing Geneva only in terms of a few minor changes in a few minor institutions, but this is simply a prudential obfuscation of the subversive nature of his writing.

That Rousseau is engaged in verbally founding a new city, and not simply calling for a few reforms, is a necessary consequence of the principles which underlie the whole corpus of his work. We have noted that Rousseau's outlook is generally conservative, that in most instances he considers attempts at reform to be "chimerical," and that he views the forestalling of change to be, except in completely corrupt societies or in extremely unusual situations, the only goal of informed political action. A society which has achieved stability is, according to Rousseau, a complex whole, the parts of which are in equilibrium with one another. In such a situation, institutional changes tend to have repercussions throughout society, and there is no way of predicting

in advance whether these second order changes will be for good or ill, although the latter is much the more probable. Rousseau's defense of the Genevan circles illustrates the consequences of this outlook: although he tacitly admits that the circles are less than ideal institutions from a republican point of view, he nevertheless seeks to preserve them precisely because they are not completely corrupt and vicious.

Seen in the light of his defense of the circles, Rousseau's proposed reform of Genevan amusements appears more than a little inconsistent. Indeed, if successfully put into practice, his proposal would have the effect of doing away with those same circles that he earlier contended should be preserved; the proliferation of new amusements would make inroads into the time the Genevans had previously devoted to the circles, and this is one of Rousseau's arguments against the theater. Even more significantly, Rousseau's reformist proposals seem to fly in the face of the conservative attitude which he has maintained throughout the Letter.

It might be objected at this point that Rousseau's proposed reforms, if put into effect, could not possibly work a transformation of Geneva, in the main because these proposals are directed to only a few, relatively unimportant institutions. To a degree, this objection is well-taken, but only to a degree. Certainly, Rousseau's subject matter is athletic contests, boat races, balls for young people, and a kind of beauty pageant, what most people would consider essentially frivolous institutions of no great importance in the general scheme of things. At the same time, he appears to ignore those institutions which are explicitly political, which is to say, those institutions

which are generally viewed as determining the nature of any given society. If Rousseau had proposed changes in Geneva's political institutions, one would be more inclined to take seriously the idea that his discourse is radically subversive of the Genevan status quo, as well as the idea that he is engaged in verbally founding a new Geneva.

That Rousseau does not propose changes in Geneva's governmental institutions does not mean that his proposals have no bearing upon the political realm. For Rousseau, those institutions which are most closely identified in common discourse with the political are epiphenomenal. Certainly, these institutions are the most visible manifestation of the organized common life of a society, but what must be remembered is that, for Rousseau, that common life both precedes and molds these institutions; in any society, the regime, and the governmental institutions which are its visible expression, is more or less determined by such factors as the distribution of wealth, the state of the arts and sciences, prevailing moeurs and religious beliefs, and the character of the people in general. Other factors, such as geography and climate, also exert considerable influence, but those enumerated in the preceding are of overwhelming political significance because they alone are subject to human influence. That they are not commonly regarded as of crucial importance does not alter this fact, but it does allow Rousseau to perform a verbal sleight of hand in the Letter. He can criticize Genevan amusements, propose changes in them, criticism which is implicitly political and changes which would have very definite political consequences, while seeming to acquiesce in the ostensibly more important aspects of the Genevan status quo. Because Rousseau refrains from criticizing those institutions which are widely regarded as

political in nature, the Letter presents itself to those in power in Geneva as innocuous, and its author appears as a harmless eccentric who is preoccupied with boat-races and dances. Yet, at the same time, Rousseau is engaged in a much more subversive activity than would have been the case had he explicitly proposed changes in the structure of Genevan government. Such changes would never have been effected. Government is epiphenomenal, and, as long as its foundation in the moeurs and character of the people remains intact, the Genevan government is secure from everything save external aggression. The Letter, if understood properly and taken seriously, undermines that foundation.

The Letter can thus be thought of as culminating in a radical attack on Geneva as it is. Nevertheless, this attack is, according to Rousseau's own principles, a necessarily futile attack, at least as far as effecting any meaningful reformation in Genevan life is concerned. Rousseau's "reforms" will never be enacted. The amusements he proposes to introduce are those suited to republics, but Geneva is fast losing, if it has not already lost, its republican character. Moreover, the clock cannot be set back; once lost, republican virtue cannot be regained; once a people has allowed itself to acquire rulers, it becomes slavish, and thereafter corruption and viciousness can only increase. Even aside from this, it is Rousseau's belief that the effect of grafting new institutions onto an ongoing society can never be predicted with any accuracy. Thus, even if his proposals were acted upon, it is likely that they would have very different consequences than those described.

When viewed exclusively in terms of Geneva, Rousseau's proposals acquire a utopian character. At the very most, they provide only a

basis for condemning Geneva as it is; if Geneva were truly a republic, it would already possess those institutions proposed by Rousseau, and those institutions, rather than the circles, would be the primary locus of Genevan amusements. Geneva thus fails to measure up to the standard tacitly imposed by Rousseau, but nothing can be done about this; the real, in this instance, cannot be brought significantly closer to the ideal.

This brings us once again to the idea of Rousseau as the founder of a city in speech. Geneva is rife with moeurs and institutions which give it a less than republican character, and which render its people less than simply virtuous. Nothing can be done to remedy this. Indeed, the most that action can achieve is to temporarily delay the further corruption of the city and its people. This does not mean, however, that the nature of Geneva's problems cannot be known or that remedies for these problems do not exist. Such remedies do exist, but they can only be employed before the problems for which they are specifics have manifested themselves; that is to say, these remedies are only applicable at the founding of a city. Because Calvin was an inferior legislator, it is already too late for Geneva. If Rousseau's analysis had stopped at this point, we would possess a subtle and insightful criticism of Genevan moeurs and institutions, and little else; the Letter would be an essentially negative and critical work. Rousseau does not stop here, however; rather, he shows the careful reader how Calvin's work could have been improved upon. He metaphorically turns back the clock and refounds Geneva, but this time with himself, rather than Calvin, as legislator.

The Letter becomes much more internally coherent if we view it as concluding with a verbal refounding of Geneva. The contradiction between Rousseau's conservatism and pessimistic attitude toward change, on the one hand, and his proposal for introducing republican amusements into Geneva, on the other, disappears. There is a time at which such proposals are perfectly in order, and that is at the initial founding of a republic. Rousseau's proposal presupposes the possibility of positive, political action, and this possibility exists only when those conditions necessary for a founding are present.

It might be argued that, even if Rousseau is engaged in "refounding" Geneva in speech, the Letter remains essentially critical. Although he may succeed in pointing out those defects in Calvin's original legislation which brought about Geneva's corruption, nothing of a practical nature can be done to remedy those defects. Rousseau's "refounding" of Geneva can never transcend mere speech. This is certainly true to an extent; Geneva is on a downward path and, according to Rousseau, nothing can be done to halt this. At the very beginning of the Letter, however, Rousseau stated that he was motivated to write out of affection for both "humanity and country."³⁶ His concerns transcend Geneva, and, in this connection, it is important to note that he lists "humanity" first. Rousseau's founding of a city in speech will not and cannot benefit Geneva, but it may very well benefit humanity. To the extent that it aids future legislators to avoid Calvin's mistakes, the Letter will serve a useful and eminently practical purpose, a purpose which is constructive, rather than critical, in nature.

Rousseau's "founding" is patterned after that of Lycurgus. This is not to say that Rousseau's city in speech will be identical to Sparta.

Each act of founding is unique and depends for its success upon a proper appreciation by the individual legislator of the uniqueness of the materials with which he is working. Study of the work of earlier legislators is helpful, but in a limited way. Such study leads one to recognize the desirability of establishing certain kinds of institutions, but these must be adapted to the particular people one is legislating for. This is Rousseau's admitted procedure in the Letter:

But whatever esteem I might have for my compatriots, I know too well how far it is from them to the Lacedaemonians; and I propose for them only those Spartan institutions of which they are not yet incapable.³⁷

Thus, just as Rousseau does not blindly follow Lycurgus, future legislators should not blindly follow Rousseau. At the same time, however, although the specific institutions proposed by Rousseau do not constitute a definite and complete model for future legislators, a careful examination of his overall approach provides the thoughtful reader, and all potential legislators must be thoughtful, with certain lessons concerning the nature of a successful and enduring founding.

In speaking of his "compatriots," Rousseau suggests that he is still dealing with 18th century Geneva, and that the character of its people is what prevents him from counseling the adoption of the full range of Spartan institutions. This seems to contradict our hypothesis that Rousseau is engaged in perfecting Calvin's work; that work cannot be improved upon in the 18th century, but only by replacing Calvin with Rousseau at Geneva's founding. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Rousseau insists that the character of his "compatriots," i.e., of the 18th century Genevans, is a factor in his proposed reformation. These seemingly contradictory conclusions can be reconciled only if we can

assume that the character of Rousseau's "compatriots" more or less approximates that of the Genevans of Calvin's day, which is to say, only if the human material of Geneva's founding was corrupt from the very beginning.

Is the above assumption a reasonable one for us to make at this point? The answer to this is a qualified "yes." The Genevans of Calvin's day and those of Rousseau's are identical in at least one important respect, and this identity also serves to separate both groups of Genevans from Lycurgus' Spartans. From the time of Calvin on, the Genevans have been modern men. As such, they differ significantly from the men of antiquity, and most especially from the Lacedaemonians.³⁸ This is not to say that there are not several distinct kinds of modern men--one need only recall the distinction between Paris and Geneva--or that the Genevans are not in the process of becoming something other than what they once were and still to a degree are. The point is that the Genevans have, from their inception as a people, partaken of the characteristics of modern man, and this necessarily had a decisive influence upon both the founding of the Republic and its subsequent development. The legislators Rousseau unequivocally praises in his various works are all ancient. Indeed, Calvin is the only modern to whom he even accords the title of "legislator," and Calvin's claim to this title is highly problematic. This would seem to create a presumption against the possibility of modern foundings, or at least against the possibility of any modern "legislator" attaining the stature of a Lycurgus, a Numa, a Moses, or even a Solon. This presumption cannot derive from any lack of a potentially great legislator: the "real science of the legislator" has, in fact, only been perfected in modern

times, and by Rousseau himself.³⁹ The problem is with modern man. Relative to the men of antiquity, modern men are deficient in those traits of character which are necessary for the founding of a republic in the complete sense. Even the best of these, the Corsicans, although they have not developed the vices which are pandemic in the modern world, do exhibit prejudices which would reduce the effectiveness of any founding.⁴⁰

The Genevans of Calvin's day and those of Rousseau's thus share certain qualities which allows Rousseau to label both groups as "modern." Moreover, even within the general category of "modern men," the Genevans, both past and present, exhibit a similarity which at the same time sets them apart from other kinds of modern men. The Genevans are now, and have been since Calvin's time, bourgeois in their outlook. As the Letter makes clear, this is in the process of changing; the Genevans are becoming more and more like Parisians, with the movement for the introduction of a theater being symptomatic of this change. But the point is that this change is by no means complete; the bourgeois character of Geneva is still largely intact, and this is what allows Rousseau to phrase his correction of Calvin's work in terms of his "compatriots." That the people of Geneva are no longer precisely the same as they were in Calvin's day, however, renders the effectiveness of Rousseau's "founding" problematic; what is most suitable for his compatriots may be only more or less suitable for the Genevans of an earlier day. This must necessarily be so. Rousseau knows the earlier Genevans only at secondhand, from their reflection in the Genevans of his day, from oral history, and from books. Rousseau is thus less than a perfect replacement for Calvin; he lacks the comprehensive

knowledge of his materials which is necessary to a true founder. Nevertheless, Rousseau is still capable of improving upon Calvin's work because he possesses the "real legislator's science" and Calvin did not. Thus, Rousseau's correction of Calvin is still of value to the potential legislator.

One might well ask at this point why Rousseau has bothered to provide an example of a necessarily defective founding. More perfect examples of past foundings are available in Lycurgus' Sparta, Numa's Rome, Moses' Jews, and even Solon's Athens. Such examples, however, are generally inapplicable to the modern world; they are, to use Rousseau's language in the Letter, "unseasonable." The founding of Geneva, on the other hand, was a modern founding, and is thus more relevant to the education of modern legislators. Moreover, in blurring the distinction between the Genevans of the past and those of the present, Rousseau's founding focuses on the Genevans as a type, and that type is bourgeois man. What he provides at the end of the Letter is thus not so much a correction of Calvin's work as it is an example of the founding of a bourgeois republic, a republic which, because of the preexisting character of the people, is less than simply virtuous, but which at the same time may represent the highest form of political life open to modern man.

Viewed in this light, the end of the Letter constitutes both a lesson to potential legislators in the art of founding republics and a reminder, both to the potential legislator and the philosophically inclined reader, that the outer limits of the possible in the sphere of political action have been greatly reduced in modern times. The potential legislator, when he exists at all, can no longer aspire to

creating a political edifice which would rival that of Lycurgus or Numa; rather, he must, so to speak, confine himself to improving upon the more mundane and commonplace legislation of a Calvin. This is not to say that there is no longer a place for the "legislator's science" in the scheme of things. That science is still the best hope of mankind, but what can be done with it is no longer so grand as it once was. Similarly, the lessons which the Letter provides in the science of the legislator are still valuable, although these lessons are, for the most part, limited to those aspects of the legislator's science which are especially relevant to bourgeois republics.

The most important of the lessons which the Letter teaches to the potential legislator is one which we have already noted in passing. Rousseau's proposed "reform" of Geneva focuses exclusively on what is generally considered the less serious side of social life, that is to say, upon amusements and spectacles. Obversely, he is silent on the subject of governmental structure as such. Plainly, Rousseau's silence does not mean that those institutions which are overtly political in nature are not important to a republic, and neither does it mean that a legislator can reasonably ignore such institutions. If nothing else, even a cursory reading of the Social Contract would correct this impression. The Social Contract is a treatise on republics, treating particularly of their founding and of the means to their preservation, and two of its four books deal with the subject of republican government as such: Book III deals with this subject in a more or less abstract form, while Book IV examines the use value of certain specific governmental structures within a republic.⁴¹ The question of what general form of government and what specific governmental institutions

are best for a given people is, therefore, an important one, but it is not the most important question for the legislator. Paradoxically, the seemingly least serious side of social life poses the most serious problem for the legislator. In the Letter, Rousseau implicitly teaches that, for a legislator, the institution of appropriate amusements and public festivals has a higher priority than the establishment of appropriate governmental structures. In this respect, the Letter is by no means atypical of Rousseau's political works. His proposed legislation for a new Polish state displays the same priorities: before turning to the question of the form which the new government should take, he first addresses himself to the problem of instituting appropriate amusements, public festivals, and children's games, while implying that, in this respect, he is simply following the practice of the ancient legislators.⁴²

The amusements Rousseau proposes to introduce into Geneva are of two kinds, the public festivals described earlier and a kind of ball or dance. In regard to the former, Rousseau's purposes are fairly transparent. That one thing most needful for republics is a patriotic citizenry, citizens who are attached to the community as a whole and to one another by bonds of affection;⁴³ indeed, without this, a community in the precise sense of the term does not exist. Geneva as it is, however, has proven incapable of inducing such affection, and it is Rousseau's intention to remedy this:

But do you know, Sir, whom we ought to strive to attract and keep within our walls? The Genevans themselves, who, with a sincere love for their country, all have so great an inclination for travelling that there is no country where one does not find them dispersed. Half of our citizens, scattered through the rest of Europe and the world, live and die far from their fatherland.⁴⁴

Rousseau ascribes the dispersal of the Genevans "through the rest of Europe and the world" to the force of circumstances and a weak kind of necessity:

I know that we are forced to go and seek afar the resources that our own land refuses us, and that we could only with difficulty subsist if we were shut up here.⁴⁵

The operative words in the above passage are "only with difficulty;" the Genevans could, Rousseau implies, subsist if they were all shut up within their own country, but they prefer an easy life abroad to a more difficult one at home, and thus reveal themselves to be deficient in that attachment to country which is the foundation of all patriotism. Rousseau proposes to remedy this state of affairs by countering the economic incentives to leave Geneva with nonmaterial inducements to stay, that is to say, by introducing amusements into Geneva which, because of the charm and pleasure associated with them, will attach the Genevans more strongly to their homeland.

These amusements must be national in character and idiosyncratic to Geneva, and this, to return to an earlier theme, constitutes yet another argument against the theater: the theater is present "through the rest of Europe and the world," and its presence in Geneva would in no way contribute to inducing Rousseau's compatriots to prefer living in the homeland to living elsewhere; indeed, because of the superiority of the Parisian theater, a Genevan lover of the theater would have yet another incentive for living abroad.

Rousseau claims to have based his proposed reform of Genevan amusements upon the example of Sparta, and thus upon the legislation of Lycurgus:

Thus did that Sparta, which I will never cite enough as the example which we ought to follow, recall its citizens by modest festivals and games without splendor; thus in Athens, amidst the fine arts, thus in Susa, in the lap of luxury and softness, the bored Spartan sighed for his coarse feasts and fatiguing exercises. It is at Sparta, in a laborious idleness, that all was pleasure and entertainment; it is there that the rudest labors passed for recreation and the least relaxations contributed to public instruction; it is there that the citizens, constantly assembled, consecrated all of life to amusements, which were the great business of the state, and to games, from which they relaxed only in war.⁴⁶

Rousseau's emphasis on the proper ordering of the less serious side of social life is vindicated by the example of Sparta. The most perfect republic made amusements "the great business of the state." The Spartan was taught at an early age to find his pleasure in ways which were available to him only in Sparta; thus, when abroad, he was unhappy and restless, and longed to return. It was the emphasis on amusement and relaxation in Sparta, and the careful tailoring of these amusements to produce a particular kind of men, which more than anything else formed the basis of the Spartan's attachment to the state, and thus of Spartan greatness. It was this attachment, in turn, which caused the Spartan to subordinate individual interest to the public good, or, more correctly, to identify his individual good with the public good and his individual happiness with the public happiness.

Rousseau's solution to the problem posed by the Genevans' lack of patriotism is, however, not a complete solution. The amusements he proposes for Geneva will not have the effect of attaching the Genevans as closely to their country as the Spartans were to theirs. Except in time of war, the Spartan went abroad only infrequently. The Spartans "in Athens" recalls the Spartan ambassadors whom we encountered earlier in the Letter, and who were abroad on the state's

business; the Spartans "in Susa," on the other hand, recalls those Spartans who were exiled from their country and engaged in "medizing," i.e., sided with the Persians against Greece, including Sparta. The point is that even these latter were not indifferent to their own country, and lived abroad only as a result of absolute necessity.⁴⁷ It appears that the Genevans, however, even when brought up under Rousseau's proposed institutions, will continue willingly to live abroad because life is easier there than at home, and that the effect of being raised under Spartan-like institutions will be only to attract them back to Geneva after they have enriched themselves abroad. Rousseau accepts this:

I know that we are forced to go abroad and seek the resources that our own land refuses us, and that we could only with difficulty subsist if we were shut up here, but at least let this banishment not be eternal for all. Let those whose labors heaven has blessed come, like the bee,⁴⁸ fetching the fruit back to the hive, gladdening their fellow citizens with the sight of their fortune, animating the emulation of the young, enriching their country with their wealth, and let them modestly enjoy at home the goods honestly acquired abroad.⁴⁹

The bourgeois character of Geneva is a given. It constitutes a brute fact which the legislator must accept. This acceptance must go beyond mere toleration. Rousseau not only tacitly admits that his proposed institutional changes will not alter Geneva's bourgeois character, but actually founds his proposal on that character. His statement of the benefits to be derived from the changes he proposes appeals directly to bourgeois acquisitiveness; the idea of instituting amusements which will bring expatriot Genevans back to the city in their old age, after they have become wealthy, thus enriching the city, is a very attractive one for the wealth-loving Genevans. Indeed, given the nature of the Genevan people, and especially their love of gain, this is perhaps the

most persuasive argument Rousseau could make in favor of his proposed institutions. Thus, in keeping with the "real science of the legislator," Rousseau presents his proposals in terms which appeal strongly to the people he is legislating for.

One must be on guard against accepting at face value Rousseau's account of the effect of his proposed institutions. He is engaged in founding a city, albeit in speech, and the Social Contract teaches that this is seldom, if ever, accomplished without the telling of a fundamental lie.⁵⁰ At a founding, the people's acceptance of the new institutional framework must be secured before they are capable of appreciating the true value of that framework. The ancient legislators gained such acceptance by claiming divine inspiration, with the gods serving as guarantors for the worth of the proposed institutions. Rousseau, by way of contrast, is silent concerning the gods, and instead appeals to the Genevans' avarice and material self-interest. What moves the Genevans is not faith or religious authority, but greed; metaphorically, the only god they give their total allegiance to is Mammon in his earthly incarnation. Consequently, where the ancient legislators claimed to reveal the true wishes of the gods, Rousseau claims to reveal a way in which Geneva can truly enrich itself. According to Rousseau, the ancient legislators lied in order to gain the people's acceptance for their proposals, and we are left with the possibility that Rousseau may be lying as well. He may intend for his proposed institutions to have an effect quite different from that which he predicts for them in the Letter. Certainly, we have good reason to believe that Rousseau's actual purpose is at variance with his stated purpose. The point to remember is that, when legislating

for a people like the Genevans, one must establish one's authority by asserting a special relationship with Mammon; one must offer such a people wealth, even if it is one's intention to give them something entirely different.

It has been argued that the latter part of the Letter teaches that the first priority of the legislator is the establishment of appropriate amusements, that is, amusements suited to a republic. To the extent that this is the case, the Letter is a vehicle for conveying a part of what Rousseau has referred to as "the real science of the legislator." This science is independent of time and place. Although it necessarily takes cognizance of time and place, the legislator's science only provides general guidelines which are good anywhere and anywhen, guidelines which the individual legislator must adapt to the particular context within which he is working. Accordingly, Rousseau's proposal for the "~~reform~~" of Genevan amusements, because it is a vehicle for conveying a part of the legislator's science, is relatively vague and amorphous; he speaks in general terms, and for the most part avoids putting forward any really concrete proposals, because to do otherwise would be to submerge the general principles he is attempting to covertly impart in the particularities of an individual case. Thus, Rousseau speaks of the need for public festivals, because these are necessary to republics as such, but he glosses over the precise form which such festivals are to take. To be sure, he lauds certain existing Genevan amusements, speaks approvingly of "prizes for gymnastics, wrestling, running, and the discus," and devotes an entire sentence to the desirability of establishing a boat race cum festival on Lake Geneva, but these ideas are thrown off, as it were, in passing, and

serve more to illustrate the need for public festivals in a republic than as concrete proposals. There is, however, one exception to this. Rousseau devotes several pages of the Letter to arguing for the establishment of "balls for young marriageable persons," and even details the overall form which these balls should take. This exception is an important one:

In perfecting this project in this way, and giving to it an air of gallantry and amusement, one would impart to these festivals several useful purposes which would make them an important part of order⁵¹ and good moeurs.⁵²

The term translated as "order" in the above passage is "police," which refers to that branch of governments which has to do with public order and morality. Thus, Rousseau clearly indicates that the "project" in question is one which would have a considerable and salutary influence on those moral qualities which are of concern to the political realm, and particularly to republics. Moreover, that this is the only proposed amusement which he discusses at any length further underlines its importance, an importance which, if our understanding of this part of the Letter is correct, derives not so much from its hypothetical effect on Geneva as it does from its relevance to the "real science of the legislator."

Rousseau assigns to the proposed balls a twofold purpose. On the one hand, they constitute yet another kind of public festival, in which the various members of the community, of all ages and both sexes, come together. On the other, these balls are specifically intended to bring together marriageable members of the two sexes in a manner most conducive to the preservation of good moeurs. It is this second purpose which distinguishes the balls from the other public festivals

proposed by Rousseau, and which gives them their special importance. They are intended to function as a restraint on that most tempestuous and dangerous of the youthful passions, sexual desire, while serving as a kind of safety valve for its harmless and decent expression:

But let me be told where young marriageable persons will have occasion to acquire a taste for one another and to see one another with more propriety and circumspection than in a gathering where the eyes of the public are constantly upon them, forcing them to be reserved and modest, and to watch themselves with the greatest care?⁵³

In sharp contrast to existing Genevan practices, these balls would provide for the orderly mingling of the young of both sexes, with the public nature of the occasion guaranteeing more or less decorous conduct. Largely as a result of its Calvinist morality, Geneva as it is frowns upon such a mingling, and does its best to discourage it. But, because of the strength of youthful sexual attraction, the only result is to drive intercourse between the sexes underground and to encourage irregular and illicit relationships:

What happens in those places where there reigns an eternal constraint, where the most innocent gaiety is punished as a crime, where the young people of the two sexes never dare to gather in public. . . ? Intolerable tyranny, which nature and reason disavow, is avoided. For the permitted pleasures, which a gay and lively youth is denied, are substituted more dangerous ones. Private tête à têtes, adroitly managed, take the place of public gatherings. By reason of concealing themselves as if they were culpable, they are tempted to become so.⁵⁴

Human sexuality cannot be suppressed completely, particularly in the young, and Calvin, or at least the Geneva he founded, appears to have overlooked this. By denying the young a decent and orderly arena in which to mingle, he literally forced them to engage in subterfuge and deception, and encouraged an example of lawlessness which, it is reasonable to conclude, spread to other areas of social life as well.

To the extent that this was indeed so, Calvin was a poor legislator.

The balls proposed by Rousseau would have the effect of making public that which is by nature private, the coming together of the two sexes for the purpose of taking pleasure in one another's company. In doing so, he would purge this coming together of its natural consummation in the sexual act, an act which by its nature is opposed to the public realm.⁵⁵ Rousseau's goal thus seems to be, as far as the unmarried are concerned, to provide for the expression of sexuality without physical sex. In making this proposal, Rousseau is not motivated by a puritanical outrage at illicit sexual activity or by a concern with sexual propriety for sexual propriety's sake. There is a distinct public interest involved in his proposal. To clarify the nature of this public interest, one might begin by recalling the lesson derived from Rousseau's earlier recounting of the story of Titus and Berenice. Unrestricted sexual desire, or romantic love, which is one of its forms, is radically apolitical, because radically private. Rousseau's intention is to deprivatize human sexuality to a certain extent by providing it with a public form of expression. His proposed balls would have the effect of bringing sexuality partially out in the open, thus making it a potential ally, rather than enemy, of the public realm. This is accomplished by providing for the institutionalization of courting in the form of public festivals or "balls."

Courtship is a prelude to marriage, and it is this which causes Rousseau to place such emphasis upon the public supervision of courtship. The public interest is clear and distinct, or should be by this point in our analysis: marriage is "the first and holiest of all the

bonds of society;"⁵⁶ civil society is founded on the family, and the family on the institution of marriage. It is important to the community at large that marriages be stable and enduring, and that marriage partners be possessed of good moeurs and character. It is in the family that citizens are formed, and the successful education of future citizens depends upon the provision of the right kind of family life. Moreover, love of family, the first and strongest of all the social bonds, constitutes the primary ingredient in love of country. The political community, composed of families, becomes a kind of super-family to which one's love is given because it is one's own. In a true community, the demands of patriotism eventually come to take precedence over love of family when there is a conflict between the two, but the latter remains the foundation upon which the former is built.

The pairing-off of male and female is the essence of marriage, or, rather, the institution of marriage involves an attempt on the part of organized society to regulate this pairing-off. Rousseau's balls would simply extend the scope of this regulation to courtship, and so would better prepare the ground for later marriages which satisfy the public interest involved. Such regulation is necessary. Marriage involves, according to Rousseau, an unnatural restraint on sexual activity, in that man is not by nature monogamous.⁵⁷ The strength of a marriage, and of the family which is founded upon it, depends upon the chastity of the partners, and particularly of the woman.⁵⁸ Problems thus arise because the sexual passions are among the strongest known to man, and because men are apt to rebel against the artificial restrictions imposed upon their sexual activity by civil society. An intense self-discipline is the only real solution to this problem, but,

because of the strength of the sexual passions, this self-discipline must be inculcated from an early age, which means, in turn, that restraints upon youthful sexuality must be imposed. These restraints cannot be either all-encompassing or coercive in nature, else sexual passion will find an illicit outlet. It is thus necessary, on the one hand, that those involved be more or less willing to abide by the restraints imposed upon them, and, on the other, that there be some provision for the channeling of youthful sexuality into innocuous and/or salutary outlets.⁵⁹ The balls proposed by Rousseau meet this twofold requirement. There, the young will come into contact with one another as male and female, but in such a way that this contact will be kept within the bounds approved by society. Moreover, although the young are taught to control themselves before the eyes of the community as a whole, that later in life they might be possessed of sufficient self-discipline to control themselves when in private, they will yet take considerable pleasure in the balls. To the extent that this is so, they become unknowing, but willing, accomplices in their own education in sexual self-discipline. Because of the pleasure involved, they will not feel the restraints imposed upon them, but these same restraints, nevertheless, will subtly and surreptitiously mold their character and moeurs.

The proposed balls would help to solidify the institution of marriage in yet another way. Because it is for life, marriage must be built upon a firm foundation, and sexual attraction in and of itself does not provide such a foundation. Purely sexual attraction is more often transitory than not; at the very least it draws most of its strength from youth and novelty. Marriage, however, extends beyond

one's youth, and novelty has a necessarily short life span. Liking and mutual respect between man and woman constitute a much firmer basis for a lifetime partnership than does physical desire; the former is built upon knowledge of one another's inner qualities of character and temperament, the latter upon a powerful but transitory attraction which blinds one to all else. The difficulty lies in the fact that the latter is, over the short-run, much more powerful than the former, particularly in the young. If left to their own devices, the young, overwhelmed by passion and physical desire, do not wait for liking and respect to develop, but impetuously form liaisons which, while they often result in marriage, frequently end in acrimony and even mutual hatred. This is not to say that liking and respect do not sometimes develop over a period of time, even in a marriage initially founded only upon passion, but this is solely a matter of chance. More often than not, when passion declines, there is nothing left to hold the marriage together, with those involved drifting apart and either taking illicit sexual partners or experiencing a life of regret and frustration. The balls proposed by Rousseau involve an attempt to avoid this unfortunate outcome. They would bring young people together in a context where sexual passion is muted and restrained by the public nature of the occasion, thus allowing them to come to know one another as something other than sexual objects.⁶⁰

The purpose of the balls is to strengthen the family, and, indirectly, civil society. The former purpose, however, seems to be only an intermediate step in the realization of the latter. Although civil society rests upon the family unit, it is treated by Rousseau as clearly superior to the family, and this serves to distinguish the Letter

from such of his works as the New Heloise and the Emile. Ultimately, Rousseau justifies the balls in terms of their salutary effect on civil society alone:

These occasions for gathering in order to form unions and arrange for the establishment of households would be a frequent means for bringing together divided families and strengthening the peace so necessary to our state. Without altering the authority of the fathers, the inclinations of children would be somewhat freer; the first choice would depend somewhat more upon their hearts; the agreements of age, temperament, taste, and character would be consulted somewhat more often; and less importance would be attached to those [agreements] of station and wealth, which make poor bonds when they are satisfied at the expense of the others. Relations becoming easier, marriages would be more frequent. These marriages, less circumscribed by equality of rank, would prevent factions, temper excessive inequality, and better maintain the body of the people in the spirit of its constitution. These balls, thus directed, would resemble less a public spectacle than the gathering of a large family, and from the breast of joy and pleasure would be born the preservation, the concord, and the prosperity of the Republic.⁶¹

The preceding underscores the importance of marriage and the family to republics. By decreasing inequality, hindering the emergence of factions, and uniting quarreling groups, properly arranged marriages promote the sense of community upon which republican liberty is founded.

Insofar as the purpose of the balls is to promote the emergence of a kind of super-family which embraces all of society, the family becomes a model which civil society seeks to imitate. The unselfish dedication to the well-being of the whole, which Rousseau demands of the citizen, is analogous to that unselfish love and devotion which, although it is not always present, is more often found in the family than in any other human institution. The political problem for the legislator thus becomes one of inculcating within the individual more or less the same feeling for the political community that he has for his family. Obviously, complete success along these lines is impossible

to achieve: the family is united by direct and immediate ties of blood, while civil society is not, and, because of its relatively small size, it is much easier to identify with one's family than with the entirety of civil society. Nevertheless, it is possible to foment a kind of patriotism which closely approximates, and even draws its strength from, love of family. Rousseau's proposed balls illustrate one possible mechanism for achieving this result. One of the purposes of these balls is to make marriages "easier," less circumscribed by considerations of relative wealth and status. In a society where such balls have been institutionalized, according to Rousseau, the young would marry more out of liking and affection for one another, and not so much because of similarity in wealth or social position. This would have a twofold effect. On the one hand, marriage ties, and thus family ties, would tend to be extended throughout society; the well-to-do would cease to marry only within their own class, as would the less well-to-do, and family ties would serve to cement society more closely together by preventing the formation of hard and fast class demarcations. On the other hand, such marriages would promote the diffusion of wealth throughout society by hindering its concentration within a single endogamous class, and would thus tend to promote and maintain equality of condition.

Both the extension of family ties throughout society and the muting of inequality would have the effect of making civil society more like the family. The former would accomplish this directly by, ideally, binding each citizen within a web of interlocking family relationships, with every citizen in some way related to every other. The muting of inequality contributes in a more indirect manner to the

"familialization" of civil society. Perceived inequalities in wealth and status constitute one of the great causes of social conflict. Where these inequalities have been significantly diminished, those differences between men which tend to keep them at a distance from one another are also diminished. Moreover, the greater the equality of condition, the more uniform individual interests can be expected to be, and the greater the chance that a true community of interest will emerge and be perceived as such. Community of interest, along with recognized blood ties, is what unites the family, and, to the extent that civil society can approximate these conditions, it acquires something of the character of a family association.

There is another side to Rousseau's teaching in the Letter concerning the relationship between the family and civil society. In the absence of some such institutions as the balls he describes, and particularly where strong family ties exist, the family may very well have a disruptive influence on civil society. The family forms bonds between individuals which are more natural than, and prior to, those of civil society. There is thus a danger that, instead of being integrated into the community, the family will constitute an independent basis of association, one which divides, rather than unites, civil society. In particular, insofar as family ties follow class lines, they tend to solidify those lines and to divide society into two or more factions. When family ties parallel social class, one's class acquires something of the character of the family: it is one's own not only by reason of one's relative wealth and social position, but also by reason of blood. Under such conditions, the bonds uniting members of the same class tend to be stronger than those uniting the community as a

whole, and, when loyalty to a class is stronger than loyalty to the community as a whole, class conflict naturally follows, further fragmenting the community. Indeed, under such circumstances, one can no longer speak of a community, except in purely hypothetical terms.

In the abstract, the worth of strong family ties in a republic is problematic. All depends upon the context within which such ties occur, upon, for example, the degree to which the community as a whole forms an endogamous group within which there are few, if any, class barriers to marriage. Where this is the case, the division of society into social classes is muted. In transcending the boundaries between social classes, family ties serve to obscure these boundaries and to reduce the strength of intra-class bonds, thus increasing the probability that loyalty to the community as a whole will take precedence over class loyalty. On the other hand, where family ties reinforce class ties, civil society is broken up into factions, the parts take precedence over the whole, and the political community disappears.

According to Rousseau, the effect of the balls which he proposes would be to reduce or eliminate class barriers to marriage. Consequently, his claim that the preservation and concord of the Republic of Geneva would be furthered by the establishment of such an institution is not mere hyperbole; it is firmly grounded in his general theory of civil society. Moreover, this proposal is more than simply a remedy for Genevan civil strife or a correction of Calvin's legislation. It points directly to the ambivalent place of the family within civil society, while at the same time showing how this ambivalence might be partially resolved. In this way, it contributes to the education of the potential legislator, but, even more than this, it constitutes

something of a correction of Plato's teaching in the Republic, and, to the extent this is so, represents Rousseau's contribution to a millenia old debate concerning the proper place of the family within civil society.

In the Republic, Socrates lists as one of the requirements for the establishment of the just city, or true political community, the abolition of the family.⁶² He would resolve the problematic status of the family within civil society by doing away with it. To a large degree, this proposal contributes to the "utopian," even laughable, character of the city in speech founded by Socrates; to propose doing away with the family is laughable because it is contrary to human nature; similarly, and for this reason, to make the realization of the perfectly just city depend upon the elimination of all family ties is to render that city "utopian." In the Letter, Rousseau does not take issue with Plato directly; the realization of the perfectly just city may require the abolition of the family.⁶³ What Rousseau does suggest is that the adverse effect of the family on political life can be significantly reduced, while leaving the family intact, through the provision of appropriate institutions regulating courtship and marriage.

In the Letter, Rousseau may be more practical than the Socrates of the Republic:⁶⁴ he accepts the family as a necessary part of human existence, and does not even consider its abolition in theory. This acceptance, however, poses problems for both Rousseau the philosopher and Rousseau the teacher of legislators. Because he admits that the family is an inevitable and legitimate form of association, even within the best practicable polity, Rousseau has admitted a certain tension into his political philosophy and into the science of the legislator.

The tension within his political philosophy is between theory and practice, or, which is almost the same thing, between the ideal and the practicable. In theory, as expressed in the Social Contract,⁶⁵ the best political order would be one in which no partial associations existed;⁶⁶ all the citizen's affection would be directed toward the community as a whole, and he would treat all his fellow citizens equally. This Rousseau recognizes as unrealizable, however; in practice, partial associations, and particularly the family, are an inevitable and even necessary part of political life. Thus, even the good citizen's loyalties will always be at least potentially divided between what is his own by reason of blood and the community. This, in turn, has important implications for the science of the legislator. The legislators, according to Rousseau's teaching, must take care to protect and preserve the family, but the family constitutes a threat to the work of the legislator. Because family ties are more natural than the bonds of fellow citizenship, and because the latter are much more subject to the vicissitudes of all man-made things, there will come a time when the interest of the family will be placed ahead of the interest of the community, and family loyalties will destroy civic loyalties. The work of the legislator thus necessarily carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. The science of the legislator is directed, in part, toward strengthening the family, but the family will eventually bring on the ruin of the political edifice which is the legislator's primary creation. The best that can be hoped for is that a legislator will be sufficiently skillful to delay this process through the provision of institutions capable of bringing about the subordination of

the family to the requirements of the political order for a long period of time.

The preceding appears very far removed from the question with which we began this inquiry several hundred pages ago: to what extent is a "free" or "republican" form of government justified in attempting to regulate the amusements and intellectual and artistic pursuits of the individual? This divergence is more apparent than real, however. The preceding analysis, if accepted, justifies the intrusion of the political realm into the most private of individual relationships, that between man and wife and between parent and child. If the political order can legitimately and justifiably go so far in the name of republican liberty, how can it be denied the right to regulate those activities which are so much less private? Even more to the point, the example of the balls proposed by Rousseau demonstrates the tremendous political import of even the most seemingly innocuous activities and institutions. Once this is accepted, it is just a short step to acknowledging that a republic has a legitimate interest in overseeing all aspects of individual behavior, and in measuring that behavior against the requirements of republican liberty.

NOTES

Chapter X

¹"Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 500). Lycurgus, Solon, and Numa are three of the four legislators for whom Rousseau indicates great respect at various places in his work; only Moses is omitted. Cf. Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 956-8); Social Contract, II, iii and viii (O.C., III, 372 and 382-4); "Observations" (O.C., III, 56); "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 499); and Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 180 and 187-8).

²See Chap. II, above.

³Letter, 8 (B., 6).

⁴The term employed by Rousseau is "spectacle."

⁵Letter, 183-4 (B., 136-7).

⁶Translated by Allan Bloom, Politics and the Arts, Appendix, 148.

⁷"O fortunate and more than fortunate, if only they knew their own good."

⁸Letter, 7 (B., 5-6).

⁹Ibid., 8 (B., 6).

¹⁰Ibid., 8 (B., 6-7).

¹¹Cf. Letter, 11-20, 98-100, 123, 165-6, and 183-4 (B., 9-16, 74-5, 92, 123-4, and 136-7). These passages of direct address are usually introduced by an appeal to the judgement of, or an interrogation of, "Monsieur." At one point, the alternate form of address, "you philosophers," which includes d'Alembert, is employed. In addition, there are also a number of passages in which Rousseau addresses an unnamed "you," whom it is reasonable to infer is also d'Alembert.

¹²Letter, 165-6 (B., 123).

¹³Ibid., 11 (B., 9); cf. Letter, 7 (B., 5-6).

¹⁴Ibid., 152-5 (B., 113-6).

¹⁵Ibid., 133-4 and 142-9 (B., 99-100 and 105-10).

¹⁶This argument is to be found in the passage which Rousseau excerpted from d'Alembert's article at the beginning of the Letter.

¹⁷Letter, 167 (B., 124).

¹⁸See note 4, above.

¹⁹Letter, 168 (B., 125).

²⁰First Discourse, I (O.C., III, 6-7 and 7n).

²¹Letter, 168 (B., 125-6).

²²Ibid., 104-5 (B., 78-9).

²³See Chap. III, note 36, above.

²⁴Letter, 168 (B., 126).

²⁵Ibid., 168-9 (B., 126).

²⁶Ibid., 169 (B., 126). Note the veiled implication that one might very well have too many of other kinds of kings.

²⁷Ibid., 169n (B., 126n).

²⁸Ibid., 79 (B., 59).

²⁹Cf. Letter, 152-5 (B., 113-6) with Letters Written from the Mountain, VII.

³⁰Cf. First Discourse, II (O.C., III, 29-30), where Rousseau calls for a reconciliation of power and knowledge.

³¹Social Contract, II, vi and vii (O.C., III, 380 and 383-4).

³²Plato, Republic, 336b-54a, and Gorgias, passim., remain the best commentaries on the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. Note especially the reconciliation between philosophy and rhetoric at the end of the passage in the Republic.

³³This is the theme of Plato's Gorgias; see especially 464b-66a.

³⁴Ten pages in the Bloom edition and fourteen in the Fuchs.

³⁵Letter, 170-1 (B., 127).

³⁶Ibid., 3 (B., 3).

³⁷Ibid., 179-80 (B., 134).

³⁸See Chap. III, note 36, above.

³⁹Cf. Letter, 88 and 163-83 (B., 66 and 126-36); Social Contract, II, viii; Government of Poland, II-IV; and Corsica (O.C., III, 901-2).

⁴⁰Corsica (O.C., III, 902). Cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 180) and Social Contract, II, viii.

⁴¹The chapter titles for these two books are instructive on this point. For Book III: "Of Government in General;" "Of the Constitutive Principles of the Various Forms of Government;" "Classifications of Governments;" "Democracy;" "Aristocracy;" "Monarchy;" "Mixed Governments;" "That All Forms of Government are not Appropriate to Every Country;" "The Signs of a Good Government;" "The Abuse of Government and its Propensity to Degenerate;" "The Death of the Body Politic;" "How the Sovereign Authority is Maintained;" "Deputies or Representatives;" "That the Institution of Government is not a Contract;" and "Means of Preventing the Corruption of Government." For Book IV: "That the General Will is Indestructible;" "The Suffrage;" "Elections;" "The Roman Comitia;" "The Tribunate;" "The Dictatorship;" "Censorship;" "The Civil Religion;" and "Conclusions."

⁴²Government of Poland, I-III (O.C., III, 955-64). Rousseau's treatment of the Corsicans, the other people for whom he drafted a body of legislation, is somewhat different, but this was an artifact of his belief that the problem as regards Corsica was not to create something new, but to maintain a relatively good status quo: see Corsica (O.C., III, 903-4).

⁴³Political Economy (O.C., III, 254-8); Government of Poland, II (O.C., III, 958).

⁴⁴Letter, 177-8 (B., 132). Recall also the number of Genevans who reside outside the walls of the city proper, even though on Genevan territory: Letter, 128-9 (B., 95-6).

⁴⁵Ibid., 178 (B., 132).

⁴⁶Ibid., 179 (B., 133).

⁴⁷Cf. the story of Demaratus in Herodotus, Histories, Book V, para. 75; VI, 61-70; VII, 102-4, 209, 234-5, 237, and 239-40.

⁴⁸Recall Rousseau's low opinion of Mandeville and that worthy's Republic of the Bees: Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 155).

⁴⁹Letter, 178 (B., 132-3).

⁵⁰Cf. Social Contract, II, vii (O.C., III, 383-4) with IV, viii (464-5).

⁵¹The french term employed is "police."

⁵²Letter, 175 (B., 130).

⁵³Ibid., 171-2 (B., 128).

⁵⁴Ibid., 172 (B., 128-9).

⁵⁵Ibid., 112 (B., 83-4).

⁵⁶Letter, 171 (B., 128); cf. Second Discourse, II (O.C., III, 168).

⁵⁷Cf. Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 157-8) and note XII (218) with Letter, 111 (B., 83). See also the second half of Chap. VIII, above.

⁵⁸Emile, V (O.C., IV, 697); Political Economy (O.C., III, 242); Second Discourse, I (O.C., III, 157). See also the second half of Chap. VIII, above.

⁵⁹Cf. Emile, IV (O.C., IV, 656-7 and 663), where Rousseau proposes two quite different outlets for the expression of youthful sexuality.

⁶⁰Cf. the way in which the "educator" in the Emile arranges the courtship and marriage of his young charge: Emile, IV-V (O.C., IV, 639-826 and 860-end).

⁶¹Letter, 175-6 (B., 131).

⁶²Republic, 451c-64d.

⁶³Cf. the distinction between the "public education" of the Cretans, the Lacedaemonians, and the ancient Persians, which is no longer possible, and the education of the Romans, which may still be possible under modern conditions: Political Economy (O.C., III, 260-2).

⁶⁴"May be," because it is questionable whether Socrates himself takes his own "proposal" seriously; cf. Republic, 457d-58b.

⁶⁵Social Contract, II, iii; cf. I, vi.

⁶⁶Even in the Social Contract, it is important to note that Rousseau never speaks openly of the abolition of the family; rather, he condemns "partial associations" in the abstract.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With the expectation that such an undertaking would be instrumental to our attaining a more comprehensive perspective on the problem of censorship, we have devoted considerable time and effort to an analysis of Rousseau's Letter to M. D'Alembert. We began at the beginning and worked our way through to the end of the Letter, focusing on each of Rousseau's arguments in turn and as they presented themselves, in the hope that, by proceeding in this manner, we would be approaching the Letter in the manner intended by Rousseau. This method has a good deal to recommend it,¹ but there is a danger associated with it as well, one which poses a potential threat to the comprehensiveness of any sustained analysis: in carefully scrutinizing its constituent trees, one runs the risk of losing sight of the forest; in carefully following the details of an author's argument, one runs the risk of missing its overall significance. The danger is particularly great with an author such as Rousseau, who admits that he frequently obfuscates his meaning,² and is compounded in a work such as the Letter, which is permeated with "digressions," salutary "lies," and internal contradictions. Having concluded the analytical portion of our work, it would therefore seem advisable that we metaphorically step back a distance, take stock of our findings as a whole, and attempt a synthesis of them.

In attempting to evaluate the Letter's contribution to an understanding of censorship, it is useful to begin with the judgement of

Bertrand de Jouvenel, one of contemporary Europe's foremost political thinkers:

How can its [the Letter's] prophetic character not be recognized today? When it was written, spectacles were the food of only a slim stratum of the population. The frequentation of the spectacles has only been able to become a habit for an entire people in our days. One must be indeed blind not to admit the disastrous effects. . . . Who would deny that movies have made souls more impressionable and more mobile, have disposed hearts to follow their most superficial impulses and to create new ones, have provided minds with false images and taught them to be fooled by pretenses? Who would not assert that today's men seek everywhere, and particularly in public life, romanesque lies and dramatic emotions for which the screen has given them a taste?³

For de Jouvenel, the value of the Letter lies in its subject matter, and especially in Rousseau's analysis of the spectacle, but it is the prophetic character of this analysis which he praises. The Letter is worth reading today, he tells us, because it speaks to contemporary problems; it deals with the effect of spectacles on a society, and that effect is more pronounced today than at any previous time. Indeed, the effect of the union of modern technology with the spectacle has been to render what was once apparent to Rousseau alone now apparent to everyone, with the possible exception of the "blind." Thus, it would seem that, because the problems which it addresses are more immediate and pressing, the worth of the Letter is greater today than when it was written. At the same time, however, de Jouvenel's remarks involve a denigration of the worth of the Letter. The spectacle looms large as a problem for us because of certain inventions which have made spectacles accessible to extremely large numbers of men. Rousseau could not have anticipated these inventions in any detail, and all indications are that he did not anticipate anything even

remotely resembling such. As a prophecy, the Letter is, like all prophecies, necessarily incomplete. That it speaks to contemporary and topical problems at all forces us to respect Rousseau's genius and prescience, but we must also recognize that that prescience did not allow for movies and television, and was thus limited. The peculiarities of the problem of the contemporary spectacle render it markedly different from that problem as it presented itself to Rousseau. As a consequence, our problems in this regard are our problems, not Rousseau's, and it is we who must solve them. For this reason, the worth of the Letter, at least as it is set forth by de Jouvenel, is largely of an antiquarian nature.

De Jouvenel's assessment of the Letter is incomplete, however.⁴ While he has managed to identify certain trees, including perhaps the largest tree, he has missed the forest entirely. His conception of the Letter, at least as expressed in the above passage, is the product of much too narrow a focus. Rousseau's criticism of the theater, or of spectacles in general, can certainly be applied to various contemporary forms of mass entertainment, particularly television and the cinema, but the Letter offers much more than this to the discerning twentieth century reader. As Rousseau suggests in the Social Contract, the Letter is a treatise on censorship as a whole, and should be approached as such.⁵ Certainly the question of the place and value of certain kinds of spectacles in civil society forms a part of the Letter's subject matter, but it does not exhaust it. Even if Rousseau's teachings in the Letter regarding censorship were framed entirely in terms of the spectacle, those teachings would still transcend the phenomenon of the spectacle: if the censorship of spectacles

is defensible in a free society, then the question of censorship as it applies to other areas of social life has been transformed; once the practice of censorship has been established as in principle compatible with republican government, the question of the desirability of its practice as regards a wide variety of intellectual and artistic activities becomes very much in order. Moreover, as we have discovered in the course of our inquiry, the Letter itself illustrates the practice of censorship, in the form of self-censorship by an author who claims to possess both a theoretical and practical understanding of the place of censorship in civil society. This claim may be false, in the sense that, in attempting to reconcile the practice of censorship with republican government, Rousseau may, as modern thought would have it, be essaying the impossible, the joining together of two incommensurable and mutually exclusive phenomena. This does not completely vitiate the value of the effort, however. At the very least, the Letter serves the purpose of keeping alive a view of censorship and its relationship to free government which has never been adequately confronted by modern thought. The claim of the Letter to an enduring worth rests on precisely this point, and not on any prophetic character which might be imputed to it.

Rousseau's treatment of censorship can be divided into two related, but analytically distinct parts: a treatment of what might be called "political censorship," and a treatment of "self-censorship" which includes a number of examples of the practice of such censorship by Rousseau himself. As noted, these two kinds of censorship are related. In the Letter, for example, Rousseau frequently employs self-censorship for political reasons. At the same time, however, the

distinction between that censorship exercised by an individual over his own writings and speech and that censorship imposed by political means on a whole society is an important one, in that it focuses our attention on the multidimensionality of the problems of censorship. Censorship is a complex phenomenon: it ranges from the telling of a "white lie" to the legal proscription, backed up by the threat of coercive force, of particular kinds of reading matter, entertainment, speech, intellectual and artistic activity, and behavior in general. Any effort to understand the place of censorship in a free society must begin by recognizing this complexity.

Rousseau's teaching concerning self-censorship consists of two, complementary parts, an overt teaching and an implicit teaching. The former is much the less complete. Its core is Rousseau's chastisement of d'Alembert for labeling the Genevan clergy as "Socinian." This overt teaching is quite simple: there are certain ideas, and even facts, to which the public at large is best not exposed, and the true philosopher will recognize the necessity of maintaining a public silence, both in speech and particularly in writing, on these matters; and such matters are exemplified by the question of the degree to which the Genevan clergy is Socinian in outlook. It is important to notice that Rousseau only gives the one example of the subjects on which a wise man will maintain a discrete, public silence, that he provides no explicit criteria for recognizing such subjects, and that he himself apparently violates his own rule as regards the Genevan clergy. Rousseau's overt teaching regarding self-censorship is thus incomplete. Indeed, it may well be that the question of when an author or public speaker should engage in self-censorship is one of

those questions which a prudent author, who himself censors his own writings, should be loath to discuss in an overt and detailed manner.

Rousseau's overt teaching regarding self-censorship is completed by his implicit teaching. In a number of places in the Letter, Rousseau distorts the truth, employs fallacious arguments and suspect logic, and even "lies." In each such case, it is reasonable to assume that Rousseau does not reveal the complete truth or argue in a rigorous manner, as without doubt he was capable of doing, because to do so would lead to undesirable consequences. Thus, each of these cases serves as an example of the practice of self-censorship by an author. Taken together, these instances provide a denotative definition, a definition by example, of that class of subject matters regarding which Rousseau considers the practice of self-censorship to be appropriate. The first and most important point to be derived from a close scrutiny of these examples is that self-censorship is, according to Rousseau, situational in nature: what one chooses to say or not to say should in large part be determined by the nature and situation of one's audience; there is more latitude to speak the truth in private than in public, in speaking with the wise than with the nonwise, in corrupt societies than in relatively virtuous ones, and when speaking of enemies as opposed to friends.

The examples of self-censorship which the Letter provides establish that it may be practiced for several, worthy reasons. Three general motives giving rise to the practice of self-censorship are discernible. Rousseau engages in self-censorship as a matter of personal prudence, as a matter of political prudence or good citizenship, and because it is a necessary adjunct to his rhetoric. Self-censorship for reasons of personal prudence reflects the wise man's recognition

that the expression of ideas which run counter to prevailing opinion is sometimes dangerous to him who expresses them: in a society of fervent believers, the outspoken atheist is imprudent in the extreme. The danger involved is not always to one's physical well-being, or even to one's self-interest. One's standing in the community is more often threatened than is one's life, and, for a wise man with the interests of his fellows at heart and who believes that their well-being depends in large part on his ability to persuade them to a particular course of action, the maintenance of his standing and good name becomes a kind of moral imperative. Similarly, self-censorship for reasons of political prudence, or good citizenship, reflects the wise man's recognition that the public dissemination of certain opinions, even when these are true opinions, may have a disruptive or otherwise undesirable effect on civil society. D'Alembert's imputation of Socinianism to the Genevan clergy exemplifies such dangerous opinions, opinions which Rousseau, as a good citizen, is anxious to discredit. The Letter abounds in similar examples, as we have seen, where Rousseau deliberately suppresses or obfuscates a truth which, if openly expressed, would have what he considered to be undesirable consequences for either Geneva in particular, or humanity in general. Concern with humanity as a whole does not, it should be noted, result in political prudence in the precise sense. The man who censors his writings or his speech not so much because of the effect they would have on his own particular society, but because of their probable effect on mankind or men everywhere, is acting as a good man, rather than as a good citizen. The "political prudence" of the good citizen and the "humane prudence" of the good man are similar, however, in the sense that both

are motivated by a concern for the adverse effect which one's speech or writing might have on other men. At the same time, these forms of prudence may conflict: what is good for one's city may not be identical with that which is good simply, or which is good for man as such. In such a situation, the philosopher's cosmopolitanism will lead him to prefer humanity to the city. Thus, Rousseau's political prudence is sometimes pro forma: he chastizes d'Alembert, for example, for imputing Socinianism to the Genevan clergy, while tacitly doing the same.

In the Letter, self-censorship is also employed by Rousseau in conjunction with his rhetoric, i.e., as part of an effort to persuade other men to hold certain opinions and/or to act in a certain way. Here too, if rhetoric is employed wisely and properly, the practice of self-censorship is motivated by a concern for one's fellows, but it is directed not so much at the suppression of dangerous truths as it is at the fostering of salutary opinion. The whole and complete truth about a complex matter is necessarily opaque to most men, who lack, according to Rousseau, either the intellect, the training, or the time for study to properly appreciate its nuances. Moral and political problems are complex by their very nature, however; hence, the nonphilosophic man requires a basis for resolving these problems which is not dependent upon his possessing complete knowledge concerning them. The possession of salutary opinion provides such a basis, and it is the knower's task to inculcate these opinions, insofar as is possible, and to preserve them where they already exist. Because opinion is not truth, he must employ rhetoric, the art of persuasion, and rhetoric is more often than not hostile or indifferent

to the truth. The presentation of the complete truth about a complex matter merely bewilders most men. The truth is persuasive only when it can be grasped as such, and, for most men, the truth about the most important matters is simply inaccessible. Rhetoric thus simplifies. The rhetorician seeks to persuade through the presentation of partial truths which appeal to his audience's emotions and prejudices. Insofar as this is the case, rhetoric distorts and conceals the truth, and consequently "lies." The good rhetorician knows the truth, but refrains from speaking it. Rousseau, for example, knows full well that shame and chastity are not natural to man, but his argument against the establishment of a theater is materially strengthened by asserting the contrary, just as it would have been weakened if he had revealed the truth. It is in the interest of the Genevans that they be misled on this subject, and Rousseau acts accordingly.

Most modern thinkers would be less intolerant of self-censorship than of political censorship. The former, after all, is voluntary, while the latter is not, and individual autonomy is a touchstone of modern thought. This is not to say that the deliberate suppression of a truth by an individual, either through silence or a lie, would not be regarded as a disservice to mankind, but the general tendency would be to view it as a significantly lesser evil than an attempt by political authority to suppress that same truth. Rousseau's acceptance of censorship as a legitimate tool of republican government thus runs more directly counter to modern thought than does his argument for self-censorship by the wise man.

The heart of the difference between most modern thinkers and Rousseau on the subject of censorship is that the former see censorship

as opposed to both individual and political freedom, while the latter does not. As was noted in the first chapter, modern thinkers tend to perceive censorship as an unjustified and unjustifiable infringement of individual freedom, as interference with the "right" of the individual to pursue his own vision of happiness in more or less his own way, and, perhaps most damning of all, as hindering the free flow of ideas and information which is both the best guarantee against the development of an oppressive and tyrannical government and an indispensable ingredient in the continuing moral, intellectual, scientific, and technological progress of the race. Censorship imposes certain constraints on the individual which are anathema to modern thought. The censor attempts to force the individual into a limited number of predetermined ways of life, those ways of life compatible with prevailing social opinion, while at the same time attempting to deny the individual access to those ideas and opinions which are subversive of established opinions and the existing order. That men are individuals, with all that this implies, has led most modern thinkers to assert the value of diversity: what is a satisfactory way of life for some men, or even most men, is not and cannot be satisfactory for all. When this idea is coupled with the belief that each individual is an end in himself and that individual happiness is the only intrinsic human good, as is the case in modern thought, the condemnation of censorship on moral grounds follows as a matter of course. Moreover, there is a tendency among modern thinkers to view the individual as the source of all creativity and progress. The maximum possible individual happiness, or development, or self-fulfillment, occurs where the individual is free to speak, to think, and to act as he sees fit,

except where his actions might adversely affect the ability of others to engage in like pursuits. Similarly, social progress is maximized in an environment where the individual is, as much as possible, unfettered by externally imposed restraints upon thought and action: the creation of great works of art, the discovery of new moral and scientific truths, and the perfection of new inventions occur only where the human intellect has been set free, and censorship constitutes a fetter, and a very heavy one, on that intellect. Lastly, because censorship interferes with the free flow of ideas and information, it is a tailor-made instrument for political oppression. Censorship can be employed not only to deny the majority of men the factual information they require in order to evaluate the performance of those in power, but, even more than this, it can also be employed to deny the masses' access to those general ideas which are a precondition to any fundamental critique of the existing order and to create a universe of discourse within which there is no perceived alternative to what is.

The divergence between Rousseau's position on censorship and that of most modern thinkers is a product of the former's conception of the nature of political freedom. Rousseau is a firm proponent of the view that it is only within the confines of a community of virtuous men that freedom is possible on any scale.⁶ The key to this conception of freedom lies in the idea of the general will. As the general will was discussed at some length in Chapter III, there is no need to examine it in detail again, but it is important to remember that Rousseau equates political freedom with the rule of the general will, and that the general will is a community of wills directed toward the good of the whole. For Rousseau, political freedom can be said to

exist only when all citizens will the common good, and when the only positive law to which obedience need be given is the product of such a willing in common. This requirement is supplemented by one other, also discussed earlier: that each citizen be completely dependent upon the community as a whole and that he alienate to the community all his rights and powers without exception. As was noted in Chapter III, the first requirement guarantees that each man is subject to only those laws which he himself has willed, while the second ensures that, since all are totally dependent upon the community, no one will be subject to the arbitrary will of another. It is only within the confines of such a community of wills that no man's will need be subordinated to a coercive, external will; only within such a community is there no necessary conflict between the claim of the individual to autonomy, or true self-rule, and the requirements of an ordered social life. This is not to say that coercion may not sometimes be necessary; it is, and Rousseau recognizes this. The point is that, in such a community as Rousseau describes, political life is not founded upon coercion and autonomy is possible.

The subordination of individual self-interest to the good of the community as a whole is a precondition for the rule of the general will, and this subordination cannot, save in isolated instances, be coerced. It is the willing subordination of individual interest to the interest of the community as a whole which permits the preservation of individual autonomy in the social state. This willing subordination of self-interest is what Rousseau means when he speaks of "civic virtue" or "the virtue of the citizen." In fact, the perfectly virtuous citizen is one who sees no conflict between his individual

interests and the common good as it is defined by the community: he so closely identifies himself and his interests with the community and its good that the tension between the two disappears.

Because civic virtue as conceived of by Rousseau is founded upon a kind of self-repression, a true republic does not need to employ open coercion on its citizens. Rather, the primary function of the political order becomes one of education: children, or potential citizens, must be raised in such a way that they learn to identify with the community as a whole; they must be taught to suppress, in the common interest, those passions and desires which tend to lead the individual to assert himself and his interests at the expense of his fellows; they must, in other words, be molded into selfless patriots. The existence of such an educational process eliminates the need to subject the individual citizen to external coercion, since, by the time he reaches adulthood, he has been trained to complete self-discipline. Educated in this way, the citizen can, for all intents and purposes, be allowed full autonomy; he will do what is right automatically, and without the use of threats or force.

Education is of course itself coercive, and Rousseau recognizes this.⁷ It forces individual character into a particular mold or molds and, in the process, does violence to nature. Political freedom and the individual autonomy which goes with it thus ultimately rest on a kind of coercion. It is this aspect of the city which, in part, leads Rousseau to speak of "forcing men to be free." This must not be understood, however, as simply a case of the end justifying the means. Education involves a peculiar kind of coercion: properly structured, it elicits the acceptance and willing cooperation of those upon whom it is

imposed, and thus does not necessarily infringe upon individual autonomy as such.

Rousseau's position on censorship is part and parcel of his conception of the nature of political freedom. If freedom is possible on any kind of a scale only in a community of virtuous men, and if such freedom is, as Rousseau believes, one of the greatest of human goods, then whatever is necessary to promote virtue and community is justified, and the practice of censorship can be subsumed under this heading.

A political community stands or falls according to the character of its citizens. In particular, where virtue is absent, so too is community; and, where men lack a sense of what is common to them all, political freedom cannot subsist. The problem is, according to Rousseau, that virtue is not natural to man. Man may be naturally "good," but he is not naturally virtuous. Indeed, all of man's natural inclinations are opposed to virtue. Thus, the realization of political freedom depends upon the suppression of what is natural in man, upon the control of his natural inclinations and desires, and upon the transformation of man into citizen. The difficulty of this task is reflected in the infrequency of its achievement. In fact, the realization of political freedom at certain times and places in the past constitutes something of a miracle. These "miraculous" occurrences were brought about by the intercession of extraordinary men--men like Solon, Lycurgus, Numa, and Moses--who employed censorship, among other means, to overcome the almost insurmountable obstacles to their success. The particular concern of these men was individual character. In order to mold that character into the proper form, to create a

virtuous citizenry, they necessarily sought to regulate all those factors which influence the formation of character, which is to say, they attempted to exercise control over the total social environment, encouraging certain kinds of habits and behavior and the formation of certain opinions and beliefs, while discouraging others. The exercise of such control certainly involved censorship, but a censorship carried to the nth degree, at least as far as its potential sphere of legitimate operation was concerned.

It might be argued that the act of founding a republic is such a difficult task, and at the same time so worthwhile, that extraordinary means may be employed, means which become out of place once an ongoing polity is established, and that the practice of censorship is one such means. Rousseau, however, would oppose such a view. Censorship is required not only to establish political freedom, but to maintain it; censorship cannot be dispensed with even after a republican edifice has been erected and a virtuous citizenry formed. Because the civic virtue upon which republican liberty depends is artificial, one cannot merely start a republican "mechanism" and then step back and allow it to function freely and with no supervision. A self-perpetuating, social equilibrium which fosters civic virtue can be established, but it is an unstable, nonhomeostatic equilibrium. Time itself is an enemy of civic virtue: time brings changes in the human world as a matter of course, and these changes affect men in unforeseen and unforeseeable ways; but the maintenance of civic virtue and a community of wills is possible only where all formative influences on individual character are orchestrated to produce the virtuous citizen, which is to say, only where those influences which

significantly affect individual character are known and controlled. By altering the formative influences on individual character in a largely unpredictable manner, time-brought changes alter citizen character as well, and the odds are greatly in favor of the new character being considerably less virtuous than the old. At any time, the introduction into a republic of new practices or new ideas may, through their impact on individual character, insidiously undermine political liberty by striking at the civic virtue which is its foundation.

The inherent fragility of civic virtue, and consequent instability of republican politics, is in large part due to the fact that the natural human inclination to place one's self and self-interest ahead of the community and its interests can be suppressed, but not eradicated. Nature must be forcibly held in check. Because time itself fights on the side of nature, however, the battle will eventually be lost. This does not mean that it should not be fought: political freedom remains one of the greatest of human goods. Nevertheless, it does imply that, insofar as one is committed to maximizing the lifespan of a republic, no weapon capable of slowing the advance of political entropy should be cast aside out-of-hand, and censorship constitutes one of the more effective of such weapons.

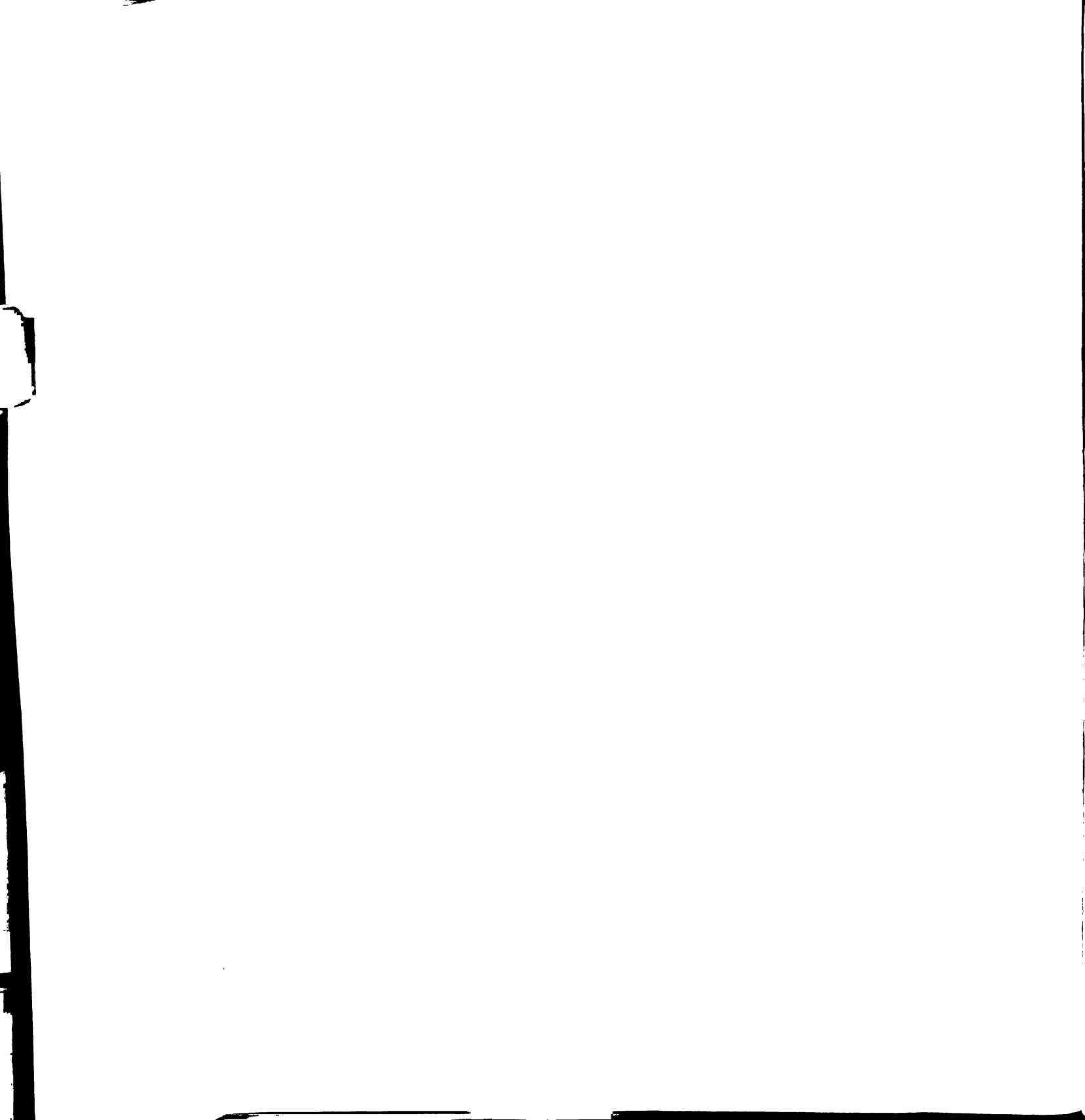
Censorship provides a defensive weapon against both the introduction of new practices and ideas and against the resurgence of human nature. It is particularly effective when it can mobilize as allies the strong emotions and prejudices which are always found attached to established customs and beliefs. Indeed, censorship aims, in part, at the preservation of those customs, beliefs, and prejudices which are

associated with the common life of an ongoing polity against the onslaughts of time and, one should add, the critical mind. For Rousseau, this is a supremely worthwhile task because established customs and prejudices are the very heart of a republican order: they constitute both the core of its educational process and its first line of defense against subversion; the resistance of custom and prejudice to change and their self-perpetuating character give republican polities what little stability over time they possess.

At the same time, it is censorship's intimate relationship with the defense of custom and prejudice which condemns it in the eyes of modern thinkers. Custom and particularly prejudice are antiprogressive. They are inherently hostile to new ideas and practices, even when those ideas are true and those practices serve to improve the material conditions of human life. Censorship as it has traditionally been practiced, and as Rousseau would see it practiced, attempts to freeze the status quo, and, according to certain more or less explicit presuppositions in modern thought, this is an evil: what is is inherently inferior to what could be if men were given their head to think in a free and critical manner and to experiment with new ideas and new ways of living. The condemnation of censorship by modern thinkers is thus due, more than anything else, to the liberal optimism which pervades modern political thought. From Thomas Hobbes to Karl Marx, from Francis Bacon to John Dewey, the idea which has dominated modern thought, and the one which has won it the most adherents, is that the major obstacle standing in the way of a significant improvement in the human condition is the fettering of the mind by established customs and beliefs.

Rousseau's defense of censorship in the Letter illustrates the generally conservative nature of his approach to the political world. On the face of it, this may seem more than a little puzzling, given his reputation for radical thought, but the puzzle is easily solved. Let there be no mistake, Rousseau's thought does possess a marked, radical cast: the First and Second Discourses, for example, constitute a crushing indictment of society as it is, while the Social Contract both deepens that indictment and presents an argument in favor of a radically different form of political and social association, one in which the principle failings of existing forms of organization would be eliminated. This is all in the realm of critical theory, however. In Rousseau's thought as a whole, there is a firm line drawn between theory and practice, between the ideal and the practicable, and this is nowhere more true than in his political writings. The radical philosopher under most circumstances is a political conservative.

Like all conservative positions, Rousseau's is informed by a fundamental pessimism concerning man and all his political works. Political freedom is not the natural condition of man, according to Rousseau; indeed, human nature is directly opposed to the realization of those conditions which are a precondition to political freedom. This means that neither the establishment nor the preservation of a realm of freedom is an easy task. It means, furthermore, that one cannot reasonably expect or even advocate, as do most modern thinkers, the continual and indefinite expansion of freedom. Generally speaking, once a realm of political freedom has been established, it can only contract. Moreover, except in extremely unusual circumstances, and even then only in the case of a very rare kind of man, the human



mind is inherently incapable of transforming the political world. The complexity of that world, the precarious nature of political freedom, the intervention of chance, and the unforeseeable concatenation of consequences which result from every novel action, all work to frustrate attempts at reform. Thus, unless conditions are ripe for a founding, the wise and prudent man will embrace any status quo which is not totally corrupt, and will, insofar as he is motivated by benevolence and a sense of responsibility toward his fellows, do his best to preserve that status quo intact, which is to say, he will, as Rousseau has done in the case of Geneva, encourage the practice of censorship when and where necessary. The lover of freedom and human dignity is always on the defensive, and, while the practice of censorship is incompatible with an outlook which sees the problem as one of extending the bounds of freedom ever outward, it is aptly suited to a perspective which views every new practice and idea as potentially subversive of that freedom which has been attained. Obversely, it is, according to Rousseau, only in a totally corrupt and vicious society, where conditions are as bad as they possibly can be, that censorship has no place. In such a society, the mere possibility, however remote, that the introduction of new practices and new ideas will bring about even a marginal improvement is a sufficient justification for countenancing any and all practices and ideas which are not patently criminal.

It is appropriate to state once again that the purpose of the preceding has not been to offer Rousseau's views on censorship as a substitute for those which are characteristic of modern thought, but simply to resurrect an alternative view which, while it has never been

adequately refuted by modern thinkers, has largely been lost to sight. The immediate value of the Letter lies in its presentation of a conception of man and the political world which confronts received opinion and established orthodoxy head-on. In this connection, a large number of specific differences between Rousseau's teachings in the Letter and the characteristic teachings of modern thought could be cited, but two stand out above all others and, although they are only implicit, form the larger background within which Rousseau's specific teachings acquire meaning. Rousseau's rejection of the idea of progress is the first of these, and it serves as a useful antidote to that unreflective, liberal optimism which characterizes all too much of modern thought. It may well be that Rousseau's pessimism is a more realistic response to the world as it is than modern optimism, and there is good reason to suspect that such might be the case, but this is largely beside the point. Our hope is that, in reviving an earlier outlook, we may persuade some moderns to take a critical look at some of their own, hitherto unexamined presuppositions, and thus contribute to an enriching of modern thought.

Rousseau's teaching regarding community serves to reveal the one-sided nature of another component of modern thought. As noted in the opening chapter, modern thinkers tend to define "freedom" in individualistic terms, with a "free polity" becoming one which is peopled by an aggregation of "free" individuals. The disadvantage of such a definition is that, with it, all values become radically individual and the public or common good is lost to sight, submerged in a sea of self-interested and self-seeking individualism. Indeed, the use of the term "value," which is pervasive among modern thinkers, is itself

a symptom of this rampant individualism. That this state of affairs constitutes a danger should be apparent to anyone acquainted with the "free rider problem" and the problem of externalities, which have recently been bruited about among economists and even among some political scientists. Moreover, the individualistic orientation of modern thought, which has served to legitimate the self-interested individualism of contemporary political man, has resulted in a situation in which cooperation in a necessary common effort can be achieved only through the application of coercive power by the state, thus interfering with the autonomy of the individual. The proliferation of laws and punishments which seems inseparable from modern society serves to underline this point.

The extensive use of coercion in modern "democracies" is in sharp contrast to Rousseau's conception of a republic, which is predicated on the willing subordination of individual interest to the common good, and in which individual autonomy is preserved by educating citizens to civic virtue. For Rousseau, the more virtuous a citizenry, the fewer coercive laws are required,⁸ all other things being equal, until, with a completely virtuous citizenry, coercion disappears entirely. It might thus be said that modern thought's rejection of the idea of combining political freedom with a political order which aims at the inculcation of virtue, a rejection made in the name of individual autonomy, has had the effect of forcing the political order to drastically curtail that autonomy: contemporary "citizens" simply cannot be trusted to subordinate, of their own accord, individual interests to the needs of the whole.

The preceding suggests that the loss of a sense of community, which is characteristic of contemporary political life, is to a significant extent a consequence of certain peculiarly modern presuppositions about the nature of man and human freedom. At the same time, it suggests the value of reexamining these presuppositions in the light of the alternative conception of man and political life which informs Rousseau's writings. That alternative conception is not new: it is at least as old as political philosophy. It is, however, novel in the modern world, which has, in the name of a highly problematic vision of an infinitely progressive humanity, denied that past thinkers have anything important to teach us. For this reason, the acceptance of Rousseau's teachings in the Letter as providing a useful correction to the one-sidedness of modern thought serves to make the great thinkers of the past accessible in a new way: to admit that Rousseau has something significant to contribute to our understanding of political life is tacitly to admit that other premodern thinkers might have something to contribute as well, and thus directs our attention to that very tradition of political philosophy the rejection of which opened the modern age.

Since our inquiry has focused on one of the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a notorious lover of paradoxes, it is appropriate to close on something of a paradoxical note. As John Stuart Mill, one of modernity's most vehement opponents of censorship, has observed: once even a true opinion no longer has any unbelievers to convince or battles to fight and is accepted in an unreflective and uncritical manner, it degenerates into mere superstition.⁹ According to this view, the only truth which we can know as such is one which we are continually compelled

to defend against worthy opponents. Ironically, this leads to the conclusion that the attempt to resurrect Rousseau's teachings on censorship, and to understand them as he himself understood them, is in keeping with the very elements of modern thought, a commitment to the value of competing opinions and the free flow of ideas and information, which those teachings attack. At the same time, the attempt to achieve such a resurrection would quite probably be condemned by Rousseau himself, assuming of course that he would judge contemporary society to be less than completely corrupt and vicious. Were he alive today, Rousseau the political conservative would, at least in public, most likely embrace the idea that censorship and free government are anathema to one another, while "in secret, in the decent and frank expansiveness of philosophic intercourse," maintaining precisely the opposite position. After all, for Rousseau, the idea that censorship and free government are incompatible would be, under modern conditions, one of those sacrosanct prejudices upon which society is founded. This, in turn, opens up the possibility that there are among contemporary thinkers, and even among the most outspoken opponents of censorship, Rousseauian fellow-travelers, true philosophers and prudent men all.

NOTES

Summary and Conclusions

¹Leo Strauss' works, in particular, illustrate the potential fruitfulness of this approach: see The City and Man (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), On Tyranny (rev. ed., Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), Thoughts on Machiavelli (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), Xenophon's Socrates (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), and Xenophon's Socratic Discourse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). Cf. the procedure in Thomas L. Pangle, Montesquieu's Philosophy of Liberalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), and in Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," The Republic of Plato.

²Cf. "Preface of a Second Letter to M. Bordes" (O.C., III, 106).

³Quoted in Masters, The Political Philosophy of Rousseau, p. 442. De Jouvenel's statement in its original form can be found in "Essai sur la Politique de Rousseau," Du Contrat Social (Geneva: Editions de Cheval Aile, 1947), p. 29.

⁴In fairness, it should be noted that de Jouvenel's remarks have not been presented in context and that he never claims that these remarks constitute a definitive assessment of the Letter's worth. Indeed, there is little risk of being mistaken in asserting that de Jouvenel's appreciation of the Letter almost certainly extends beyond an admiration of its prophetic character.

⁵Social Contract, IV, vii (O.C., III, 459n and context).

⁶As implied, there are exceptions to this, but they are extremely rare and cannot be applied to man in the mass. The Emile, for example, provides a theoretical blueprint for educating a man who is capable of being individually free anywhere, but it requires a lifetime's work by a supremely dedicated and talented educator to produce such an individual, and even then only one pupil can be handled by each such educator.

⁷Emile, I (O.C., IV, 245-50).

⁸Cf. "Preface to Narcisse" (O.C., II, 971), "Political Fragments" (O.C., III, 492 and 497), Political Economy (O.C., III, 259), and Social Contract, II, v and xii (O.C., III, 377 and 394).

⁹On Liberty, pp. 43-64.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbot, Edwin. Flatland. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.
- Adams, John. The Political Writings of John Adams, ed. George A. Peek, Jr. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954.
- Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Aristophanes. The Clouds. Trans. William Arrowsmith. New York: New American Library, 1962.
- Aristotle. Aristotle's Politics and Poetics. Trans. Benjamin Jowett and Thomas Twinning. New York: The Viking Press, 1957.
- Aristotle. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and the Fine Arts. Trans. S. H. Butcher. New York: Dover Publications, 1951.
- Aristotle. Introduction to Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1947.
- Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. Trans. Martin Ostwald. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962.
- Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Aristotle. Politics, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Aristotle. The Rhetoric of Aristotle. Trans. Lane Cooper. New York: Appleton-Century, Crofts, 1960.
- Bachrach, Peter. The Theory of Democratic Elitism. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1967.
- Bacon, Francis. Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces, ed. Richard Foster. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1937.
- Berns, Walter. Freedom, Virtue, and the First Amendment. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965.
- Bloom, Allan. "Interpretive Essay," The Republic of Plato, ed. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

- Bloom, Allan. Introduction to Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater, ed. Allan Bloom. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Bloom, Allan, ed. Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Calvin, Jean. Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Fred Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Cicero. The Basic Writings of Cicero, ed. Moses Hadas. New York: Random House, 1951.
- Clor, Harry. Obscenity and Public Morality. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Dewey, John. Liberalism and Social Action. New York: Capricorn Books, 1963.
- Dewey, John. The Public and its Problems. Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1927.
- Diderot, Denis. Oeuvres Esthétiques, ed. Paul Vernière. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1968.
- Douglas, William O. Dissenting Opinion in "Ginzburg v. United States," United States Reports. 383 (1966), pp. 482-92.
- Engels, Friedrich. "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," Marx and Engels, ed. Lewis Feuer. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.
- Gehénno, Jean. Jean-Jacques. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
- Hamilton, Alexander, John Jay, and James Madison. The Federalist Papers, ed. Max Beloff. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948.
- Hendel, Charles. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Moralists. 2 vols. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934.
- Herodotus. The History of Herodotus, ed. E. H. Blakeney. Trans. George Rawlinson. 2 vols. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1960.
- Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan, ed. C. B. MacPherson. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Jefferson, Thomas. The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Edward Dumbauld. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Perpetual Peace," On History, ed. Lewis White Beck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963.
- Kolakowski, Leszek. Toward a Marxist Humanism. Trans. Jane Zielonko Peel. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

- Kristol, Irving. The Democratic Idea in America. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Locke, John. Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett. New York: New American Library, 1965.
- Lockhart, William and Robert McClure. "Literature, the Law of Obscenity, and the Constitution," Minnesota Law Review. 38 (March 1954), 295-395.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince and the Discourses. Trans. Luigi Ricci, with revisions by E. R. P. Vincent. New York: Random House, 1950.
- MacPherson, C. B. The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Masters, Roger. The Political Philosophy of Rousseau. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Masters, Roger. "The Structure of Rousseau's Political Thought," Hobbes and Rousseau, eds. Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Mill, John Stuart. On Liberty. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Utilitarianism," The Utilitarians, ed. not given. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961.
- Milton, John. Areopagitica, ed. George Sabine. New York: Appleton-Century, Crofts, 1951.
- Moffat, Margaret Mary. Rousseau et la Querelle du Théâtre au XVIII^e Siècle. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1930.
- Montesquieu, Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de. Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Roger Caillois. 2 vols. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951.
- Pire, George. "De l'Influence de Sénèque sur les Théories Pédagogiques de J.-J. Rousseau," Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau. XXXIII (1953), 57-92.
- Pire, George. "Du Bon Plutarque au Citoyen de Genève," Revue de Littérature Comparée. XXXIII (1958), 510-47.
- Plato. Laws. Trans. Trevor Saunders. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Plato. Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. Harold North Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

- Plato. Plato: Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Plato. Plato: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Plato. Plato: Statesman, Philebus, Ion, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Plato. The Republic of Plato. Trans. Allan Bloom, with an introduction, notes, and an interpretive essay by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1968.
- Plutarch. Plutarch's Lives. Trans. John Dryden, with revisions by A. H. Clough. New York: Random House, [n.d.].
- The President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
- Riesman, David. The Lonely Crowd. New York: Doubleday, 1952.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Correspondence Complète, ed. R. A. Leigh. 6 vols. Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965-72.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts, ed. George R. Havens. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1946.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Du Contrat Social de J.-J. Rousseau, ed. Bertrand de Jouvenel. Geneva: Editions de Cheval Ailé, 1947.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. The First and Second Discourses, ed. Roger Masters. Trans. Roger D. and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Oeuvres Complètes, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959-.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les Spectacles, ed. M. Fuchs. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1948.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ed. C. E. Vaughan. 2 vols. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater, ed. Allan Bloom. Trans. Allan Bloom. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968.

- Shklar, Judith. Men and Citizens. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Strauss, Leo. The City and Man. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964.
- Strauss, Leo. Natural Right and History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Strauss, Leo. "On the Intention of Rousseau," Hobbes and Rousseau, eds. Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Strauss, Leo. On Tyranny. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Strauss, Leo. Persecution and the Art of Writing. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952.
- Strauss, Leo. Xenophon's Socrates. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972.
- Strauss, Leo. Xenophon's Socratic Discourse. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970.
- Thucydides. The Peloponnesian War, ed. John H. Finley, Jr. New York: Random House, 1951.
- Weinberger, J. "Hobbes' Doctrine of Method," American Political Science Review. LXIX (Dec., 1975), 1336-53.
- Weinberger, J. "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the New Atlantis," American Political Science Review. LXX (Sept., 1976), 865-85.
- Wolff, Robert Paul. The Poverty of Liberalism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.
- Wolff, Robert Paul, Herbert Marcuse, and Barrington Moore, Jr. A Critique of Pure Tolerance. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Wolin, Sheldon. Politics and Vision. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1960.
- Xenophon. Xenophon: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology, in The Loeb Classical Library Series. Trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

General References

- Acher, William. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Écrivain de l'Amitié. Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1971.
- Alembert, Jean Lerond d'. Oeuvres et Correspondence Inédites de D'Alembert, ed. Charles Henry. Geneva: Slatkine, 1967.
- Bloom, Allan. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," History of Political Philosophy, 2nd ed., eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. Chicago: Rand McNally Publishing Company, 1972.
- Bretonneau, G. Valeurs Humaines de J.-J. Rousseau. Paris: La Colombe, 1961.
- Burgelin, Pierre. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Religion de Genève. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1962.
- Cassirer, Ernst. The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Trans. Peter Gay. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.
- Derathé, Robert. Le Rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.
- Diderot, Denis, ed. L'Encyclopédie. Paris: Briasson, 1751-65.
- Diderot, Denis. The Paradox of Acting. Trans. W. H. Pollock. London: Chalto and Windus, 1883.
- Faguet, Émile. Rousseau contre Molière. Paris: Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1912.
- Feugère, Anatole. "Pourquoi Rousseau a Ramanié la Preface de la Lettre à D'Alembert," Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau. XX (1931), 127-62.
- Green, F. C. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Critical Study of his Life and Writings. London: Cambridge University Press, 1955.
- Green, F. C. Rousseau and the Idea of Progress. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.
- Jouvenel, Bertrand de. "Rousseau the Pessimistic Evolutionist," Yale French Studies. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.
- Lamy, Bernard. La Rhétorique ou l'Art de Parler. Brighton, Sussex: Library for the Committee for Research in French Studies, 1969.

- Lanson, Gustave. Histoire de la Littérature Française. Paris: Hachette, 1924.
- Launay, Michel. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son Temps: Politique et Littérature au XVIII^e Siècle. Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1969.
- Pons, Amilda. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le Théâtre. Geneva: A. Jullien, 1909.
- Rod, Edouard. L'Affaire J.-J. Rousseau. Paris: Perrin, 1906.
- Vallette, Gaspard. Jean-Jacques Rousseau Genevois. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1911.