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Université de Montréal

Constructions of "Nature" in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*

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Résumé

Ce travail tourne autour d'une analyse féministe et déconstructive du concept de la "nature" dans un oeuvre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Émile ou de l'éducation*. En se justifiant avec ce qui est dites "naturel," Rousseau élabore deux programmes éducatif: un pour la femme idéale, l'autre pour l'homme idéal. Puisque la femme idéale est supposée d'être la contraire de l'homme idéal, Rousseau affirme qu'ils sont deux moitiés incomplètes qui forment ensemble un couple complet. Cependant, lorsqu'on creuse cette affirmation, on constate que ce n'est pas le cas. De plus, la contamination de la femme idéale et de l'homme idéal par des éléments non-naturels est un risque très sérieux. Rousseau nous indique à plusieurs reprises que l'étudiant ou l'étudiante pourrait être corrompu(e), mais je démontrerai que la contamination existe aussi partout dans le texte. Les oppositions "naturelles" établies par Rousseau existe dans un état perpétuel d'effondrement qui nie et qui permet l'existence même de ces oppositions. En parlant de la topographie fantasmagique de Rousseau, je soulignerai comment les métaphores influencent la conception Rousseauiste de la nature et comment les incohérences soutiennent cette conception là. Finalement, le rôle du sexe hétérosexuel entre la femme idéale et l'homme idéal servira d'exemple spectaculaire de l'effondrement et du relèvement simultané de la topographie fantasmagique et des oppositions naturelles. Comme toutes les oppositions, la conception Rousseauiste de la nature n'est pas pure face à son opposé (la société). La tension qui existe entre les deux termes d'une opposition permet et nie la possibilité même des termes opposés.

Mots clés: Philosophie, Féminisme, Rousseau, Éducation, Derrida, Déconstruction.

Summary

The present study offers a feminist and deconstructive analysis of the concept of “Nature” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile ou de l'éducation*. Relying upon what is deemed to be natural, Rousseau proposes two educational programmes: one meant for the ideal woman, the other for the ideal man. Through these educational prescriptions, two sets of specific and markedly opposed gender norms emerge. I will trouble the Rousseauist claim that the ideal man and the ideal woman are supposed to be halves of a single whole (the heterosexual marital unit). The threat of contamination will also be addressed: throughout one's education-- and even once one's education is complete-- one may become contaminated by unnatural elements. Although Rousseau points out various occasions ^{when} where this contamination may occur, I will show that contamination is rampant throughout the text; the “natural” oppositions or binarities Rousseau establishes are always collapsing into one another. I will touch upon Rousseau's phantasmatic topography in order to illustrate how his metaphors shape his understanding of the natural and summarise the incoherencies that make up his conception of nature. Finally, the necessary but dangerous heterosexual couplings between the ideal man and the ideal woman become the site at which Rousseau's phantasmatic topography as well as its related matrices of binarities undo themselves just as they are asserted. The Rousseauist concept of nature is not pure of its opposite (society), nor is any other half of a binarity free from its opposite. This tension both brings the opposition into being *and* simultaneously refuses it.

Key words: Philosophy, Feminism, Rousseau, Education, Derrida, Deconstruction.

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Abbreviations

- BM: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, 1993).
- DG: Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967).
- DN: John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York, 1997).
- DS: Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris, 1949).
- EE: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (Paris, 1966).
- FD: Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme* (London, 1994).
- HT: Penelope Deutscher, *How To Read Derrida* (London, 2005).
- IE: Yves Vargis, *Introduction à l'Émile de Rousseau* (Paris, 1995).
- LD: Genevieve Lloyd, *Le Dæuff and History of Philosophy* (New York, 2002).
- MH: Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Mirror for Humanity: A Concise Introduction To Cultural Anthropology* (New York, 2005).
- NE: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Mineola, NY, 1998).
- OF: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (Paris, 1997).
- OL: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Paris, 1990).
- PC: Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Cultures: The Origins Of Culture* (New York, 1958).
- RI: N.J.H. Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction To His Psychological, Social and Political Theory* (Oxford, 1988).
- SP: Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago, 1984).
- SPE: Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany, NY, 1997).
- TO: Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle et Sept essais sur Rousseau* (Paris, 1971).
- YG: Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy* (New York, 1997).

Dedications

To my loving and supportive parents, Linda Connors and Robert Mackay.

To my monkey-partner, Glyn Devine.

And, finally, to my beloved Granny, Gwen Mackay (1930-2005).

Introductory Remarks

... I want to state as clearly as possible that there is a sense in which feminism already “is” deconstruction, and deconstruction “is” already feminism. And yet, with this said, they also do not collapse into one another and eliminate their differences.

--Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme*, p. 19

Nature has long been appealed to as a source of goodness and rightness. The contemporary examples are numerous. Whether an argument against gay marriage is being fashioned, or a boy's roughhousing is being justified, nature or what is deemed to be “natural” has a moral weight. It is supposed to be in one's best interests to choose what is “natural.” One certainly would not want *to allow or to become something unnatural*.

But what is nature? Well, it is often conceived of as the opposite of society¹. Through this lens, nature becomes a place/time where one can see (or imagine) the original form of humanity in both its constitution and its habits. The specifics of this natural place/time may shift, but it may generally be understood as an origin of sorts, a place/time of both greater simplicity and purity than we know today. Society, on the other hand, is a place/time where humanity is-- at least in some sense-- “unnatural,” artificial, or corrupted. A humanity which is socialised is at a necessary and marked remove from nature; this humanity is burdened and sullied by knowledge and social obligations which may include employment, marriage, politics and family.

Because the concept of nature and the natural have such an apparent moral heft

¹ In the chapters that follow, I will use both the terms society and culture. Edward Burnett Tylor is often quoted as saying “Culture or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (PC, p. 1). In other words, individuals acquire certain attributes “by growing up in a particular society in which they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition” (MH, p. 41). Most everyone is a member of society, yet different societies are shaped by different cultural practices and beliefs. I will most frequently use the term society. Though, on the occasions when I use the term culture, this should be understood as a specific society with its own particular cultural blueprint.

to them, I will turn my attention to a thinker for whom nature was an undoubtedly important construct: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There are repeated appeals to nature and the natural throughout Rousseau's corpus. On various occasions, in Rousseau's hands, nature is used as (among other things): a heuristic device, an origin myth, an ideal.

While I will outline some of the ways nature and the natural are used to justify Rousseau's claims, my main task will be to illuminate the contradictions embedded within the text as well as the phantasmatic topography which underlies Rousseau's theoretical writings. Though I will briefly refer to a few of his other works, my primary text will be Rousseau's *Émile ou de l'éducation* (hereafter *Émile*). I will examine the gender norms prescribed by Rousseau, the pervasive threat of contamination faced by those wise enough to follow his educational programme, and the way heterosexual sex acts as the site of interaction between oppositions which Rousseau intended to keep separate. Binarities will figure prominently in my work as I show the impossibility of truly making two opposite terms stand apart.

My analysis will draw upon Jacques Derrida's writings and his strategy of deconstruction. I seek to inhabit *Émile* in the style of Derrida, and I will draw from some of Derrida's writings about Rousseau. My goal is not to repeat Derrida's fine work; I wish to use his analyses and his deconstructive approach for my own purposes.

Before proceeding, I wish to offer a few explanations as well as a few caveats. Firstly, an important motivation for this project stems from my passionate interest and belief in feminism (and so also feminist philosophy). The question is: can feminism and deconstruction peaceably coexist? Both are certainly difficult to define: the first due to its breadth and diversity; the second due in large part to its troubling the very idea of definition. Diane Elam argues that:

not only is the search for a universally agreed upon definition of 'feminism' and 'deconstruction' a waste of time, it is also highly undesirable. For once you think you know what 'feminism' and 'deconstruction' are, then their political and ethical work is done. As I have already hinted, short hand definitions, while practical at times, can easily lead to caricature, dismissal, and unnecessary limits placed on thought and political action².

Although quick definitions may be practical, they can also be in some sense perilous. Rather than offer definitions that ultimately do a disservice to both concepts, or devote many pages to a discussion of this tricky issue, I will assume the reader already has at least a sense of what these concepts mean; instead of defining them outright or discussing the difficulties in attempting to do so, I will propose how the two serve common interests and may improve one another as well.

Perhaps most obviously, feminism and deconstruction each seek to trouble key binarities; both seek to unearth incoherencies and to offer a more nuanced understanding of certain subjects. While deconstruction often troubles concepts within the academic context, feminism does its troubling in the academic realm and through grassroots work. Feminism and deconstruction are similar too in that their style and approach is challenging; neither takes well established concepts or practices as wholly justified or as being beyond revision³.

One of the major ways deconstruction can improve feminism is by promoting self-criticism. Penelope Deutscher sums up this point well:

² FD, p. 4-5.

³ This challenging style often results in personal attacks being leveled at feminists and deconstructionists alike. Also, feminism and deconstruction are frequently said to be the cause of great misfortunes. The examples are plentiful, but consider this one: "It is not uncommon to portray Derrida as the devil himself, a street-corner anarchist, a relativist, or subjectivist, or nihilist, out to destroy our traditions and institutions, our beliefs and values, to mock philosophy and truth itself, to undo everything the Enlightenment has done-- and to replace all this with wild nonsense and irresponsible play" (DN, p. 36). The work being done by both feminism and deconstruction can be profoundly unsettling-- as is shown in part by the fervour of the backlash they each suffer.

...any feminism should be accompanied with a simultaneous effort to deconstruct feminism. This can be a constructive contribution to feminism. Many feminist writers have engaged in self-criticism about feminism's failure to adequately include the perspectives and priorities of women from different backgrounds, classes and cultures⁴.

Feminism would thus best be served if it were accompanied by a deconstructive gesture, or a simultaneous deconstruction, of its own assertions. In this way, feminism would be more aware of its shortcomings and any concept, person, or nation it excludes in its efforts to further a particular agenda. In short, deconstruction could sharpen feminism with its reminder to be constantly vigilant, careful and self-critical.

Deconstruction would primarily benefit from feminism's influence because it would give deconstruction a more visibly tangible context. While language undoubtedly shapes our interactions and our understanding of the so-called real world, deconstruction is sometimes accused of being hyper-textual (ie: overly mired in the academic or the theoretical)⁵. If applied to feminist concerns, deconstruction would be more readily linked to more practical, everyday issues.

Finally, I wish to offer the following caveat. In asserting that feminism and deconstruction may peaceably coexist, I do not mean to imply that Derrida's deconstructive project is inherently feminist or imbued with explicitly feminist sensibilities on his part. The issue of what role feminism plays in Derrida's texts is contentious at best, and otherwise completely deserving of its own in depth analysis⁶. My goal here is only to explain how I perceive the two as coexisting strategies and

4 HT, p. 49.

5 While deconstruction is admittedly mind-bending and usually used by academics, I do not believe the meat of Derrida's writings is at a remove to the "real" world. Quite the opposite!

6 This question and its related issues has been approached by other authors. For a few examples, see the feminism and deconstruction section in the bibliography.

sensibilities, and thus as useful for this thesis.

Before beginning my deconstructive analysis of *Émile*, I wish to make two more points. Firstly, throughout the text that follows, I use the terms “ideal woman” and “ideal man.” These terms, while not found in Rousseau's text, serve as generic markers for the ideals manifested by *Émile* and Sophie. Though Rousseau told the particular story of *Émile* and Sophie, he was trying to sketch an educational programme that would be suitable to all (or, more precisely, suitable at least to those eighteenth century Europeans fortunate enough to be in the middle and upper classes). For simplicity's sake, I will speak of his ideas in a generalised “ideal man and ideal woman” way in order to underline the applicability Rousseau hoped his programme would have.

Secondly, in *Émile*, Rousseau weaves between prescriptive and descriptive statements about the society in which he lived. Because of this weaving, he alternates between discussing the ideal woman and the wet nurse. In the eighteenth century, women of the middle- and upper-classes usually hired wet nurses and frequently sent their children away to boarding school once they were of a certain age⁷. Rousseau speaks contemptuously of this habit:

Depuis que les mères, méprisant leur premier devoir,
n'ont plus voulu nourrir leurs enfants, il a fallu les
confier à des femmes mercenaires, qui, se trouvant
ainsi mères d'enfants étrangers pour qui la nature ne
leur disait rien, n'ont cherché qu'à s'épargner de la peine⁸.

Biological mothers are thus faulted for not assuming the burden of breastfeeding and child-rearing. Wet nurses are faulted for their lack of natural affection and their apparent

⁷ SPE, p. 25. Additionally, of course, it is worth noting that women of the lower-class could not afford this practice. In *Émile*, Rousseau does not devote time to considering whether these “real mother” women from his own society managed to embody their ideal; his focus was upon more well-to-do citizens.

⁸ EE, p. 44.

disinterest in the children under their care. In short, Rousseau thought this trend to be deplorable and profoundly unnatural. Furthermore, he believed that much of society's ills could be remedied if women would only choose to be “real mothers” to their children: “Mais que les mères daignent nourrir leurs enfants, les mœurs vont se réformer d'elle-mêmes, les sentiments de la nature se réveiller dans tous les cœurs; l'État va se repeupler: ce premier point, ce point seul va tout réunir⁹.”

Because of this tension between what was the case among well-to-do families in Rousseau's time and what he thought *should* be the norm, in a prescriptive gesture he maintained that the ideal woman should raise her own child; this would include breastfeeding the child as well as tending to its needs. And, in a descriptive gesture, he sometimes dictated how the wet nurse should do her job. I will point out occasions in my work where confusion may result from the way Rousseau shifts between these two modes (prescriptive and descriptive) and thereby shifts who he is discussing (the ideal woman or the wet nurse).

Now that my project has been sketched in its broadstrokes, the compatibility of feminism and deconstruction has been touched upon, and some of my terminology has been explained, let us now turn to the issue of gender norms in *Émile*; what differentiates the ideal man from the ideal woman and how is nature used to justify such distinctions?

⁹ EE, pp. 47-48.

Chapter One: Nature and Norms

Dès qu'une fois il est démontré que l'homme et la femme ne sont ni ne doivent être constitués de même, de caractère ni de tempérament, il s'ensuit qu'ils ne doivent pas avoir la même éducation.

--Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, p. 473

One of the foundational elements of Rousseau's treatise on education (as well as of his phantasmatic topography) involves the distinct and opposite natures of man and woman. In order to show the path others should follow, Rousseau concerns himself with ideals: the ideal man and the ideal woman. Because of the differences between the two and the distinct roles they are meant to assume in society, the ideal man and the ideal woman should not be educated in the same way. Throughout *Émile*, Rousseau creates the ideal man and the ideal woman by establishing certain gender norms; by describing the constitution and tasks appropriate to each, Rousseau sketches a picture of what the ideal man and the ideal woman should be like. This Rousseauist sketch relies on repeated appeals to Nature or the natural in order to justify itself and maintain its own integrity.

With particular attention given to the natural justifications for the gender norms, I will outline some of the ideal man's personality traits and his socially useful skills. I will then explain some of the ideal woman's gender norms and the natural justifications thereof. Because so much of the ideal woman's gender norms exist in relation to others, the ideal man's gender norms will reverberate throughout my discussion of the ideal woman. Additionally, since the ideal woman exists primarily in relation to others, I have chosen to explain some of her personality traits and socially useful skills through the two main categories of woman that exist in the text: mother and wife. The division between mother and wife is in some sense artificial since the two roles often coincide.

This artificiality is reflected in my choice to mention the importance of certain traits or skills for both categories. The division, in this case, serves to highlight which aspects of the gender norms seem to be the *most* significant to either the mother or the wife; it is not a matter of claiming certain elements are *exclusive* to the mother or to the wife.

The gender norms established by Rousseau create the oppositionality of the ideal man and the ideal woman. Since the two are opposites, they are supposed to complement and complete each other as a heterosexual marital unit. However, I will argue that such a marital unit does not in fact constitute a “whole” of two halved individuals. I will then examine the importance of a woman's body for her norms and discuss the ramifications of the ideal woman always being associated to her sex. To highlight the seriousness of what is being required of each gendered type, I will examine a few of the sanctions suffered by those who choose to betray their particular gender norms as well as the rewards that would be enjoyed by those who carefully respect their gender norms. The chapter will close with a brief discussion of the supplement, and the binarities that are exemplified by Rousseau's gender norms.

One of the key personality traits of the ideal man is his independence. A child must be raised in accordance with his primitive dispositions which are said to consist of what we are drawn to or repulsed by¹⁰. For example, a baby is said to naturally seek out pleasure and to avoid pain. Primitive dispositions may be progressively altered by habit as the child ages; the natural primitive dispositions may be replaced by unnatural or undesirable dispositions. Society is responsible for the “bastardisation” of the natural within the child; the educational programme that is elaborated in *Émile* will socialise the child in a way that is respectful of his nature. One must either choose to raise the boy

¹⁰ EE, p. 38.

into a man or a citizen; the two options are mutually exclusive. While discussing the oppositional tension between nature's and society's pull on the boy, the reader is asked: “[quoi faire] quand, au lieu d'élever un homme pour lui-même, on veut l'élever pour les autres?”¹¹ This rhetorical question underlines the importance of a boy's-- and later a man's-- independence. To socialise the boy in a way that respects his nature is to raise him for himself. To socialise him in a way that strips away his naturalness and replaces it with some sort of social construction is to make him dependent on others. The natural independence of a boy must be respected. His education must therefore encourage the development of his natural independence.

The significance of the ideal man's independence is illuminated by the two types of dependence:

Il y a deux sortes de dépendances: celle des choses, qui est de la nature; celle des hommes, qui est de la société. La dépendance des choses, n'ayant aucune moralité, ne nuit point à la liberté, et n'engendre point de vices; la dépendance des hommes étant désordonnée les engendre tous, et c'est par elle que le maître et l'esclave se dépravent mutuellement¹².

The only acceptable (ie: natural) form of dependence is that which involves a reliance upon objects and not on other individuals. In the state of nature, the natural man was solitary and survived thanks to his wits and his strength. While the natural man depended on objects in his environment for survival (such as food and makeshift shelters), dependence on others did not figure into this origin myth. While the ideal man cannot return to this state of nature, a proper Rousseauist education may permit him to embody certain gendered traits that echo what is truly natural. Therefore, since the natural man was utterly without dependence on others, the well-educated and properly-

¹¹ EE, p. 8.

¹² EE, pp. 100-101.

socialised ideal man should also avoid relying on others; the ideal man should be independent.

The ideal man's gendered personality trait of independence resurfaces near the end of *Émile*, when the précepteur lovingly praises the wonders of walking¹³:

Je ne conçois qu'une manière de voyager plus agréable que d'aller à cheval; c'est d'aller à pied. On part à son moment, on s'arrête à sa volonté, on fait tant et si peu d'exercice qu'on veut. On observe tout le pays; on se détourne à droite, à gauche; on examine tout ce qui nous flatte; on s'arrête à tous les points de vue. Aperçois-je une rivière, je la côtoie; un bois touffu, je vais sous son ombre; une grotte, je la visite; une carrière, j'examine les minéraux. Partout où je me plais, j'y reste. A l'instant que je m'ennuie, je m'en vais. Je ne dépends ni des chevaux ni du postillon. Je n'ai pas besoin de choisir des chemins tout faits, des routes commodes; je passe partout où un homme peut passer; je vois tout ce qu'un homme peut voir; et, ne dépendant que de moi-même, je jouis de toute la liberté dont un homme peut jouir. Si le mauvais temps m'arrête et que l'ennui me gagne, alors je prends des chevaux¹⁴.

There is a certain seductiveness inherent in the use of narrative and its related metaphors, similes or analogies. Showing one of the ideal man's traits in a natural environment encourages the reader to perceive the trait as natural too; the traits may become natural by virtue of their literary context. Rousseau may find naturalness seductive because he is disappointed by society. Nostalgia for a “lost naturalness” encourages Rousseau to be seduced by the natural; a similar nostalgia may also encourage his readers to believe the natural Rousseauist rhetoric.

Let us return to the example at hand. Walking allows the man to savour his independence from others while appreciating various natural phenomenon. He is able to

13 The walking analogy also serves to reinforce the importance of the ideal man's freedom. For the moment, I chose to read the excerpt only in terms of its relevance to the ideal man's independence.

14 EE, p. 540.

walk at his own pace, choosing where and when and how long he stops to enjoy certain elements of the natural setting. He need not follow roads that have already been made; he sets aside conventional ways of traversing the landscape (such as following a path or riding a horse). These conventional methods of travel are effective, but they do not spring forth from nature (rather, they are produced by society). A horse must be domesticated for one to ride it and a road must be built by skilled workers or at least worn into existence by many who walk the same route. While walking through the woods, man is not limited by a means of travel that exists because of society. Instead, he is limited only by himself: his body's capabilities, his personal interests and his endurance. The ideal and well-educated man who walks in the forest is an echo of the natural man who roamed free in the state of nature. The ideal man is thus able to recapture the feeling of being truly natural as man once was in the state of nature. However, walking through the woods-- this savouring of his independence-- may be set aside as needed. Should bad weather or boredom consume him, mounting a horse once more is perfectly acceptable.

Another personality trait the ideal man ought to possess is freedom. This quality cannot be conceived of as being strictly a personality trait, as it also plays a key role in the ideal man's social position. Freedom is paramount from the outset; the boy's body should never be unduly restricted. Such an assertion is validated in part by condemning the practice of tightly binding newborns:

L'inaction, la contrainte où l'on retient les membres d'un enfant, ne peuvent que gêner la circulation du sang, des humeurs, empêcher l'enfant de se fortifier, de croître, et altérer sa constitution¹⁵.

15 EE, p. 44.

Binding newborns compromises their physical growth which in turn compromises their personal growth. Freedom extends also to the boy's actions; he should not be forbidden from doing things for unjust reasons. For example, one should not prevent the boy from doing that which will cause pain because this experience will provide him with invaluable knowledge of the world. A boy who has endured physical restrictions or has had unreasonable limits placed upon his actions could not hope to become the ideal man.

In the Second Book of *Émile*, a comparison is drawn between a country boy and a city boy which serves to underline the significance of freedom to the ideal man:

La gêne perpétuelle où vous tenez vos élèves irrite leur vivacité; plus ils sont contraints sous vos yeux, plus ils sont turbulents au moment qu'ils s'échappent; il faut bien qu'ils se dédommagent quand ils peuvent de la dure contrainte où vous les tenez. Deux écoliers de la ville feront plus de dégât dans un pays que la jeunesse de tout un village. Enfermez un petit monsieur et un petit paysan dans une chambre; le premier aura tout renversé, tout brisé, avant que le second soit sorti de sa place. Pourquoi cela, si ce n'est que l'un se hâte d'abuser d'un moment de licence, tandis que l'autre, toujours sûr de sa liberté, ne se presse jamais d'en user? Et cependant les enfants des villageois, souvent flattés ou contrariés, sont encore bien loin de l'état où je veux qu'on les tienne¹⁶.

A boy will behave well when within view of those who have compromised his freedom, but he will seize the chance to throw off the limitations imposed upon him by behaving poorly. To put it more colloquially: If you keep a boy on too tight of a leash, he will rebel when the occasion presents itself. Boys raised in the largely negative environment of the city will cause more problems than boys raised in the largely positive environment of the country. This point is emphasised through “improvised statistics”; two city boys will do more damage than a whole village's worth of country boys. In fact, if a city boy

¹⁶ EE, p. 111.

and a country boy were locked in a room together, the city boy would be the one to break things. The country boy would not be tempted by the opportunity to wreak havoc; his freedom was never unduly restricted, so he would feel no need to reassert his freedom through violence and destruction. It's worth noting that, in the case of the city boy, an attempt to curb a boy's freedom results in a spontaneous if opportunity-sensitive resistance. The power of the natural makes itself known in this way; the city boy rebels and thus lays claim to his freedom in a forceful and destructive manner.

The “country context” is often used in an effort to illustrate *what should be*. Nature is thereby romanticised and used as a vehicle for expressing moral prescriptions. However, the country context, like all types of society, is at a remove from the state of nature. Thus it too is imperfect and guilty of raising children in a way that doesn't adequately respect their nature. Still, the country context is much closer to getting it right than its opposite, the city context. The country context is a source of good examples that will suffice yet which do not wholly embody the natural ideal that Rousseau holds dear.

Although there are several socially useful skills that are required of the ideal man, I will focus on two main components of those requirements. Firstly, let us examine the ideal man's disinterest in others' opinions. One of the traits that make the ideal man essentially good is the fact that he does not compare himself to others: “ce qui rend l'homme essentiellement bon est d'avoir peu de besoins, et de peu se comparer aux autres; ce qui le rend essentiellement méchant est d'avoir beaucoup de besoins, et de tenir beaucoup à l'opinion¹⁷.” The ideal man should not let others' opinions shape who he is or what he chooses to do. In a manner of speaking, the ideal man must be in some

¹⁷ EE, p. 277

sense impermeable to the social influence of others' opinions. If the ideal man did not have this resistance to opinions, his carefully realised and respectful-of-his-nature education would be compromised. For the ideal man, to be receptive to opinions is to be open to the possibility of being distanced from his properly denatured self.

Another of the ideal man's socially useful skills requires that he educate his future wife. Her disposition, experiences and “unofficial education” will have made her into “une terre bien préparée qui n'attend que le grain pour rapporter¹⁸.” Another metaphor that refers to natural processes, or objects which are found in nature. What could be more natural than planting a seed in well prepared and fertile soil so that a new plant may eventually grow? The task at hand is characterised as joyous and pleasant for the ideal man. He has the opportunity to shape the ideal woman's mind based on his own learnings.

A selection of the gender norms assigned to the ideal woman will now be seen through the lens of a particular category of woman: the mother. Whereas the boy required freedom to become an ideal man, the girl requires a limited form of freedom to become an ideal woman. Woman is said to be more prone to extremes and thus too much freedom might result in her acquiring certain vices¹⁹. Where boys whose freedom was infringed upon seized certain opportunities to act out, girls will act out if given the freedom enjoyed by boys who are raised according to the Rousseauist educational programme.

A limited freedom for girls is justified in the following excerpt: “Accoutumez-les à se voir interrompre au milieu de leurs jeux, et ramener à d'autres soins sans murmurer.

¹⁸ EE, p. 538.

¹⁹ EE, p. 482.

La seule habitude suffit encore en ceci, parce qu'elle ne fait que seconder la nature²⁰.”

One should interrupt a girl's playtime and have her tend to other tasks. She is to accept this without complaint. It is only a matter of establishing such a routine with the girl, since the course of action in question simply mirrors what is natural. A limited freedom is relevant to a mother's experience since any “playful” or enjoyable activities will have to be set aside in favour of tending to the baby or to other domestic tasks. Ideally, of course, the mother would do so without complaint.

Unlike the city boy's outburst against the limitations imposed upon his freedom, here the girl appears to have no natural stirrings against said limitations. Rousseau does not even differentiate between a city girl and a country girl; neither sort of girl is said to have natural stirrings against a limited freedom. She is not said to seize the first opportunity to showcase her freedom through destruction. It is only necessary to get the girl into the habit of having a limited freedom. This habit mirrors her natural requirement for such a restriction. Although there may be a brief period where the girl must learn *not* to complain or fuss when taken away from her playtime, she will quickly adapt and thereby her behaviour will mirror her natural inclinations.

The main socially useful task of the mother is to take care of the child's first education:

La première éducation est celle qui importe le plus, et cette première éducation appartient incontestablement aux femmes: si l'Auteur de la nature eût voulu qu'elle appartienne aux hommes, il leur eût donné du lait pour nourrir les enfants²¹.

The first or natural education is the ideal woman's responsibility. More precisely, it is the *mother's* responsibility; the ability to lactate and to breastfeed is identified as the

²⁰ EE, p. 482.

²¹ EE, p. 35.

reason why this particular task is assigned to woman and not to man. The first or natural education involves the development of one's faculties and one's organs; it is also said to occur independently of us²². In short, the main task of the mother is to ensure that the baby survives its first education. The mother must tend to the baby's physical needs, thereby allowing the child to reach an age where the next stage of education may begin. In the case of a boy, the mother will hand off her son to a suitable précepteur so that he may oversee his later education. In the case of a girl, the mother will play more of a role in the child's development. The mother will help to ready the girl's mind and spirit for the education she will eventually receive from her husband as well as the tasks and the disposition required of the girl when she becomes a wife. It is imperative that the first or natural education proceed without incident, or else later educations would invariably fail.

It is wise at this juncture to repeat that the gender norms associated with both the mother and the wife are not based on a hard and fast division. There is a fair degree of overlap where the norms are required of the ideal woman regardless of the role she assumes. Also, the two roles frequently overlap in practice when the woman is both a wife and mother. I chose to use these two lenses in part to highlight how women exist primarily as “bookends” in the text. She is present as the mother, in charge of the baby boy's first education, then she is gone. She returns as a future wife when the boy has reached maturity. Her principal roles consist in maintaining the naturalness of the baby and in aiding the grown boy into a larger social context. I mention this point only briefly, as it will resurface later in my work.

Let us now change the lens through which we've been viewing a selection of the

22 EE, p. 37,

gender norms assigned to the ideal woman. Let us turn to what may be called the main features and obligations of the wife. Firstly, just like the mother, the wife is defined chiefly by her dependence. The wife is passive where the husband is active, therefore she is subjugated to him and must also seek to please him²³. She is dependent upon her husband because he is active while she is not. Staying in the husband's good graces is vital, for the wife depends on the husband for her survival. The need to please her husband is not a law of love, but rather a law of nature which precedes love itself²⁴. Wives are also said to depend on their husbands due to their desires and their needs, whereas husbands are said to “depend” on their wives only because of their desires²⁵. Wives, then, are financially dependent on their husbands. They are at a natural disadvantage to the husband who relies on his wife only out of sexual desire.

The wife is said to be concerned with her appearance. While distinguishing it from a boy's concerns, this interest is traced back to her childhood experiences:

Les garçons cherchent le mouvement et le bruit: des tambours, des sabots, de petits carrosses; les filles aiment mieux ce qui donne dans la vue et sert à l'ornement : des miroirs, des bijoux, des chiffons, surtout des poupées: la poupée est l'amusement spécial de ce sexe; voilà très évidemment son goût déterminé sur sa destination²⁶.

Boys like toys that involve movement and noise; girls enjoy toys that involve playing dress-up. The girl's taste for dolls reflects the style and attitude she is to assume as an ideal woman. She should interest herself in clothes and attractiveness, although she should not be excessively interested in such things. A taste for dolls and for its associated values occurs naturally in the girl; nobody forces her to take an active interest

23 EE, p. 466.

24 EE, p. 466.

25 EE, p. 475.

26 EE, pp. 478-479.

in dolls. Because the interest is natural, the interest should be encouraged on into adulthood; a wife must make herself attractive without being concerned with expensive jewels or other social trappings.

Another pivotal norm associated with the ideal wife concerns her tolerance for injustice. Rather than reconstruct what is said in the text, I offer the following pertinent excerpt:

En un mot, elle souffre avec patience les torts des autres, et répare avec plaisir les siens. Tel est l'aimable naturel de son sexe avant que nous l'ayons gâté. La femme est faite pour céder à l'homme et pour supporter même son injustice. Vous ne réduirez jamais les jeunes garçons au même point; le sentiment intérieur s'élève et se révolte en eux contre l'injustice; la nature ne les fit pas pour la tolérer²⁷.

If not compromised by social intervention, the wife has a natural tolerance for injustice. She is naturally made to defer to the ideal man and to suffer any injustices he perpetrates. The ideal man could never be reduced to sharing such a tolerance because nature has instilled in him a sensibility that rebels against injustice. In order to fully embody the ideal, the wife must adhere to this gender norm. She must not offer any resistance to the injustices she may endure.

The last gender norm assigned to the wife that I will discuss concerns the importance of others' opinions. Where these have no bearing on the ideal man, they are quite significant for the ideal woman as wife:

L'homme, en bien faisant, ne dépend que de lui-même, et peut braver le jugement public; mais la femme, en bien faisant, n'a fait que la moitié de sa tâche, et ce que l'on pense d'elle ne lui importe pas moins que ce qu'elle est en effet²⁸.

27 EE, p. 520.

28 EE, p. 475.

The ideal man who does good need pay no attention to what others think. In contrast, the ideal woman-- and the wife in particular-- who does good must also be *seen* or *believed* by others to be doing good. At least in part, this reliance on others' opinions may be explained by her natural dependence on the ideal man. She must exist in a relation with others in order for her actions-- and arguably for herself-- to gain credibility. The wife's financial dependence on the husband may emphasise the need not only to behave well but also to be perceived as behaving well. For example, if the husband believed she was not being faithful, this could have disastrous consequences for the wife even if she had not in fact committed adultery.

Although this may have become quite evident throughout the discussion of certain gender norms, the ideal man and the ideal woman are meant to be opposites. For example, thanks to the educational programme prescribed by Rousseau, the ideal man will be independent and free, where the ideal woman will be dependent and enjoy only a limited freedom. Rousseau describes the two as being halves of a whole: the heterosexual marital unit. The perfect man and the perfect woman should not resemble each other²⁹. Instead, their differences each serve the heterosexual marital unit in unique ways which are specific to their respective genders³⁰.

I stress that the marital unit is a heterosexual one for two main reasons. Firstly, Rousseau spends no time discussing homosexual or transgendered relationships in *Émile*. This should not come as too much of a shock, however, considering the time in which he wrote³¹. Secondly, Rousseau says “Un sexe est attiré vers l'autre: voilà le

29 EE, p. 466.

30 EE, p. 466.

31 My point here is certainly not to claim that history is in a perpetual and relentless march towards progress so therefore contemporary interests are undoubtedly “better” than modern ones. While I believe LGBT rights and queer theory are highly pertinent and engaging, my point is not to condemn or dismiss modern thinkers for their lack of insight or interest in such topics. Instead, my point is only

mouvement de la nature³².” The only attraction that is deemed natural is between a man and a woman. While opening a can of worms that I do not have the space to properly address here, the quote does at least underline Rousseau's heteronormative views where “natural” attraction and “natural” pairings are deemed to be exclusively heterosexual.

The ideal man and the ideal woman are said to be in some sense incomplete without the other. They are meant to complement each other, thereby forming a whole which is better than each individual. However, it is difficult to fathom how the ideal man is not already whole as an individual. Some of the ideal woman's traits such as sexual attractiveness and her gentleness [transl. of “douceur”] are supposed to temper or “tenderise” the ideal man; I struggle to see how such an influence can be said to act upon an ideal man who is *not* already whole in and of himself. He is independent and free. He knows a trade; he is active, particularly in the public sphere. In stark contrast, the ideal woman must not appear in public after marriage³³. Her dependence means that she is “à la merci des jugements de l'homme³⁴.” Her responsibilities as both mother and wife infringe upon what might be called her ability to be whole on her own. I see the opposition Rousseau sought to establish between man and woman as in fact unfolding thusly: The ideal man is a wholly formed member of society, an “unto-itself,” whereas the ideal woman is a truncated or unfinished member of society.

This situation may be best encapsulated by de Beauvoir:

En s'attribuant exclusivement sa postérité, l'homme se dégage définitivement de l'emprise de la féminité, il conquiert contre la femme la domination du monde. Vouée à la procréation et à des tâches secondaires, dépouillée de son importance pratique et de son prestige

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that Rousseau's historical context was likely not very conducive to such thinking or sensitivities.

32 EE, p. 277.

33 EE, p. 477.

34 EE, p. 475.

mystique, la femme n'apparaît plus que comme servante³⁵.

Within their union, the ideal man is the dominant and assertive figure; he in turn rules the world as he distances himself from female tasks and femininity in general. The ideal man and the ideal woman do not complement *each other* as incomplete halves. Instead, the ideal woman-- with her domestic responsibilities and her temperament-- is a "halved" or unfinished creature while the ideal man is whole, an individual.

The importance of the body for the ideal woman's gender norms has thus far gone unexplicated, even though it has at least been suggested. Consider that motherhood necessarily follows from the woman's breast (or her ability to lactate). Remember also the wife's interest in and maintenance of her appearance. Notwithstanding mentions of the body used to justify or explain certain norms established for the ideal man, the figurative weight of the female body is heavier for the ideal woman.

This particular and gendered importance may resonate in Rousseau's taking an interest in both the wet nurse's diet and Sophie's sweet tooth. In the first case, Rousseau considers both the country woman's eating opposed to that of the city woman as well as the diet of carnivorous animals opposed to that of herbivores³⁶. He seeks to determine what diet, when consumed by a wet nurse³⁷, would produce the best and the most milk. While it is legitimate to wonder what foods or substances would produce the best milk for a baby's health, the way in which Rousseau addresses this question stresses her animality or her bodiliness. It is not written in the style of a guidebook for women who are wet nurses. Instead it is-- somewhat humourously-- written in the style of a farmer's manual.

35 DS, p. 104.

36 EE, pp. 64-65.

37 Here Rousseau draws upon the descriptive: the fact that wet nurses were common in certain well-to-do circles in his time.

In the second case, in order to curb Sophie's sweet tooth, it is explained that eating too many sweets will result in rotten teeth and an overly plump waistline³⁸. While both can be understood as valid health risks, the significance of her body is also underlined. Her appearance would undoubtedly be compromised should her teeth be rotten or her waist too ample.

Part of why the ideal woman's body is so pertinent may be explained by the ideal woman always being linked to her sex. Rousseau says several contradictory things regarding sex differences and when the ideal man or the ideal woman is properly associated with their sex. Initially, he maintains that we are born twice: once as a member of one's species, then again as a member of one's sex³⁹. This would lead one to believe that both the ideal man and the ideal woman would *be* their sex once they reached a certain point in their education and their physical development. However, Rousseau later asserts the following:

Il n'y a nulle parité entre les deux sexes quant à la conséquence du sexe. Le mâle [sic] n'est mâle qu'en certains instants, la femelle est femelle toute sa vie, ou du moins toute sa jeunesse; tout la rappelle sans cesse à son sexe, et, pour bien remplir les fonctions, il lui faut une constitution qui s'y rapporte⁴⁰.

Here, the ideal man is only a member of male sex at certain moments in his life, whereas the ideal woman must be a member of the female sex for *every* moment in her life. To properly fulfill the roles of wife and mother, she must also have a certain disposition. Rousseau goes on to list the various qualities required of the ideal woman so that she may successfully bear and raise children, manage the household and maintain the cohesion of the family unit. Once the ideal woman's youth has passed, presumably once

38 EE, p. 519.

39 EE, p. 273.

40 EE, p. 470.

she has done all of the above, then she may be seen as no longer belonging to her sex; since she will no longer be able to use her body (for reproductive purposes, she would no longer be seen as being her sex. That said, for the vast majority of the ideal woman's life, she will be a member of her sex. It is in part because of her uterus and her breasts that she is said to always be so, while the ideal man will only be a member of his sex at certain moments such as when he is sexually aroused or sexually engaged. Otherwise, his male body does not shape his existence as the female body shapes that of the ideal woman.

The best proof that the traits and activities prescribed for the ideal man and for the ideal woman are in fact norms may be found in the mention of both sanctions and rewards in *Émile*. Let us first consider how important it is that a girl be raised according to the feminine norms. Rousseau addresses himself to the mother: “Croyez-moi, mère judicieuse, ne faites point de votre fille un honnête homme, comme pour donner un démenti à la nature; faites-en une honnête femme, et soyez sûre qu'elle en vaudra mieux pour elle et pour nous⁴¹.” Should one raise a girl by the norms specific to the ideal man, one would create a fiercely unnatural creature, a monster.

As for the boy, he must also respect his gender norms. He must choose a trade that is manly and thus appropriate to him. Rousseau makes light of Italian men who work in boutiques, using their large, manly hands to sell delicate cloths and ribbons to women⁴². Such work is ill-suited to the ideal man who is best occupied by certain types of physically demanding labour. If a man should choose an unmanly trade, he risks being sanctioned by his peers⁴³. Not only will he be going against nature, he will also

41 EE, p. 474.

42 EE, p. 260.

43 It is unclear exactly *who* or *what* will sanction the man, although I assume other men who better exemplify their ideal will do the sanctioning.

have to suffer the ridicule of others. He may also be ostracised, considered either as a womanly man or as an idiot.

A woman who does not respect her gender norms may also suffer certain sanctions. For example, should a mother raise her child in a distinctly un-Rousseauist fashion, she may endure the consequences of this failure once she is old or widowed⁴⁴. In part explained by the child's own improperly socialised self, the grown child may choose to mistreat her or to deny her financial support.

Rousseau also suggests the possibility of certain rewards for mothers who do their job according to their gender norms:

...j'ose promettre à ces dignes mères un attachement solide et constant de la part de leurs maris, une tendresse vraiment filiale de la part de leurs enfants, l'estime et le respect du public, d'heureuses couches sans accident et sans suites, une santé ferme et vigoureuse, enfin le plaisir de se voir un jour imiter par leurs filles, et citer en exemple à celles d'autrui⁴⁵.

The successful ideal mother would enjoy the following benefits: a devoted husband, loving children, respect from one's peers, easy and uncomplicated births, excellent health, the joy of witnessing her girls follow her example, and the pride of being a good example for others. The remarkable rewards of being a good mother extend from strong social approval to personal well-being. Though it is quite absurd to promise good health and easy labour to good mothers, this promise clearly shows the extent of the goodness that will come from a mother who respects her gender norms.

One of the key rewards offered to the ideal man is a “Sophie-esque” mate. Such a mate is rare and difficult to find⁴⁶, yet she will provide much for her husband. She will

44 EE, pp. 35-36.

45 EE, p. 48.

46 EE, p. 430.

be his wife and the mother to his children. She will make sure the household runs smoothly. She will assure the proper development of the children throughout their first education. She will act as the mediator between him and nature. While working within the limits of her own modesty, she will satisfy his sexual needs. She will also be his pupil; he will teach her what he has learned over the years.

Allow me now to pull a few loose ends together. When Rousseau asserts that a girl should not be raised into an “honest man,” he suggests that socialisation could in some way complete woman. By implication, he admits the possibility of a girl following and successfully finishing the educational programme prescribed for a boy. In such a case, rather than being unfinished or halved, the woman would become complete in the masculine sense of the term; she would therefore embody the ideals and satisfy the obligations traditionally assigned to the ideal man. And still, a daughter raised according to the masculine educational programme is said to be a monster. If this natural completion of the individual is reserved for the ideal man alone, then what does this imply for the ideal woman?

Upon first glance, it seems that the ideal woman is never natural, if a being may be called natural only when it is biologically male and possesses the traits of a man who has followed Rousseau's masculine educational programme. This interpretation explains why a woman would be called a monster if she received the same education as a man. “Completion” as an individual is a monstrous possibility for a woman. Alternatively, in the interest of testing the limits of the concept, I believe that Rousseau's “nature” bifurcates into (1) a nature that gives itself entirely over to maintaining the well-being of the species through child-bearing and child-rearing as well as into (2) a nature that separates itself from the interests of the species. The ideal man must adhere to the

second conception of nature, while the ideal woman must align herself with the first.

This dialectic is one in which nature has two tasks. The first task of nature belongs to women by virtue of their physical ability to bear and feed the young; it involves the reproduction and the perpetuation of the species. Since her body predisposes her to the first task of nature, the woman's education should simply encourage such an innate disposition, thereby helping her to reach her ideal. The second task of nature belongs to men and it involves in the production of individuals. These individuals-- men-- are free to tend to matters that do not directly relate to the reproduction of the species.

Nature is thereby constituted by two opposite teloi: one which produces individuals, and another which produces beings who serve the interests of the species. These two natural teloi are gendered; producing individuals is the telos of nature *for the ideal man*, while producing beings who serve the interests of the species is the natural telos *for the ideal woman*. Most of the book is devoted to the elaboration of a masculine educational programme which results in independent, free, male individuals. Comparatively, little time is spent explaining the nuances of the feminine educational programme. Additionally, as I have shown, the ideal woman is a halved and unfinished creature as she tends to the obligations associated with her species, while the ideal man is whole and unburdened by the obligations of his species. The natural telos reserved for the ideal man is the best option presented in *Émile*.

If individuals are the “best” telos of nature, then this is possible only because some aspect of human existence allows nature to produce human beings differently than it does with other animals. One does not commonly see a lion who chooses to opt out of species-specific obligations in favour of learning a trade; free, autonomous individuals

do not appear to exist anywhere else but in man. In this light, who then is the monster? Is it the individual, a natural product of education who is not quite natural? Or is it the rare woman who sets aside the concerns of the species because of the (masculine) education she received?

The goodness that will grace the woman who lives in service of the species and the ill that will befall her if she were to become an “unwomanly” individual suggest that to be a natural being is to properly represent the ends of the species. Of course, the individual (the man) does not do this. In fact, it seems that a natural being is characterised as serving the species *in all cases except those of men*. Rather than exclude men from membership in the species, perhaps in their case, to be a species is to be precisely (if perversely) an individual. With the ideal man exemplifying the “best” telos of nature, the traditional conception of a species falls into impossibility. Ideal women, since they occupy themselves with the “second best” or secondary natural telos that serves the ends of the species, therefore fall into a state of impossibility as well.

What might explain how nature can produce an individual that is so different from what it usually produces (ie: species)? One might explain it with the concept of a supplement at work in *Émile*. This supplement makes the concept of nature dualist: one, pure; the other, supplemented. The following quotation may help to illuminate the supplement and its influence in the text:

The supplement has the connotation of plenitude. In completing a deficiency, its purpose is to make the encyclopedia complete. But in so doing, it also reconfigures the encyclopedia as having been deficient, because, if not for the supplement, it would have had the status of being complete. In this sense, the supplement has the connotations of both 'plenitude' and 'lack' and is 'undecidable.' It makes something deficient in the same

moment as it completes it⁴⁷.

Here, the supplement is meant to produce a “complete” individual, the ideal man, who is opposed to the species-focused ideal woman. In the attempt to complete the male individual, the deficient woman is in turn created. Thus, the supplement comes to represent both the completion and the lack; it is undecidable since it allows both the ideal man and the concept of a supplemented nature to become complete while simultaneously rendering the ideal woman as well as the pure concept of nature deficient. When supplemented, nature can produce individuals.

Several binarities shaped Rousseau's understanding of the ideal man and the ideal woman. Consequently, binarities have also shaped my analysis and reconstruction of his work. Some of the binarities I touched upon in this chapter are : nature versus society, man versus woman, activity versus passivity, independence versus dependence, indifference to others' opinions versus receptivity to others' opinion, intolerance of injustice versus tolerance of injustice, and freedom versus restriction. These oppositions play prominent roles in the gender norms Rousseau establishes for personality traits and socially useful skills as well as the rewards or punishments he proposes. However, a strong undercurrent lurks beneath these binarities: the threat of contamination. Under certain conditions, even the most properly educated man or woman may become contaminated and fall short of their ideal. It is to this serious threat that I turn my attention in the second chapter.

47 HT, p. 38.

Chapter Two: The Threat of Contamination

For Rousseau, culture is 'bad', a degradation from the natural state. Culture is also a necessary, remedying supplement both to our (mythical) 'fall' from the natural state and to the (mythical) natural state per se (as isolated, pre-linguistic individuals) from which we must inevitably 'depart.'

--Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender*, p. 105

Having examined some of the gender norms associated with both the ideal man and the ideal woman in the previous chapter, I will now offer a more critical appraisal of certain aspects of Rousseau's thought. After reiterating the role education is meant to serve for humanity, I will discuss the impossibility of returning to the state of nature. I will also identify a few of the states of nature or "closer to natural states" that Rousseau proposes.

Rousseau indicates precise moments when the carefully socialised, ideal humans may become contaminated or degraded. I will examine one example of such an "overt threat of contamination": the role a wet nurse plays in a baby's linguistic development⁴⁸. I argue that the contamination present in the case of the wet nurse runs deeper than Rousseau realises. Next, in a return to some of the textual examples I addressed in chapter one, I will analyse certain cases where contamination seems to occur in the text *without Rousseau acknowledging it or perhaps even without his being aware of it*. Contamination is ultimately more pervasive than Rousseau may have anticipated and it is difficult to fathom a case where something "pure" is not already degraded or holding within it the possibility of contamination. In fact, it is quite impossible to determine how purity could have ever existed in a human universe. The structure of our language (which in turns shapes how we conceive of the world) is such that no concept and so no thing, no person, no place-- in short nothing at all-- could be completely pure of all

48 Another case where Rousseau relies on the descriptive as he addresses the wet nurse and not the ideal woman.

contaminants (ie: its undesirable opposite). With this impossibility in mind, purity as a heuristic device, which is also linked to nature as a heuristic device, is not only open to skepticism; it also takes on a fanciful and phantasmatic air.

Lastly, I will turn my attention to Rousseau's phantasm, the symbolic and moral topography he creates for the ideal man and the ideal woman. His use of metaphor shapes his understanding of nature and also encapsulates the incoherencies that make up his conception of nature.

Rousseau's main educational goal is to produce individuals who are socialised in a way that remains respectful of nature and the natural dispositions proper to each sex. Although he frequently portrays culture as being a contaminating influence upon the natural being and the natural order of things, a certain degree of cultural influence allows humanity to live in a way that is closer to nature. In this manner, education acts as a “cultural amendment [...] which will generate a greater proximity to a social organisation supposedly 'ordained by nature'⁴⁹.” A properly controlled and meticulously executed exposure to such a “cultural amendment” results in the production of both the ideal man and the ideal woman, where ideal is not the contrary of “natural” but as close to this sense as is possible *post facto*. Each is subject to a particular and gendered educational programme which is meant to allow them to become both “socialised” and “naturalised.” Paradoxically, education is a matter of “properly denaturing” men and women so that they may more closely resemble their counterparts in the state of nature while still living within society.

Furthermore, the cultural amendment of education is the only viable option available to us, since it is impossible to return to our true origin, the state of nature. Jean

49 YG, p. 122.

Starobinski summarises this impossibility as follows:

La transformation est irréversible; le chemin du retour n'est ouvert qu'aux rêveurs. Pour véhément qu'en soit le désir, il n'est pas permis de rétrograder. Tout ce qui est en notre pouvoir, c'est de réveiller et de garder vive la *mémoire* de l'état de nature⁵⁰.

A return to the state of nature is only possible in dreams or a certain memory. Through an imaginative or reconstructive memory, we must hold onto the idea of the state of nature and use it as a guide for navigating our current social circumstances in the most natural way possible; for, having inevitably “fallen” from the state of nature, we can only seek to mitigate the contaminating effects of society. Education is thus a *cultural* process meant to encourage the development of the *natural* (a concept that, while itself formal, has supplanted more abstract notions of the ideal in Rousseau) within both men and women.

The state of nature is meant to be understood as a useful, fictional point of reference and not as an empirical, anthropological moment in human history. Rousseau tries to use the state of nature narrative as if it were “adequate for acquiring and expressing those deep truths about human nature and what kinds of life are best⁵¹.” In short, he seems to use the state of nature as a heuristic device. In his work, Rousseau does not always use literary devices (narrative, metaphor, etc) as a means of accessing what he believes to be fundamental truths. However, in *Émile*, Rousseau primarily uses the state of nature narrative and appeals to the natural man and the natural woman as reference points which allows him to name truths about “the natural” as well as how the ideal man and the ideal woman should be shaped by education.

If claims can be made about the ideal man and the ideal woman through

⁵⁰ TO, p. 344.

⁵¹ LD, p. 33.

justifications that rely upon nature, this implies that the state of nature may be more than a simple heuristic device to Rousseau. Although he insists that nature is but a useful fiction, he seems to be seduced by his own imaginary narrative; because he bases his understanding of men and women as well as his entire educational programme on what is natural and what is supposed to be respectful of nature, the Rousseauist conception of nature thereby becomes more than a useful fiction. As much as Rousseau swears the state of nature is but a heuristic device, *his use of the concept* suggests he-- at least occasionally-- believes otherwise. The state of nature does not act as a helpful springboard or exemplar for his arguments; it acts as the very foundation of his thought. Furthermore, if the state of nature were simply understood as a fiction to which we could not possibly return, the natural foundation upon which Rousseau constructs his educational programme would be cast into doubt; why appeal to a concept that we could never hope to successfully approximate? The task would be doomed from the start.

Throughout his corpus, Rousseau repeatedly repositions the state of nature. Consequently, what he deems to be a close, “natural-ish” second to the state of nature also fluctuates. Before turning to some of the representations of the state of nature in *Émile*, let us first consider examples drawn from two of Rousseau's other texts: *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. In the *Discours*, the state of nature is identified as a time when humans lived an animalistic life in the forest⁵². In this state of nature, savage man had no language or dwelling and he sought only to satisfy his physical needs. Here, families did not exist; men's role in maintaining the species ceased after the sexual act and women only tended to the children until they could fend for themselves⁵³. In contrast, “le barbare

⁵² OF, p. 38.

⁵³ In *Discours*, it is unclear how long it takes for children to be able to fend for themselves.

de l'*Essai* a une famille, une cabane et une langue, même si elle se réduit au 'geste et à quelques sons inarticulés'⁵⁴." If primitiveness is gauged by the absence of families, lodging and language-- in short, social structures and social necessities-- then it would seem the state of nature presented in the *Discours* is more "primitive" than that which is outlined in the *Essai*. The state of nature in the first case seems to be more pure, less contaminated by social influence. I will question this split between purity and contamination shortly.

One can draw a parallel between the gender norms in the previous chapter and the two states of nature I just outlined. The state of nature in the *Discours* requires a great deal of independence; a solitary life in the woods necessitates that such an attribute figure prominently in one's constitution. One of the ideal man's main attributes is thus independence. Because there is no language of any kind and because humans only interact for the purposes of sexual reproduction, there are neither words nor, presumably, complex gestures with which to express opinions and no social context in which to voice them. In this way, being susceptible to others' opinions becomes impossible; the ideal man's indifference to others' opinions echoes the state of nature where opinions were irrelevant. Finally, consider pity in the *Discours*' state of nature:

au lieu de cette maxime sublime de justice raisonnée,
Fais à autrui comme tu veux qu'on te fasse, inspire à
tous les hommes cette autre maxime de bonté naturelle,
bien moins parfaite, mais plus utile peut-être que la
précédente: *Fais ton bien avec le moindre mal d'autrui*
*qu'il est possible*⁵⁵.

While pity is not justice in a lawful sense, it does involve an emotional reaction and a sensitivity to the mistreatment and misfortune of others. The natural emotion of pity

54 DG, p. 357.

55 OF, p. 66.

permits savage humans to identify and to avoid (or at least to minimise the prevalence of) occurrences that are unfair or unjust. For example, “c'est [la pitié] qui détournera tout sauvage robuste d'enlever à un faible enfant, ou à un vieillard infirme, sa subsistance acquise avec peine⁵⁶.”

Rousseau broaches the topic of the savage person's pity by setting his own understanding of the state of nature against the brutish and harsh version put forth by Thomas Hobbes. According to Rousseau, Hobbes neglected to consider the innately natural feeling of pity which resides within the savage and which mitigates the selfish and self-preserving drives⁵⁷. Rousseau uses examples drawn from the animal kingdom to justify his assertion that pity is innate in the savage; consider, for example, that certain animals are naturally disturbed in the company of their dead kin. Rousseau thereby tries to cast pity in an animalistic light; pity is something which innately exists in animals and, because humans are *related* to animals (or, more precisely, in the state of nature we *were* uniquely gifted animals, though-- once socialised-- I doubt that Rousseau would feel comfortable saying humans *are still* animals), so too does pity innately exist in humans. For Rousseau: Before reason, there is pity. In fact, reason sometimes corrupts or compromises one's natural feelings of pity towards others. So what can be gleaned from this natural pity?

Well, I understand natural pity to be a “proto-intolerance” for injustice which, in more socialised contexts, develops into the full-blown intolerance for injustice that the ideal man possesses according to Rousseau's gender norms. In short, the ideal man reflects the more “primitive” state of nature that was elaborated in the *Discours*. He is said to embody the key traits named as emblematic of this fictional time and place.

⁵⁶ OF, p. 66.

⁵⁷ OF, pp. 63-64.

Because the state of nature proposed in the *Essai* includes families, dependence figures more prominently; families are by definition groups of people who rely upon one another in various ways. The ideal woman is said to be quite dependent upon others. In this way, the ideal woman seems more closely aligned with the particular state of nature presented in the *Essai*. Thanks to language and social units like the family, opinions have both a means to be expressed and a forum in which to express them. The ideal woman, who is supposed to be sensitive to such opinions, is then able to manifest such a sensitivity. Finally, since lodging exists in this state of nature, the ideal woman may therefore tend to the work of the private sphere: child-rearing and the upkeep of the home, for example. The ideal woman becomes associated with a state of nature that is less primitive-- less pure-- than the state of nature which seems to value traits associated with the ideal man. Man may then be seen as representing a purer or more original nature than that of woman⁵⁸. She will instead represent a derivative nature, or a non-nature. It is unclear whether Rousseau believes the ideal woman is a derivative nature or a non-entity who is so derived or removed from nature that she has no existence except as a life-support system in whichever state of nature (however primitive).

In *Émile*, Rousseau often refers to other points in time that are *not* the state of nature *tout court* but which nonetheless serve to imperfectly illustrate some of the state of nature's characteristics. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Rousseau compares the "country context" with the "city context." Although the country context manifests many of the social trappings and ills Rousseau wishes to avoid, it does at least fare better than the city context. The country context is not as good as the state of nature (which we

⁵⁸ The assertion that the ideal woman is more closely aligned to the second state of nature described here, while the ideal man is more closely related to the first is an idea that can be found in a slightly different form in Okin 1979, p. 121.

cannot return to anyway, even if we wished to do so), but it is preferable to the hyper-socialised and highly contaminated city context. Rousseau's aim is not that we all live within the country context. Instead, he refers to the country context to show his readers a place where people are closer to their ideal selves than their contaminated, urban counterparts.

Rousseau also uses childhood as a point in time where individuals are generally purer (and so, closer to a state of nature) than they are in adulthood. As Starobinski emphasises, the innocence of childhood runs parallel to the innocence of the state of nature⁵⁹. Just as the state of nature is meant to represent a time before the contaminating effects of society, so too is childhood portrayed as a time preceding the social contaminants of adulthood. Again, childhood is not as perfect an example as the state of nature, though, like the country context versus the city context, it does act as an excellent counterpoint to adulthood.

Is any originary point that Rousseau identifies, such as the state of nature, the country context, or childhood truly pure? Can such origins really be free from all social contaminants? Every originary point must in some sense be “always already social” since some constituent element of this origin results in the “fall” into a more socialised state⁶⁰. In fact, Rousseau's conception of nature involves a *necessary fall* or degradation. Therefore, nature cannot be understood as wholly (or, arguably, “holy”) pure; nature must by its very definition contain a “social seed” that leads to its inevitable “supplementation by culture⁶¹.” The more primitive state of nature may thus collapse at certain points and times into the less primitive state of nature. The rare and mostly

59 TO, p. 23.

60 YG, p. 115.

61 YG, p. 115.

sexual interactions between wild individuals may become more frequent and may eventually result in the formation of the family such as it is represented in the less primitive state of nature. However, the country context cannot be understood without its opposite, and the understanding that the country context may with time collapse into the city context. The same applies to childhood. As the child grows, the opportunities for the child to become a contaminated adult are most plentiful. Deutscher summarises this point well:

... every supposedly original state contains the possibility of its own loss in the form of its immanent degradation or substitution, replacement or supplementation. The origin is not autonomous of the supplement⁶².

The “social seed” thus waits for the right opportunity to present itself. I do not mean to imply that this “social seed” has a consciousness. I use the term as a way of underlining how the threat of contamination lives-- i.e., virtually-- within the supposedly pure conception of nature, thereby rendering nature structurally impure or less-than-pure from the outset, before any supplementation occurs. The origin exists in conjunction with its supplementation, and the supplementation persists in a virtual or latent form.

Remarkably, the not-conscious or *impensé* here is *social*; the *impensé* is usually considered as being pre-social or “natural.”

If the natural person or the natural setting contains the possibility of contamination, it is also this possibility that renders education feasible. The properly educated child and the poorly socialised or “corrupted” child have both had their nature supplemented with the cultural amendment of education. In this way, education, or, to put it in more broadly, culture, becomes a “necessary evil” that represents “le progrès

⁶² HT, p. 41.

comme la possibilité de perversion⁶³.”

What does this imply for the Rousseauist conception of nature? Let us turn to Derrida, in the hopes that a textual excerpt may illuminate the issue:

... la nature ne se supplée point: son supplément ne procède pas d'elle-même, ne lui est pas seulement inférieur mais autre. Et pourtant toute l'éducation, pièce maîtresse de la pensée rousseauiste, sera décrite ou prescrite comme un système de suppléance destiné à reconstituer le plus naturellement possible l'édifice de la nature⁶⁴.

Heterogeneous with regard to that to which it is intimately tied, the supplement, any supplement to nature is something which does not actually supplement nature: i.e., that which it is *supposed* to supplement. Instead, the supplement stands apart from and inferior to nature. Rousseau conceives of education as capable of “reconstituer le plus naturellement possible l'édifice de la nature,” yet this appears to be a contradiction in terms. If supplementation is at a remove from nature, supplementation could not have truly natural repercussions in the individual. Or perhaps, the cultural amendment of education-- the supplement-- “est l'image et la représentation de la nature. Or l'image n'est ni dans ni hors de la nature⁶⁵.” Individuals who have received the supplement of education may represent nature, but their make-up is fundamentally at a remove from nature by virtue of the difference of essence of the supplement itself. In the same way that *différance* is, for Derrida, neither presence or absence, the supplement represents neither a deficiency nor a plenitude, neither an actuality nor a potentiality. The supplement represents both the impossibility of being natural and simultaneously allows for that very same possibility to manifest itself.

63 DG, p. 211.

64 DG, p. 209.

65 DG, p. 214.

Rousseau points out several occasions throughout his educational programme where the ideal man and the ideal woman may become contaminated by the negative elements of society. Even once one's education is completed, a person's integrity as a "properly denatured" being may be corrupted; one *must* be constantly vigilant against the threat of contamination. I will turn my attention to an occasion Rousseau identifies as particularly perilous: the baby's first steps towards acquiring language during its first education. My analysis will illustrate the uncriticised ambiguities in Rousseau's binary logic, and their consequent instability; it will also highlight the burden women are called to bear as mediators between natural and social elements.

It should come as little surprise that Rousseau makes a distinction between a language that is natural or original, and a language that springs forth from the social realm. The natural language is common to all men and "c'est celle que les enfants parlent avant de savoir parler⁶⁶." This language is not fully articulated in the conventional sense, though it is vocal and expressive. I understand this natural language as being primarily concerned with affectivity; what is said and the particular sounds themselves are less important than the emotions expressed through sound. Rousseau offers us another piece of information about the natural language and the relationship wet nurses⁶⁷ have with it:

Les nourrices sont nos maîtres dans cette langue; elles entendent tout ce que disent leurs nourrissons; elles leur répondent, elles ont avec eux des dialogues très bien suivis; et quoiqu'elles prononcent des mots, ces mots sont parfaitement inutiles; ce n'est point le sens du mot qu'ils entendent, mais l'accent dont il est accompagné⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ EE, p. 74.

⁶⁷ As mentioned in the introduction, this is another occasion when some confusion may result from the shift from talking about the ideal woman to the wet nurse. In this instance, Rousseau draws from the descriptive and discusses wet nurses.

⁶⁸ EE, p. 74.

Wet nurses are the masters of natural language. They listen to everything their babies say and they answer their babies too. Wet nurses even carry on “conversations” with babies. Although the actual words used by the wet nurse are incomprehensible to the baby, the infant does understand the tone [transl. of *l'accent*] used by the woman. This tone lends credence to natural language's affectivity; for example, through tone, the wet nurse and the baby may express emotions such as love, joy, perhaps even frustration.

A few pages later, Rousseau mentions how, since birth, children are exposed to what may be referred to as a socialised, or adult, language. Even before babies are able to understand what is being said or to imitate the sounds they hear, adults speak to children. Rousseau questions whether babies even have the auditory capacities to perceive speech the way adults do. He then returns to the issue of wet nurses and the development of (social) language:

Je ne désapprouve pas que la nourrice amuse l'enfant par des chants et des accents très gais et très variés; mais je désapprouve qu'elle l'étourdisse incessamment d'une multitude de paroles inutiles auxquelles il ne comprend rien que le ton qu'elle y met. Je voudrais que les premières articulations qu'on lui fait entendre fussent rares, faciles, distinctes, souvent répétées et que les mots qu'elles expriment ne se rapportassent qu'à des objets sensibles qu'on pût d'abord montrer à l'enfant. La malheureuse facilité que nous avons à nous payer de mots que nous n'entendons point commence plus tôt qu'on se pense. L'écolier écoute en classe le verbiage de son régent, comme il écoutait au maillot le babil de sa nourrice. Il me semble que ce serait l'instruire fort utilement que de l'élever à n'y rien comprendre⁶⁹.

While it is acceptable for the wet nurse to sing joyful and varied songs to an infant, Rousseau disapproves of the wet nurse who speaks incessantly to a baby. After all, the baby will understand only the tone of her speech and not its content. Rousseau would

⁶⁹ EE, pp. 81-82.

prefer that the baby's first exposure to social language consist in the simple and repeated naming of concrete objects that are presented to the child. This would thereby preclude instilling in the child a receptivity to speech that is beyond his understanding; such a receptivity or passivity is associated with an educational system where teachers subject their students to lectures which are beyond their comprehension. In short, exposing a baby to social language exposes him/her to a myriad of ideas and words that have little or nothing to do with "real life" (ie: concrete experience). Acquiring language takes us away from a more natural existence where a language of affectivity and a tangible reality predominate; Rousseau would like to delay this as long as possible and avoid first crowding the baby's mind with a (social) language that has little to do the "real world."

It would be a prudent step to first establish whether the wet nurse is in fact engaging with the child in the same way in both textual excerpts. In the first case, the wet nurse understands the child's vocalisations yet responds with words from the social, or adult, language. She cannot completely return to the natural language; she can only reproduce its key affective tone in the language of adults. Therefore, although the child does not comprehend *the meaning* of these words (and thus, the words themselves are characterised as useless), s/he does seem to understand *the tone* in which the words are spoken. In the second case, the wet nurse uses the same "paroles inutiles auxquelles [l'enfant] ne comprend rien que le ton qu'elle y met." Indeed, in both cases, the wet nurse responds to the child by using words whose meanings are incomprehensible; the child is only able to make sense of the wet nurse's tone of voice (ie: her expressions of affectivity).

Rousseau's opinions of the wet nurse's role here are mixed. On one hand, he values that she is able to communicate affectively with the child. On the other, he

devalues her work because she is also slowly taking the baby away from natural, purely affective communication. She both understands what is most important (affective communication) *and* encourages the baby's exit from such a natural, linguistic state.

Rather than drawing upon a contemporary understanding of how language is acquired by children, I choose to focus upon how contamination (which equals adult language or, more broadly, culture) figures quite prominently in pure, natural language as well as in the course for language acquirement proposed by Rousseau.

Arguably, natural language contains certain building blocks of the adult language. Once the baby has moved past simple gurgling or cooing, the sounds s/he makes are imitative of the adult language; they rely on a mixture of vowel and consonant sounds to express affectivity. The child masters neither the correct form nor the meaning of the words, but s/he seizes upon a few of the basic components of spoken, adult language. In this way, the contamination of adult language exists within the supposedly natural language.

Rousseau proposes that, as the first step towards acquiring language, babies should be shown objects and informed of the object's name. Presumably, a baby would see the object, hear a word spoken by an adult and be able to associate the vocalisation (or word) to its corresponding meaning. However, if babies are incapable of knowing the meaning of words in a general way, how could they then learn the meaning of words through such an association? If the words themselves hold no meaning to a baby, it becomes impossible to attribute meaning by associating sounds and objects. Conversely, if babies are capable of succeeding thanks to Rousseau's proposed course of action, this implies that babies possess a predisposition towards acquiring adult language. Yet again, the social seed lurks within what it intended to be pure, or all natural.

The case of natural language and the wet nurse highlights how women are the site of tension between oppositionalities such as nature versus culture. The wet nurse is said to be a master of the natural language; she is supposed to understand what the baby is saying. She is thus affiliated to nature by virtue of this alleged understanding. That said, it is questionable if she truly is a master of the natural language. She may understand the child, but she responds in the adult, or social, language. Were her mastery of the natural language complete, she would be able to express herself with it as well. Were she familiar exclusively with the social language, she would be incapable of knowing what the child was saying. The wet nurse straddles the opposition between the two languages, representing neither wholly.

In this way, and others, Rousseau develops the phantasm of nature which guides his thought. The Rousseauist phantasmatic universe is one in which man is nature, action, independence and thus a heartier manifestation of the natural. Woman becomes nature too, but derivatively. Nature cannot consist only of passivity and tasks related to the survival of the species (such as breeding and child-rearing); these are the kinds of traits and skills at which the ideal woman excels. This split between a “heartier” nature and a derived nature echoes the split between the more primitive state of nature and the less primitive one. The ideal man is more closely associated with the first state, just as he represents a “heartier” manifestation of nature by virtue of his affiliation with action, independence, etc. The ideal woman is associated with the second, or familial state of nature and she represents a less vigorous, more passive nature by virtue of her affiliation with domestic obligations. The ideal woman's nature is derivative, but it is still necessary. Rousseau's phantasm of nature is internally complex: what counts as natural differs for each sex, and each variation could not exist in society without the support of

the other.

The topography of Rousseau's phantasm is divided in two. On one side, there is the ideal man. On the other side, there is the ideal woman. Each are subject to their own rules of incarnation for what it means to be natural. The ideal personality, the correct skills, and the proper morality differ between them. What is best for the ideal woman is not what is best for the ideal man and vice versa. The worst that the ideal man can be is "less worse" than the worst an ideal woman can be. The highs and lows for each sex follow differing logics; each sex may reach different peaks and valleys, as it were. The individual who transgresses the gendered limits of the topography is perhaps the very worst of all cases; each sex must remain within his or her gendered guidelines, lest further degeneracy ensue. I will return to the issue of this division based on sexual difference.

We cannot return to the state of nature; though nature-- as a heuristic device-- profoundly shapes the terrain of Rousseau's phantasmatic topography, returning to a natural state is a foreclosed possibility. The fall from nature is unavoidable; a return, while perhaps dreamed of by some, is impossible. Consequently, men and women must respect and obey the gender-specific guidelines set forth by Rousseau; doing so is the only way humans can become something better than corrupted and improperly denatured creatures. Humans cannot go back to being their truly natural selves (as they existed in whichever state of nature Rousseau pinpointed). Instead, according to Rousseau's logic, humanity must move forward in a way that is as reminiscent of "the natural" as possible. Without this forward-movement, it is likely that the social corruption and contamination would increase further; it is for "our own good" that everyone must follow their gender-specific guidelines.

Nature, though it is meant to act as a guiding theoretical principle, “reçoit une évidence presque concrète, par la vertu d'un langage qui sait donner à l'imaginaire tous les caractères de la présence⁷⁰.” Metaphors which guide Rousseau's reflection on nature seduce the reader (and quite possibly Rousseau himself, as I suggested earlier) into believing such a conception of nature actually exists; with the help of metaphors and a literary style, the imaginary *évidence* is imbued with an illusory presence (or reality). Although such metaphoric stylings are meant to give credence to his assertions, upon further analysis, these metaphors and literary elements introduce contradictions into the text. I will encourage the interaction between a prescription and a metaphor mentioned in my first chapter: the requirement that a girl become accustomed to a limited freedom and the metaphor that equates the ideal woman with the earth (ie: the soil).

Girls may experience a period of adaptation in the face of limits being placed upon their freedom. At first, girls may complain or offer resistance to such limits. Rousseau maintains that one must simply enforce the restriction until the girl's behaviour mirrors her natural inclination to require such a limitation. While natural, limits to her freedom and the related concept of her servitude require initial enforcement for the natural inclination to prosper. Then, according to this logic, would the African-American slaves of the early United States have also had their “natural inclination towards servitude and a limited freedom” initially enforced? Both arguments are essentialist, but the second case is more unsettling to contemplate and more likely to emphasise the absurdity inherent to such claims.

Later in the text, Sophie is characterised as being “une terre bien préparée qui n'attend que le grain pour rapporter⁷¹.” The ideal woman, Sophie, and the embodiment of

⁷⁰ TO, p. 345.

⁷¹ EE, p. 538.

the female element is thus metaphorically associated with fertile soil. The female ideal is represented as the “incarnation” of the Earth: a passive, inertial entity, rich in nutrients, that supports other forms of life. How then can we explain the “earthy” girl's acting out against a limited freedom? It is contradictory to assert both that girls would act out and that the female is fertile soil.

Before reaching puberty, girls are more “hermaphroditic.” They do not exist as fully female; instead, girls may exist as a mix of both sexes. If girls were completely female, they would not go through a period of adaptation. Their natural inclinations towards a limited freedom would result in immediate acceptance of such limitations. Alternatively, even if the girls wished to act out in response, they would be unable to do so because their inertial earthiness would prevent it. They would be too passive and nurturing to pursue such a rebellious act. Through this particular lens, girls' acting out is understood as the product of the active, male element of their hermaphroditism. Boys resist having their freedom restricted; so too would girls who have not yet experienced puberty.

Another way of explaining this contradiction is in the assertion that girls do not grasp their essence as easily or as distinctly as boys do. Since the ideal woman is a mixed-thing, it may be more difficult for girls to realise what the make-up of their natural essence is. Also, boys may seize upon their essence more easily because considerable responsibility and *jouissance* accompany it. Boys will eventually act within the public sphere, participate in politics and be the patriarch of a household. They will occupy themselves with educating their mate as well. With the responsibilities comes great and repeated opportunities for *jouissance*.

How might the ideal woman's "hermaphroditism" (her straddling or shifting back and forth between the two halves of Rousseau's gendered divide) relate to Rousseau's phantasmatic topography? To answer this, let us examine one of the main material metaphoric qualities of Rousseau's phantasm of nature: the concepts of fluidity and solidity. The ideal man is solid and the ideal woman is fluid. For example, the ideal man is impermeable (or "solid") in the face of others' opinions. In contrast, the ideal woman is "fluid" in response to others' opinions; she may be influenced. This metaphoric topography looks deceptively simple, though further examination will reveal its inherent complexity.

Liquids are active in the sense that they change their shape to suit their environment. Consider a beverage assuming the dimensions of a tumbler, or a stream squeezing through crevices in a pile of rocks. The ideal woman, in turn, is active by virtue of her flexibility and adaptability. She will bend and flow according to male wishes. Even though the female is associated with *passivity*, here we see how *action* is a key component of the ideal woman's fluidity. In this sense, she is capable of more flexibility and adaptation than her solid, male counterpart.

In fact, the ideal woman's fluidity is quite necessary for her survival. Were she to be more "solid," she would risk facing the sanctions I mentioned in the first chapter. Should she fail to exemplify her gender norms (in which fluidity plays a prominent role), she might lose her husband, her children and her good-standing in the public's eye⁷². These consequences are disastrous and could lead to impoverishment, abandonment, or injury. The ideal woman *must* be pliable and adaptable. In short, she is forced to be that way. Since it is born out of such an urgent necessity, her fluidity is perceived as being

⁷² EE, p. 48.

both absurd and morally right. It is absurd because the ideal man would never be reduced to such fluidity; *his* nature could never tolerate such a thing, though *her* nature can and should tolerate it. Curiously enough, adaptability or fluidity is not a positive attribute. Her fluidity is morally right because the ideal woman is meant to be dependent on and to be of service to the ideal man. And her fluidity facilitates the existence of such a heterosexual relationship.

As previously stated, the concept of nature is not unitary; it has no integrity in and of itself. This point was suggested in the previous chapter when I asserted that there was no way to conceive of the ideal man as not already being whole in and of himself; the supposed complementarity of two “halved” sexes disintegrated as a consequence. Also, nature has two distinct *telo*i: one for the ideal woman, the other for the ideal man. The fragmentation of the concept of nature is underlined again within Rousseau's phantasmatic topography because the ideal woman frequently inhabits *both sides* of topography, despite the rule that neither sex wander into in the opposite sex's topography.

The ideal woman manifests traits that exist on both the male and female side of the topographical divide. She is, of course, passive, life-producing and life-sustaining; dependent on her husband, she tends to the home and the propagation of the species. However, in certain instances, the ideal woman is also called to be *active*, the polar opposite of the passivity she is said to exhibit.

Perhaps the best example of such an instance involves the first education of the children. The ideal woman must lactate and breastfeed her child⁷³, but she must also

73 This would be Rousseau's prescription. Once again, we witness the textual contradictions brought about by Rousseau's prescription that ideal women should breastfeed their own children coupled with his awareness that most women in the eighteenth century who were in the middle- and upper-classes hired wet nurses.

possess enough activity and insight to guide the child through this critically important first education. In this way, the ideal woman illustrates the complexity and composite constitution of a less pure nature, which Rousseau takes for every bit as “concrete” as the primordial one. Rather than marking a distinct split between the binary of passivity and activity, here nature seems to require both parts of the dichotomy to function properly. The ideal woman, in order to be natural, must-- in a move that becomes “perversely unnatural and natural”-- possess traits from both the male and female sides of the topography. This is a perversion since each sex is supposed to remain within its gendered topographical confines; the ideal woman cannot respect this obligation. Nevertheless, this transgression should also be understood as in some sense “natural” because paradoxically the woman must, in order to be natural, tend to the children's first education (which requires both her passivity and activity).

Rousseau may seek to minimise the importance of the ideal woman's role in the first, or natural, education. Proof of this may be found in the structure of the text itself. Although he addresses himself to a “tendre et prévoyante mère” in the body of the text, he mentions that the first education belongs to women in a lengthy footnote⁷⁴. While he claims to speak to mothers themselves, the explicitation of her task appears to be somewhat of an aside in the text. It is literally a footnote to a larger narrative.

While Rousseau may wish that the ideal woman's involvement in the first education remain a “lesser social activity,” such a wish is undone by many of his other assertions. Namely, he maintains that the ideal woman is more sociable than the ideal man. She is thoroughly invested in and dependent upon her family. She is receptive to others' opinions and she cares about her appearance. All of these traits align her with

74 EE, p. 35 n X.

other human beings and with the social realm. Because Rousseau associates the ideal woman with the social realm, her participation in the first education must be seen as significant and social.

This brings us to another aspect of Rousseau's metaphorical topography. While the ideal man is supposed to be closer to the more pure state of nature, he is also meant to be active in politics. The ideal woman, on the other hand, is closer to a derivative form of nature and is meant to stay away from politics. However, an analysis of both sexes' corresponding traits reveals that perhaps each is unsuited to the task to which they were assigned.

With her receptivity to others' opinions, her undeniable involvement with others, her fluidity, and her concern for appearances, the ideal woman may be able to act more effectively in politics than the ideal man. In contrast, the ideal man with his independence and indifference to others' opinions may hold himself too far apart from others to succeed in politics, much less to perpetuate a working democratic space of debate and negotiation. The ideal man has an intolerance for injustice which, presumably, is meant to help him in politics. Of course, the ideal woman does not possess such a trait. However, it is worth noting that-- thankfully for Rousseau-- she does have a tolerance to injustice *committed against her*.

Aristotle conceived of justice as being a "mean state"⁷⁵. The task then is to find the just mean that is mindful of the status of those individuals involved and which also represents neither a deficiency nor an excess of justice. If justice is thus framed, the ideal man may seem to better understand such a conception due to his intolerance for injustice. However, were his intolerance complete, would it not extend towards the ideal

75 NE, p. 76.

woman? If his intolerance for injustice were wholly manifested, he would perceive the injustices suffered by the ideal woman and would seek out the just mean. Instead he too possesses an intolerance for injustice committed against himself and a tolerance for injustice endured by others, namely the ideal woman. Given such a reprehensible tolerance for injustice-- or worse, a willful ignorance of injustice when it is personally beneficial-- the ideal man imperfectly realises his supposed intolerance for injustice and thereby throws into doubt his efficacy as a political agent.

Furthermore, the ideal man may be too consumed by the project of maintaining his own autonomy from others. Independence, indifference, and metaphorical solidity compromise the social drive; thus they also compromise his political effectiveness. This possibility contradicts the phantasmatic topography which aligns the ideal man with politics and a pure nature, and the ideal woman with a derived nature and the private sphere.

A final, fundamental element of Rousseau's phantasmic topography is his belief in the existence of two ontologically distinct and essentially separated sexes. Sexual difference is thus of utmost importance to Rousseau; it shapes his educational programme just as it shapes, with the dualistic Nature he relies on, his phantasmatic topography. It marks the most basic division in both his educational programme and in his phantasmatic topography. Should one ever wish to apply or relate either to one's self, the logical question one would ask before doing so is: What sex am I? From this first division, all other acceptable traits and skills will follow.

A theoretical move that has historically been important to feminist thought is distinguishing one's sex from one's gender. Sex consisted in bodily attributes that were said to be specific to a particular sex. For example, the female sex would be determined

by the presence of breasts and female reproductive organs. The male sex would be determined by the male reproductive organs. Gender, on the other hand, reflected the traits and skills associated via culture to a particular sex. For example, the female gender is associated with emotionality, whereas the male gender is associated with rationality. The division between sex and gender has proved useful for feminists and I do not intend to minimise its importance or its continued presence today. However, more recently, the lines between sex and gender have been blurred⁷⁶. In fact, the static and ordinary nature of the body has been put into question; it is to this idea that I focus my attention.

Judith Butler has argued that sexual difference “is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices⁷⁷.” By this she does not mean that discourse *causes* sexual difference, but that discourse (i.e., conceptuality, textuality, gestuality in a host of contexts) *cannot be separated from* sexual difference. By combining the material reality of the body with a discourse that decides “what counts” as determining a given sex, sexual difference is produced and reproduced:

And there will be no way to understand 'gender' as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as 'the body' or its given sex. Rather, once 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. 'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility⁷⁸.

Sex becomes a norm that imposes itself upon the body and permits the individual to gain

⁷⁶ Perhaps most notably so by Judith Butler in Gender Trouble (see bibliography).

⁷⁷ BM, p. 1.

⁷⁸ BM, p. 2.

“cultural intelligibility.” Sex thereby becomes one of the ways a person becomes a (social) person, so to speak. If sex is produced through the chiasm of bodies and discursive practices, it is not something which is static or pre-cultural (natural in a Rousseauian, originary sense). In this light, the foundational and essential sexual division proposed by Rousseau loses credibility; sexual difference as mere biological difference is itself a phantasm. The very structure of his phantasmatic topography falters under this view without the assurance of the pre-cultural (natural) existence of two essentially opposed sexes, one of which is a mixed thing, passive and passive-active. For our ends, however, this permits an exploration of the phantasm, as no philosophy-- perhaps no social group-- can legitimate and perpetuate itself without a narrative that is grounded on a foundational phantasm.

The necessity of such a phantasm is given further credence by Derrida's analysis of Rousseau's necessary reliance upon onanism. The contradictory role of the “dangerous supplement” is summarised as follows:

il conduit le désir hors du bon chemin, il fait errer loin des voies naturelles, le mène vers sa perte ou sa chute et c'est pourquoi il est une sorte de lapsus ou de scandale. Il détruit ainsi la nature. Mais le scandale de la raison, c'est que rien ne semble plus naturel que cette destruction de la nature ⁷⁹.”

Auto-eroticism turns desire's focus away from a suitable female mate; in this way, it represents a loss, a scandalous moving-away from the natural object of desire. Nature is obliterated in this moving-away, yet it is also reaffirmed for what could be more natural than supplementing the natural? Although onanism is “vécue dans l'angoisse⁸⁰” because it exposes Rousseau to the possibilities of castration, madness and death, he cannot set

⁷⁹ DG, p. 216.

⁸⁰ DG, p. 216,

aside the practice and the presences he conjures up in his imagination. Rousseau “ne peut renoncer à ce qui lui restitue immédiatement l'autre présence désirée; pas plus qu'on peut renoncer au langage⁸¹.” In fact, his use of onanism persists even though auto-affection is cause for considerable frustration as well. For, no matter how detailed or realistic his conjurings, the imagined (and so absent) presence is but an illusion: “S'y promet en s'y déroband, s'y donne en s'y déplaçant quelque chose qu'on ne peut même appeler rigoureusement présence⁸².” The supplement is maddening; while the imagination brings to life a “non-presence,” the lack inherent to such imaginings is obvious. The imaginary presence is present and absent; by the same movement, it is both.

The supplement is a terrifying menace, yet it is also the best protection against just such a menace. However, although Rousseau deems it to be perilous, the dangerous supplement is better than the alternative: cohabitation with women⁸³. Yes, it is a perversion. It destroys nature just as it asserts nature. It threatens Rousseau with castration, madness, death and frustration. It is a gesture which simultaneously gives and takes away the possibilities of presence, and nature. It is profoundly dangerous, but it is also profoundly preferable to-- and likely more satisfying than-- the “real thing” (ie: sexual entanglement with a woman, and the related possibility of embodying the truly natural).

How then will Derrida's analysis of Rousseau and onanism aid in the understanding of Rousseau's phantasm as it has been elaborated in this work? Like the phantasmatic topography and its most basic sexual division, onanism is absolutely

81 DG, p. 221.

82 DG, p. 222.

83 DG, p. 223.

necessary even though it undoes itself just as it asserts itself. Most importantly, onanism troubles the notion of an originary, natural form. A natural desire for a woman is deemed to be riskier than the admittedly dangerous supplement of onanism. The rightness and inflexibility of what is natural is thereby troubled; the “post-natural” (ie: the social, the supplement) is in fact deemed to be better than the natural. Much as the idea of there being two pre-cultural, distinct and opposed sexes is a foundational component of Rousseau's phantasm, so too is his conception of nature. With every act of supplementation, Rousseau's authorship simultaneously undermines and asserts this particular foundational phantasm of nature. The foundational phantasm as well as its necessary supplementation cannot be surrendered-- just as the language which permits and enacts such complexities and incoherencies never be surrendered.

I will address one final issue concerning Rousseau's phantasmatic topography: his descriptions of natural characteristics and identities. The traits and skills he maps out reflect his own society. For example, the woman is in the private sphere, financially and emotionally dependent upon her husband; this was the case for women of a certain social class in Rousseau's time. As such, the roles and traits assigned to the ideal woman, as necessities within the larger logic of “the natural,” become a phantasm. Additionally, although Rousseau often refers to the country context, it is unclear whether he had any significant contact with peasants or country life. This lack of clarity gives me pause. What experiences, be they lived or theoretical (that is, drawn from a text), does Rousseau use to justify his affection and valuation of the country context? I fail to see how his discussions and his qualified praise of the country context could be anything but a phantasm.

Chapter Three: Purity, Sex, and Socialisation

Comment ne voit-on pas qu'avec une si grande inégalité dans la mise commune, si la réserve n'imposait à l'un la modération que la nature impose à l'autre, il en résulterait bientôt la ruine de tous deux, et que le genre humain périrait par les moyens établis pour le conserver?

--Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, p. 467

Although he understood it to be necessary and important, Rousseau did not thoroughly embrace heterosexual sex⁸⁴. Within heterosexual couplings, he saw the possibility of ruin on either a large or small scale (for the species or for the two parties involved)⁸⁵. Through his discussion of sexual relations in *Émile*, many of the ideas I have previously mentioned are at play: namely, the contaminating influence of the public sphere, the comparative purity of the private sphere, the conception of man and woman that marks them as polar opposites, the marital unit as forming a co-dependent whole of two halves, and the woman playing the role of mediator between nature and society. The seduction game that occurs between the ideal man and the ideal woman echoes these concerns. The notions which are of primary importance to Rousseau resonate throughout his consideration of sexual relations. “Seduction game” is a term I have chosen to refer to the series of sexual advances and refusals that are supposed to occur between the ideal man and the ideal woman; Rousseau believes this tension, this seduction game, to be quite essential to heterosexual couplings. Because the ideas Rousseau holds most dear are visible within his treatment of heterosexual sex, the play of binaries in Rousseau's thought and, arguably, the critical aspect of these matrices of

84 Once more, I believe it is necessary to highlight that Rousseau considers only the possibility of heterosexual couplings; sex between one man and one woman is the only sort of sex he deems to be 'natural.'

85 This possibility of ruin on a personal or grand scale is echoed in the excerpt at the beginning of the chapter. It is echoed too in the *Discours*: “Parmi les passions qui agitent le cœur de l'homme, il en est une ardente, impétueuse, qui rend un sexe nécessaire à l'autre, passion terrible qui brave tous les dangers, renverse tous les obstacles, et qui dans ses fureurs semble propre à détruire le genre humain qu'elle est destinée à conserver” (OF, p. 67).

oppositions are highlighted. Of course, the amplification also underlines the instability of such matrices. I will outline the ways in which the ideas mentioned above manifest themselves in Rousseau's discussion of sexual relations.

Why is it important to discuss sexual relations as they are presented in *Émile*? Sex as sexuality and as coupling plays a key role in the ideal man's development. Sexual entanglement (which must necessarily occur within the confines the heterosexual marital unit) acts as the ideal man's *final and full* introduction to society. It is through sexuality (and thereby also marriage) that the ideal man is in some sense fully “socialised” or brought into closer contact with society. The ideal woman, by virtue of her strong ties to domestic and species-related concerns like child-bearing and child-rearing, is more social than her male counterpart. Ideal women are therefore called to act as “the agents of men's socialisation⁸⁶.” This is a critical step in the ideal man's educational programme. Although he has been taught to embody his natural traits and skills, he must also exist within a society: “Émile n'est pas fait pour rester toujours solitaire; membre de société, il en doit remplir les devoirs⁸⁷.” It is necessary to introduce Émile, the ideal man, to society. The best way of doing this involves finding a mate that is worthy of him. The précepteur, or Rousseau's authorship, summarises this element as follows:

Ton coeur, dis-je au jeune homme, a besoin d'une compagne; allons chercher celle qui te convient: nous ne la trouverons pas aisément peut-être, le vrai mérite est toujours rare; mais ne nous pressons ni ne nous rebutons point. Sans doute il en est une et nous la trouverons à la fin, ou du moins celle qui en approche le plus. *Avec un projet si flatteur pour lui je l'introduis dans le monde*⁸⁸.

The ideal man is introduced to society (le monde) via the “projet flatteur” of finding him

⁸⁶ SP, p. 6.

⁸⁷ EE, p. 429.

⁸⁸ EE, p. 430. My emphasis.

a suitable mate. Such a mate would be the ideal woman, or at least a woman who closely resembles her ideal. The search for a mate will likely be a difficult task, but the précepteur is optimistic about its eventual outcome. Through the ideal woman (or a reasonable approximation thereof), the ideal man will become sociable (or socialised). Relatedly, “being found” is the first moment of true significance in the ideal woman's life. In fact, all of her informal education up until that point was in preparation of her becoming the ideal man's wife; before she may fulfill her natural telos of propagating the species, she must achieve a related telos that must precede breeding: becoming a wife. Because of the key role finding a mate plays in the development of both the ideal man and the ideal woman, it becomes essential to give these issues some consideration.

Of course, the agent of socialisation should be the life partner of the ideal man; an ideal man should certainly not seek out a feminine, socialising influence through sex that occurs outside of the confines of marriage. It is only with a worthy woman who properly manifests her natural self that the ideal man (who also properly manifests his natural self thereby) should seek to become socialised through sex and its necessary precursor: marriage. Sex that occurs outside of this acceptable context would not have a socialising effect; it is not so much the sexual act itself that socialises; instead, it would be better to understand *sexual desire and its related seduction strategies* as having a socialising influence upon the ideal man. Sexual desire, or the heterosexual male “pull” towards a woman, as well as the seduction game played by the woman are what have the socialising influence.

Before proceeding, I wish to quickly sketch the key differences between what I call (the more natural) “sexual need” and (the more socialised) “sexual desire.” Though Rousseau will use the term “desire” when referring to cases that follow what I call

“sexual need” and “sexual desire,” I believe it is beneficial to conceive of desire as something which shaped by social influences and therefore irrelevant to the case of “sexual need.” Consider the following excerpt from the *Discours* as a means of engaging this distinction:

Commençons par distinguer le moral du physique dans le sentiment de l'amour. Le physique est ce désir général qui porte un sexe à s'unir à l'autre; le moral est ce qui détermine ce désir et le fixe sur un seul objet exclusivement, ou qui du moins lui donne pour cet objet préféré un plus grand degré d'énergie. Or, il est facile de voir que le moral de l'amour est un sentiment factice né de l'usage de la société...⁸⁹

Although Rousseau splits the concept of love into its physical and moral pieces, I find the use of the term of “love” for both cases to be confusing. Romantic love (in the sense of a deep affection, understanding, and commitment for a partner of the opposite sex⁹⁰) does not actually exist in the first case; with that in mind, I prefer to differentiate between the two by calling the first sexual need, and the second sexual desire (which is a sexual need that must be accompanied by romantic love and other “artificial” social customs). In the *Discours*, Rousseau maintains that the sexual need would occur fairly infrequently because it would not be augmented by social elements such as love, disagreements with other male suitors, and imagination. Sexual need is thus a physical, urgent, yet easily sated need: “chacun attend paisiblement l'impulsion de la nature; s'y livre sans choix, avec plus de plaisir que de fureur; et, le besoins satisfait, tout le désir est éteint⁹¹.”

Sexual desire, on the other hand, is the physical need complicated and amplified by romantic love, the requirement of monogamy, and social practices (namely, marriage

⁸⁹ OF, p. 68.

⁹⁰ Rousseau's heteronormativity is at play again here.

⁹¹ OF, p. 68.

and its related seduction game). The ideal man is directed to avoid the sexual services of prostitutes, even though he will be inclined to sate himself sexually before finding his lifemate (Sophie)⁹². It is also said that “si [les] désirs [de l'homme idéal] l'entraînent vers le sexe, il n'y trouve point ce qu'il cherche, et son cœur préoccupé le retient⁹³.” The ideal man is thus seeking not only the physical act of sex; he seeks also romantic love (which must in turn be accompanied by marriage).

While I will not address in great detail what Rousseau understood to be love, I will say that it seems to be highly romanticised (and so likely impossible) in its requirements of total understanding and openness between a man and a woman⁹⁴. N.J.H. Dent neatly summarised the romantic love (as it is explained in *Émile*) as follows: “In such intimate personal [romantic] love, the lover is skinlessly exposed in all his hopes and fears, his sense of himself and what he means, to the return of his loved one to him and to his love⁹⁵.” The expression “skinlessly exposed” (while, in my case, it conjures up the unappetising image of raw chicken breasts) highlights the exceptionally great intimacy and openness that is *supposed* to come with romantic love (and so also with sexual desire). It is doubtful if such a love could truly manifest itself; a dissatisfaction with romantic love and subsequent efforts to supplement it may be found in some of Rousseau's autobiographical writings. That said, and with the concepts of “sexual need” and “sexual desire” sketched in their broadstrokes, I must now put aside further discussion on the subject of romantic love in favour of returning to the issue at hand: heterosexual couplings between the ideal man and the ideal woman. Though romantic love plays a role in sexual desire, I will focus exclusively upon heterosexual couplings

92 EE, p. 432.

93 EE, p. 433.

94 Again, I feel compelled to point out the heteronormativity inherent to this romantic love.

95 RI, p. 152.

(as, according to Rousseau, they are meant to occur within a context of married, heterosexual, romantic love).

It is through sexual desire that the ideal man is made aware of his relation to the species. Although the ideal woman has consistently been affiliated with her species and with her sex, it is only through (married, heterosexual) sex that the ideal man-- the individual par excellence-- comes to feel an affiliation with his species. As established in chapter one, the ideal man will only be his sex (or, in other words, feel affiliated to his species) at certain moments in his life such as when he is sexually desirous or sexually engaged. His sense of being a member of the species is centred around his sexuality and his reproductive organs.

How, then, are sexual relations negotiated between the ideal man and the ideal woman? Let us refer to the advice given by the précepteur to Sophie:

Vous régnerez longtemps par l'amour, si vous rendez vos faveurs rares et précieuses, si vous savez les faire valoir. Voulez-vous voir votre mari sans cesse à vos pieds, tenez-le toujours à quelque distance de votre personne. Mais, dans votre sévérité, mettez de la modestie, et non du caprice; qu'il vous voie réservée, et non pas fantasque; gardez qu'en ménageant son amour vous ne le fassiez douter du vôtre. Faites-vous chérir par vos faveurs et respecter par vos refus; qu'il honore la chasteté de sa femme sans avoir à se plaindre de sa froideur⁹⁶.

The ideal woman must withhold sex, but not so much that she may be perceived as being frigid. She must give sex to her mate but also periodically refuse so that, when she does consent, it is a precious gift. By refusing to be sexually receptive all the time, she thereby exerts a certain degree of power over the ideal man. She guarantees that her husband will remain interested in her.

⁹⁶ EE, p. 627.

Regardless of whether the ideal woman is desirous of her mate, “elle [...] repousse [l’homme] et se défend toujours, mais non pas toujours avec la même force, ni par conséquent avec le même succès⁹⁷.” The seduction game requires that she resist; this resistance camouflages whether she desires him or if she is only submitting to his desire:

Alors ce qu’il y a de plus doux pour l’homme dans sa victoire est de douter si c’est la faiblesse qui cède à la force, ou si c’est la volonté qui se rend; et la ruse ordinaire de la femme est de laisser toujours ce doute entre elle et lui⁹⁸.

The ideal man, celebrating a sexual victory, greatly enjoys not knowing if his mate is willfully consenting to sex, or not⁹⁹. The ideal woman is complicit in his doubt; she never reveals whether she was forced to acquiesce or if she truly wanted to have sex. This mystery ought to be maintained as it is part of what makes the ideal woman so attractive to the ideal man: the effacement or the non-existence of her sexual desire. Thankfully, such a ruse suits her well: “loin de rougir de leur faiblesse, [les femmes] en font gloire¹⁰⁰.” She delights in both her physical weakness, and her weakness in surrendering to the male’s sexual advances. Were she to be upfront about her sexual desire (or the lack thereof), she would be quite vulnerable. The mystery that surrounds her sexuality, and its corollary natural female weakness of ruse, are nonetheless necessary for the ideal woman’s well-being. She might be perceived as a tart if she were too forthright, or as frigid if she expressed her disinterest; either possibility is dangerous due to her financial dependence on her husband. The mystery is also necessary for the

97 EE, p. 468.

98 EE, pp. 468-469.

99 The language used by Rousseau in the previous excerpt is troubling. The ideal man rejoices in his victory (sexual conquest) in part because he’s not sure if he had consensual sex or not. Even though Rousseau briefly voices his disapproval of rape (“le plus libre et le plus doux de tous les actes n’admet point de violence réelle” E, p. 468), it invites an analysis of the text in terms of the usefulness of rape-- and/or the usefulness of the possibility of rape-- to the seduction game.

100 EE, p. 469.

well-being of the ideal man for, as I will show, his physical ability to be sexual is limited.

Because of the seduction game, the ideal man is supposed to confide in the ideal woman, to listen to her advice, to consult with her about important matters and to solve no problem without her assistance¹⁰¹. In this way, the ideal woman may covertly influence her mate's actions and opinions. She may thereby supplement her weakness¹⁰². Though she is restricted to the private sphere, she may thusly shape his behaviour in the public sphere. Of course, she should not seek to usurp the ideal man's position as the master of the house; the patriarch. She should exert her power quietly while respecting his superiority as master of the household. This familiar arrangement is supposed to even out the power distribution in the marital unit as well as solidify the marital bond. The ideal woman is financially and physically dependent on the ideal man; he is sexually dependent on her because of “la modestie et la honte dont la nature arma le faible pour asservir le fort¹⁰³.” According to this discourse, they are both dependent on each other in various ways; they are both influenced by each other's input.

Why should the ideal woman participate in such a game of sexual refusals? Firstly, this may be explained by the fact that her dependence upon her mate is more critical than his dependence upon her; hence, the unofficial motto of the ideal woman is said to be “survivre, c'est séduire¹⁰⁴.” She must maintain the ideal man's sexual interest in order to live; it is difficult to fathom how she could survive without his economic support. Playing the seduction game with the ideal man thereby becomes a matter of survival. If she is not successful, she may be abandoned (or possibly injured) by her

101 EE, p. 627.

102 SP, p. 87.

103 EE, p. 467.

104 IE, p. 208.

husband.

Secondly, a particular law of nature dictates that “la femme [a] plus de facilité d'exciter les désirs [que] l'homme [a] de les satisfaire¹⁰⁵.” The ideal man's sexual desire is greater than his physical ability to be sexual. Since his sexuality is linked to his sociability, so too does he possess a limited ability to be social; this is ironic, of course, since he is meant to spend much of his time in the public sphere tending to political and social matters. Male sexuality (and so also male sociability) may thus be understood as fragile and needy of female support. Socially, the ideal woman supports the ideal man through her domestic work and her greater social sensibilities. Sexually, female support comes in the form of female modesty:

it ensures both male potency in sexual encounters and male survival despite them. In the absence of female modesty, male desire would be either too weak to suit women's desire, or too strong to suit men's ability to perform¹⁰⁶.

The ideal woman's refusal of male sexual advances allows the ideal man to maintain the integrity of his virility. Periodic refusals help to eliminate occasions where he may be unable to perform sexually. The hypothetical absence of female modesty explains both a lack of male desire that would result in poor sexual performance, and an overly potent male desire that could not equal his physical abilities. The ideal woman is thereby in charge of balancing the sexual (and also social) forces for the good of the marital unit and for the good of society. Female modesty works to avoid the emasculation of the ideal man and ultimately the destabilisation of society; it works to maintain his fragile sexual-- and social-- virility. In a broader sense, the ideal woman must play the seduction game in order to maintain the integrity of the ideal man. He is weakened when

¹⁰⁵ EE, p. 468.

¹⁰⁶ SP, pp. 38-39.

he is affiliated to his sex; it is a sensitive time for him. Without the proper support from the ideal woman, his constitution may be compromised or corrupted. th

Rousseau's gender norms seek to establish two very distinct and opposite types; his prescriptions concerning sexual relations also seek to respect and reinforce this distinct oppositionality. In particular, the relative purity of each becomes important in the context of sexual relations. The ideal man is supposedly less pure because he must frequent the public sphere, a place that is “inevitably a locus of corruption, exploitation, and misery¹⁰⁷.” Although the ideal man is undoubtedly more pure than other men who did not undergo the Rousseauist educational programme, he is less pure than the ideal woman. Rousseau believed that the ideal woman was lucky to be excluded from public life; he also believed that the distinctness of the private sphere, or the home, served an immensely valuable purpose to society:

According to Rousseau, the exclusion of women from public life was necessary to preserve the purity and moral vigor of the home, so that the family could become the basis for the moral regeneration of society¹⁰⁸.

The public sphere is a place of corruption and exploitation where the private sphere is one of purity and morality. Though the ideal man is not corrupt and exploitive himself, it is likely taxing for him to move through a sphere where such social contaminants exist. Consequently, he is less pure. On the other hand, Sophie (or the ideal woman) is pure¹⁰⁹ and must maintain the family home as a safe haven of purity and morality. A social regeneration will occur because of this safe haven. In fact, women who did not respect their ideal were the cause of the degeneration of society. “These eighteenth century

107 SPE, p. 29.

108 SPE, p. 18.

109 EE, p. 518.

Eves¹¹⁰” could also be the cause of society's rebirth, provided they are willing to respect the gender norms put forth by Rousseau¹¹¹.

The relationship between purity and the split between the public and private sphere is echoed in the seduction game. The ideal man is less pure due to his prominent sexual desire. The ideal woman is more pure by virtue of the mysteriousness of her sexuality; because it is never clear how frequent or how strong her sexual urges are, she is in some sense spared the sullyng influence of overt sexual desire. This relative purity allows her to maintain the sanctity of the home. She is not compromised by the negativity of the public sphere, nor apparently is she compromised by strong sexual desire.

However, it is possible that she does harbour strong sexual urges which she hides in order to play the seduction game. Mystery does not in fact equal purity; the ideal woman may have few sexual urges, or she may simply be concealing them. The purity is neither clearly established nor refuted; instead, the mysteriousness of her sexuality is in effect mistaken for the purity of her sexuality.

In this light, the ideal woman's purity becomes illusory; an artifact necessary because of the ideal man's fragile sexuality. By extension, the purity of the domestic sphere may also be put into question. If the domestic goddess herself does not manifest an internal sexual purity, the purity of the domestic sphere itself may in turn be compromised. An impure entity could not hope to maintain the purity of certain location. The oppositionality between purity and contamination is thus harder to maintain. Destabilising elements are at work within the very concept of purity.

If men and women are in close proximity, they risk contaminating each other

110 SPE, p. 18.

111 Another case where Rousseau makes a prescription about how families *should* be in his time.

with their particular gender norms. Men and women have different bodies; these bodies in turn require that they respect norms that are specific to their body, or their sex. The segregation of the sexes in their respective spheres is one way in which the distinctiveness of each is meant to be maintained. If they acted within the same sphere, if they interacted excessively, they would contaminate each other. Each would lose hold of the 'natural' traits and skills that are supposed to be emblematic of their sex. Here, we return to the issue of the threat of contamination; it is a perpetual concern for Rousseau and the ideal types he theorises into being. Constant vigilance is required.

Instead of returning to the consequences suffered by those who disregard their gender norms, I will now suggest that, without the distinct oppositionality of the sexes, the ideal woman could not covertly rule over the ideal man. Due to her weakness, her alluring but modest sexual appeal, her dependence and her supposed purity, she is able to influence him covertly through the withholding and granting of sexual favours. Sexual relations thereby become the arena in which the distinctiveness of each sex is meant to be asserted as well as maintained.

Sexual relations between the ideal man and the ideal woman are intended to perpetuate the matrices of binarities elaborated in Rousseau's phantasmatic topography. Sexual relations seek to maintain the division between those binarities I've already addressed such as: activity versus passivity, independence versus dependence, and susceptibility to others' opinions versus indifference to opinions. It also introduces new binarities which further shape the phantasmatic topography: insatiability versus sexual indifference, virility versus impotence, and even death versus life. All of these are affiliated with either the male or female gender, and with either nature or society.

Through sexual relations, the ideal man is supposed to maintain his activity,

independence, indifference to opinion, insatiability, virility, as well as his own life. The ideal woman acts as a means for the ideal man to achieve these ends. Just as the gender norms dictated that she became the not quite natural mixed-entity who is of service to her species so that he may become the perversely natural and “heartier” telos of nature (the individual), she must also use gender norms to reduce and restrict herself so that the ideal man's sexuality may be fully and properly (read: with virility) manifested. In both cases, her work is supportive. Firstly, her work permits the ideal man to separate himself from his species by becoming an individual, a being-for-itself. Secondly, her work allows him to save face, sexually speaking, while remaining the true master of their heterosexual pairing. The ideal woman, in all things, is meant to be of service; she is a truncated being in effect so that the male may be whole on his own. Their union is not one of two halves forming a single whole.

However, if pressure is applied to this regimented split, the binaries collapse in upon themselves. The text thereby undoes itself. I will examine two particular cases of this: the ideal woman's activity and passivity, and the way sex itself straddles life and death, nature and society. I will approach the second case through a brief consideration of the ideal man's immunity and susceptibility to others' opinions.

Superficially, the ideal woman is passive during the seduction game. She is meant to refuse or to acquiesce. She is the object of desire; her status as a sexual being, while not denied outright by Rousseau, is at least camouflaged by the mystery that surrounds her sexuality. It should never be clear whether she is refusing sex because she is not interested, or because she is being coy. When she does consent to sex, these occasions are characterised as “rare and precious” to her husband; her engagement or enjoyment is fairly irrelevant. The nature of sexuality is fundamentally male. The

seduction game as well as the perspective with which sex is approached in *Émile* underline this point. The male is supposed to be active, soliciting, while the female is passive and periodically receptive.

Despite this supposed passivity, the ideal woman's role in the seduction game is surprisingly active (much as her work during a child's first education is also surprisingly active). She must, through modest refusals, maintain the ideal man's sexual interest. This seems to involve some contorsions; she has to find the correct balance between refusals and acceptances. Additionally, for the ideal woman, the main perk of the seduction game involves wielding covert power over her husband. If she appears sufficiently passive (although in fact this is an active process on her part), she may later have the chance to be *overtly* active (thanks to her *covert* power). She must therefore be passive in order to be active. In this way, the seed of activity lies within passivity's core. Now, the task of the ideal woman is to be active while maintaining the illusion of passivity. In order to pass as the woman who is respectful of her gender norms, she must conceal the activity that is inherent to her task. To be active, she must assume a pose of passivity. The two halves of the binary cannot stand apart; they exist in symbiotic relationship with one another, simultaneously allowing the possibility of their realisation, and refusing it.

As previously established, the ideal man should not be susceptible to others' opinions. If he possessed such a susceptibility, he would risk being contaminated by undesirable social elements which are (and should remain) foreign to his constitution. This indifference to others' opinions is one of the main personality traits of the ideal man. Despite this assertion, because of the seduction game, the ideal man is supposed to be receptive to his wife's input. How can this be?

In a strict sense, what Rousseau seeks to avoid happens in the very text he has

written: the two sexes contaminate each other. Through sex, the ideal woman influences the decisions and opinions of her husband, the ideal man. She is supposed to restrict her influence so that he may still remain the head of the household; regardless of this restraint, she is still shaping his behaviour and, by extension, his constitution. He is meant to be immune to the opinions of others, yet he is not immune to his wife's input. Because of the seduction game *elaborated by Rousseau himself*, contamination occurs between husband and wife. Contamination exists precisely where Rousseau seeks to eliminate it. The instability of the categories Rousseau creates is exposed. The ideal woman surreptitiously contaminates the ideal man, despite all efforts to keep the two distinct from one another.

Because sex brings the instability inherent in the text to the forefront, I will show how sex straddles life and death, then how it straddles nature and society. Sex represents the possibility of life because it perpetuates the species; heterosexual sex often results in babies. Due to her close affiliation with the species (via the secondary and female telos of nature) as well as her physical ability to bear children, the ideal woman best represents life. Sex also represents the possibility of death. As it was suggested in the quotation at the start of the chapter, sex-- if improperly used-- has the potential to destroy the human species. The ideal man seems tied to the possibility of death, where death is understood literally or figuratively; the ideal man may actually cease to exist or he may be drawn away from his ideal and thereby suffer a "figurative death"¹¹². If his sex drive were not controlled by the ideal woman, he would be killed, or at least emasculated, by insatiability or impotence.

¹¹² By figurative death, I mean that the man who fell from his ideal would have suffered a horrible fate; one which-- while not necessarily death itself (though a literal death may follow a fall from one's ideal)-- would be reminiscent of death in its finality and irreversibility.

Sexual relations may be particularly dangerous to the ideal man because he is supposed to only “be” his sex at certain times. To be affiliated with one's sex is to be close to one's species. Serving the ends of the species is not the natural telos which the ideal man is called to respect; he is meant to embody the perversely natural telos of the individual. Therefore, the ideal man is particularly vulnerable when he must “be” his sex. All the hard work of making him into an individual may be compromised; the threat of contamination figures both in the co-mingling of the sexes through marriage and in the sexual couplings. This may partially explain the need for the seduction game; the game is meant to lessen the risks to the ideal man.

Is it in fact accurate to link the male and death? Instead it may be more accurate to say that the ideal woman represents death-- and life. Since she is always her sex, always intimately tied with the species, from the male perspective, the ideal woman represents the possibility of death. She embodies every trait from which he distances himself. However, she also represents the possibility of life by virtue of her physical capabilities and the gender roles assigned to her. For the ideal man, she is a useful and pleasant necessity, yet she also represents the possibility of his undoing (his literal or figurative death). Both possibilities exist in the same moment, thereby metaphorically and simultaneously allowing and refusing each possibility.

Sex is also related to the binary of nature and society. Sex is natural in the sense that it existed in the state of nature, even though it occurred in a different way than Rousseau believes it should occur in society. Sex is also understood as natural because it is linked to the “original” and lesser conception of nature, where beings are meant to be of service to the species. However, since this particular or “female” conception of nature, to which ideal women belong exemplarily, is devalued in comparison to the

“male” conception of nature that produces individuals, the naturalness of sex is likewise put into question. It becomes something which is “beneath” the “natural” male individual, although the individual may still crave it. As mentioned above, sex certainly presents a risk to him.

Society exists within the concept of sex too. Firstly, it is through marriage and sex that the ideal man is fully “brought into” society. Secondly, sex must be tempered by the ideal woman's modesty. Rousseau says this modesty is given to the ideal woman by nature. However, in Rousseau's logic, such modesty cannot be natural; coyness is a social product since it did not figure within the “most pure” state of nature. As I mentioned, in the more primitive state of nature, couplings occurred without regard to modesty or convention; they occurred randomly and only out of sexual need. In general, the ideal woman is more sociable or socialised than the ideal man, thus her role in sex is both natural (in the feminine sense of the term) and social. She represents a threat of contamination in both respects; she belongs to two realms which are supposed to remain distinct from the ideal man, the individual par excellence. However, it is necessary that the ideal man be “socialised” or given a social context through marriage and sex. Without this “social initiation,” his functionality in the public sphere (*his* public sphere) would suffer. The ideal woman is in some sense “the potentially contaminating bridge” between both the concepts of feminine nature and society, as well as between the ideal man and society.

Heterosexual sex-- or the co-mingling of the ideal man and the ideal woman-- is necessary but dangerous. Although Rousseau wishes to keep the two sexes apart, their interaction is unavoidable and even required; their interaction results in the blurring of the distinctions Rousseau made between the two of them. The phantasmatic topography,

including the gender norms and gender-based oppositions, he created necessarily collapses in upon itself. Each term of a binary cannot exist entirely apart from its opposite; though they are not meant to exist apart, they both must have their own distinctness. The “seed” that undoes Rousseau's phantasmatic topography is embedded within the very structure he created.

Conclusion: Looking Back And Looking Ahead

In this project, I have done my best to sketch some of the gender norms that follow from nature as they are outlined by Rousseau in *Émile*. These gender norms are part of Rousseau's phantasmatic topography. I used these gender norms as a means of showing that, despite Rousseau's claim to the contrary, the ideal man and the ideal woman are not two halves of a (maritally bonded) whole. Additionally, the gender norms result in the creation of two teloi of nature: one proper to the ideal woman, the other (and better one) proper to the ideal man.

I then turned my attention to the issue of contamination and how it threatens the starkly opposed gender norms in both ways that Rousseau identifies and ways he apparently fails to notice. I primarily used cases (stated and unstated) of contamination to trouble the Rousseauist natural gendered oppositions as well as his phantasmatic topography. With the help of Judith Butler, I also questioned the most basic split of his phantasmatic topography: the two sexes, male and female.

Finally, I examined sexual relations between the ideal man and the ideal woman; I showed that this is an exemplary site at which the lines that divide Rousseau's gender norms and the differences that demarcate his phantasmatic topography blur together in an extraordinary fashion.

The theme that draws all these analyses together is Rousseau's construction of nature and the natural. With the help of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive strategies, I sought to bring to light the incoherencies that allowed Rousseau's theoretical writings to assert themselves just as they undid themselves; I sought to bring to light parts of the text that were uncriticised and underdeveloped.

While I believe this work is relevant within the confines of philosophical

academia, it may also prove to be useful in a broader sense; uncriticised and underdeveloped appeals to nature persist in contemporary society. Many of the ideas put forth by Rousseau will likely be familiar to us; for example, consider the heterosexual marital unit being a whole of two halves, or the woman wielding covert power over the man thanks to her sexuality.

With that in mind, may this work serve not only as a feminist and deconstructive analysis of *Émile*. It is my wish that it may also serve as a reminder to question and criticise arguments or opinions based upon appeals to nature that exist in contemporary society. They too are likely based upon incoherencies and dependent upon supplementation; with a bit of work, their justifications may be troubled as well. This troubling is necessary and valuable; cultivating such an “esprit critique” is an exceptionally important tool for the citizens of today's society.

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