INTELLECTUALS

From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky

Paul Johnson

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'An Interesting Madman'

OVER the past two hundred years the influence of intellectuals has grown steadily. Indeed, the rise of the secular intellectual has been a key factor in shaping the modern world. Seen against the long perspective of history it is in many ways a new phenomenon. It is true that in their earlier incarnations as priests, scribes and soothsayers, intellectuals have laid claim to guide society from the very beginning. But as guardians of hieratic cultures, whether primitive or sophisticated, their moral and ideological innovations were limited by the canons of external authority and by the inheritance of tradition. They were not, and could not be, free spirits, adventurers of the mind.

With the decline of clerical power in the eighteenth century, a new kind of mentor emerged to fill the vacuum and capture the ear of society. The secular intellectual might be deist, sceptic or atheist. But he was just as ready as any pontiff or presbyter to tell mankind how to conduct its affairs. He proclaimed, from the start, a special devotion to the interests of humanity and an evangelical duty to advance them by his teaching. He brought to this self-appointed task a far more radical approach than his clerical predecessors. He felt himself bound by no corpus of revealed religion. The collective wisdom of the past, the legacy of tradition, the prescriptive codes of ancestral experience existed to be selectively followed or wholly rejected entirely as his own good sense might decide. For the first time in human history, and with growing confidence and audacity, men arose to assert that they could diagnose the ills of society and cure them with their own unaided intellects: more, that they could devise formulae whereby not merely the structure of society

but the fundamental habits of human beings could be transformed for the better. Unlike their sacerdotal predecessors, they were not servants and interpreters of the gods but substitutes. Their hero was Prometheus, who stole the celestial fire and brought it to earth.

One of the most marked characteristics of the new secular intellectuals was the relish with which they subjected religion and its protagonists to critical scrutiny. How far had they benefited or harmed humanity, these great systems of faith? To what extent had these popes and pastors lived up to their precepts, of purity and truthfulness, of charity and benevolence? The verdicts pronounced on both churches and clergy were harsh. Now, after two centuries during which the influence of religion has continued to decline, and secular intellectuals have played an ever-growing role in shaping our attitudes and institutions, it is time to examine *their* record, both public and personal. In particular, I want to focus on the moral and judgmental credentials of intellectuals to tell mankind how to conduct itself. How did they run their own lives? With what degree of rectitude did they behave to family, friends and associates? Were they just in their sexual and financial dealings? Did they tell, and write, the truth? And how have their own systems stood up to the test of time and praxis?

The inquiry begins with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), who was the first of the modern intellectuals, their archetype and in many ways the most influential of them all. Older men like Voltaire had started the work of demolishing the altars and enthroning reason. But Rousseau was the first to combine all the salient characteristics of the modern Promethean: the assertion of his right to reject the existing order in its entirety; confidence in his capacity to refashion it from the bottom in accordance with principles of his own devising; belief that this could be achieved by the political process; and, not least, recognition of the huge part instinct, intuition and impulse play in human conduct. He believed he had a unique love for humanity and had been endowed with unprecedented gifts and insights to increase its felicity. An astonishing number of people, in his own day and since, have taken him at his own valuation.

In both the long and the short term his influence was enormous. In the generation after his death, it attained the status of a myth. He died a decade before the French Revolution of 1789 but many contemporaries held him responsible for it, and so for the demolition of the *ancien régime* in Europe. This view was shared by both Louis XVI and Napoleon. Edmund Burke said of the revolutionary elites: 'There is a great dispute among their leaders which of them is the best resemblance of Rousseau…He is their standard figure of perfection.' As Robespierre himself

put it: 'Rousseau is the one man who, through the loftiness of his soul and the grandeur of his character, showed himself worthy of the role of teacher of mankind.' During the Revolution the National Convention voted to have his ashes transferred to the Panthéon. At the ceremony its president declared: 'It is to Rousseau that is due the health-giving improvement that has transformed our morals, customs, laws, feelings and habits.'[1]

At a much deeper level, however, and over a far longer span of time, Rousseau altered some of the basic assumptions of civilized man and shifted around the furniture of the human mind. The span of his influence is dramatically wide but it can be grouped under five main headings. First, all our modern ideas of education are affected to some degree by Rousseau's doctrine, especially by his treatise *Émile* (1762). He popularized and to some extent invented the cult of nature, the taste for the open air, the quest for freshness, spontaneity, the invigorating and the natural. He introduced the critique of urban sophistication. He identified and branded the artificialities of civilization. He is the father of the cold bath, systematic exercise, sport as character-forming, the weekend cottage.[2]

Second, and linked to his revaluation of nature, Rousseau taught distrust of the progressive, gradual improvements brought about by the slow march of materialist culture; in this sense he rejected the Enlightenment, of which he was part, and looked for a far more radical solution.[3] He insisted that reason itself had severe limitations as the means to cure society. That did not mean, however, that the human mind was inadequate to bring about the necessary changes, because it has hidden, untapped resources of poetic insight and intuition which must be used to overrule the sterilizing dictates of reason.[4] In pursuit of this line of thought, Rousseau wrote his *Confessions*, finished in 1770, though not published until after his death. This third process was the beginning both of the Romantic movement and of modern introspective literature, for in it he took the discovery of the individual, the prime achievement of the Renaissance, a giant stage further, delving into the inner self and producing it for public inspection. For the first time readers were shown the inside of a heart, though-and this too was to be a characteristic of modern literature-the vision was deceptive, the heart thus exhibited misleading, outwardly frank, inwardly full of guile.

The fourth concept Rousseau popularized was in some ways the most pervasive of all. When society evolves from its primitive state of nature to urban sophistication, he argued, man is corrupted: his natural selfishness, which he calls *amour de soi*, is transformed into a far more pernicious instinct, *amour-propre*, which combines vanity and self-esteem, each

man rating himself by what others think of him and thus seeking to impress them by his money, strength, brains and moral superiority. His natural selfishness becomes competitive and acquisitive, and so he becomes alienated not only from other men, whom he sees as competitors and not brothers, but from himself.[5] Alienation induces a psychological sickness in man, characterized by a tragic divergence between appearance and reality.

The evil of competition, as he saw it, which destroys man's inborn communal sense and encourages all his most evil traits, including his desire to exploit others, led Rousseau to distrust private property, as the source of social crime. His fifth innovation, then, on the very eve of the Industrial Revolution, was to develop the elements of a critique of capitalism, both in the preface to his play *Narcisse* and in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, by identifying property and the competition to acquire it as the primary cause of alienation.[6] This was a thought-deposit Marx and others were to mine ruthlessly, together with Rousseau's related idea of cultural evolution. To him, 'natural' meant 'original' or pre-cultural. All culture brings problems since it is man's association with others which brings out his evil propensities: as he puts it in *Émile*, 'Man's breath is fatal to his fellow men.' Thus the culture in which man lived, itself an evolving, artificial construct, dictated man's behaviour, and you could improve, indeed totally transform, his behaviour by changing the culture and the competitive forces which produced it–that is, by social engineering.

These ideas are so wide-ranging as to constitute, almost by themselves, an encyclopaedia of modern thought. It is true that not all of them were original to him. His reading was wide: Descartes, Rabelais, Pascal, Leibnitz, Bayle, Fontenelle, Corneille, Petrarch, Tasso, and in particular he drew on Locke and Montaigne. Germaine de Staël, who believed he possessed 'the most sublime faculties ever bestowed on a man' declared: 'He has invented nothing.' But, she added, 'he has infused all with fire.' It was the simple, direct, powerful, indeed passionate, manner in which Rousseau wrote which made his notions seem so vivid and fresh, so that they came to men and women with the shock of a revelation.

Who, then, was this dispenser of such extraordinary moral and intellectual power, and how did he come to acquire it? Rousseau was a Swiss, born in Geneva in 1712 and brought up a Calvinist. His father Isaac was a watchmaker but did not flourish in his trade, being a troublemaker, often involved in violence and riots. His mother, Suzanne Bernard, came from a wealthy family, but died of puerperal fever shortly after Rousseau's birth. Neither parent came from the tight circle of families which formed the ruling oligarchy of Geneva and composed the Council of

Two Hundred and the Inner Council of Twenty-Five. But they had full voting and legal privileges and Rousseau was always very conscious of his superior status. It made him a natural conservative by interest (though not by intellectual conviction) and gave him a lifelong contempt for the voteless mob. There was also a substantial amount of money in the family.

Rousseau had no sisters but a brother, seven years his senior. He himself strongly resembled his mother, and thus became the favourite of his widowed father. Isaac's treatment of him oscillated between lachrymose affection and frightening violence and even the favoured Jean-Jacques deplored the way his father brought him up, later complaining in *Émile*: 'The ambition, greed, tyranny and misguided foresight of fathers, their negligence and brutal insensitivity, are a hundred times more harmful to children than the unthinking tenderness of mothers.' However, it was the elder brother who became the chief victim of the father's savagery. In 1718 he was sent to a reformatory, at the father's request, on the grounds that he was incorrigibly wicked; in 1723 he ran away and was never seen again. Rousseau was thus, in effect, an only child, a situation he shared with many other modern intellectual leaders. But, though indulged in some ways, he emerged from childhood with a strong sense of deprivation and–perhaps his most marked personal characteristic–self-pity.[7]

Death deprived him quickly of both his father and his foster-mother. He disliked the trade of engraving to which he was apprenticed. So in 1728, aged fifteen, he ran away and became a convert to Catholicism, in order to obtain the protection of a certain Madame Françoise-Louise de Warens, who lived in Annecy. The details of Rousseau's early career, as recorded in his *Confessions*, cannot be trusted. But his own letters, and the vast resources of the immense Rousseau industry, have been used to establish the salient facts.[8] Madame de Warens lived on a French royal pension and seems to have been an agent both of the French government and of the Roman Catholic Church. Rousseau lived with her, at her expense, for the best part of fourteen years, 1728–42. For some of this time he was her lover; there were also periods when he wandered off on his own. Until he was well into his thirties, Rousseau led a life of failure and of dependence, especially on women. He tried at least thirteen jobs, as an engraver, lackey, seminary student, musician, civil servant, farmer, tutor, cashier, music-copier, writer and private secretary. In 1743 he was given what seemed the plum post of secretary to the French Ambassador in Venice, the Comte de Montaigu. This lasted eleven months and ended in his dismissal and flight to avoid arrest by the Venetian Senate. Montaigu stated (and his version is to be pre-

ferred to Rousseau's own) that his secretary was doomed to poverty on account of his 'vile disposition' and 'unspeakable insolence', the product of his 'insanity' and 'high opinion of himself'.[9]

For some years Rousseau had come to see himself as a born writer. He had great skill with words. He was particularly effective at putting the case for himself in letters, without too scrupulous a regard for the facts; indeed, he might have made a brilliant lawyer. (One of the reasons Montaigu, a military man, came to dislike him so much was Rousseau's habit, when taking dictation, of yawning ostentatiously or even strolling to the window, while the Ambassador struggled for a word.) In 1745 Rousseau met a young laundress, Thérèse Levasseur, ten years his junior, who agreed to become his mistress on a permanent basis. This gave some kind of stability to his drifting life. In the meantime he had met and been befriended by Denis Diderot, the cardinal figure of the Enlightenment and later to be editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopédie*. Like Rousseau, Diderot was the son of an artisan and became the prototype of the self-made writer. He was a kind man and an assiduous nourisher of talent. Rousseau owed a good deal to him. Through him he met the German literary critic and diplomat Friedrich Melchior Grimm, who was well established in society; and Grimm took him to the famous radical *salon* of Baron d'Holbach, known as '*le Maître d'Hôtel de la philosophie*'.

The power of the French intellectuals was just beginning and was to increase steadily in the second half of the century. But in the 1740s and 1750s their position as critics of society was still precarious. The State, when it felt itself threatened, was still liable to turn on them with sudden ferocity. Rousseau later loudly complained of the persecution he suffered, but in fact he had less to put up with than most of his contemporaries. Voltaire was publicly caned by the servants of an aristocrat he had offended, and served nearly a year in the Bastille. Those who sold forbidden books might get ten years in the galleys. In July 1749 Diderot was arrested and put in solitary confinement in the Vincennes fortress for publishing a book defending atheism. He was there three months. Rousseau visited him there, and while walking on the road to Vincennes he saw in the paper a notice from the Dijon Academy of Letters inviting entries for an essay competition on the theme 'Whether the rebirth of the sciences and the arts has contributed to the improvement of morals'.

This episode, which occurred in 1750, was the turning point in Rousseau's life. He saw in a flash of inspiration what he must do. Other entrants would naturally plead the cause of the arts and sciences. He would argue the superiority of nature. Suddenly, as he says in his *Confessions*, he conceived an overwhelming enthusiasm for 'truth, liberty

and virtue'. He says he declared to himself: 'Virtue, truth! I will cry increasingly, truth, virtue!' He added that his waistcoat was 'soaked with tears I had shed without noticing it'. The soaking tears may well be true: tears came easily to him. What is certain is that Rousseau decided there and then to write the essay on lines which became the essence of his creed, won the prize by this paradoxical approach, and became famous almost overnight. Here was a case of a man of thirty-nine, hitherto unsuccessful and embittered, longing for notice and fame, at last hitting the right note. The essay is feeble and today almost unreadable. As always, when one looks back on such a literary event, it seems inexplicable that so paltry a work could have produced such an explosion of celebrity; indeed the famous critic Jules Lemaître called this instant apotheosis of Rousseau 'one of the strongest proofs ever provided of human stupidity'.[10]

Publication of the *Discours* on the arts and sciences did not make Rousseau rich, for though it circulated widely, and evoked nearly three hundred printed replies, the number of copies actually sold was small and it was the booksellers who made money from such works.[11] On the other hand it gave him the run of many aristocratic houses and estates, which were open to fashionable intellectuals. Rousseau could, and sometimes did, support himself by music-copying (he had a beautiful writing-hand) but after 1750 he was always in a position to live off the hospitality of the aristocracy, except (as often happened) when he chose to stage ferocious quarrels with those who dispensed it. For occupation, he became a professional writer. He was always fertile in ideas and, when he got down to it, wrote easily and well. But the impact of his books, at any rate in his own lifetime and for long after, varied greatly.[12] His *Social Contract*, generally supposed to encapsulate his mature political philosophy, which he began in 1752 and finally published ten years later, was scarcely read at all in his lifetime and had only been reprinted once by 1791. Examination of five hundred contemporary libraries showed that only one possessed a copy. The scholar Joan Macdonald, who looked at 1114 political pamphlets published in 1789–91, found only twelve references to it.[13] As she observed: 'It is necessary to distinguish between the cult of Rousseau and the influence of his political thought.' The cult, which began with the prize essay but continued to grow in force, centred around two books. The first was his novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, subtitled *Letters of Two Lovers* and modelled on Richardson's *Clarissa*. The story of the pursuit, seduction, repentance and punishment of a young woman, it is written with extraordinary skill to appeal both to the prurient interest of readers, especially women–and especially the burgeoning market of middle-class women–and to their sense of

morality. The material is often very outspoken for the time, but the final message is highly proper. The Archbishop of Paris accused it of 'insinuating the poison of lust while seeming to proscribe it', but this merely served to increase its sales, as did Rousseau's own cunningly-worded preface, in which he asserts that a girl who reads a single page of it is a lost soul, adding however that 'chaste girls do not read love stories.' In fact both chaste girls and respectable matrons read it and defended themselves by citing its highly moral conclusions. In short it was a natural best-seller, and became one, though most of the copies bought were pirated.

The Rousseau cult was intensified in 1762 with the publication of *Émile*, in which he launched the myriad of ideas, on nature and man's response to it, which were to become the staple fare of the Romantic Age but were then pristine. This book too was brilliantly engineered to secure the maximum number of readers. But in one respect Rousseau was too clever for his own good. It was part of his growing appeal, as the prophet of truth and virtue, to point out the limits of reason and allow for the place of religion in the hearts of men. He thus included in *Émile* a chapter entitled 'Profession of Faith' in which he accused his fellow intellectuals of the Enlightenment, especially the atheists or mere deists, of being arrogant and dogmatic, 'professing even in their so-called scepticism to know everything' and heedless of the damage they do to decent men and women by undermining faith: 'They destroy and trample underfoot all that men revere, steal from the suffering the consolation they derive from religion and take away the only force that restrains the passions of the rich and the powerful.' It was highly effective stuff, but to balance it Rousseau felt it necessary to criticize the established Church too, especially its cult of miracles and encouragement of superstition. This was highly imprudent, especially since Rousseau, to frustrate the book-pirates, took the risk of signing the work. He was already suspect in French ecclesiastical eyes as a double-renegade: having converted to Catholicism, he later returned to Calvinism in order to regain his Genevan citizenship. So now the Paris *Parlement*, dominated by Jansenists, took the strongest objection to the anti-Catholic sentiments in *Émile*, had the book burnt in front of the Palais de Justice and issued a warrant for Rousseau's arrest. He was saved by a timely warning from high-placed friends. Thereafter he was for some years a fugitive. For the Calvinists objected to *Émile* too and even outside Catholic territory he was forced to move on from one town to another. But he was never without powerful protectors, in Britain (where he spent fifteen months in 1766-67) and in France too, where he lived from 1767 onwards. During his last decade the State lost interest in him, and his chief enemies were

fellow intellectuals, notably Voltaire. To answer them Rousseau wrote his *Confessions*, completed in Paris where he finally settled in 1770. He did not venture to publish them but they were widely known from the readings he gave at fashionable houses. By the time of his death in 1778 his reputation was on the eve of a fresh upsurge, consummated when the revolutionaries took over.

Rousseau, then, enjoyed considerable success even in his lifetime. To the unprejudiced modern eye he does not seem to have had much to grumble about. Yet Rousseau was one of the greatest grumblers in the history of literature. He insisted that his life had been one of misery and persecution. He reiterates the complaint so often and in such harrowing terms, that one feels obliged to believe him. On one point he was adamant: he suffered from chronic ill-health. He was 'an unfortunate wretch worn out by illness…struggling every day of my life between pain and death'. He had 'not been able to sleep for thirty years'. 'Nature,' he added, 'which has shaped me for suffering, has given me a constitution proof against pain in order that, unable to exhaust my forces, it may always make itself felt with the same intensity.'[14] It is true that he always had trouble with his penis. In a letter to his friend Dr Tronchin, written in 1755, he refers to 'the malformation of an organ, with which I was born'. His biographer Lester Crocker, after a careful diagnosis, writes: 'I am convinced that Jean-Jacques was born a victim of hypospadias, a deformity of the penis in which the urethra opens somewhere on the ventral surface.'[15] In adult life this became a stricture, necessitating painful use of a catheter, which aggravated the problem both psychologically and physically. He constantly felt the need to urinate and this raised difficulties when he was living in high society: 'I still shudder to think of myself,' he wrote, 'in a circle of women, compelled to wait until some fine talk had finished…When at last I find a well-lit staircase there are other ladies who delay me, then a courtyard full of constantly moving carriages ready to crush me, ladies' maids who are looking at me, lackeys who line the walls and laugh at me. I do not find a single wall or wretched little corner that is suitable for my purpose. In short I can urinate only in full view of everybody and on some noble white-stockinged leg.'[16]

The passage is self-pitying and suggests, along with much other evidence, that Rousseau's health was not as bad as he makes out. At times, when it suits his argument, he points to his good health. His insomnia was partly fantasy, since various people testify to his snoring. David Hume, who was with him on the voyage to England, wrote: 'He is one of the most robust men I have ever known. He passed ten hours in the night-time above deck in the most severe weather, where all the seamen were almost frozen to death, and he took no harm.'[17]

Incessant concern about his health, justified or not, was the original dynamic of the self-pity which came to envelop him and feed on every episode in his life. At quite an early age he developed a habit of telling what he called his 'story', in order to elicit sympathy, especially from well-born women. He called himself 'the unhappiest of mortals', spoke of 'the grim fate which dogs my footsteps', claimed 'few men have shed so many tears' and insisted: 'My destiny is such that no one would dare to describe it, and no one would believe it.' In fact he described it often and many did believe it, until they learned more about his character. Even then, some sympathy often remained. Madame d'Épinay, a patroness whom he treated abominably, remarked, even after her eyes were opened: 'I still feel moved by the simple and original way in which he recounted his misfortunes.' He was what armies call an Old Soldier, a practised psychological con-man. One is not surprised to find that, as a young man, he wrote begging letters, one of which has survived. It was written to the Governor of Savoy and demands a pension on the grounds that he suffers from a dreadful disfiguring disease and will soon be dead.[18]

Behind the self-pity lay an overpowering egoism, a feeling that he was quite unlike other men, both in his sufferings and his qualities. He wrote: 'What could your miseries have in common with mine? My situation is unique, unheard of since the beginning of time…' Equally, 'The person who can love me as I can love is still to be born.' 'No one ever had more talent for loving.' 'I was born to be the best friend that ever existed.' 'I would leave this life with apprehension if I knew a better man than me.' 'Show me a better man than me, a heart more loving, more tender, more sensitive…' 'Posterity will honour me…because it is my due.' 'I rejoice in myself.' '…my consolation lies in my self-esteem.' '…if there were a single enlightened government in Europe, it would have erected statues to me.'[19] No wonder Burke declared: 'Vanity was the vice he possessed to a degree little short of madness.'

It was part of Rousseau's vanity that he believed himself incapable of base emotions. 'I feel too superior to hate.' 'I love myself too much to hate anybody.' 'Never have I known the hateful passions, never did jealousy, wickedness, vengeance enter my heart…anger occasionally but I am never crafty and never bear a grudge.' In fact he frequently bore grudges and was crafty in pursuing them. Men noticed this. Rousseau was the first intellectual to proclaim himself, repeatedly, the friend of all mankind. But loving as he did humanity in general, he developed a strong propensity for quarrelling with human beings in particular. One of his victims, his former friend Dr Tronchin of Geneva, protested: 'How is it possible that the friend of mankind is no longer the friend

of men, or scarcely so?' Replying, Rousseau defended his right to administer rebukes to those who deserved it: 'I am the friend of mankind, and men are everywhere. The friend of truth also finds malevolent men everywhere-and I do not need to go very far.'[20] Being an egoist, Rousseau tended to equate hostility to himself with hostility to truth and virtue as such. Hence nothing was too bad for his enemies; their very existence made sense of the doctrine of eternal punishment: 'I am not ferocious by nature,' he told Madame d'Épinay, 'but when I see there is no justice in this world for these monsters, I like to think there is a hell waiting for them.'[21]

Since Rousseau was vain, egotistical and quarrelsome, how was it that so many people were prepared to befriend him? The answer to this question brings us to the heart of his character and historical significance. Partly by accident, partly by instinct, partly by deliberate contrivance, he was the first intellectual systematically to exploit the guilt of the privileged. And he did it, moreover, in an entirely new way, by the systematic cult of rudeness. He was the prototype of that characteristic figure of the modern age, the Angry Young Man. By nature he was not anti-social. Indeed from an early age he wished to shine in society. In particular he wanted the smiles of society women. 'Seamstresses,' he wrote, 'chambermaids, shopgirls did not tempt me. I needed young ladies.' But he was an obvious and ineradicable provincial, in many ways boorish, ill-bred. His initial attempts to break into society, in the 1740s, by playing society's own game, were complete failures; his first play for the favours of a married society woman was a humiliating disaster.[22]

However, after the success of his essay revealed to him the rich rewards for playing the card of Nature, he reversed his tactics. Instead of trying to conceal his boorishness, he emphasized it. He made a virtue of it. And the strategy worked. It was already customary among the better-educated of the French nobility, who were being made to feel increasingly uneasy by the ancient system of class privilege, to cultivate writers as talismans to ward off evil. The contemporary social critic, C.P. Duclos, wrote: 'Among the grandees, even those who do not really like intellectuals pretend to do so because it is the fashion.'[23] Most writers, thus patronized, sought to ape their betters. By doing the reverse, Rousseau became a much more interesting, and so desirable, visitor to their salons, a brilliant, highly intelligent Brute of Nature or 'Bear', as they liked to call him. He deliberately stressed sentiment as opposed to convention, the impulse of the heart rather than manners. 'My sentiments,' he said, 'are such that they must not be disguised. They dispense me from being polite.' He admitted he was 'uncouth, unpleasant and rude on principle.

I do not care twopence for your courtiers. I am a barbarian.' Or again: 'I have things in my heart which absolve me from being good-mannered.'

This approach fitted in very well with his prose, which was far more simple than the polished periods of most contemporary writers. His directness admirably suited his outspoken treatment of sex (*La Nouvelle Héloïse* was one of the first novels to mention such articles as ladies' corsets). Rousseau highlighted his ostentatious rejection of social norms by a studied simplicity and looseness of dress, which in time became the hallmark of all the young Romantics. He later recorded: 'I began my reformation with my dress. I gave up gold lace and white stockings and wore a round wig. I gave up my sword and sold my watch.' Next followed longer hair, what he called 'my usual careless style with a rough beard'. He was the first of the hirsute highbrows. Over the years he developed a variety of sartorial ways of drawing public attention to himself. At Neufchâtel he was painted by Allan Ramsay wearing an Armenian robe, a sort of kaftan. He even wore it to church. The locals objected at first but soon got used to it and in time it became a Rousseau hallmark. During his celebrated visit to England he wore it at the Drury Lane Theatre, and was so anxious to respond to the plaudits of the crowd that Mrs Garrick had to hang onto the robe to prevent him falling out of the box.[24]

Consciously or not, he was a superb self-publicist: his eccentricities, his social brutalities, his personal extremism, even his quarrels, attracted a vast amount of attention and were undoubtedly part of his appeal both to his aristocratic patrons and to his readers and cultists. It is a significant fact, as we shall see, that personal public relations, not least through quirks of dress and appearance, was to become an important element in the success of numerous intellectual leaders. Rousseau led the way in this as in so many other respects. Who can say he was wrong? Most people are resistant to ideas, especially new ones. But they are fascinated by character. Extravagance of personality is one way in which the pill can be sugared and the public induced to look at works dealing with ideas.

As part of his technique for securing publicity, attention and favour, Rousseau, who was no mean psychologist, made a positive virtue of that most repellent of vices, ingratitude. To him it seemed no fault. While professing spontaneity, he was in fact a calculating man; and since he persuaded himself that he was, quite literally, the best of moral human beings, it followed logically that others were even more calculating, and from worse motives, than he was. Hence in any dealings with him, they would seek to take advantage, and he must outwit them. The basis on which he negotiated with others, therefore, was quite sim-

ple: they gave, he took. He bolstered this by an audacious argument: because of his uniqueness, anyone who helped him was in fact doing a favour to himself. He set the pattern in his response to the letter of the Dijon Academy awarding him the prize. His essay, he wrote, had taken the unpopular line of truth, 'and by your generosity in honouring my courage, you have honoured yourselves still more. Yes, gentlemen, what you have done for my glory, is a crown of laurels added to your own.' He used the same technique when his fame brought him offers of hospitality; indeed it became second nature to him. First he insisted that such benevolence was no more than his due. 'As a sick man I have a right to the indulgence humanity owes to those who are in pain.' Or: 'I am poor, and…merit special favour.' Then, he goes on, to accept help, which he will only do under pressure, is very distressing to him: 'When I surrender to prolonged entreaties to accept an offer, repeated over and over again, I do so for the sake of peace and quiet rather than my own advantage. However much it may have cost the giver, he is actually in my debt-for it costs me more.' This being so, he was entitled to lay down conditions for accepting, say, the loan of a *cottage orné* or a small château. He undertook no social duties whatever, since 'my idea of happiness is…never to have to do anything I don't wish to do.' To a host, therefore, he writes: 'I must insist that you leave me completely free.' 'If you cause me the least annoyance you will never see me again.' His thank-you letters (if that is the right word for them) were liable to be disagreeable documents: 'I thank you,' ran one, 'for the visit you persuaded me to make, and my thanks might have been warmer if you had not made me pay for it so dearly.'[25]

As one of Rousseau's biographers has pointed out, he was always setting little traps for people. He would emphasize his difficulties and poverty, then when they offered help affect hurt surprise, even indignation. Thus: 'Your proposal froze my heart. How you misunderstand your own interests when you try to make a valet out of a friend.' He adds: 'I am not unwilling to listen to what you have to propose, provided you appreciate that I am not for sale.' The would-be host, thus wrong-footed, was then induced to reformulate his invitation on Rousseau's terms.[26] It was one of Rousseau's psychological skills to persuade people, not least his social superiors, that common-or-garden words of thanks were not in his vocabulary. Thus he wrote to the Duc de Montmorency-Luxembourg, who lent him a château: 'I neither praise you nor thank you. But I live in your house. Everyone has his own language-I have said everything in mine.' The ploy worked beautifully, the Duchess replying apologetically: 'It is not for you to thank us-it is the Marshal and I who are in *your* debt.'[27]

But Rousseau was not prepared just to lead an agreeable, Harold Skimpole-like existence. He was too complicated and interesting for that. Alongside his streak of cool, hard-headed calculation there was a genuine element of paranoia, which did not permit him to settle for an easy life of self-centred parasitism. He quarrelled, ferociously and usually permanently, with virtually everyone with whom he had close dealings, and especially those who befriended him; and it is impossible to study the painful and repetitive tale of these rows without reaching the conclusion that he was a mentally sick man. This sickness cohabited with a great and original genius of mind, and the combination was very dangerous both for Rousseau and for others. The conviction of total rectitude was, of course, a primary symptom of his illness, and if Rousseau had possessed no talent it might have cured itself or, at worse, remained a small personal tragedy. But his wonderful gifts as a writer brought him acceptance, celebrity, even popularity. This was proof to him that his conviction that he was always right was not a subjective judgment but that of the world-apart, of course, from his enemies.

These enemies were, in every case, former friends or benefactors, who (Rousseau reasoned after he broke with them) had sought, under the guise of amity, to exploit and destroy him. The notion of disinterested friendship was alien to him; and since he was better than other men, and since he was incapable of feeling such an urge, then *a fortiori* it could not be felt by others. Hence the actions of all his 'friends' were carefully analysed by him from the start, and the moment they made a false move he was onto them. He quarrelled with Diderot, to whom he owed most of all. He quarrelled with Grimm. He had a particularly savage and hurtful break with Madame d'Épinay, his warmest benefactress. He quarrelled with Voltaire-that was not so difficult. He quarrelled with David Hume, who took him at his own valuation as a literary martyr, brought him to England and a hero's welcome and did everything in his power to make the visit a success, and Rousseau happy. There were dozens of minor rows, with his Genevan friend Dr Tronchin, for instance. Rousseau marked most of his major quarrels by composing a gigantic letter of remonstrance. These documents are among his most brilliant works, miracles of forensic skill in which evidence is cunningly fabricated, history rewritten and chronology confused with superb ingenuity in order to prove that the recipient is a monster. The letter he wrote to Hume, 10 July 1766, is eighteen folio pages (twenty-five of printed text) and has been described by Hume's biographer as 'consistent with the complete logical consistency of dementia. It remains one of the most brilliant and fascinating documents ever produced by a disordered mentality.'[28]

Rousseau gradually came to believe that these individual acts of enmity by men and women who had pretended to love him were not isolated but part of a connected pattern. They were all agents in a ramifying, long-term plot to frustrate, annoy and even destroy him and to damage his work. Working backwards through his life, he decided that the conspiracy went back to the days when, aged sixteen, he was a lackey to the Comtesse de Vercellis: 'I believe that from this time I suffered from the malicious play of secret interests which has thwarted me ever since and which has given me an understandable dislike for the apparent order responsible for it.' In sober fact, Rousseau was rather well treated by the French authorities, compared with other authors. There was only one attempt to arrest him, and the chief censor, Malesherbes, usually did his best to help get his work published. But Rousseau's feeling that he was the victim of an international network grew, especially during his visit to England. He became convinced that Hume was currently masterminding the plot, with the help of dozens of assistants. At one point he wrote to Lord Camden, the Lord Chancellor, explaining that his life was in danger and demanding an armed escort to get him out of the country. But Lord Chancellors are not unused to getting letters from madmen and Camden took no action. Rousseau's actions at Dover, just before his final departure, were hysterical, running on board a ship and locking himself in a cabin, and jumping on a post and addressing the crowd with the fantastic claim that Thérèse was now part of the plot and trying to keep him in England by force.[29]

Back on the Continent, he took to pinning posters to his front door listing his complaints against various sections of society arrayed against him: priests, fashionable intellectuals, the common people, women, the Swiss. He became convinced that the Duc de Choiseul, France's Foreign Minister, had taken personal charge of the international conspiracy and spent much of his time organizing the vast network of people whose task it was to make Rousseau's life a misery. Public events, such as the French seizure of Corsica, for which he had written a constitution, were ingeniously woven into the saga. Oddly enough, it was at Choiseul's request that Rousseau produced, for the Polish nationalists, a similar constitution for an independent Poland, and when Choiseul fell from power in 1770, Rousseau was upset: another sinister move! Rousseau declared that he could never discover the original offence (other than his identification with truth and justice) for which 'they' were determined to punish him. But there was no doubt about the details of the plot; it was 'immense, inconceivable': 'They will build around me an impenetrable edifice of darkness. They will bury me alive in a coffin…If I travel, everything will be prearranged to control me wherever I go.

The word will be given to passengers, coachmen, innkeepers…Such horror of me will be spread on my road that at each step I take, at everything I see, my heart will be lacerated.' His last works, the *Dialogues avec moi-même* (begun in 1772) and his *Révéiries du promeneur solitaire* (1776) reflect this persecution-mania. When he finished the *Dialogues* he became convinced that 'they' intended to destroy them, and on 24 February 1776 he went to Notre Dame Cathedral with the intention of claiming sanctuary for his manuscript and placing it on the High Altar. But the gate to the choir was mysteriously locked. Sinister! So he made six copies and deposited them superstitiously in different hands: one went to Dr Johnson's bluestocking friend, Miss Brooke Boothby of Lichfield, and it was she who first published it in 1780. By that time, of course, Rousseau had gone to his grave, still sure that thousands of agents were after him.[30]

The agonies of mind caused by this form of dementia are real enough to the sufferer and it is impossible, from time to time, not to feel pity for Rousseau. Unhappily, he cannot be thus dismissed. He was one of the most influential writers who ever lived. He presented himself as the friend of humanity and, in particular, as the champion of the principles of truth and virtue. He was, and indeed still is, widely accepted as such. It is necessary, therefore, to look more closely at his own conduct as a teller of truth and a man of virtue. What do we find? The issue of truth is particularly significant because Rousseau became, after his death, best known by his *Confessions*. These were a self-proclaimed effort to tell the whole inner truth about a man's life, in a way never before attempted. The book was a new kind of ultra-truthful autobiography, just as James Boswell's life of Dr Johnson, published ten years later (1791), was a new kind of ultra-accurate biography.

Rousseau made absolute claims for the veracity of this book. In the winter of 1770-71 he held readings of it, in packed salons, lasting fifteen to seventeen hours, with breaks for meals. His attacks on his victims were so unsupportable that one of them, Madame d'Épinay, asked the authorities to have them stopped. Rousseau agreed to desist, but at the last reading he added these words: 'I have said the truth. If anyone knows facts contrary to what I have just said, even if they were proved a thousand times, they are lies and impostures…[whoever] examines with his own eyes my nature, my character, morals, inclinations, pleasures, habits, and can believe me to be a dishonest man, is himself a man who deserves to be strangled.' This produced an impressive silence.

Rousseau bolstered his title to be a truth-teller by claiming a superb memory. More important, he convinced readers he was sincere by being the first man to disclose details of his sex life, not in a spirit of macho

boasting but, on the contrary, with shame and reluctance. As he rightly says, referring to 'the dark and dirty labyrinth' of his sexual experiences, 'It is not what is criminal which is hardest to tell, but what makes us feel ridiculous and ashamed.' But how genuine was the reluctance? In Turin, as a young man, he roamed the dark back streets and exposed his bare bottom to women: 'The foolish pleasure I took in displaying it before their eyes cannot be described.' Rousseau was a natural exhibitionist, in sexual as in other respects, and there is a certain relish in the way he narrates his sex life. He describes his masochism, how he enjoyed being spanked on his bare bottom by the strict pastor's sister, Mademoiselle Lambercier, being deliberately naughty to provoke punishment, and how he encouraged an older girl, Mademoiselle Groton, to spank him too: 'To lie at the feet of an imperious mistress, to obey her commands, to ask her forgiveness-this was for me a sweet enjoyment.'[31] He tells how, as a boy, he took up masturbation. He defends it because it prevents the young from catching venereal disease and because, 'This vice which shame and timidity find so convenient has more than one attraction for live imaginations: it enables them to subject all women to their whims and to make beauty serve the pleasure which tempts them without obtaining its consent.'[32] He gave an account of an attempt to seduce him by a homosexual at the hospice in Turin.[33] He admitted he had shared the favours of Madame de Warens with her gardener. He described how he was unable to make love to one girl when he discovered she had no nipple on one breast, and records her furious dismissal of him: 'Leave women alone and study mathematics.' He confesses to resuming masturbation in later life as more convenient than pursuing an active love life. He gives the impression, part intentionally, part unconsciously, that his attitude to sex remained essentially infantile: his mistress, Madame de Warens, is always 'Maman'.

These damaging admissions build up confidence in Rousseau's regard for truth, and he reinforces it by relating other shameful, non-sexual episodes, involving theft, lies, cowardice and desertion. But there was an element of cunning in this. His accusations against himself make his subsequent accusations against his enemies far more convincing. As Diderot furiously observed, 'he describes himself in odious colours to give his unjust and cruel imputations the semblance of truth.' Moreover, the self-accusations are deceptive since in every critical one he follows up the bare admission by a skilfully presented exculpation so that the reader ends by sympathizing with him and giving him credit for his forthright honesty.[34] Then again, the truths Rousseau presents often turn out to be half-truths: his selective honesty is in some ways the most dishonest aspect both of his *Confessions* and his letters. The

'facts' he so frankly admits often emerge, in the light of modern scholarship, to be inaccurate, distorted or non-existent. This is sometimes clear even from internal evidence. Thus he gives two quite different accounts of the homosexual advance, in *Émile* and in the *Confessions*. His total-recall memory was a myth. He gives the wrong year for his father's death and describes him as 'about sixty', when he was in fact seventy-five. He lies about virtually all the details of his stay at the hospice in Turin, one of the most critical episodes of his early life. It gradually emerges that no statement in the *Confessions* can be trusted if unsupported by external evidence. Indeed it is hard not to agree with one of Rousseau's most comprehensive modern critics, J.H. Huizinga, that the insistent claims of the *Confessions* to truth and honesty make its distortions and falsehoods peculiarly disgraceful: 'The more attentively one reads and re-reads, the deeper one delves into this work, the more layers of ignominy become apparent.'[35] What makes Rousseau's dishonesty so dangerous-what made his inventions so rightly feared by his ex-friends-was the diabolical skill and brilliance with which they were presented. As his fair-minded biographer, Professor Crocker, puts it: 'All his accounts of his quarrels (as in the Venetian episode) have an irresistible persuasiveness, eloquence and air of sincerity; then the facts come as a shock.'[36]

So much for Rousseau's devotion to truth. What of his virtue? Very few of us lead lives which will bear close scrutiny, and there is something mean in subjecting Rousseau's, laid horribly bare by the activities of thousands of scholars, to moral judgment. But granted his claims, and still more his influence on ethics and behaviour, there is no alternative. He was a man, he said, born to love, and he taught the doctrine of love more persistently than most ecclesiastics. How well, then, did he express his love by those nature had placed closest to him? The death of his mother deprived him, from birth, of a normal family life. He could have no feelings for her, one way or another, since he never knew her. But he showed no affection, or indeed interest in, other members of his family. His father meant nothing to him, and his death was merely an opportunity to inherit. At this point Rousseau's concern for his long-lost brother revived to the extent of certifying him dead, so the family money could be his. He saw his family in terms of cash. In the *Confessions* he describes 'one of my apparent inconsistencies-the union of an almost sordid avarice with the greatest contempt for money'.[37] There is not much evidence of this contempt in his life. When his family inheritance was proved in his favour, he described receiving the draft, and, by a supreme effort of will, delaying opening the letter until the next day. Then: 'I opened it with deliberate slowness and found the money-order

in it. I felt many pleasures at once but I swear the keenest was of having conquered myself.'[38]

If that was his attitude to his natural family, how did he treat the woman who became, in effect, his foster-mother, Madame de Warens? The answer is: meanly. She had rescued him from destitution no less than four times, but when he later prospered and she became indigent, he did little for her. By his own account he sent her 'a little' money when he inherited the family fortune in the 1740s, but refused to send more as it would simply have been taken by the 'rascals' who surrounded her.[39] This was an excuse. Her later pleas to him for help went unanswered. She spent her last two years bedridden and her death, in 1761, may have been from malnutrition. The Comte de Charmette, who knew both of them, strongly condemned Rousseau's failure 'to return at least a part of what he had cost his generous benefactress'. Rousseau then went on to deal with her, in his *Confessions*, with consummate humbug, hailing her as 'best of women and mothers'. He claimed he had not written to her because he did not want to make her miserable by recounting his troubles. He ended: 'Go, taste the fruits of your charitableness and prepare for your pupil the place he hopes to take next to you some day! Happy in your misfortunes because Heaven, by ending them, has spared you the cruel spectacle of his.' It was characteristic of Rousseau to treat her death in a purely egocentric context.

Was Rousseau capable of loving a woman without strong selfish reservations? According to his own account, 'the first and only love of all my life' was Sophie, Comtesse d'Houdetot, sister-in-law of his benefactress Madame d'Épinay. He may have loved her, but he says he 'took the precaution' of writing his love-letters to her in such a way as to make their publication as damaging to her as to him. Of Thérèse Levasseur, the twenty-three-year-old laundress whom he made his mistress in 1745 and who remained with him thirty-three years until his death, he said he 'never felt the least glimmering of love for her…the sensual needs I satisfied with her were purely sexual and were nothing to do with her as an individual.' 'I told her,' he wrote, 'I would never leave her and never marry her.' A quarter of a century later he went through a pseudo-wedding with her in front of a few friends but used the occasion to make a vainglorious speech, declaring that posterity would erect statues to him and 'It will then be no empty honour to have been a friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.'

In one way he despised Thérè'se as a coarse, illiterate servant-girl, and despised himself for consorting with her. He accused her mother of being grasping and her brother of stealing his forty-two fine shirts (there is no evidence her family was as bad as he paints them). He

said that Thérèse not only could not read or write but was incapable of telling the time and did not know what day of the month it was. He never took her out and when he invited people to dine she was not allowed to sit down. She brought in the food and he 'made merry at her expense'. To amuse the Duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg he compiled a catalogue of her solecisms. Even some of his grand friends were shocked at the contemptuous way he used her. Contemporaries were divided about her, some considering her a malicious gossip; Rousseau's innumerable hagiographers have painted her in the blackest colours to justify his mean-spirited behaviour to her. But she has also had some vigorous defenders.[40]

Indeed, to do Rousseau justice, he paid her compliments too: 'the heart of an angel', 'tender and virtuous', 'an excellent counsellor', 'a simple girl without flirtatiousness'. He found her 'timorous and easily dominated'. In fact it is not at all clear that Rousseau understood her, probably because he was too self-obsessed to study her. The most reliable portrait of her is provided by James Boswell, who visited Rousseau five times in 1764 and later escorted Thérèse to England.[41] He found her 'a little, lively, neat French girl', bribed her to obtain further access to Rousseau and managed to cadge from her two letters Rousseau had written to her (only one other exists).[42] They reveal him as affectionate and their relationship as intimate. She told Boswell: 'I have been twenty-two years with Monsieur Rousseau. I would not give up my place to be Queen of France.' On the other hand, once Boswell became her travelling companion, he seduced her without the slightest difficulty. His blow-by-blow account of the affair was cut from his manuscript diary by his literary executors, who marked the gap 'Reprehensible Passage'. But they left in a sentence in which Boswell, at Dover, had recorded: 'Yesterday morning had gone to her bed very early (on landing) and had done it once: thirteen in all,' and enough remains of his account to reveal her as a far more sophisticated and worldly woman than most people have supposed. The truth seems to be that she was devoted to Rousseau, in most respects, but had been taught, by his own behaviour, to use him, as he used her. Rousseau's warmest affection went to animals. Boswell records a delightful scene of him playing with his cat and his dog Sultan. He gave Sultan (and his predecessor, Turc) a love he could not find for humans, and the howling of this dog, whom he brought with him to London, almost prevented him from attending the special benefit performance Garrick had set up for him at Drury Lane.[43]

Rousseau kept and even cherished Thérèse because she could do for him things animals could not: operate the catheter to relieve his stricture, for instance. He would not tolerate third parties interfering in his rela-

tions with her: he became furious, for instance, when a publisher sent her a dress; he promptly vetoed a plan to provide her with a pension, which might have made her independent of him. Most of all, he would not allow children to usurp his claims on her, and this led him to his greatest crime. Since a large part of Rousseau's reputation rests on his theories about the upbringing of children-more education is the main, underlying theme of his *Discours, Émile*, the *Social Contract* and even *La Nouvelle Héloïse*-it is curious that, in real life as opposed to writing, he took so little interest in children. There is no evidence whatever that he studied children to verify his theories. He claimed that no one enjoyed playing with children more than himself, but the one anecdote we have of him in this capacity is not reassuring. The painter Delacroix relates in his *Journal* (31 May 1824) that a man told him he had seen Rousseau in the gardens of the Tuileries: 'A child's ball struck the philosopher's leg. He flew into a rage and pursued the child with his cane.'[44] From what we know of his character, it is unlikely that Rousseau could ever have made a good father. Even so, it comes as a sickening shock to discover what Rousseau did to his own children.

The first was born to Thérèse in the winter of 1746-47. We do not know its sex. It was never named. With (he says) 'the greatest difficulty in the world', he persuaded Thérèse that the baby must be abandoned 'to save her honour'. She 'obeyed with a sigh'. He placed a cypher-card in the infant's clothing and told the midwife to drop off the bundle at the Hôpital des Enfants-trouvés. Four other babies he had by Thérèse were disposed of in exactly the same manner, except that he did not trouble to insert a cypher-card after the first. None had names. It is unlikely that any of them survived long. A history of this institution which appeared in 1746 in the *Mercure de France* makes it clear that it was overwhelmed by abandoned infants, over 3000 a year. In 1758 Rousseau himself noted that the total had risen to 5082. By 1772 it averaged nearly 8000. Two-thirds of the babies died in their first year. An average of fourteen out of every hundred survived to the age of seven, and of these five grew to maturity, most of them becoming beggars and vagabonds.[45] Rousseau did not even note the dates of the births of his five children and never took any interest in what happened to them, except once in 1761, when he believed Thérèse was dying and made a perfunctory attempt, soon discontinued, to use the cypher to discover the whereabouts of the first child.

Rousseau could not keep his conduct entirely secret, and on various occasions, in 1751 and again in 1761 for instance, he was obliged to defend himself in private letters. Then in 1764 Voltaire, angered by Rousseau's attacks on his atheism, published an anonymous pamphlet, writ-

ten in the guise of a Genevan pastor, called *Le Sentiment des Citoyens*. This openly accused him of abandoning his five children; but it also stated he was a syphilitic and murderer, and Rousseau's denials of all these charges were generally accepted. He brooded on the episode, however, and it was one factor determining him to write his *Confessions*, which were essentially designed to rebut or extenuate facts already made public. Twice in this work he defends himself about the babies, and he returns to the subject in his *Reveries* and in various letters. In all, his efforts to justify himself, publicly and privately, spread over twenty-five years and vary considerably. They merely make matters worse, since they compound cruelty and selfishness with hypocrisy.[46] First, he blamed the wicked circle of godless intellectuals among whom he then moved for putting the idea of the orphanage into his innocent head. Then, to have children was 'an inconvenience'. He could not afford it. 'How could I achieve the tranquillity of mind necessary for my work, my garret filled with domestic cares and the noise of children?' He would have been forced to stoop to degrading work, 'to all those infamous acts which fill me with such justified horror'. 'I know full well no father is more tender than I would have been' but he did not want his children to have any contact with Thérèse's mother: 'I trembled at the thought of entrusting mine to that ill-bred family.' As for cruelty, how could anyone of his outstanding moral character be guilty of such a thing? '…my ardent love of the great, the true, the beautiful and the just; my horror of evil of every kind, my utter inability to hate or injure or even to think of it; the sweet and lively emotion which I feel at the sight of all that is virtuous, generous and amiable; is it possible, I ask, that all these can ever agree in the same heart with the depravity which, without the least scruple, tramples underfoot the sweetest of obligations? No! I feel, and loudly assert-it is impossible! Never, for a single moment in his life, could Jean-Jacques have been a man without feeling, without compassion, or an unnatural father.'

Granted his own virtue, Rousseau was obliged to go further and defend his actions on positive grounds. At this point, almost by accident, Rousseau takes us right to the heart both of his own personal problem and of his political philosophy. It is right to dwell on his desertion of his children not only because it is the most striking single example of his inhumanity but because it is organically part of the process which produced his theory of politics and the role of the state. Rousseau regarded himself as an abandoned child. To a great extent he never really grew up but remained a dependent child all his life, turning to Madame de Warens as a mother, to Thérèse as a nanny. There are many passages in his *Confessions* and still more in his letters which stress the child element.

Many of those who had dealings with him-Hume, for instance-saw him as a child. They began by thinking of him as a harmless child, who could be managed, and discovered to their cost they were dealing with a brilliant and savage delinquent. Since Rousseau felt (in some ways) as a child, it followed he could not bring up children of his own. Something had to take his place, and that something was the State, in the form of the orphanage.

Hence, he argued, what he did was 'a good and sensible arrangement'. It was exactly what Plato had advocated. The children would 'be all the better for not being delicately reared since it would make them more robust'. They would be 'happier than their father'. 'I could have wished,' he wrote, 'and still do wish that I had been brought up and nurtured as they have been.' 'If only I could have had the same good fortune.' In short, by transferring his responsibilities to the State, 'I thought I was performing the act of a citizen and a father and I looked on myself as a member of Plato's Republic.'

Rousseau asserts that brooding on his conduct towards his children led him eventually to formulate the theory of education he put forward in *Émile*. It also clearly helped to shape his *Social Contract*, published the same year. What began as a process of personal self-justification in a particular case-a series of hasty, ill thought-out excuses for behaviour he must have known, initially, was unnatural-gradually evolved, as repetition and growing self-esteem hardened them into genuine convictions, into the proposition that education was the key to social and moral improvement and, this being so, it was the concern of the State. The State must form the minds of all, not only as children (as it had done to Rousseau's in the orphanage) but as adult citizens. By a curious chain of infamous moral logic, Rousseau's iniquity as a parent was linked to his ideological offspring, the future totalitarian state.

Confusion has always surrounded Rousseau's political ideas because he was in many respects an inconsistent and contradictory writer-one reason why the Rousseau industry has grown so gigantic: academics thrive on resolving 'problems'. In some passages of his works he appears a conservative, strongly opposed to revolution: 'Think of the dangers of setting the masses in motion.' 'People who make revolutions nearly always end by handing themselves over to tempters who make their chains heavier than before.' 'I would not have anything to do with revolutionary plots which always lead to disorder, violence and bloodshed.' 'The liberty of the entire human race is not worth the life of a single human being.' But his writings also abound with radical bitterness. 'I hate the great, I hate their rank, their harshness, their prejudices, their pettiness, all their vice.' He wrote to one grand lady: 'It is the wealthy

class, your class, that steals from mine the bread of my children,' and he admitted to 'a certain resentment against the rich and successful, as if their wealth and happiness had been gained at my expense'. The rich were 'hungry wolves who, once having tasted human flesh, refuse any other nourishment'. His many powerful aphorisms, which make his books so sharply attractive especially to the young, are radical in tone. 'The fruits of the earth belong to us all, the earth itself to none.' 'Man is born free and is everywhere in chains.' His entry in the *Encyclopédie* on 'Political Economy' sums up the attitude of the ruling class: 'You need me for I am rich and you are poor. Let us make an agreement: I will allow you to have the honour of serving me, provided you give me whatever you have left for the trouble I shall take to command you.'

However, once we understand the nature of the state Rousseau wished to create, his views begin to cohere. It was necessary to replace the existing society by something totally different and essentially egalitarian; but, this done, revolutionary disorder could not be permitted. The rich and the privileged, as the ordering force, would be replaced by the State, embodying the General Will, which all contracted to obey. Such obedience would become instinctive and voluntary since the State, by a systematic process of cultural engineering, would inculcate virtue in all. The State was the father, the *patrie*, and all its citizens were the children of the paternal orphanage. (Hence the supposedly puzzling remark of Dr Johnson, who cut clean through Rousseau's sophistries, 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.') It is true that the citizen-children, unlike Rousseau's own babies, originally agree to submit to the State/orphanage by freely contracting into it. They thus constitute, through their collective will, its legitimacy, and thereafter they have no right to feel constrained, since, having wanted the laws, they must love the obligations they impose.[47]

Though Rousseau writes about the General Will in terms of liberty, it is essentially an authoritarian instrument, an early adumbration of Lenin's 'democratic centralism'. Laws made under the General Will must, by definition, have moral authority. 'The people making laws for itself cannot be unjust.' 'The General Will is always righteous.' Moreover, provided the State is 'well-intentioned' (i.e., its long-term objectives are desirable) interpretation of the General Will can safely be left to the leaders since 'they know well that the General Will always favours the decision most conducive to the public interest.' Hence any individual who finds himself in opposition to the General Will is in error: 'When the opinion that is contrary to my own prevails, this simply proves that I was mistaken and that what I thought to be the General Will, was not so.' Indeed, 'if my particular opinion had carried the day I should

have achieved the opposite of what was my will and I should not therefore have been free.' We are here almost in the chilly region of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* or George Orwell's 'Newspeak'.

Rousseau's state is not merely authoritarian: it is also totalitarian, since it orders every aspect of human activity, thought included. Under the social contract, the individual was obliged to 'alienate himself, with all his rights, to the whole of the community' (i.e., the State). Rousseau held that there was an ineradicable conflict between man's natural selfishness and his social duties, between the Man and the Citizen. And that made him miserable. The function of the social contract, and the State it brought into being, was to make man whole again: 'Make man one, and you will make him as happy as he can be. Give him all to the State, or leave him all to himself. But if you divide his heart, you tear him in two.' You must, therefore, treat citizens as children and control their upbringing and thoughts, planting 'the social law in the bottom of their hearts'. They then become 'social men by their natures and citizens by their inclinations; they will be one, they will be good, they will be happy, and their happiness will be that of the Republic'.

This procedure demanded total submission. The original social contract oath for his projected constitution for Corsica reads: 'I join myself, body, goods, will and all my powers, to the Corsican nation, granting her ownership of me, of myself and all who depend on me.'[48] The State would thus 'possess men and all their powers', and control every aspect of their economic and social life, which would be spartan, anti-luxurious and anti-urban, the people being prevented from entering the towns except by special permission. In a number of ways the State Rousseau planned for Corsica anticipated the one the Pol Pot regime actually tried to create in Cambodia, and this is not entirely surprising since the Paris-educated leaders of the regime had all absorbed Rousseau's ideas. Of course, Rousseau sincerely believed that such a State would be contented since the people would have been trained to like it. He did not use the word 'brainwash', but he wrote: 'Those who control a people's opinions control its actions.' Such control is established by treating citizens, from infancy, as children of the State, trained to 'consider themselves only in their relationship to the Body of the State'. 'For being nothing except by it, they will be nothing except for it. It will have all they have and will be all they are.' Again, this anticipates Mussolini's central Fascist doctrine: 'Everything within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State.' The educational process was thus the key to the success of the cultural engineering needed to make the State acceptable and successful; the axis of Rousseau's ideas was the citizen as child and the State as parent, and he insisted the government should have complete

charge of the upbringing of all children. Hence-and this is the true revolution Rousseau's ideas brought about-he moved the political process to the very centre of human existence by making the legislator, who is also a pedagogue, into the new Messiah, capable of solving all human problems by creating New Men. 'Everything,' he wrote, 'is at root dependent on politics.' Virtue is the product of good government. 'Vices belong less to man, than to man badly governed.' The political process, and the new kind of state it brings into being, are the universal remedies for the ills of mankind.[49] Politics will do all. Rousseau thus prepared the blueprint for the principal delusions and follies of the twentieth century.

Rousseau's reputation during his lifetime, and his influence after his death, raise disturbing questions about human gullibility, and indeed about the human propensity to reject evidence it does not wish to admit. The acceptability of what Rousseau wrote depended in great part on his strident claim to be not merely virtuous but the most virtuous man of his time. Why did not this claim collapse in ridicule and ignominy when his weaknesses and vices became not merely public knowledge but the subject of international debate? After all the people who assailed him were not strangers or political opponents but former friends and associates who had gone out of their way to assist him. Their charges were serious and the collective indictment devastating. Hume, who had once thought him 'gentle, modest, affectionate, disinterested and exquisitely sensitive', decided, from more extensive experience, that he was 'a monster who saw himself as the only important being in the universe'. Diderot, after long acquaintance, summed him up as 'deceitful, vain as Satan, ungrateful, cruel, hypocritical and full of malice'. To Grimm he was 'odious, monstrous'. To Voltaire, 'a monster of vanity and vileness'. Saddest of all are the judgments passed on him by kind-hearted women who helped him, like Madame d'Épinay, and her harmless husband, whose last words to Rousseau were 'I have nothing left for you but pity.' These judgments were based not on the man's words but on his deeds, and since that time, over two hundred years, the mass of material unearthed by scholars has tended relentlessly to substantiate them. One modern academic lists Rousseau's shortcomings as follows: he was a 'masochist, exhibitionist, neurasthenic, hypochondriac, onanist, latent homosexual afflicted by the typical urge for repeated displacements, incapable of normal or parental affection, incipient paranoiac, narcissistic introvert rendered unsocial by his illness, filled with guilt feelings, pathologically timid, a kleptomaniac, infantilist, irritable and miserly'.[50]

Such accusations, and extensive display of the evidence on which they

are based, made very little difference to the regard in which Rousseau and his works were, and are, held by those for whom he has an intellectual and emotional attraction. During his life, no matter how many friendships he destroyed, he never found any difficulty in forming new ones and recruiting fresh admirers, disciples and grandees to provide him with houses, dinners and the incense he craved. When he died he was buried on the Île des Peupliers on the lake at Ermononville and this rapidly became a place of secular pilgrimage for men and women from all over Europe, like the shrine of a saint in the Middle Ages. Descriptions of the antics of these *dévotés* make hilarious reading: 'I dropped to my knees…pressed my lips to the cold stone of the monument…and kissed it repeatedly.'[51] Relics, such as his tobacco pouch and jar, were carefully preserved at 'the Sanctuary', as it was known. One recalls Erasmus and John Colet visiting the great shrine of St Thomas à Becket at Canterbury in *c*. 1512 and sneering at the excesses of the pilgrims. What would they have found to say of 'Saint Rousseau' (as George Sand was reverently to call him), three hundred years after the Reformation had supposedly ended that sort of thing? The plaudits continued long after the ashes were transferred to the Panthéon. To Kant he had 'a sensibility of soul of unequalled perfection'. To Shelley he was 'a sublime genius'. For Schiller he was 'a Christlike soul for whom only Heaven's angels are fit company'. John Stuart Mill and George Eliot, Hugo and Flaubert, paid deep homage. Tolstoy said that Rousseau and the Gospel had been 'the two great and healthy influences of my life'. One of the most influential intellectuals of our own times, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his principal work, *Tristes Tropiques*, hails him as 'our master and our brother…every page of this book could have been dedicated to him, had it not been unworthy of his great memory'.[52]

It is all very baffling and suggests that intellectuals are as unreasonable, illogical and superstitious as anyone else. The truth seems to be that Rousseau was a writer of genius but fatally unbalanced both in his life and in his views. He is best summed up by the woman who, he said, was his only love, Sophie d'Houdetot. She lived on until 1813 and, in extreme old age, delivered this verdict: 'He was ugly enough to frighten me and love did not make him more attractive. But he was a pathetic figure and I treated him with gentleness and kindness. He was an interesting madman.'[53]