

Rousseau Rousseau
and et la
Criticism Critique

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Self-Love and Self-Defense: *Amour de soi, Amour-propre, and Rousseau's Responses to Criticism*

"If there were neither knaves nor flatterers, he would love
all humankind."

(Rousseau, referring to Molière's *Misanthrope*, in
Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater.¹)

The theme of this year's colloquium, "Rousseau and Criticism," lends itself to a discussion of Rousseau's personal responses to criticism. How did Rousseau himself react to the many forms of criticism that were launched against him and his work? How did he defend himself when under attack?

As recent scholarship on Rousseau has indicated, Rousseau's public writings in self-defense constitute an impressive *oeuvre* ranging from his short, self-confident replies to critics of his first and second *Discourses* to his book-length letters defending *Emile* and the *Social Contract*. Included in the earlier period's work are his six various "Replies," "Observations," and "Letters" addressed to Raynal, Stanislas, Gautier, Borde, and Lecat, as well as his "Preface" to *Narcissus* and his letters to Voltaire and Philopolis; in the later period are his famous *Letter to Christophe de Beaumont*, and his *Letters Written from the Mountain*.²

Bold, persevering, and resourceful, Rousseau's polemical writings combine a skillful use of rhetorical strategies with a clearly presented reaffirmation of the cause the author is defending. Whether he is responding to an anonymous writer for the *Mercure de France* or addressing the Archbishop of Paris, his tone is generally assertive

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 38.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts and Polemics*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992); also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses, together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, Editions Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), Tome IV, pp. 927-1007 and Tome III, pp. 685-897.

but respectful; both when he is taking on his adversary's criticisms point by point and when he is re-stating his basic argument, his vindications of his work are vigorous and clear. The first page of his first Reply to the Abbé Reynal illustrates the tone of many of the responses that follow. "I owe thanks, sir, to those who have passed on to you the observations that you so kindly convey to me, and I will try to benefit from them," he graciously begins, but then quickly shifts to more aggressive tactics:

however, I will admit that I find my Censors a little hard on my logic, and I suspect they would have proved less scrupulous if I had shared their opinion. It seems to me at least that if they themselves had a little of that rigorous exactness they require of me, I would have had no need of the clarifications for which I am going to ask them.

Rousseau then proceeds to engage in a point-by-point parry with his opponent, typically raising an issue that has been made against him, only to knock it down with devastating logic:

*The Author seems, they say, to prefer the situation in which Europe was before the renewal of the Sciences, a State worse than ignorance because of the false knowledge or jargon that prevailed. The Author of this observation seems to have me say that false knowledge or scholastic jargon is preferable to Science; yet it is I myself who said it was worse than ignorance...They add that the Author prefers rusticity to politeness. It is true that the Author prefers rusticity to the proud and false politeness of our century, and he stated the reason why. And that he delivers a mortal blow to all learned men and artists. So be it, since that is what they want, I agree to suppress all the distinctions I made.*³

Like an accomplished tactician Rousseau takes on his adversaries with undaunted self-confidence and a clear sense of strategy. Referring to this period later on in his *Confessions*, he proudly admits that he "crushed their little witticisms with my

³ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, eds. Masters and Kelly, p. 25.

observations, as I might crush an insect between my fingers."⁴ Looked at independently of his personal letters and autobiographical writings (i.e. his *Confessions*, *Dialogues*, and *Reveries*), Rousseau's public responses to criticism impress one as being generally robust and resilient.⁵

His private letters and autobiographical writings, however, present us with a very different Rousseau. As Volume 2 of Maurice Cranston's biography of *The Noble Savage* reveals, in place of the bold warrior we see a haunted fugitive, or, even worse, a petulant child. Far from robust, his own accounts (in the *Confessions* and in other personal writings) of the continual need to defend himself are phrased in terms of "miseries" and recurring illness. Personal attacks are particularly wounding. Rousseau's extreme sensitivity to Diderot's playful comments on his solitary life, his painful defensiveness over his abandonment of his children, his bitter suspiciousness of anyone questioning his treatment of Mme. Le Vasseur or Sophie d'Houdetot, his retreat from those who dare to approach him with gifts--these over-reactions to apparently minor provocations make even a sympathetic reader uneasy. A passage from a letter to Diderot in response to the latter's seemingly innocuous suggestion that Rousseau accompany Mme. d'Épinay to Geneva can give a flavor of some of these over-reactions and contrast sharply with his bold defense of the first *Discourse*. In the *Confessions* he tells us that he "trembled with such rage and was so utterly astounded as I read [Diderot's] letter, that I could hardly get to the end," and that he immediately drafted an explosive response:

"My dear friend, you cannot know either the magnitude of my obligations to Mme. d'Épinay, or the extent to which I am bound by them, or whether she really needs my company on her journey, or if she seriously wants me to go with her, or if it is possible for me

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 388.

⁵ There are admittedly exceptions to this generalization. In Rousseau's *Letter to Beaumont* and *Letters Written from the Mountain*, as well as in his earlier *Preface to Narcissus*, there are passages that reflect the same self-pity and defensiveness that one finds in his personal writings. On the whole, however, and considering the actual force of the attacks against him, Rousseau's ability to defend himself publicly is impressive.

to do so, or any reasons I may have for not doing so...[I]t is the height of rashness to prescribe so positively what I ought to do, without putting yourself in the position to judge."

Following this initial outburst he shifts to a tone of hurt pride and to the suggestion that Diderot is acting on behalf of a larger conspiracy:

"But what is still worse, as I see it, is that the advice you offer me is not your own. Not only am I very little disposed to let myself be led by some third or fourth party speaking in your name, but I detect in this tortuous procedure some underhand dealings that do not suit your frank nature and which you would do well, both for your own sake and mine, to avoid in future."⁶

After coming to expect nothing less than high-mindedness from Rousseau, such clear signs of hypersensitivity and even paranoia make us begin to distrust our positive responses to his genius.

How can one explain such different reactions? Confronted with the contrast between Rousseau's honorable response to the King of Poland's criticism of the first *Discourse* and his miserable response to Grimm's criticism of his treatment of Mme. Le Vasseur (or, later on, between his vigorous response to the Genevan government's burning of the *Social Contract* and his mistrustful response to David Hume's offers of hospitality),⁷ one might be tempted to argue simply that Rousseau was capable of dealing with public criticism but could not deal with private criticism--or that attacks on his work were not threatening but that attacks on his person were. Although these arguments have some validity, a close look at the texts forces one to go beyond such self-evident dichotomies. In one of his Replies to critics of the first *Discourse*, for example, he makes the point that he is *less* concerned with attacks on his person than he is with attacks on

⁶ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 442.

⁷ e.g. see Rousseau, *Lettres écrites de la montagne* and Jean Guéhenno, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman, Vol II (London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1967), Chapter 6.

his ideas.⁸ Furthermore, in many of his works-- particularly the "Preface" to *Narcissus* and *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*--the line between making a public defense and making a private defense is very thin indeed.

In addition to the inconsistencies in his responses to criticism is the puzzling fact that Rousseau's most forceful moments of self-defense were followed by withdrawal and retreat. This is especially evident in the period following his defense of the first *Discourse*. Between 1751 and 1753 the need to defend his bold assertion that progress in the sciences and arts tends to corrupt human morality made Rousseau into a kind of celebrity: criticisms of the *Discourse* and Rousseau's responses to them appeared regularly in the *Mercur de France* and in independently-printed pamphlets. And yet, no sooner had Rousseau become the hot topic of conversation that most authors only dream of than he began to try to separate himself from the very society that worshipped him--first by undertaking a self-imposed "reform" of his lifestyle, and later by withdrawing from Parisian society altogether. What explains such an apparent aversion to his own literary triumphs?

In an effort to understand Rousseau's contradictory responses to various forms of criticism, I began to wonder if his experience of self-defense might be illuminated by his theory of self-love. Unlike Hobbes or Freud who portrayed human nature as being motivated by a single, unitary instinct or drive (for Hobbes it was aggression, for Freud it was sex), Rousseau developed a complex affective theory based on two very different motivating instincts--*amour de soi* and *amour-propre*.

To trace in full the evolution of *amour de soi* and *amour propre* in Rousseau's work would require a substantial treatise; this paper will provide only a summary of these two important concepts. Prior to his elaboration of these complex forms of self-love in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and *Emile*, Rousseau wrote about a very simple form of self-love in his early comedy, *Narcissus: or the Lover of Himself*, in which self-love is portrayed simply as vanity. But by the time he wrote the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* twenty years later, Rousseau's affective theory had

⁸ Rousseau, "Preface to a Second Letter to Bordes," in Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, ed. Masters and Kelly, p. 184; in ed. Gourevitch, pp. 113-114.

developed well beyond the simple stereotypes about vanity stated at the end of *Narcissus*. In the process of describing how natural man evolves into social man, Rousseau maps out the distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*. *Amour-propre* (sometimes translated as vanity) is the source of all our competitive energies and passions, but it is not an original instinct. *Amour-propre* develops only within the context of competitive social relationships: "[*Amour-propre*] is only a relative sentiment, artificial and born in society, which inclines each individual to have a greater esteem for himself than for anyone else, inspires in men all the harm they do to one another, and is the true source of honor," he explains.⁹ Whenever we are forced to compare ourselves with others, to depend on them, or to fear their dependence on us, *amour-propre* is aroused and stimulated. According to the circumstances, it may manifest itself either in the form of negative social passions such as vanity, envy, and aggression, or in the form of positive social passions such as honor, pride, and patriotism. In the genealogy of social life that is presented in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *amour-propre* first appears when individuals accidentally come together to form families and tribes; it becomes dominant with the appearance of private property; and it emerges triumphant when states go to war.

One of the central arguments of the *Discourse*, however, is that in the earliest stages of natural life, prior to the appearance of *amour-propre*, a much purer form of self-love motivates sentient life. This instinct, which Rousseau calls *amour de soi*, is limited simply to self-preservation. It is the sole sentiment that is "innate" in an actual, as opposed to a potential, sense; and it is a purely innocent form of self-love. As Rousseau explains in his famous note "O,"

[*Amour de soi*] is a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to watch over its own preservation...This being well understood, I say that in our primitive state, in the true state of nature, [*amour propre*] does not exist; for each particular man regarding himself as the sole spectator to observe him,...it is not possible that a sentiment having its source in comparisons he is not capable of making could spring

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St Martin's Press, 1964), p. 221.

up in his soul.¹⁰

In its earliest form there is no morality attached to *amour de soi*. Primitive man is self-sufficient and solitary; his "desires do not exceed his physical needs, the only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a female, and repose; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger."¹¹ With no one to compare himself to, primitive man is free of any form of malice. Hate and revenge are foreign to him since they are "passions that arise only from the opinion that some offense has been received," and solitary natural man has no access to such opinion. The only relative sentiment deriving from *amour de soi* is *pitié* or compassion, "an innate repugnance to see one's fellow man suffer" which serves to "soften" even the most basic needs for self preservation. *Amour de soi* is based on the conviction that deep inside each human being is a love of pure being, and that at its roots our human nature is harmless.

The distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* runs as a double-stranded thread throughout all of Rousseau's mature work. In addition to providing the basic themes for the second *Discourse* and *Emile*, the concepts are woven into the first *Discourse*, the "Preface" to *Narcissus*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, *Letter to D'Alembert*, *On the Social Contract*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Letter to Beaumont*, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques*, and *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Indeed one can argue that Rousseau's great signature statements--"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains," "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man," "There is no original perversity in the human heart"--can be only understood with the distinction between *amour de soi* and

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Discourses*, p. 222. Even the appearance of the two words serves to connote their essential difference: *amour-propre* is associated with appropriation, propriety, and convention; *amour de soi* concerns pure being as such. See Robert McClintock, "Rousseau and the Dilemma of Authority," *History of Education Quarterly*, Fall 1974, n. 26, p. 331.

¹¹ Rousseau, *Discourses*, p. 116. Robert McClintock suggests a fruitful example of the distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*: "*Amour de soi* prompts one to eat enough food to sustain a full and active life; *amour-propre* goads one to consume meals more sumptuous than those of one's neighbors;" in "Rousseau and the Dilemma of Authority," p. 318.

amour-propre firmly in mind.¹² The self-love we are born with is innocent, Rousseau repeatedly tells us; it is only in competition with others that we are tempted to be wicked. Before applying these concepts to the problem of Rousseau's response to criticism, I would like to focus briefly on one more context in which they appear, namely his theory of international relations, where, I would argue, the link between self-love and self-defense can be seen on a large scale.

In his early writings on "The State of War" Rousseau implicitly acknowledged that states are even more prone to be dominated by the passions of *amour-propre* than individuals are. Whereas human beings can survive without the help of others and have certain natural limits to their strength and size, a state's sense of itself is necessarily always relative:

[A state] can always expand, and yet it always feels weak as long as there are other states that are stronger than itself. Its security, its defense, demand that it try to appear more powerful than its neighbors; and it can only... feed itself, and test its strength at their expense.¹³

In other words, because states are necessarily contiguous with each other (except in the case of states, like Corsica, that happen to be islands), they "naturally" tend to compare themselves with each other, and this very comparison leads to competition and the ever-present possibility of aggression and attack.

Given the propensity of states to manifest *amour-propre*, Rousseau suggests that international conflict is inevitable unless states take one of two possible steps to get beyond the war system. One step would be to carefully and deliberately institute a confederation for peace structured along the lines of the one suggested by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre in his *Project for Perpetual Peace*--i.e. a kind of international social contract. The other possible step, particularly for

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 46; Rousseau, *Emile* p. 37; Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, 935., pp. 77-126.

¹³ Rousseau's unfinished manuscript on "The State of War," Appendix A, in Grace G. Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 191.

a young and relatively weak state, would be to try to become economically and militarily independent of the international system altogether. This suggestion is at the heart of Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. Beneath his recommendations for Poland's military, economic, and educational systems lies the consistent aim to make Poland a self-sufficient and autonomous republic, stoically resistant to the financial and diplomatic interdependencies of the empires that surround it.¹⁴

As is evident from these and other texts, at the core of Rousseau's theory of international relations is the recognition that the need to defend oneself from attack is inevitably bound up with *amour-propre*. For to be compelled to defend oneself inevitably calls forth pride, anger, revenge--all the socially related passions of *amour-propre* that threaten the sentiments of *amour de soi*. Rousseau's writings on international relations also suggest that the only way to cultivate a collective *amour de soi* in a social context that one perceives to be unredeemable is to withdraw from it.

Rousseau's discussion of national defense provides an apt transition to his own experience of self-defense. This brings us to the point where we can apply *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* to Rousseau's own life, particularly those periods when he and his work were under attack. Here I would like to propose that Rousseau's experience of responding to his critics, even though he was very skillful at it (indeed, perhaps *because* he was very skillful at it), threatened his need for self-love, particularly the innocent form of self-love represented by *amour de soi*. A deep fear of being corrupted by *amour-propre* and an even deeper need to hold on to *amour de soi*, I would argue, explains much of the apparent contradictions concerning Rousseau's responses to criticism. Like the portrait in *Narcissus*, Rousseau's writings in self-defense exposed his own vanity to himself and made him crave a more innocent form of self-love. And like his recommendations for Poland, his own solution to the need for self-love was to withdraw to a life of simplicity, self-sufficiency, and solitude.

Let us examine this hypothesis more closely. Although Rousseau does not often mention *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* in

¹⁴ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, in *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Frederick Watkins (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1953), Chaps. IV, XI, and XII; also Roosevelt, Chapt. 5.

his *Confessions*, the struggle to resist the corrupting influences of public opinion and to hold onto his own original innocence resounds throughout Rousseau's autobiographical writings. Jean-Jacques' own *amour de soi* never received the careful nurturing that he later, perhaps wishfully, proposed for Emile; nevertheless his life story as he tells it in the *Confessions* is marked by a "before" and "after" the temptations of *amour-propre* very similar to the key dividing lines in *Emile* and the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. The great divide between Part I and Part II of the *Confessions* appears when Rousseau leaves Charmettes and arrives in Paris, about to become a new member of the heady and glittery high society of the French Enlightenment. Rousseau describes this change as a painful fall from "the quiet and idle life for which I felt I had been born" to one in which he experiences "a continual opposition between my situation and my desires."¹⁵

Referring specifically to the period when he was responding to the criticisms launched against his first *Discourse*, Rousseau admits that his ability to defend himself made him feel "bold, proud, and fearless," and indeed, his whole tone when writing about this period is self-assured, even humorous. In the same passage a few lines later, however, his words make it clear that he experienced this new-found pride as something alien, as contrary to his inner nature: "What a change!...No state of being could be found on earth more contrary to my true nature than this one. If ever there was a moment in my life in which I became another man and ceased to be myself, it was at the time I am speaking of"¹⁶--i.e. the time when he was so successfully defending himself against his critics.

In his *Reveries*, which look back at this period from an even further vantage point, Rousseau's language becomes much more explicit, and he admits that during the period he was "in the world," especially when he was "an Author," he felt *amour-propre* "prodigiously." This sentence, written only a few weeks before the end of Rousseau's life, indicates that he experienced his response to criticism as a stimulation of his *amour-propre*. Directly following this avowal of experiencing *amour-propre* "prodigiously," he goes on to explain how he tried to cure himself of it:

¹⁵ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 261.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

By withdrawing into my soul and severing the external relations which make it demanding, by renouncing comparisons and preferences, it was satisfied with my being good in my own eyes. Then again becoming [*amour de soi*], it returned to the natural order and delivered me from the yoke of opinion. From that moment, I again found peace of soul and almost felicity. In whatever situation we find ourselves, it is only because of [*amour-propre*] that we are constantly unhappy.¹⁷

What Rousseau is referring to in this passage is his decision to withdraw from a situation in which he was continually on the defensive in order to adapt a way of life that would remove him from the clamor of public opinion and personal dependence--not because he was incapable of defending himself, but, on the contrary because his success at it stimulated aspects of himself that he did not like. It is this sentiment that informed his decision, at the peak of his fame, to "reform" his lifestyle, to support himself through music copying, and to reject a pension offered by the king; it is this sentiment that also made him leave Paris in 1756 and seclude himself in Montmorency. As he has already explained in the second *Discourse*, in *Emile*, and even in *Considerations on Poland*, *amour de soi* requires solitude and self-sufficiency. Simple self-love is nurtured only when our powers are sufficient to our needs, only when we are free of dependence and envy.

Two questions come to mind at this point. First, why did Rousseau feel so threatened by *amour-propre* and so in need of *amour de soi* in the first place? Like most psychological questions, this one takes us back to Rousseau's earliest years. What *amour de soi* represents is original innocence, and I would argue that throughout his life Rousseau's knowledge of his birth having caused his mother's death left an enormous burden of doubt about his own goodness.¹⁸ To accept his own being in the world at all, he *had* to deny "original sin"; to live with himself, he had to remain convinced that although evil

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, ed. and trans. Charles E. Butterworth (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 116.

¹⁸ Rousseau's father does not seem to have helped in this matter: "He seemed to see her again in me, but could never forget that I had robbed him of her;" Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 19.

may have occurred, he was not at fault. As he insists over and over again throughout his personal writings, his intentions were pure, and therefore he himself is innocent.

The burden of having caused his mother's death seems to me to explain much in the *Confessions*--from the incident with Mlle. Lambercier's comb (though falsely accused, he was innocent) to the episode concerning Marion and the ribbon (though guilty, he falsely accused someone who was innocent) to his continual ambivalence over having abandoned his own children and his defensiveness regarding his treatment of old Mme. Le Vasseur.¹⁹ Just as Freudian theory may have been based as much on Freud's own self-analysis as it was on the needs of his patients, Rousseau's affective theory may reveal much about his own unique psychological needs. Rousseau's understanding of ego development and the origin of evil absolutely required the assumption of primal innocence; his early experience compelled him to posit a form of self-love that was in essence harmless.

A second question is whether or not Rousseau's attempt to nurture his *amour de soi* succeeded. To this I would answer No and Yes, and here we are finally ready to try to understand Rousseau's over-reactions to criticisms by Diderot, Grimm, Mme. d'Épinay and others--people whom he at one point had considered his closest friends. Certainly his personal and autobiographical writings suggest that, having taken the moral high ground and isolated himself in the "forests" of Montmorency, Rousseau eventually became much more sensitive to criticisms of his behavior than he had been earlier to criticisms of his work. Having lowered his defenses, he was unprepared for any form of attack. When Diderot questioned his solitude, or Mme. d'Épinay raised her eyebrows at his relationship with Sophie d'Houdetot, or Grimm hinted that he lacked compassion for Mme. Le Vasseur, Rousseau was stung to the quick, for it was precisely these qualities of *amour de soi*--self-sufficiency, purity, compassion-- that he felt he had been so virtuously pursuing. Challenges to his pride could be tolerated; challenges to his innocence could not. Ironically his sensitivity on this score became so

¹⁹ It is fairly obvious that Rousseau's burden of guilt over his mother's death probably also serves to explain his love of being spanked as a child and his ambivalent sexual relations with Mme. de Warens. But here we are closer to Freud's libidinal theory than we are to Rousseau's.

pronounced that he himself seemed eventually to justify Diderot's offhand remark that "Only the wicked man is alone."²⁰ At this point Rousseau's sympathetic defense of Molière's "misanthrope" in his 1758 *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater* becomes quite logical.

His attempt to recover his *amour de soi* in self-imposed solitude backfired in another way. Solitude fed his imagination; as Mme. d'Épinay observed, in solitude "A fly becomes a monster."²¹ Public opinion in the form of actual attacks in the *Mercure de France* could be dealt with head-on; public opinion in the form of whispers or innuendo grew in his imagination into a monstrous plot aimed intentionally against Jean-Jacques. When imagined persecution turned into actual persecution (after the publication of *Emile* and *On the Social Contract*), the plot assumed universal, indeed almost unbearable proportions.²² Rousseau was not unaware of his own tendency to exaggerate threats; at the end of his life he acknowledged that "Real evils have little hold on me: I resign myself easily to those I experience, but not to those I dread. My alarmed imagination brings them together, turns them over and over, draws them out, and increases them." What he never recognized, however, was the degree to which his own gifts of imagination threatened his need for pure self-love.²³

Another unforeseen challenge to Rousseau's quest for innocence resulted from the workings of what Freudians call "projection." Again, Rousseau seems to have understood this dynamic in others but not in himself. In the *Reveries*, for example, he argued

²⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 423.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

²² See Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3. As Book II of *Emile* makes clear, Rousseau had a clear theoretical understanding of the destructive influence that imagination can have on *amour de soi*. By stretching "the measure of the possible," an overly-stimulated imagination can threaten the delicate balance between needs and powers that is the hallmark of natural existence. A poignant irony in Rousseau's story is that he was able to elucidate so clearly in his writings truths that he was not able to experience in his life. The double irony in this case is that the imagined truth pertained to the two-sided power of imagination itself.

that the Oratorians would always be hostile towards him, for "Their own iniquity constitutes the crime for which their [*amour-propre*] will never forgive me."²⁴ Rousseau was at times guilty of similarly projecting his own hostility onto others. Away from his friends and self-consciously nurturing his own *amour de soi*, he began to see their faults more clearly; his lingering pride however, could not accept these feelings of contempt in himself. In his desperate need to love himself unequivocally, he turned his own questionable feelings for them into their betrayal of him. Such hostilities can only escalate, since accusations of hatred on both sides simply breed further hurt and distrust.

Rousseau's apparent failure to hold onto the innocent self-love that he so desperately craved makes one wonder if perhaps the whole concept of *amour de soi* is, as Rousseau would say, "chimerical." From his vision of natural man to his hopes for an independent Poland, isn't the ideal of preserving moral autonomy a hopeless illusion? For aren't all of us--individuals, couples, cities, nations--enmeshed irretrievably in dense social webs that inevitably make *all* of our passions "relative"? Are not human beings indeed "sexual"--with all of the other-directed urges and powers that this word implies--even at birth, as Freud would later maintain?

Such arguments are difficult to counter. But if *amour de soi* were indeed a useless concept, if this essential element in Rousseau's writing were in fact untenable, it seems to me that his work would not have the power it does. It is our recognition of the truth value of *amour de soi*, I would argue, that has made the three great works conceived during his years of relative solitude--*Emile*, the *Social Contract*, and *Julie*--live as long as they have. That it is possible to preserve a child's freedom without "spoiling" him, that under certain circumstances self-fulfilment can be achieved through participating in an unselfish "general will," and that romantic love can survive renunciation--these themes affirm forms of self-love very different from the competitive passions posited by Hobbes or Freud. In more personal terms, I would argue that most of us probably recognize some form of *amour de soi* in ourselves--even if it is only a trace, and even if it is heavily encrusted, like the statue of Glaucus, by time's corruptions.

Finally, we can perhaps find a vindication of *amour de soi* in

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Rousseau's own life. I rediscovered the *Reveries* this past winter, and the beauty of Rousseau's contentment at the end of his life--not constant but recurring--seems to have made his whole effort worthwhile. "Everything brings me back to the happy and sweet life for which I was born," he tells us in the Eighth Walk:

I pass three-fourths of my life occupied with instructive and even agreeable objects in which I indulge my mind and my senses with delight, or with the children of my fancy whom I have created according to my heart and whose company sustains its sentiments, or with myself alone, satisfied with myself and already full of the happiness I feel to be due me. In all this, [*amour de moi-même*] does all the work; [*amour propre*] has nothing to do with it.²⁵

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²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.