

Interpretation

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Denise Schaeffer's *Rousseau on Education, Freedom, and Judgment* is an exploration of the in-between. The reason for this is that Rousseau was himself, on Schaeffer's reading, a theorist of the in-between. Schaeffer resists approaches that would associate Rousseau with extremes of individualism and collectivism, or, in her words, "seductive enchantment" and "rational detachment," describing him instead as a "theorist of middle states" (192). Judgment, the primary object of Schaeffer's attention, is the faculty that best captures Rousseau's proclivity for the in-between, because it sits between sentiment and reason, oscillating between the two, always, Schaeffer emphasizes, under the guidance and supervision of figures with a claim to wisdom. In this sense, Schaeffer suggests that judgment, though not a central concept in Rousseau's philosophical system, captures, perhaps better than others (e.g., imagination, reason, sentiment), the essence of Rousseau's epistemology and moral psychology.

While Schaeffer associates her approach with Mark Cladis and Jonathan Marks,¹ who also emphasize the in-between, I would suggest that her book might also be situated within another salutary trend in Rousseau studies, which emphasizes commonalities and continuities among what otherwise appear to be antithetical or mutually exclusive images of unity: the solitary and the citizen, sentiment and reason, individualism and collectivism, and

¹ Mark Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and Twenty-First-Century Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jonathan Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

so forth. It is a trend I would associate primarily with Laurence Cooper and Christopher Kelly, who have suggested that Rousseau's disparate texts might be productively read as aspiring to a particular conception of being or the extension of being.² For Cooper and Kelly, it is being or the extension of being that provides the unifying or consistent impulse, while for Schaeffer it is judgment, which she sees at work not only in the moral education of *Emile*, but also in the civic education of the citizen and even in the solitary contemplation of the *Reveries*.

The bulk of Schaeffer's book is a careful, nuanced reading of judgment in *Emile*, of the process by which *Emile* develops a reflective capacity to govern himself. As a stand-alone reading of *Emile*, the book will be indispensable for anyone looking to understand Rousseau's most formidable text. The writing is lucid and erudite; Schaeffer's analysis moves successively through Rousseau's argument, lingering on all of the key moments in the text, such that, as a reader, one feels oneself to be in good hands, to have chosen a reliable guide.

But Schaeffer's intent is less to provide an interpretation of *Emile* than it is to use *Emile* to outline a theory of judgment that is operative throughout Rousseau's philosophical system.³ Although Rousseau's approach to sovereignty and self-government depends on citizens with a capacity for reflective judgment, Schaeffer argues that he does not provide a full account of judgment in his explicitly political writings. For that, we must consult *Emile*, which *does* provide a guide to the judgment required of the free and equal citizens of Rousseau's republic. So, in reading *Emile*, Schaeffer distills an approach to fundamental epistemological, moral, and political questions that might be applied beyond the scope of that particular text to Rousseau's work more broadly and possibly even to democratic societies writ large.⁴

² Laurence D. Cooper, "Between Eros and Will to Power: Rousseau and 'the Desire to Extend Our Being,'" *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004): 105–19; Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). I have tried to contribute to this line of interpretation as well by emphasizing the impulse toward communion in *Rousseau's Ethics of Truth* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chap. 2.

³ In this respect, the book makes an important contribution to our understanding of epistemology in the Enlightenment; it acts, for example, as a useful supplement to Michael Frazer's inquiry into the relationship between reason and sentiment in the Enlightenment (*The Enlightenment of Sympathy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010]).

⁴ Here Schaeffer makes a significant contribution to the literature on the role of sentiment in politics, which I would associate with scholars like George Marcus (*The Sentimental Citizen* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002]), Cheryl Hall (*The Trouble with Passion* [New York: Routledge, 2005]), and Martha Nussbaum (*Political Emotions* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015]).

Typically Rousseau's fundamental political problem—to “find a form of association by means of which, each, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before”—has been seen by readers as a procedural problem, by which Rousseau describes a set of institutionalized practices that enable citizens to remain as free in society—having agreed to all of its attendant constraints—as they were in the state of nature. By contrast, Schaeffer describes the fundamental political problem as formative. If citizens are to legislate for themselves (which was for Rousseau a basic requirement of justice) and if force and freedom are to be reconciled (which Rousseau demanded), it will be because citizens have developed the ability to make good use of their freedom. In this Schaeffer gets at the core of Rousseau's political project, which is to theorize the conditions under which popular sovereignty might be exercised in a manner that serves the common interest.

If it is not obvious by now, Plato looms large in this book. In reading Schaeffer, one feels oneself being pulled toward the *Republic*, particularly Socrates's use of imagery to entice citizens toward virtue. Reflective judgment, like Plato's true opinion, is neither pure reason nor pure sentiment but is instead a mixture of the two. It is an in-between state, suited to human beings “as they are,” superior to prejudice but a far cry from philosophy, complete with shadows and reflections—Schaeffer prefers the term “chimeras”—projected by the wise (the tutor, the Lawgiver) and intended to elicit good judgment from subjects. We cannot do without our illusions, Schaeffer argues, although we may be able to relate to them with some measure of detachment as we come to understand that we can be moved by them either viscerally (through their appeal to sentiment or emotion) or rationally (through an appreciation of the function they perform). While some illusions are nothing more than mere prejudice, others can be the object of critical reflection and bear some “essential relationship to truth.” Chimeras that begin as an appeal to sentiment or emotion might “dazzle and inspire” but can also ultimately provoke “critical reflection and judgment” (5).

Part of the brilliance of *Emile* is that, as readers, we are simultaneously witnessing the pupil's education to reflective judgment and being educated ourselves through the application of a kindred method. Schaeffer shows how the figure of Emile operates as a chimera for the reader, conveying at once Rousseau's theory of education and instantiating it with respect to the “spectatorship” of the reader (9). As Emile's judgment is developed, so too is the reader's. And Schaeffer executes a comparable double move in her book, which begins by describing a straightforward political problem and moves to

a discussion of human psychology—to an account of what it takes for human beings to exercise judgment well and why it is through indirect education that judgment is most effectively developed and refined. In so doing, she too uses what is ostensibly one thing—an interpretation of *Emile* on judgment—to accomplish something else, that is, to cultivate good judgment in her readers.

While indirect education is not always problematic, the use of chimeras raises some troubling questions with respect to the freedom of pupils and citizens. Schaeffer does not ignore these questions; in fact she is sensitive to the ways in which the techniques necessary to the cultivation of reflective judgment can, as she puts it, “sacrifice genuine self-rule” (5). While the book is more exegesis than critical analysis, Schaeffer acknowledges the perils of making freedom dependent on properly educated judgment. It is probably the case that *Emile*’s education, dependent as it is on the heavy hand of the tutor, is quite simply not a model for modern citizenship. The challenge, Schaeffer suggests, is to develop a democratic capacity for reflective citizenship, one that can be cultivated not through the kind of authoritarianism that Rousseau describes but by each citizen, individually, consistent with genuine self-rule. Citizens must somehow be both seduced by, and critically aware of, chimeras and the sway they hold over them. Schaeffer admits that this is a problem for her reading of Rousseau no less than for Rousseau himself (14–15).

The most controversial piece of the book is surely Schaeffer’s (extensively defended) claim that Sophie’s judgment is not only as developed as *Emile*’s but possibly even more so (136). While it is true that Rousseau does not “deprive women of their capacity to judge or to reason as moral agents” (138), most of Rousseau’s interpreters have situated Sophie’s education within the context of a patriarchal framework, in which men are citizens and women are domesticated in service to the production of those citizens. Yes, Sophie develops the qualities of full-fledged personhood, including judgment, but she does all of it so as to be more pleasing to *Emile*, to be capable of satisfying not only his sexual desire but his *amour propre* as well.

Finally, I would note that there is an austerity to Schaeffer’s reading on judgment that can sometimes feel closer to an ancient Greek ethos than a Rousseauian one. In emphasizing the in-between, there is necessarily less emphasis on Rousseau’s moments of unreflective ecstasy in, for example, republican citizenship, solitary reverie, and religious communion. I wonder if Schaeffer, in remaining in between, does not fully convey the ways in which the extension of being was sublime for Rousseau. Schaeffer concedes that the middle states she emphasizes are quite rare in Rousseau’s corpus, alluded

to “only indirectly and fleetingly” (192) in *Emile* and occasionally in Rousseau’s other texts (193–94). I would suggest that this may be the case because judgment was for Rousseau less an end in itself than it was a condition for the recuperation of ancient harmony in the context of modern alienation. Judgment is our best bet in imperfect circumstances, but Rousseau’s truly redemptive moments—floating on Lake Biemme, silent communion in Clarens or with Christian brothers, planting a stake for a public festival in the *Letter to d’Alembert*—are not in-between moments. Schaeffer characterizes these images as chimeras, intended to draw on our imagination for purposes of cultivating judgment. I would suggest that the inverse is equally the case—that Rousseau’s education to reflective judgment is part of a larger aspiration to recapture the wholeness and harmony of the state of nature amid the fragmentation and mediation that structure modern society.