

# Interpretation

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# Interpretation

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# Rousseau's Philosophic Dream

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## INTRODUCTION

Much of the disagreement about the essence of Rousseau's thought stems from the narrowness of the various perspectives from which it is viewed. Individual scholars only rarely encompass the scope of his works. Often specialists in political philosophy who study the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* or the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* remain ignorant of the contents, or even the existence, of his numerous essays on music. Students of comparative literature who specialize in *Julie* tend to be unacquainted with the *Letters Written from the Mountain*. Almost no one who studies the *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* reads Rousseau's fairy tale, "The Queen Fantastic." One work that has drawn very little attention from scholars in any field in the English-speaking world is the so-called "Fiction or Allegorical Fragment on Revelation."<sup>1</sup> Yet this work is of importance because in it Rousseau directly addresses the nature of philosophy, gives his judgment of Jesus and Socrates, and presents his view of the obstacles faced by philosophers who wish to have an influence on the public.

Two factors that may have contributed to the neglect of this work are the fact that its title does not give a very accurate account of its contents and the degree of uncertainty about when Rousseau wrote the work. Rousseau originally entrusted the manuscript to his friend and literary executor Paul Moulto, along with many other papers that he wanted to preserve. He left no indication of how he intended to use this fragment, although he took pains to preserve it, unlike other fragmentary works which he took some care to destroy. There is no evidence concerning how Rousseau planned to finish the story he tells in it or whether it was meant to fit into a larger work, as the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar" fits into *Emile*, or the "Prosopopeia of Fabricius" fits into the *First Discourse*. The manuscript has no title, but was given one by Moulto's descendent Streckheisen-Moulto upon its first publication 1861 in an edition of previously unpublished works and correspondence by Rousseau.

At the time of its initial publication it was suggested that the "Fiction" was written in 1778, the last year of Rousseau's life, and even that it was his last work, composed after he stopped writing the *Reveries* very shortly before his death. More recently almost all scholars have rejected this date without agree-

ing on an alternative. Three major possibilities have been suggested: the period between 1750 and 1753 between the *First* and *Second Discourses*, the years 1756–57 shortly after Rousseau left Paris following the publication of the *Second Discourse* and prior to his work on *Emile*, and a date between these two.<sup>2</sup> In sum, there is no consensus beyond the unsurprising view that the “Fiction” was written sometime after the beginning of Rousseau’s literary career in 1750 and before the end of his life in 1778. To date no one has made a case for a date based on physical evidence such as the ink used on the manuscript or the date Rousseau purchased the paper on which it was written.<sup>3</sup> All the evidence cited by those who have attempted to establish the date the “Fiction” was written is based either on a presumed relation between the issues addressed in this work and those addressed in other works the date of whose composition is known or on a presumed development in Rousseau’s thinking about issues or individuals.<sup>4</sup> Such evidence can be more or less persuasive, but it can never be conclusive to anyone with a different interpretation of the “Fiction.”

This confusion over the dating of the “Fiction” underscores the fact that the work presents issues and even specific examples to which Rousseau returned many times over a period of more than twenty-five years. Much of its interest stems from precisely the fact that it treats a range of topics of persisting importance for Rousseau. It is, however, not entirely obvious how these topics fit together in the “Fiction,” or what its major focus is. The title given to it by Streckheisen-Moultou, “Fiction or Allegorical Fragment on Revelation,” designates both a subject and a literary form, as well as the incompleteness of the work. It indicates the editor’s judgment about the central topic of the “Fiction,” namely religious revelation. This judgment was accepted and amplified upon in the first treatments of the work. In one of the first reviews Sainte-Beuve said that it “shows us Rousseau in all the fervor of his religious enthusiasm” and that it demonstrates that Rousseau should be included among those people who are “Christians by instinct, feeling and desire.”<sup>5</sup> Fifty years later Saint-Beuve’s evaluation, which had been shared by numerous contemporary critics, was called into question by Pierre-Maurice Masson, who argued that the work’s early interpreters had been led astray by the misleading title and by faulty assumptions about the completeness of the work.<sup>6</sup> Masson argues that the “Fiction” is characterized primarily by its opposition to any sort of philosophic or religious dogmatism. Most importantly, he very reasonably insists that a proper judgment of this work and its significance must depend on an evaluation of its contents.

#### THE FIRST PHILOSOPHER

At the beginning the focus of the “Fiction” is philosophy, not revelation. It recounts the story of “the first man who attempted to philosophize.” Rousseau leaves in ambiguity whether he is concerned with a historical question concern-

ing the beginnings of philosophy or with issues that perennially concern anyone who attempts to philosophize. He does not tell us who this first philosopher is, although at one point in the manuscript he originally identified him as Pythagoras, only to withdraw this identification. He usually refers to him only as "the Philosopher." Although it was withdrawn, this identification with Pythagoras may provide a clue to the issue of the "Fiction." In other works Rousseau fairly regularly connects Pythagoras with the origins of philosophy. In both the *Second Discourse* and *Emile* he counts him among the ancient philosophers who understood how to travel in order to learn.<sup>7</sup> In these contexts Rousseau uses the Greek philosopher to illustrate the failings of modern philosophy which assumes that universal human nature corresponds to European customs.

In one of his replies to critics of the *First Discourse*, however, Rousseau uses Pythagoras's name to identify a characteristic defect in both ancient and modern philosophy. In his "Observations," he says,

[W]hat shall we say about the distinction between two doctrines so eagerly received by all the Philosophers, and by which they professed in secret sentiments contrary to those they taught publicly? Pythagoras was the first to make use of the esoteric doctrine. He did not reveal it to his disciples until after lengthy tests and with the greatest mystery. He gave them lessons in Atheism in secret and solemnly offered Hecatombs to Jupiter. The Philosophers were so comfortable with this method that it spread rapidly in Greece and from there in Rome. . . . The History of this deadly doctrine, written by an informed and sincere man, would be a terrible blow to ancient and modern Philosophy. But Philosophy will always defy reason, truth, and even time, because it has its source in human pride, stronger than all those things.<sup>8</sup>

Here, the name of Pythagoras is connected with a separation between the private atheism of philosophers and their public conventional piety, and this separation is portrayed in a sinister way. Thus Pythagoras represents to Rousseau both the superiority of ancient to modern philosophy in the pursuit of truth and the shared defect of the two in morality.<sup>9</sup> In short, Rousseau's use (even though withdrawn) of the name Pythagoras in "Fiction" suggests at least the possibility that he is concerned with the issue of the relation between philosophers and the general public. As we shall see, this is indeed the major theme of at least part of the "Fiction."

#### THE SETTING

Prior to any confrontation with public opinion Rousseau's first philosopher retreats from the bustle of the city to the countryside and solitude for his meditations. The first philosopher's isolation from the hubbub of public opinion is a typical Rousseauian device. He very commonly insists on the need for some more or less total rupture from the way of life represented by cities, even

though he is well aware of how easy it is to “transport the life of the city into the country” both physically and psychologically (see *Lettres morales*, Pléiade, vol. 4, p. 1116). In order to stimulate his young student’s meditations about cosmology and providence, the Savoyard Vicar takes him out of Turin to a hillside overlooking the valley of the Po River (see *Emile*, bk 4, p. 266). Rousseau himself arrived at the argument of the *Second Discourse* in the depths of the forest of Saint Germain, and most of the great works he wrote from 1756 through 1762 were conceived during his walks in the forest of Montmorency (see *Confessions, Collected Writings*, vol. 5, pp. 326 and 339). This sort of retreat differs markedly from the activity of Plato’s Socrates, who characteristically conducts his philosophizing in the market-place or at least well-attended functions in private homes of the sort that Rousseau’s contemporaries might well identify as salons if it were not for the absence of women.<sup>10</sup>

#### MATERIALISM AND THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

In his rural retreat the first philosopher is surrounded by objects that give him a pleasant sense of the orderliness of nature. His curiosity about this order is stirred particularly by the sight of the complex motions of the heavens. Rather than being comforted, however, he is troubled about the source of this order. The philosopher’s perplexity covers two general issues. The first of these concerns the source of the order of the physical universe and the second concerns his own ability to perceive this order or to construct it in his thought. His meditations focus on the first of these issues.

He is unsure about whether physical order is the result of a purely “fortuitous arrangement” or the consequence of some ordering principle. In effect, he is torn between materialist explanations of the world and teleological accounts. He briefly ponders the difficulties facing materialists: the apparent spontaneity of motion in animals, the nature of sensation, and his own experience of thinking and free will. Although he sees no satisfactory materialist account of these issues, he concedes that such an account is not outside of the realm of possibility.<sup>11</sup> He professes stronger reservations concerning what he regards as the indispensable assumption of materialism, i.e., the claim that motion is intrinsic to matter and that this motion can ceaselessly generate new combinations. The philosopher’s most profound meditations are unable to resolve or solidify his reservations, and the spectacle of the order of nature becomes only a source of uneasiness for him.

The formulation Rousseau gives to the philosopher’s perplexity is very reminiscent of a particular issue to which he returned several times in his literary career. For example, in one version of his so-called Letter to Voltaire on Providence from 1756 Rousseau says,

I remember what has struck me the most forcefully in my whole life, on the fortuitous arrangement of the universe is the twenty-first philosophical thought, where is shown by the laws of analysis of chance that when the quantity of throws is infinite, the difficulty of the event is more than sufficiently compensated by the multiplicity of the throws, and consequently the mind ought to be more astonished by the hypothetical continuation of chaos than by the real birth of the universe. This is, while assuming motion necessary, what has never been said with more force to my mind on this dispute; and as for me, I declare that I do not know the least response that common sense might have, whether true or false, if not to deny as false what one cannot know, that motion might be essential to matter.<sup>12</sup>

The reference to the twenty-first philosophical thought is to Diderot's *Philosophical Thoughts*. There Diderot uses the newly fashionable study of probability to argue that the orderliness of the universe does not refute atheism. In fact, he claims that atheism is favored by this orderliness because in the infinity of time an orderly universe must necessarily arise out of randomness. While the first philosopher concedes the force of Diderot's argument, he also insists that it falls far short of a demonstration, given that it assumes without proving that motion is intrinsic to matter and therefore that God is unnecessary to begin motion.

Thus, Rousseau's first philosopher appears to be well acquainted with Diderot's book published in 1746. (On this point see Gouhier, p. 197.) Nevertheless, as is shown by the philosopher's reference to the Epicurean doctrine of the "swerve" which is needed to make moving atoms collide—a doctrine not mentioned by Diderot—Rousseau was well aware that the relation between the orderliness of the heavens and natural teleology had a long history. In one of the fragments to *Emile*, he cites Aristotle as arguing against the materialist position on the key issue of whether matter can be conceived of as having motion intrinsic to it (see *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 876). In short, Rousseau regards this issue as coeval with philosophy and as unsolvable, or at least unsolved. His objection to his contemporary philosophers was to their dogmatic belief that they had solved this vexing problem.

#### PHILOSOPHIC PRIDE AND HUMILITY

When offering guidance to a young man who had written to him about a condition of perplexity into which he had fallen as a result of studying philosophy, Rousseau declared that the state of doubt in which the philosopher finds himself was completely alien to him (see the "Letter to M. de Franquières, *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 1134). More commonly, however, he says that this is precisely the condition into which his own studies had put him.<sup>13</sup> In addition to asserting that doubt is the beginning of philosophy, he consistently claims that uncertainty about certain ultimate metaphysical questions must be the ultimate

outcome of philosophic pursuits. Although he frequently attacks skeptics and Pyrrhonists, he does so mainly to object to the moral consequences they draw from their skepticism, not to the skepticism itself.<sup>14</sup>

The first philosopher's admission of uncertainty leads him to the brink of abandoning any reasoning about these unsolvable questions. He sees that, rather than being a reasonable pursuit of knowledge, further investigation will only be in the service of his sense of pride. At this point comes the experience that has led commentators to call this the fragment on revelation: "All at once a ray of light happened to strike his mind and to unveil to him those sublime truths which it does not belong to man to know by himself and which human reason serves to confirm without serving to discover them. A new universe offered itself so to speak to his contemplation." A faith that allows him to conceive of the world as the work of a divine being takes the place of his doubt. It is only when he has given up his philosophic pride, his conviction that his reason alone can settle the issues he has been debating, that the first philosopher receives this revelation.

The vulnerability of philosophers to pride is a regular theme in Rousseau's works. In the *First Discourse* he places the origin of philosophy, or at least the study of nature and of morality, not in wonder but in pride and similar vices (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 12). As we have seen, in his remarks about esotericism Rousseau traces the source of philosophy to pride. Moreover, this philosophic pride gives birth to a certain misanthropy. Rousseau argues that, by exposing human beings for what they are, philosophy engenders contempt for his fellows in the philosopher. Finally, "his contempt for others turns to the profit of his pride: his amour-propre increases in the same proportion as his indifference to the rest of the universe. For him, family, fatherland become words void of meaning: he is neither parent, nor citizen, nor man; he is a philosopher" ("Preface to Narcissus," *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 192). Finally, in the *Second Discourse*, it is the combination of amour-propre and reason to which Rousseau attributes the lack of compassion in philosophers (*Collected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 37).

In sum, pride causes philosophers to overestimate the power of their own reason and to press their inquiries beyond their ability. In doing so they reach dogmatic conclusions that gratify their vanity even though they would fail to satisfy an impartial reason. This, in turn, causes them to congratulate themselves on their superiority to other humans. This is also the source of their esotericism, or willingness to deceive others for their own benefit.<sup>15</sup>

Somehow Rousseau's first philosopher is immune to or resists this temptation of pride. This is what opens him to the "revelation" of the "invisible chain that links all beings." The somewhat imprecise understanding now embraced by the philosopher is identified more precisely elsewhere in Rousseau's writings. This characterization of the orderliness of the universe belongs to optimism, particularly in the version developed by Pope.<sup>16</sup> In effect the first philosopher

turns away from materialism and toward optimism. He does so, however, not as a turn from a faulty philosophic doctrine to another that is demonstrably true. While optimism presents itself as an argument for divine providence, in Rousseau's view it assumes the existence of God rather than proving it (see the "Letter to Voltaire," *Collected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 115).

Optimism is only one of the possible alternatives to materialism, and the version presented here has a strong theological cast. Rousseau was well aware of other alternatives, for example, in the citation of Aristotle's opposition to the supposition of eternal motion referred to above Rousseau says that this philosopher "did not appear to have thought too well of the Divinity" (*Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 876). The rather tentative, or imprecise, character of the "revelation" given to the first philosopher is indicated by the way it is described in the "Fiction" itself. Although it is said that the "sublime truths" seen by the philosopher are confirmable by human reason, he remains incapable of providing a completely rational account of what he has discovered. There are still "perplexing sophisms" that he is unable to resolve. It is not exactly the case that the philosopher has come to prefer revelation to reason. Rather, he relies on his "interior sentiment" to decide between two alternative rational, but imperfect, accounts of the world. In the "Letter to M. de Franquières" Rousseau says, not that this interior sentiment is beyond reason, but that it protects us against the "sophisms of reason."<sup>17</sup> Although Rousseau claims that this sentiment is infallible, although not always followed, he does not claim any more than that it allows us to recognize the limits of our reason.

The philosopher's excursion into philosophic meditation has taught him the futility of attempting to resolve his remaining doubts. His reason has learned its own limits, and his philosophic pride is replaced by a humility that leaves him open to consolation. The effect of this change of feeling in the philosopher is that he is inspired by a new philanthropy, the opposite of the misanthropy all too typical of philosophers. While at the beginning he is seen only outside of society and there is no indication that he philosophizes for any reason other than to satisfy his own curiosity, under the influence of his new enthusiasm he suddenly acquires a desire to share his consoling discovery. He believes that what he has discovered can be put into the service of virtue. Philosophy becomes philanthropic only after it becomes aware of its own limits. The first philosopher now longs to share his discovery with the world, but his meditations have lasted into the night and, while waiting for the dawn, he falls into a deep sleep and begins to dream.

#### THE DREAM: ON THE BLINDNESS OF PEOPLES

In his dream the philosopher finds himself in an immense temple, whose dome is supported by seven statues each of which has the shape of one of the seven deadly sins.<sup>18</sup> These statues accurately portray the hideousness of the

vices they represent, but by a trick of perspective appear beautiful when seen from inside the temple. In the center of the temple is an altar upon which there is an eighth statue, which is veiled. This statue is worshipped in a variety of ways by its devotees, each of whom imagines it in terms of his own dominant passion. Sadistic perversity reigns everywhere. The forms of worship either prohibit natural acts or require an unnatural cruelty.

The ministers of the temple, marked by “a modest and contemplative air” which thinly conceals their “pride and cruelty,” make sure that those entering the temple are blindfolded until they reach the point of perspective at which the seven statues will take on their deceptively beautiful appearance. Unlike the people, who commit atrocious acts because they are under the spell of illusion, the ministers are well aware of the deformity of their idols, but serve them out of self-interest. They profit from the fanaticism they help to inculcate.

It is not unusual for Rousseau to transport his readers back to a time before philosophy affected the world. In the “Fiction,” however, the prephilosophic world is one of fanaticism and prejudice. It is characterized by the same qualities Rousseau elsewhere identifies as the distinctive marks of corrupt religion: “iniquity, falsity, hypocrisy, and tyranny” (“Letter to M. de Franquières, *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 1142). In such an atmosphere the philosophic gesture of stripping away the veil, of undermining respect for irrationally held opinions, cannot appear in the sinister light it usually takes on in Rousseau’s treatments of philosophy. In this instance Rousseau makes common cause with his erstwhile friends the Encyclopedists and with Voltaire. In the philanthropic first philosopher’s dream the issue is less justifying philosophy than it is the tactical question of how philosophy can combat religious prejudices.<sup>19</sup>

One of the striking features of the “Fiction” is that, prior to his dream, the philosopher is quite unaware of the precise nature and extent of the prejudices from which his fellows must be liberated. To be sure, he knows that they are in need of enlightenment and he hopes to make them happy and virtuous by filling this need. Nevertheless, his own enlightenment took place entirely outside of a social context, and he himself was liberated from doubt rather than from prejudice. Rousseau seems to understand meditation and reasoning as a source of and cure for the former, but not the latter. In this first part of the dream the philosopher has presumably learned that the public is in even greater need of his discovery than he had thought. In fact, it is tempting to say that the most significant revelation experienced by the philosopher comes, not from his sudden illumination about the order of the universe, but from what he learns from the dream about the obstacles fanaticism opposes to the spread of the truth.

Rousseau’s description of the temple and of what goes on in it bears a certain resemblance to the cave image in Book 7 of Plato’s *Republic*. In both instances the populace is taken in by illusions presented to them by others, and wise men are liberated from the illusions.<sup>20</sup> Rousseau’s image differs from

Plato's in focusing on religious authority in particular as responsible for the deception. Most importantly, Rousseau's image is an entirely artificial one employing blindfolds and tricks of perspective within a manmade edifice to sustain the illusion. For Rousseau, men bear the sole blame for the position in which they find themselves; nature plays no role in it at all.

#### THE DREAM: ON THE DESTINY OF THE WISE

The theme of public enlightenment in Rousseau's image is introduced by a mysterious voice which says to the philosopher, "You have just contemplated the blindness of peoples, it remains for you to see what the destiny of the wise is in this place." The *Pléiade* editors suggest that the invisible source of this voice may be connected with the illumination the philosopher has already experienced (vol. 4, p. 1769). It should be considered, however, that the illumination took place before the dream and was not accompanied by any voices. However this may be, the reference to a missing earlier occasion on which the invisible being spoke certainly betrays the unfinished character of the "Fiction." The function of the voice in the work as we have it is to introduce the theme of the remainder of the dream.

The destiny of the wise is revealed by three characters who successively enter the temple, each of whom confronts the corrupt religion with a different tactic. Rousseau offers no account of how each of them acquires his wisdom; each already has it upon his arrival at the temple. Like the first philosopher, none of them appears to learn the truth from his encounter with the false opinions of society. Significantly, Rousseau gives no hint of any disagreement among the three concerning the truth about nature. They either agree or their disagreements are unimportant. What is important is their shared philanthropy.

Two of the three alternatives presented here are easy to identify. The details of the second intruder's experiences clearly correspond to the death of Socrates as portrayed in Plato's *Crito* and *Phaedo* and the third is identified as the "son of man," a clear reference to Jesus.<sup>21</sup> It has proven to be more difficult to attach a name to the first wise man. His only clearly distinguishing mark is that he is dressed like the first philosopher. Since it is in this part of the "Fiction" that Rousseau originally identified the first philosopher as Pythagoras, some scholars have identified the first wise man as a Greek, specifically Xenophanes.<sup>22</sup> Others assume that the intruder is dressed like Rousseau himself and accordingly identify him as a contemporary, for example Diderot (see Masson, vol. 2, pp. 52–53). In this interpretation, his tactic represents the publication of the *Encyclopedia*. Another plausible, but not conclusive, suggestion is that this man whose face is not visible is the first philosopher himself as he would be if he tried to communicate his newfound wisdom without reflecting on the dream.<sup>23</sup>

## THE FIRST WISE MAN: EXPOSING THE VICIES OF RELIGION

This first wise man's behavior is marked by a degree of caution. Because he understands the deceptive character of the temple and the power of its clergy, he does not directly proclaim the truth to the populace as the first philosopher had planned to do prior to his falling asleep. Instead, "subtly touching the blindfold of those who were led [to the altar] he returned the use of sight to them without causing any apparent displacement." His strategy, then, is a discreet enlightenment of a few rather than a direct public challenge of religious authority.

The object of the enlightenment given by this wise man is the exposure of the hideous character of the seven statues and of the atrocities incited by the clergy. He pays no attention to the eighth statue and teaches nothing about the truth concerning nature or divinity. The enlightenment he offers is largely negative in character. It is successful in that those whose blindfolds have been displaced refuse to worship the statues and attempt to convince others to behave the same way. This lack of discretion on their part is the cause of this strategy's failure. The ministers trace this sedition to its source and "immolate" the wise man on the spot to great popular acclaim.

Masson is one of those who suggest that the first wise man is Diderot. He supports this suggestion with a reference to *La promenade du sceptique*, written in the late 1740's, in which Diderot uses an image of an army in blindfolds to portray Christians and discusses the possibility of removing the blindfolds. Against Masson, it should be pointed out that in this work and elsewhere Diderot shows himself to be very conscious of the fate in store for anyone who attempts to remove the blindfolds of prejudice. Consequently, it seems likely that both Diderot and Rousseau share the same reservations about the approach taken by the first wise man. It is not impossible that one of the objects of these reservations is Voltaire, who crusaded tirelessly against what he perceived to be the evil consequences of religion while often publicly disowning his own works, adopting as one of his mottoes, "Strike and conceal your hand" (see Furbank, p. 167). In any event, it is certain that this wise man represents a general strategy as much as any particular individual.

This first strategy of enlightenment fails for two main reasons. First, its gradual nature leaves it vulnerable to persecution by the ever vigilant ministers, who will destroy any threat to their power before it becomes strong enough to challenge them effectively. Second, because it depends on avoiding detection, this strategy places too heavy a weight on the newly enlightened. The wise man's own behavior is quite discreet, but those who have been enlightened by him, i.e., those who have not been wise enough to enlighten themselves, are incapable of the discretion necessary for the success of this conspiracy. With this example Rousseau seems to be issuing a warning against a struggle for allegiance against the forces of prejudice.

THE SECOND WISE MAN: EXPOSING FANATICISM

The second intruder, or Socrates, avoids these causes of failure through a combination of greater caution and greater boldness. His caution consists in an apparent devotion to the cult of the temple: he avoids the blindfold by claiming to be a blind man in search of a cure from the divinity. In other words, he dissimulates about his own enlightenment: he claims to know less than he does. In fact, his claim to blindness is quite analogous to the Socratic claim of ignorance. It is the ironic claim to know nothing, but in fact to be free of the illusory claims to knowledge characteristic of the populace.

This deception allows the second intruder to draw near enough to the altar so that he can leap onto it and strip the veil off the central statue. Rather than contenting himself with exposing the vices of the clergy to a few, with one stroke this wise man gets to the heart of the matter by exposing the very nature of fanaticism to the many. The central statue is now revealed to be a combined image of ecstasy and rage. Its eyes gaze tenderly toward heaven, but it stifles humanity underfoot and holds an inflamed heart in one hand and a dagger in the other. This image, which the worshippers had previously fashioned after their own passions, is now revealed to be one of fanatical intolerance. To complete his action the wise man gives a speech indicating the self-destructive character of this form of religious devotion.

This revelation of the destructive character of the religion of the temple does not have its desired effect. The spectators are incapable of seeing the statue for what it is even after its veil has been stripped off. What the philosopher sees as cruelty the crowd sees as "celestial enthusiasm." Accordingly the wise man is seized, tried, and put to death in the manner of Socrates.

This philosophic strategy fails because it assumes that stripping off the veil of deception is enough. It assumes that people will recognize the truth when they see it in front of them. It fails to see that the most powerful source of the errors of the people lies in the people themselves. This example shows that the deceptive hypocrisy of the ministers of the temple is founded on the self-deception of the people. The purely rational strategy of exposing the truth is inadequate to deal with this deeper phenomenon.

This characterization of Socrates, the proponent of the noble lie, as the champion of public enlightenment who falls because he overestimated the capacity of the many to understand the truth, can strike one as odd. In fact, in the *First Discourse*, Rousseau presents Socrates as his own predecessor in arguing against the public dissemination of learning (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 9–10). Nevertheless, the fact that Socrates was put to death for his philosophizing is evidence that can be cited to show that his behavior was excessively bold and involved a miscalculation.

The first philosopher finds something unfathomable in the behavior of this second wise man after he is sentenced to death. In an apparent allusion to

Socrates' final words, "I owe a cock to Aesculapius," Rousseau observes that "the last speech of the old man who made a very distinct homage to that very statue which he had unveiled cast into the Philosopher's mind a doubt and a perplexity from which he was never able to extricate himself very well." How can it happen that the man who willingly goes to his death for opposing fanaticism, as Rousseau's Socrates does, openly professes a devotion to one of the objects of the cult he opposed?<sup>24</sup> The Philosopher imagines two possibilities. First, the statement must be understood allegorically rather than literally: for example, by saying that he owes a sacrifice to the god of healing, Socrates may be indicating that he regards life as a sickness from which he is about to be released and that he indicates no particular devotion by his remark. Second, Socrates may merely be making an act of submission to the laws which command a particular mode of worship: "For if all manners of serving the divinity are indifferent to it, it is obedience to the laws that must be preserved." The first alternative is uncertain and depends on an unprovable interpretation. The second leaves an apparent contradiction between this public submission and Socrates' earlier defiance of the publicly ordained worship of the temple. The story of Socrates here seems to show how intractable is the problem of combining the enlightenment gesture of stripping away the veil with a proper submission to public authority.<sup>25</sup>

The second interpretation which the Philosopher finds for Socrates' final words, in fact, makes Socrates into an adherent of something like Rousseau's own position. Rousseau strictly insists on dividing religion into three elements: external worship, dogmas which serve as the basis of morality, and purely speculative dogmas having no connection to morality. He insists that the last of these is merely a matter of individual belief. The other two are within the legitimate scope of legal regulation.<sup>26</sup> Thus the paradox in Socrates' behavior could be resolved if he, like Rousseau, made these distinctions. This would allow him to oppose fanaticism—which attempts to force belief in purely speculative dogmas—on civic grounds while continuing to observe the religious practices of the community that are not inextricably bound to fanaticism.

The similarity between Rousseau's own position and the philosopher's second interpretation of the Socrates of the dream suggests either that Rousseau shares the contradiction that he finds in Socrates or that he has reservations about Socrates' action in stripping off the veil. The difficulty is this: it appears possible to maintain the distinction between the essentials of religious belief and the inessential public religious worship only when the latter does not require the immoral actions found in the temple. When the public religion does make such demands, in other words when it uses speculative dogma to justify immoral actions, some sort of opposition to that religion seems necessary.

In the end the problem is less with "Socrates'" bold opposition to some aspects of religious fanaticism than with his failure to oppose it successfully. The source of the failure of the Socratic strategy of unveiling was its under-

estimation of the people's attachment to their passions, its belief that the mere exposure of worship as fanaticism would cure that fanaticism. As Rousseau says elsewhere, "The Philosopher can give the Universe some salutary instructions, but his lessons will never correct either the nobles who scorn them or the People which does not hear them at all. Men are not governed in that way by abstract views."<sup>27</sup> The failure of philosophy to overcome fanaticism leaves us with the question of whether there is an alternative to the sort of enlightenment symbolized by the Socratic gesture of stripping off the veil.

### THE THIRD WISE MAN: TAKING THE PLACE OF FANATICISM

The third intruder in the dream, the "son of man," presents such an alternative. The first wise man offered an exposure of the effects of fanaticism, the second revealed the nature of fanaticism itself. The third wise man offers something to the passions that fuel fanaticism to supplement the purely negative criticism given by his two predecessors. He seizes the statue, throws it to the ground, and takes its place on the pedestal: he offers the populace, not philosophy, but a new object of worship in his example. He teaches, not with rational demonstrations, but with fables and parables that have an inspiring effect on even the least intelligent of his audience. His effect is precisely to transform the passions and feelings that supported fanaticism. It can be said that, like Julie, the Legislator, heroes in general, and other figures in Rousseau's works, he gives his audience new souls, or changes them into different people.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to note, as most commentators do, that there is nothing supernatural about the "son of man" aside from the mysterious voice that announces his appearance. He performs no miracles, and Rousseau does not make even a hint of a reference to the resurrection. Like Rousseau's legislator, it is his great but thoroughly human soul that is the strongest source of the conviction he inspires (see *Social Contract*, bk 2, chap. 7, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 157). Furthermore, he does not appear to redeem men from their sins. Rather, he says, "I come to atone for and cure your errors" (on this point see Gouhier, p. 203, and Starobinski, p. 70). His mission is no different from the one undertaken by the two other wise men. The only difference is the means he employs to be successful. In short, the Jesus of the dream is a particular sort of wise man, and his superiority to his predecessors in the dream is based solely on the superiority of his tactics.<sup>29</sup>

The tactics used by the son of man are less a rejection than the completion of the tactics used by the second wise man. It would have been quite possible for him to overturn the central statue even if it had not been unveiled, but his replacement of this statue with himself is aided by the fact that he can be compared with the unveiled image of fanatical intolerance. In short, the "philosophic" tactic of the second wise man was not useless, but it needed completion

by the “religious” tactic of the third wise man. These two tactics are complementary with each other in a way that neither of them is with the tactic of the first wise man, which makes no contribution to the other two.

At the point that the “Fiction” breaks off the son of man is in triumph. His “revolution” has completely won over the people, although they waver temporarily when he refuses to destroy his enemies. Although the “Fiction” does not provide an ultimate judgment about the son of man, nothing in it is incompatible with what Rousseau says elsewhere. In other places he presents Jesus as a failed political legislator and as the founder of a transpolitical revolution in the universe (see the “Letter to M. de Franquières,” *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 1146). He presents this new revolution as one of the leading causes of the impossibility of sound politics in the modern world (see *Social Contract*, bk. 4, chap. 8, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, pp. 216–24) and also as one of the few remaining barriers to the harshest despotism ever seen, a despotism founded on the dogmatic antireligious spirit of modern philosophy.

The “Fiction” leaves its readers with a very strong impression of Rousseau’s view of the superiority of Jesus to the alternatives presented in this work. Perhaps this impression should be tempered a bit by the acknowledgment that the fragment breaks off with no reference to the crucifixion, which would match the violence of the death of the first intruder in the temple.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, we do not know how the dream would have concluded or how the first philosopher might behave when he wakes up. Does he worship Jesus or imitate him? Does he seek and perhaps find an even better strategy for enlightening the public, or does he abandon such hopes to return to his private reveries? Each of these alternatives can be found in Rousseau’s works or in interpretations given to these works.

#### ROUSSEAU AND THE FIRST PHILOSOPHER

Whether or not Rousseau’s first philosopher represents the purely historical origins of philosophy, in many ways he bears a strong resemblance to Rousseau himself. The formulation given to the “revelation” experienced by the philosopher, “a new universe offered itself so to speak to his contemplation,” is very reminiscent of Rousseau’s accounts of his own “illumination” on the road to Vincennes (see *Confessions*, bk 8, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 294, and the second “Letter to Malesherbes,” *ibid.*, p. 574). In particular, Rousseau’s description of this philosopher’s meditations and dilemmas closely resembles his discussion of his own position around the time he wrote his *Second Discourse*. This period is described in the second half of Book 8 and first half of Book 9 of the *Confessions*. In sum, while Rousseau is presenting the origins of philosophy in general, he is very much concerned with his own experience of philosophy.

In Book 8 of the *Confessions* Rousseau summarizes the conclusions of his reflections to explain his reconversion to Protestantism when he regained his Genevan citizenship. The passage in which he explains this reconversion very closely reflects the argument of the “Fiction.” Rousseau says,

The study of man and of the universe had shown me everywhere final causes and the intelligence that directs them. The reading of the Bible and above all of the Gospel to which I had applied myself for several years had made me despise the base and foolish interpretations given to Jesus Christ by the people least worthy of understanding him. In a word, while attaching me to what is essential in Religion, philosophy had detached me from that farrago of little formulas with which men have obfuscated it. Judging that for a reasonable man there were not two ways of being Christian, I also judged that everything that is form and discipline in each country fell within the competence of the laws.<sup>31</sup>

As is the case for the Socrates in the “Fiction,” Rousseau here presents philosophy as paving the way for the reconciliation with civil religion.

However Rousseau may have intended to end the “Fiction,” it is clear that its movement reflects his understanding of the movement of his own thought and writing. Like the first philosopher, Rousseau’s first impulse after making his discovery of “another universe” is to use it to cure men of their errors. As he says in the *Confessions*, “I no longer saw anything but error and folly in the doctrine of our wise men, anything but oppression and misery in our social order. In the illusion of my foolish pride I believed I was made to dissipate all these illusions” (*Confessions*, bk 9, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 349). Not long after he saw the reaction to the *Second Discourse*, he declared that he had “lost so many days pursuing a vain glory, by telling the public truths that it is in no condition to understand” (*Lettres morales*, Pléiade, vol. 4, p. 1082). It is after making this reflection that Rousseau launched himself into writing *Julie* and putting his thoughts on education into the form of a novel.<sup>32</sup> In these works and in the *Confessions* he works to provide a new image for people to look up to and imitate. In effect, he adopts a variant of the tactic of the third wise man.

In Rousseau’s view, stripping away the veils from popular prejudices may be necessary in some circumstances, but it is always dangerous. This is so because, rather than leading necessarily to knowledge of the truth, this process of enlightenment leads in the first place to doubt. It is possible that this state of doubt will resolve into the skepticism about metaphysical questions and reassurance about moral issues recommended by Rousseau, but it can also resolve into a more comprehensive skepticism that is destructive of morality. Reasonable and modest philosophy knows its own limits at least in public discussion, it “stops and does not touch the veil at all,” when it comes to the deepest questions (“Letter to M. de Franquières,” Pléiade, vol. 4, p. 1137). The most influential modern interpretation of Rousseau, that developed by Jean Starobinski in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, holds that

essential to Rousseau's thought is a desire for transparency and a hatred of the obscurity of shadows.<sup>33</sup> Evidence in support of this interpretation is abundant wherever one looks in Rousseau's works. At the same time that he desires transparency of a certain type, Rousseau is the implacable foe of philosophic attempts to order society in accord with transparent reasoning.

When prejudices are so dangerous that they must be opposed, Rousseau argues that they can be opposed successfully only on their own level. Stripping off the veil can play a part in this, and when it can Rousseau is willing to defend very bold action. Nevertheless there is a point at which it must stop, both because it cannot lead to the ultimate goal and because the critical philosophic spirit that demands a reason for everything can easily degenerate into a new fanaticism.<sup>34</sup> Fanaticism and the feelings that are its foundation must be opposed by other feelings and new images to believe in. The attempt to make popular opinion more rational and correct—for example by writing the *Social Contract* to give Genevans a sounder idea of their political principles—must be accompanied by or even preceded by efforts to predispose them to accept this attempt. One can wonder whether Rousseau's strategy does not run the risk of replacing one form of fanaticism with another (see *Emile*, pp. 312–14). It is certain that he was willing to run this risk, at least in part because he thought that sound politics must be founded on the feelings and opinions of normal citizens rather than on their reason or that of philosophers.

## CONCLUSION

Rousseau's "Fiction" is a lesson for philosophers. It teaches about the dangers of philosophic pride and the proper practice of philanthropy. In doing so it points to without settling a variety of perennial issues for philosophers about the nature of the world and the mind's ability to grasp this nature. In the final analysis Rousseau's philosophic "Fiction" practices what it preaches about the undesirability of letting these issues intrude on the public arena. Like the third wise man, Rousseau teaches through apologues and fables. He presents the need for the use of allegories in the form of an allegory.

## NOTES

1. The "Fiction" can be found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 4 vols. to date (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959– ), vol. 4, pp. 1044–54. Citations to this edition will be identified as Pléiade. Translations from the French, including the Fiction, are my own.

2. For a brief account of these attempts to date the work, see Pléiade vol. 4, pp. 1766–67. For subsequent attempts see Henri Gouhier, *Les Méditations métaphysiques de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970), p. 196, who suggests the spring of 1756; Michel Launay, who argues for 1753–56 in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau écrivain politique*, 2d ed. (Paris-Geneva: Editions Champion

Slatkine, 1989), pp. 202–5; and Raymond Trousson, who argues for 1756–57 in *Socrate devant Voltaire, Diderot et Rousseau* (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1967), pp. 95–96. Trousson also provides a useful account of the dispute over the date (see n. 142, p. 137).

3. Such a case has been made convincingly by Hermine de Saussure concerning parts of the manuscripts of the *Confessions*. See Saussure, *Rousseau et les Manuscrits des "Confessions"* (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1958).

4. For example, Trousson agrees with those who argue for 1756–57 based on his analysis of Rousseau's treatment of Socrates at different periods of his literary career. See Trousson, pp. 95–96.

5. C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, July 22, 1864. The translation is my own. Sainte-Beuve does qualify his claim by adding that, in comparison with his contemporary "philosophes," "Rousseau was relatively Christian" (emphasis added). Given the religious views of the other "philosophes" to whom Sainte-Beuve refers, it should be pointed out that there is a great deal of ground between their hostile disbelief and religious enthusiasm.

6. Pierre-Maurice Masson, *La Religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1916; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), p. 50.

7. Pierre Bayle's article on "Pythagoras" in his *Dictionary* identifies him as the first person to be called a philosopher. This article also discusses the esoteric doctrine which Rousseau attributes to Pythagoras. See *Second Discourse*, in *Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–) vol. 3, p. 85 (This edition will be cited as *Collected Writings.*), and *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 412 and 454.

8. "Observations," in *Collected Writings* vol. 2, p. 45. In the part of this passage that is not quoted, Rousseau argues that this "esoteric doctrine" is not peculiar to Western philosophy. He claims that it arises wherever philosophy does, for example, in China. For a brief discussion of Rousseau's attack on esotericism see Victor Gourevitch, "Rousseau on Lying: A Provisional Reading of the Fourth *Rêverie*," *Berkshire Review* vol. 15 (1980), pp. 97–98. One other reference to Pythagoras by Rousseau (vol. 3, pp. 538–39) is given special prominence by James Miller. See *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 13. In this passage Rousseau cites only a maxim attributed to Pythagoras that the simulacra of the Gods "give a new soul to those who approach them to receive their oracles." As Miller points out, Rousseau himself attributes this power, not to the simulacra of the Gods, but to the heroic actions of the great men of antiquity. It will be argued below that it is precisely this ability of heroes to give others "new souls" that distinguishes them from philosophers.

9. Launay has noted the relation between the passage about the internal doctrine and the use of the name Pythagoras in the "Fiction," but he mistakenly says that Rousseau uses the name to describe a different figure in the dream, one of the wise men who visit the temple. This is the basis of his identification of this figure with Diderot, who told Rousseau about the "internal doctrine." See Launay, p. 203.

10. On Socrates' attendance at such functions consider the settings of the *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*. Even the *Phaedrus* does not present Socrates as meditating by himself in a country setting.

11. Elsewhere Rousseau is more skeptical about this possibility. See, for example, the "Letter to M. de Franquières" of 1769 (Pléiade, vol. 4, pp. 1139–40) and "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar" (*Emile*, notes to pp. 273 and 279).

12. "Letter to Voltaire, August 18, 1756," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 117–18. The paragraph containing this passage is not in any of the manuscripts of the "Letter." It was published for the first time in 1861 by Streckheisen-Moultou in the same volume as the "Fiction." For a list of other places in which Rousseau refers to this example see the editors' note 34, pp. 195–96.

13. See *Reveries*, Pléiade, vol. 1, p. 1016, *Emile*, p. 267, and *Lettres morales*, Pléiade, vol. 4, pp. 1087–91. In the first two of these passages he presents doubt as the beginning point of philosophy, but in the latter he also insists that—on metaphysical as opposed to moral questions—it is also the terminus. See especially Pléiade, Vol. 4, p. 1099, where he says that it is necessary to end where Descartes began.

14. The ultimate status of reason in Rousseau's thought goes far beyond the scope of this paper. For an excellent account of the problem of reason in Rousseau and the influence of his conception of this problem, see Richard L. Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

15. For a statement of the principle of morality of those who follow the esoteric doctrine see *Confessions, Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 393.

16. Rousseau discusses the need for modification of Pope's version of the great chain of being in the "Letter to Voltaire," *Collected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 114.

17. *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 1138. It is also worth noting that the philosopher does not appear to adopt the antimaterialist doctrine of two substances, another position which Rousseau liked to encourage, although he was well aware of its problems.

18. This seems clear even though only four of the statues are described. These four represent pride, prodigality, anger, and avarice.

19. In a portion of an early draft of the *Second Discourse* which he rewrote several times, only to remove it from the final version, Rousseau gives a comparable account of the clergy that also shows the extent of his agreement with the Enlightenment critique of religion (*Collected Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 96–101). The passage in question also indicates the limit of this agreement by linking the vices of religion to his analysis of philosophic pride. In this passage Rousseau attributes the origin of fanaticism to a "proud curiosity" that attempts to exceed the bounds of human intelligence. This curiosity leads to dogmatic claims to possess truths beyond the capacity of human reason. Ultimately it is the source of a new form of unnatural inequality. "It bred a species of singular men who—presenting themselves as Interpreters of incomprehensible things—claimed to subject all other people to their decisions." While this manipulative clergy are not themselves proud philosophers, they are the beneficiaries of the tendencies set in motion by the latter.

20. As has been documented by P. N. Furbank, Diderot was fascinated by the cave image and discussed it both during and after the period of his friendship with Rousseau. See *Diderot: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), pp. 1–2. In one of his discussions, dating from 1751 at the height of his relations with Rousseau, Diderot published a letter in which he gave an extensive discussion of the image. See Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. Georges Roth (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 120–21.

21. For a brief but very useful account of "the son of man" in the Bible, see Gouhier, pp. 202–3.

22. See *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 1769. Most scholars today do not accept this identification. To the best of my knowledge, Rousseau never mentions Xenophanes in any of his works.

23. See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 67.

24. Trousson suggests that these last words reveal a lack of courage on Socrates' part (Trousson, p. 94), but the emphasis in this last scene on the calmness with which Socrates meets death makes this interpretation implausible. Therefore it is also necessary to reject the view he endorses that Rousseau presents Socrates as "the first Jesuit there ever was in the universe."

25. On the contradiction to be found in either interpretation of Socrates' behavior, see Gouhier, p. 199.

26. See in particular *Lettres écrites de la montagne*, *Pléiade*, vol. 4, p. 694. Rousseau also relies on this distinction in his discussion of the civil religion in the *Social Contract* and in his letter to Voltaire on providence (*Collected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp. 119–21).

27. *Discourse on This Question: Which is the Virtue Most Necessary for a Hero and Which are the Heroes Who Lacked This Virtue?* in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 2. See also Rousseau's comparison between Socrates and Cato in "Political Economy," *Collected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 151.

28. On the son of man as an "exemplar," see Starobinski, p. 69. On the difference between Socrates who reasons and convinces and Jesus who engages in "immediate communication," see Trousson, p. 95. On the general theme of the opposition between convincing and persuading in Rousseau's thought, see Christopher Kelly, "'To Persuade without Convincing': The Language of Rousseau's Legislator," *American Journal of Political Science* vol. 31, No. 2 (May 1987), pp. 321–35. See also Miller, pp. 5–13, and Judith N. Shklar, "Rousseau's Images of Authority," in

*Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 333–65.

29. The son of man is also described as having less affectation than the second wise man. In other words he is even better cured of philosophic pride.

30. Starobinski thinks that the “Fiction” ends the way it does because Rousseau “does not know what to make of the cross, a symbol of mediation” (p. 69). Rousseau suggests elsewhere, however, that it is precisely the manner of his death that makes Jesus such a compelling figure. See *Emile*, p. 626. Starobinski is correct in suggesting that Rousseau strips Jesus of most of his significance for Christianity.

31. See *Confessions*, bk 8, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 329. This passage contains the virtually unique explicit reference to final causality in Rousseau’s works.

32. Rousseau admits that even in *Julie*, he made the mistake of assuming that people were too open to reason. See *Confessions*, bk 9, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 366.

33. For a treatment of the complexities of Rousseau’s view of shadows, see Marc Eigeldinger, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Univers mythique et cohérence* (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1978), pp. 181–216.

34. On Rousseau’s view of the possibility of the Enlightenment turning into a new and even more dangerous form of fanaticism, see Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters, “Rousseau on Reading ‘Jean-Jaques’: *The Dialogues*,” *Interpretation*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter 1989–90), pp. 239–54.

*Translation*

## [Fiction or Allegorical Fragment on Revelation]

It was during a fine Summer night that the first man who attempted to philosophize—having abandoned himself to a deep and delightful reverie and being guided by that involuntary enthusiasm that sometimes transports the soul out of its abode and makes it embrace the entire universe so to speak—dared to raise his reflections up to the sanctuary of Nature and to penetrate by means of thought as far as human wisdom is permitted to reach.

The heat had scarcely subsided along with the sun, the birds (already withdrawn and not yet asleep) betokened the pleasure they were tasting in breathing a cooler air by means of a languishing and voluptuous warbling. An abundant and healthy dew was already reviving the greenery withered by the heat of the sun, the flowers were casting their sweetest perfumes from every direction. In all their adornment, the orchards and the woods were forming a less lively and more touching sight across the twilight and the first rays of the moon, than during the brightness of the day. Having been effaced by the tumult of the day, the murmur of the brooks was beginning to make itself heard, various domestic animals returning slowly were lowing in the distance and seemed to be enjoying the repose the night was going to give them, and the calm that was beginning to reign in every direction was all the more charming in that it betokened places that were tranquil without being deserts, and peace rather than solitude.

Touched by this combination of pleasant objects, as a sensitive soul always is in such a case where tranquil innocence reigns, the philosopher abandons his heart and his senses to their sweet impressions: to taste them more at leisure he lies down on the grass and leaning his head on his hand he lets his gazes move delightfully over everything that charms them. After several moments of contemplation, by chance he turns his eyes toward Heaven and, from this sight which is so familiar to him and which ordinarily strikes him so little, he is left seized by admiration, he believes he is seeing this immense vault and its superb adornment for the first time. He notices still in the occident the traces of fire which the star that gives us heat<sup>1</sup> and light leaves after it; toward the orient he perceives the gentle and melancholy gleam of the one that guides our steps and excites our reveries during the night; moreover he distinguishes two or three of them that make themselves noticed by the apparent irregularity of their path in the midst of the constant and regular disposition of all the other parts of Heaven; he considers with I know not what shivering the slow and majestic progress of this multitude of globes which are rolling in silence over his head and which ceaselessly cast a pure and unfailing light across the spaces of the Heavens. In spite of the immense intervals that separate them from each other, there is a secret correspondence among these bodies which makes them all move in accordance with the same guidance, and with a curiosity mixed with

uneasiness he observes between the zenith and the horizon the mysterious star around which this common revolution seems to be made. "What inconceivable mechanic could have made all the stars submit to this law, what hand could have linked all the parts of this universe among themselves in this way; and by what strange faculty of myself are all these parts—united outside by this common law—also in a sort of system in my thought which I suspect without conceiving it?

"The same regularity of movement that I notice in the revolutions of the celestial bodies, I find again on the earth in the succession of the seasons, in the organization of the plants and animals. The explanation of all these Phenomena can be sought only in matter set into motion and ordered in accordance with fixed Laws: but who can have established these Laws and how do all bodies find themselves subjected to them? That is what I do not know how to understand. Moreover, the progressive and spontaneous movement of the animals, the sensations, power to think, freedom of will and action that I find in myself and in my fellows, all this surpasses the concepts of mechanism that I can deduce from the known properties of matter.

"That it might have some property that I do not know at all and perhaps never will know so that ordered or organized in a certain manner it becomes susceptible to feeling, reflection and will, I can believe without difficulty; but how can the rule of this organization which could have established it be something by itself or in what archetype can it be conceived as existing?

"If I assume that everything is the effect of a fortuitous arrangement, what will become of the idea of order and the relation of intention and end that I notice among all the parts of the Universe? I admit that in the multitude of possible combinations the one that exists cannot be excluded and that it must even have found its place in the infinity of successions; but these successions themselves cannot have happened except with the aid of motion and this is a source of new perplexity for my mind.

"I can conceive that there reigns in the universe a certain amount of motion which, successively modifying bodies, might always be the same in quantity; but I find that since the idea of motion is nothing but an abstraction and cannot be conceived apart from the substance moved, what force could have moved matter always remains to be sought, and if the sum of the motion was susceptible to augmentation or diminution the difficulty would become even greater.

"Thus here I am reduced to assuming the one thing in the world most contrary to all my experiences, namely the necessity of motion within matter: for on every occasion I find bodies indifferent to motion and to rest by themselves, and equally susceptible to either in accordance with the force that pushes them or holds them back; whereas it is impossible for me to conceive motion as a natural property of matter if only for lack of a fixed direction, without which there is no motion whatsoever, and which—if it existed—would eternally carry all bodies along in straight and parallel lines with an equal force, or at least an

equal speed, without the smallest atom ever being able to meet another nor to swerve from the common direction for an instant.”

Plunged into these reveries and abandoning himself to a thousand confused ideas that he could neither abandon nor clarify, the indiscreet Philosopher was striving vainly to pierce the mysteries of nature, its sight which had at first enchanted him was no longer anything but a subject of uneasiness for him and the whim of explaining it had deprived him of all the pleasure of enjoying it.

Weary at last of fluctuating with so much contention between doubt and error, discouraged at dividing his mind between unprovable systems and unanswerable objections, he was ready to renounce deep and frivolous meditations more fit to inspire him with pride than with knowledge; when all at once a ray of light happened to strike his mind and to unveil for him those sublime truths which it does not belong to man to know by himself and which human reason serves to confirm without serving to discover them. A new universe offered itself so to speak to his contemplation; he perceived the invisible chain that links all the Beings among themselves, he saw a powerful hand extended over everything that exists, the sanctuary of nature was open to his understanding as it is to the celestial intelligences and all the most sublime ideas that we attach to this word God presented themselves to his mind. This grace was the reward for his sincere love for the truth and for the good faith with which, without wishing to show off his vain researches, he consented to waste the effort he had taken and to admit his ignorance rather than to consecrate his errors in the eyes of other people under the fine name of philosophy. Instantly all the enigmas which had made him so very uneasy were made clear to his mind. The course of the Heavens, the magnificence of the stars, the adornment of the earth, the succession of Beings, the relations of conformity and utility that he remarked among them, the mystery of physical organization, that of thought, in a word, the action of the entire machine, all became possible for him to conceive as the work of a powerful Being, director of all things; and—if there were some difficulties left for him that he could not resolve, their solution[s]<sup>2</sup> appeared to him beyond his understanding rather than contrary to his reason—he trusted the interior sentiment which was speaking to him with so much energy in favor of his discovery, in preference to some perplexing sophisms that drew their strength only from his mind’s weakness.

His soul—seized by admiration by these great and ravishing lights<sup>3</sup> and raising itself so to speak to the level of the object that occupied it—felt itself penetrated by a lively and delightful sensation: a spark of that divine fire that it had perceived seemed to give him a new life; carried away with respect, gratitude and zeal he arose precipitously then, raising his eyes and hands toward Heaven and next bowing his face against the earth, his heart and his mouth addressed to the Divine Being the first and perhaps the purest homage that it might ever have received from mortals.

Set aflame by this new<sup>4</sup> Enthusiasm he would have wanted to communicate its ardor to all of nature, he would have wished above all to share it with his fellows and his most delightful thoughts turned upon the projects of wisdom and felicity that he contemplated causing men to adopt by showing them in the perfections of their common author the source of the virtues they ought to acquire, and in his benefits the example and the reward of those they ought to spread. "Let us go," he shouted carried away with zeal, "let us carry everywhere along with the explanation of the mysteries of nature the sublime Law of the master who governs it and who manifests himself in his works. Let us teach men to regard themselves as the instruments of a supreme will who unites them among themselves and with a greater whole; to despise the ills of this short life which is only a passage for returning to the eternal being from which they draw their existence, and to love everyone as so many brothers destined to be reunited one day in the bosom of their common Father."

It was in these thoughts so flattering for human pride and so sweet for every loving and sensitive being that he awaited the return of day, impatient to carry a purer and more striking one into the soul of other men and to communicate to them the celestial enlightenment that he had just acquired. Nevertheless, since the fatigue of a long meditation had exhausted his spirits and the coolness of the night was inviting him to rest, he dozed off insensibly still dreaming and meditating, and finally slept deeply. During his sleep the disturbances that contemplation had just excited in his brain gave him a dream that was as extraordinary as the ideas that had produced it. He believed he was in the middle of an immense edifice formed by a dazzling Dome supported by seven colossal statues instead of columns. To look at them closely all these statues were horrible and deformed, but by the artifice of a clever perspective, viewed from the center of the Edifice each of them changed appearance and presented a charming form to the eye. These statues all had separate and emblematic poses. One, a mirror in her hand, was sitting on a Peacock whose vain and haughty countenance she imitated. Another with an impudent eye and a lascivious hand urged the objects of her brutal sensuality to share it. Another held serpents nourished from her own substance which she tore out of her bosom in order to devour them and one saw them reborn endlessly. Another, a hideous skeleton that one could distinguish from death only by the sparkling voracity of its eyes, shunned true food in order to swallow with long gulps cups of molten gold which parched it without nourishing it. Finally, all were marked by dreadful attributes which should have made them objects of horror, but which, seen from the point at which they appeared beautiful, seemed to be the ornaments of their beauty. On the keystone of the vault were written these words in large letters: *Peoples serve<sup>5</sup> the Gods of the earth*. Directly underneath, that is to say at the center of the building and at the point of perspective, was a large Heptagonal altar on which the humans came in crowds to offer their offerings and their vows to the seven statues which they honored with a thousand different rites and under a

thousand bizarre names. This altar served as base to an eighth statue to which the whole edifice was consecrated and which shared the honors rendered to all the others.<sup>6</sup> Always surrounded by an impenetrable veil, it was perpetually served by the People and was never perceived by them;<sup>7</sup> the imagination of its worshippers depicted it to them in accordance with their characters and their passions and each—all the more attached to the object of his worship the more imaginary it was—place under this mysterious veil only the idol of his own heart.<sup>8</sup>

Among the crowd which flocked ceaselessly in this place, he<sup>9</sup> distinguished at first some singularly dressed men<sup>10</sup> who—through a modest and contemplative air—had in their physiognomy an undefinable something sinister which announced pride and cruelty at the same time. Occupied with continuously introducing Peoples into the edifice, they appeared to be the officers or the masters of the place and sovereignly directed the cult of the seven statues. They began by blindfolding the eyes of all those who presented themselves at the entrance of the temple, then—having led them this way into a corner of the sanctuary—they gave them back the use of sight only when all the objects cooperated in fascinating it. If someone tried to remove his blindfold during the journey, they instantly pronounced over him some magic words which gave him the form of a monster under which, abhorred by all and unknown to his relatives, it was not long before he was torn apart by the assembly.

What was most surprising is that the Ministers of the temple who saw all the deformity of their idols fully did not serve them less ardently than the blind vulgar people. They identified themselves so to speak with their horrible divinities and, receiving in their name the homages and the gifts of mortals, each of them offered for his self-interest the same vows to them that fear tore from the peoples.

The continual noise of hymns and songs of gladness threw the spectators into an enthusiasm that set them outside of themselves.<sup>11</sup> The altar which stood in the middle of the temple was barely distinguished through the fumes of a thick incense which spread to the head and disturbed reason; but while the vulgar saw there only the phantoms of its agitated imagination, the calmer philosopher perceived enough of it to judge about what he did not discern, the apparatus of a continuous carnage surrounded that terrible altar, he saw with horror the monstrous mixture of murder and prostitution. Now tender infants were thrown into flames from cedar wood, now grown men were immolated through the falsehoods of a decrepit old man. While groaning denatured Fathers plunged the knife into the bosom of their own daughters. Young people in an elegant and pompous adornment which still enhanced their beauty were<sup>12</sup> buried alive for having listened to the voice of nature while others were ceremoniously abandoned to the most infamous debauchery, and by an abominable contrast one heard at the same time the sighs of the dying along with those of sensual pleasure.

“Ah,<sup>13</sup>” cried the appalled philosopher to himself, “what horrible<sup>14</sup> spectacle, why have my gazes been soiled by it? Let us hasten to leave this infernal

abode.” “It is not yet time,” the invisible being who had already spoken to him<sup>15</sup> said to him while holding him back, “you have just contemplated the blindness of peoples it remains for you to see what the destiny of the wise is in this place.”

Instantly he noticed at the entrance of the Temple a man dressed exactly like him and whose features he was prevented from distinguishing by the distance. This man whose bearing was grave and composed did not himself go to the altar, but—subtly touching the blindfold of those who were led there without causing any apparent displacement in it—he returned the use of sight to them. This service was soon discovered by the indiscretion of those who received it. For, seeing the ugliness of the objects of their worship while crossing the temple, the majority of them refused to go to the altar and attempted to dissuade their neighbors from doing so. Always vigilant for their interest, the Ministers of the Temple soon discovered the source of the scandal, seized the veiled man, dragged him to the foot of the altar and immolated him on the spot to the unanimous acclamations of the blinded troop.

Turning his eyes toward the nearest entrance the Philosopher saw there an old man of a rather unimposing appearance but whose insinuating manners and familiar and profound discourse soon caused his physiognomy to be forgotten. As soon as he presented himself to enter the ministers of the temple brought the sacred blindfold. But he said to them, “Divine men spare yourselves a superfluous care for a poor old man deprived of sight who comes under your auspices to seek to recover it here; condescend only to lead me to the altar so that I can give homage to the divinity and she can cure me.” As he pretended to bump rather heavily against the objects around him, the hope of a miracle made them forget to verify its need any better;<sup>16</sup> the ceremony of the blindfold was omitted as superfluous and the old man was ushered in leaning upon a young man who served him as guide, and to whom no attention was paid.

Frightened by the horrible sight of the seven statues and by the blood that he saw streaming around the eighth, twenty times this young man tried to escape and to flee out of the temple, but, held back with a vigorous arm by the old man, he was constrained to lead him or rather to follow him all the way to the enclosure of the sanctuary in order to observe what he saw and to work one day for the instruction of men. All at once, lightly leaping onto the altar, the pretended blind man uncovered the statue with a bold hand and exposed it to all gazes without its veil. Depicted on its visage was seen ecstasy along with fury; under its feet it stifled personified humanity, but its eyes were tenderly turned toward Heaven: in the left hand it was holding an inflamed heart and in the other it was sharpening a dagger. This sight made the philosopher shudder, but far from revolting the spectators, instead of an air of cruelty they saw there only a celestial enthusiasm, and felt augment for the statue thus uncovered the zeal they had had for it without knowing it. “*Peoples*,” the intrepid old man who perceived this cried out to them with a tone full of fire, “*what is your madness to serve Gods who seek only to harm, and to adore beings even more*

*maleficent than you? Ah far from forcing them by indiscreet sacrifices to think about you in order to torment you, endeavor rather to make them forget you, you will be less wretched for it; if you believe you please them by destroying their works, what can you hope from them other than that they destroy you in their turn? Serve the one who wants everyone to be happy if you wish to be happy yourselves."*

The Ministers did not permit him to proceed, and interrupting him with a great noise they asked the People for justice for that ingrate who as a reward for having, they said, recovered his sight upon the altar of the Goddess dared to profane her statue and to disparage her worship. At once the whole People threw itself upon him, ready to tear him to pieces, but seeing his death assured the Ministers wished to clothe it with a juridical form and caused him to be condemned by the assembly to drink green water, a type of death often imposed on the wise. While the liquor was being prepared the friends of the old man wished to take him away secretly, but he refused to follow them. "Let me," he said to them, "go to receive the reward for my zeal from the one who is its object. While living among these peoples, did I not submit to their laws, and ought I to transgress them at the moment they crown me? After having devoted my days to the progress of truth am I not only too happy still to be able to devote to it the end of a life that nature was going to ask back from me? Oh my friends, the example of my last day is the only instruction that I leave you or the one at least that ought to give weight to all the others. I would be suspected of having lived only as a sophist if I was afraid to die as a Philosopher." After this speech he received the cup of the Wise Men and having drunk with a serene air he conversed peacefully with his friends about the immortality of the soul and the great truths of nature which the philosopher listened to all the more attentively because they were related to his preceding meditations. But the last speech of the old man which was a very distinct homage to that same statue which he had unveiled cast into the mind of the Philosopher a doubt and a perplexity from which he was never able to extricate himself very well, and he was always uncertain whether these words contained an allegorical sense or simply an act of submission to the worship established by the laws. "For," he said, "if all the manners of serving the divinity are indifferent to it, it is obedience to the laws that must be preferred." Nevertheless between this action and the preceding one there always remained a contradiction which appeared to him impossible to remove.

Struck by everything that he had just seen, he was reflecting deeply about these terrible scenes; when suddenly a voice made itself heard in the air pronouncing distinctly these words: "*Here is the son of man. The Heavens are silent before him, earth listen to his voice.*" Then lifting his eyes he perceived on the altar a personage whose imposing and gentle aspect struck him with astonishment and respect; his clothing was common and similar to that of an artisan, but his gaze was celestial, his bearing modest, grave, and less affected

even than that of his predecessor;<sup>17</sup> his features had something undefinably sublime in which simplicity was allied with greatness and one could not envisage him without feeling oneself pierced with a lively and delightful emotion which had its source in no feeling known to men. "*Oh my Children,*" he said in a tone of tenderness which pierced the soul, "*I come to atone for and cure our errors, love the one who loves you and know the one who is.*" Instantly seizing the statue, he threw it down effortlessly and climbing onto the pedestal with as little agitation, he seemed to be taking his place rather than usurping someone else's.

His air, his tone, his gesture caused an extraordinary fermentation in the assembly; the People were seized by them to the point of enthusiasm, the ministers were angered by them to the point of fury, but they were hardly listened to. Preaching a divine morality,<sup>18</sup> the popular and firm unknown man swept away everything, everything announced a revolution, he had only to say a word and his enemies were no longer: but the one who came to destroy bloodthirsty intolerance had no care to imitate it, he employed only the means that suited the things he had to say and the functions with which he was charged, and because of this the people—all of whose passions are furies—became less zealous for his defense.<sup>19</sup> After the testimony of strength and intrepidity that he had just given he took up his discourse again with the same gentleness as before; he depicted the love of men and all the virtues with such touching features and such lovable colors that aside from the officers of the Temple (enemies by their estate of all humanity) none heard him without being softened and without loving better his duties and the happiness of others because of them. His speech was simple and gentle and yet profound and sublime, without stunning the ear he nourished the soul, it was milk for children and bread for men,<sup>20</sup> he animated<sup>21</sup> the strong and consoled the weak and the least adequate geniuses among them all found him equally at their level, he did not at all harangue with a pompous and dignified tone but his familiar speeches shone with the most ravishing eloquence, and his teachings were fables and apoloques, common conversations but full of justness and profundity. Nothing perplexed him; the most captious questions that the desire to ruin him caused to be proposed immediately had solutions dictated by wisdom; it was necessary to hear him only once to be certain of admiring him always, one felt that the language of the truth cost him nothing because it had its source within him.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

1. Rousseau originally wrote "life," rather than "heat."
2. The form of the French possessive pronoun used by Rousseau requires a plural noun, but his manuscript gives a singular. The Pléiade editors have supplied the plural ending of the noun in brackets.
3. Rousseau originally wrote, "ideas," rather than "lights."

4. Rousseau originally wrote, “divine,” rather than “new.”

5. Rousseau originally wrote, “Everyone come to serve,” and then, “Everyone hasten and serve,” before settling on the formulation in the text.

6. At this point in the manuscript occurs the following passage which has been crossed out: “Depicted on its visage was seen ecstasy with fury; death and hell were under its feet, but its eyes were turned toward heaven. In the left hand it was holding a blazing heart and in the other it was sharpening a dagger.” A passage closely resembling this appears several paragraphs below in the final version.

7. The manuscript alternates between “perceived” and “saw uncovered” before settling on the former. After this sentence comes the following passage which has been crossed out: “The Philosopher who had approached without being observed dared to draw aside the veil with a reckless hand but—frightened by a thousand menacing cries—he let it fall back and hastily withdrawing, he contented himself with examining in secret everything that struck his eyes.” In this passage between “fall back” and “and hastily” the following passage was struck out: “The veil drew itself aside for the philosopher but he soon closed it himself seeing himself threatened by a dagger.”

8. Rousseau first wrote and then crossed out “the phantom of his own mind,” rather than “the idol of his own heart.”

9. Rousseau originally wrote, “Pythagoras,” and then “The Philosopher,” each of which is crossed out.

10. Here and several places below the manuscript gives only the letter “h” which Rousseau frequently used as an abbreviation for *hommes* (men).

11. This sentence is an addition to the original draft.

12. The manuscript gives a singular verb which has been corrected by the Pléiade editors.

13. At this point in the margin of the manuscript occur the words “and all the most sublime ideas that we attached to this word, *God*, presented themselves to his mind.” The words have been crossed out and appear a few paragraphs earlier in the final version.

14. Rousseau originally wrote and then crossed out, “infamous and barbarous” and then, “execrable and barbarous,” before settling on horrible.

15. Rousseau originally wrote and then crossed out, “a man who was accompanying him” and then “a man he suddenly noticed close to him,” before settling on “the invisible being who had already spoken to him.”

16. Rousseau first wrote and then crossed out, “the hope for a miracle made the priests not very fastidious about verifying the blindness.”

17. Rousseau first wrote and then crossed out, “his bearing, modest and grave without being base or imperious.”

18. Rousseau originally wrote and crossed out, “the purest divine morality.”

19. In place of “for his defense” some editors beginning with Streckheisen-Moultou have put “and neglected to defend him seeing that he did not want to attack at all.” This phrase occurs at the bottom of the manuscript page without any indication of where or if it belongs in the manuscript. At that point Rousseau first wrote and then crossed out, “did not any longer defend the one who did not want to attack at all.”

20. Rousseau first wrote and then struck out “robust people,” instead of “men.”

21. This word is unclear in the manuscript. Rousseau originally wrote and then struck out, “raised up.”

22. The manuscript ends here.