

Do You See What I See? The Education of the Reader in Rousseau's *Emile*

John T. Scott

Abstract: Rousseau first glimpsed the principle of the natural goodness of man in the so-called “Illumination of Vincennes,” and he made it his mission as an author to persuade his readers of the truth of that vision. Rousseau must persuade his readers that they are deceived by what they see before their own eyes and that they must learn to see anew—through his eyes. In order to educate his reader, Rousseau consistently uses rhetorical and literary techniques that are meant to change the reader’s perspective. His use of these techniques is particularly pervasive in *Emile*. The present analysis examines Rousseau’s education of the reader of his pedagogical treatise, especially through comparisons he draws between his imaginary pupil, Emile, and actual children that are meant to persuade the reader of the truth of what first appears to be imaginary and the falsity of what the reader previously believed was real.

“At the moment of that reading I saw another universe and I became another man.”¹ A change in visual perspective is how Rousseau describes the discovery of his “system” of the natural goodness of man and his corruption in society upon reading the prize-essay question proposed by the Academy of Dijon on the road to Vincennes: “I saw another universe.” He likewise utilizes the language of sight in his description of the “illumination of Vincennes” in a letter to Malesherbes: “Oh Sir, if I had ever been able to write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, how clearly I would have made all the contradictions of the social system seen, with what strength I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is from these

John T. Scott is Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, University of California, Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616 (jtscott@ucdavis.edu).

The author would like to thank Laurence Cooper, Denise Schaeffer, and John Warner for their comments and suggestions.

¹J.-J. Rousseau, *Confessions*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Roger D. Masters et al. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–), 5:294.

institutions alone that he becomes wicked."² Rousseau "saw" something he had hitherto not seen, and he makes it his mission as an author to make his readers see what he saw.

Vision as a metaphor for knowledge has dominated philosophy from at least Plato,³ and is also a strong trope in the tradition of visionary religious experiences, such as the vision of Saul on the road to Damascus upon which Rousseau seems to model his account of the insight that initiated his philosophic career. The paradox of Rousseau's thought and his writing is that he must persuade his readers that they are deceived by what they see before their own eyes and that they must learn to see anew—through Rousseau's eyes. As he writes at the conclusion of the *Discourse on Inequality*: "society no longer offers to the eyes of the wise man anything except an assemblage of artificial men and factitious passions which ... have no true foundation in nature."⁴ That is, only after reading Rousseau's work will the wise man no longer see in the same way.

In order to educate his reader, Rousseau consistently uses rhetorical and literary techniques that are meant to change the reader's perspective, to cause the reader to visualize the world differently. Through a combination of reason and seduction, the reader comes to view Rousseau's images—which often first seem to be the product of his imagination—as true and, conversely, to see what at first appeared to be real or true as false, artificial, and even chimerical. Numerous examples of this technique might be adduced throughout Rousseau's works. The famous prosopopoeia of Frabicius in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, the portion of his prize essay that Rousseau claimed he wrote under the spell of what he "saw and felt" on the road to Vincennes, comes to mind.⁵ Similarly, from the very outset of the *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau poses the problem he will investigate in visual terms by presenting the reader with an image that simultaneously reveals the difficulty and the

²Rousseau to Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, January 12, 1762, in *Collected Writings*, 5:575. For Rousseau's most important statements concerning the "natural goodness" of man, see *Letter to Beaumont*, in *Collected Writings*, 9:31; *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, in *Collected Writings*, 1:212–14. For an analysis of Rousseau's thought that focuses on this principle, see Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

³See esp. Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002).

⁴Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *First and Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters and Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), 178.

⁵Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, in *First and Second Discourses*, 45–46. For Rousseau's statement on writing the prosopopoeia of Fabricius, see *Confessions*, in *Collected Writings*, 5:295, and letter to Malesherbes, January 12, 1762, in *Collected Writings*, 5:575.

possibility of his enterprise: “And how will man manage to see himself as nature formed him, through all the changes that the sequence of time and things must have produced in his constitution ...? Like the statue of Glaucus, which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it looked less like a god than a wild beast, the human soul, altered in the bosom of society ... has, so to speak, changed its appearance to the point of being nearly unrecognizable.”⁶ Yet, as noted above, the “attentive reader”—the “wise man” who has learned to discern what is artificial from what is natural in the men he perceives around him—through the very act of reading Rousseau’s *Discourse* will be able to recognize the truth hiding beneath the deceptive surface of what he hitherto took to be real. While an analysis of how Rousseau educates his reader through visual images and related techniques throughout his corpus would constitute a fruitful investigation of both the substance of his thought and the rhetorical methods he employs to persuade his reader, the present article will focus on one work in which Rousseau’s use of visual images is pervasive: *Emile, or On Education*.

The present analysis is inspired and guided in part by the school of literary criticism known as the “reader response” approach and its concept of the “implied reader.” Two prominent exemplars of this approach are Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. Iser develops his conception of the implied reader through analyzing the novel form, and especially the eighteenth-century English novel, a genre that directly influenced Rousseau’s own novel *Julie* and, I would suggest, *Emile*.⁷ Iser argues that a central purpose of the novel is to challenge the reader to examine his or her own world in light of an alternative world presented in the novel, which is at once similar to the reader’s world—and hence “realistic”—and yet different. “What was presented in the novel led to a specific effect: namely, to involve the reader in the world of the novel and so help him to understand it—and ultimately his own world—more clearly,” he explains. Readers are therefore “forced to take an active part in the composition of the novel’s meaning, which revolves around a basic divergence from the familiar.”⁸ As we shall see, Rousseau utilizes a number of techniques that force his reader to compare his imaginary pupil to real-world examples and thereby change the reader’s perspective.

Fish’s seminal study of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is likewise useful for reading *Emile* and Rousseau’s other works, especially with regard to his central philosophical tenet of the natural goodness of man. As Fish summarizes his

⁶Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 91. For an excellent analysis of Rousseau’s complex use of the image of the statue of Glaucus, see Richard Velkley, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 36–39.

⁷For a study of the influence of the English novel on *Julie*, see Byron R. Wells, *Clarissa and La Nouvelle Héloïse: Dialectics of Struggle with Self and Others* (Ravenna: Longo, 1985).

⁸Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyun to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), xi–xii.

analysis: "Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his."⁹ Fish's examination of how Milton achieves this effect on what he terms the "fit reader" through poetic techniques is analogous to how Rousseau educates what he terms the "attentive reader" through visual images and other techniques. Nonetheless, a critical difference between the lessons to be learned in Milton and those in Rousseau must be noted from the outset. Whereas Milton, especially in Fish's hands, teaches his reader to recognize his own participation in the story of the Fall both as a reader and as a human being, Rousseau intends precisely the opposite lesson. Although he agrees with Milton's, and scripture's, sense of the distance that separates us from our erstwhile innocence, his aim is to persuade his reader of the fundamental principle of his "system" of thought: that despite the evil the reader sees around him and feels within himself, man is "naturally good."

Analyzing Rousseau's works in terms of their intended effect on the reader would likewise be valuable, for although interpreters in political philosophy and other disciplines rightly focus on the *content* of his thought, debating its unity and relating the parts to the whole, readers from the very first publication of Rousseau's works to the present day have been struck by the *manner* in which he conveys his thought. Indeed, many readers have found that Rousseau's style overtakes his substance. David Hume—even before his noisy break with Jean-Jacques—spoke for many of their contemporaries when he characterized Rousseau's prose as "always intermingled [with] some degree of extravagance."¹⁰ More recently, John Rawls remarks: "style can be a danger, attracting attention to itself, as it does in Rousseau. We may be dazzled and distracted and so fail to note the intricacies of reasoning that call for our full concentration."¹¹ Whether susceptible or immune to the force of Rousseau's prose, readers have recognized that he is engaged in his writing in an attempt to *persuade*, and that he therefore employs the full arsenal of rhetorical and literary devices. This is certainly true of *Emile*. Vanpée broaches an examination of that work in a manner that anticipates the present analysis when she explains: "The text conveys its pedagogical mission in at least two modes: as a story describing the process by which an orphaned child will be educated ... and thus become the ideal pedagogue of his own offspring; and as a performative discourse enacting the very

⁹Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 1.

¹⁰David Hume to Marie-Charlotte Hippolyte de Campet de Saujon, Comtesse de Boufflers, January 22, 1763, quoted in Robert Zaretsky and John T. Scott, *The Philosophers' Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume, and the Limits of Human Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 100.

¹¹John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 192.

process it describes and implicating the reader as the agent by whose means its transmission proceeds." In order to succeed in the second task, she explains, the reader must "engage" with the text in such a way that "the reading of this work might constitute an education in itself."¹² Since she is interested in Rousseau's readers' failure to engage in this reading and their tendency instead to take the educational treatise "literally," Vanpée does not develop this analysis of the text itself. The purpose of the present analysis is to begin to undertake such an investigation of *Emile*.

An Imaginary Pupil to Prevent Getting Lost in Visions

Rousseau opens *Emile* by admitting that he sees things differently from his reader, and this admission carries with it an implicit accusation against the reader for misapprehending the world. His opening salvo in the preface begins with his complaints about how poorly children are observed. "Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way." The utility of his work, he claims, is therefore found foremost in his study of childhood. "This is the study to which I have most applied myself, so that even though my entire method were chimerical and false, my observations could still be of profit." But what are these "observations"? Rousseau will bring forward numerous examples of children's behavior in his work, but the main point of his observations will be to argue that we have incorrectly observed children. The correct observation of children, and of human nature as a whole, in fact requires accepting Rousseau's "method," that is, the premise of the natural goodness of man and the educational method suited to it. The failure of his readers to know human nature will, he predicts, lead to objections. "As to what will be called the systematic part, which is here nothing but the march of nature, it is the point that will most put the readers off, and doubtless it is here that I will be attacked." In this way, then, Rousseau inaugurates a dialogue with his skeptical reader. His response will be to juxtapose his "vision" of childhood and human nature against the models before his readers' eyes. "It will be believed that what is being read is less an educational treatise than a visionary's dreams about education. What is to be done about it? It is on the basis not of others' ideas that I write but on that of my own. I do not see as do other men. I have long been reproached for that. But is it up to me to provide myself with other eyes or to affect other ideas?"¹³

In order to make his readers see as he does, to make them accept his "visions" as real, Rousseau adopts a device that underscores the importance

¹²Janie Vanpée, "Rousseau's *Emile ou de l'éducation*: A Resistance to Reading," *Yale French Studies*, no. 77 (1990): 157–58.

¹³Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, ed. and trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 33–34. Subsequent references to *Emile* will be parenthetical in the text.

of the education of his readers by making them visualize the world anew. Taking up his pen to write about education, he notes that he recognizes that, like so many other authors, he is in danger of proposing what is impossible to achieve in practice. However, his own situation is far more complicated, for the education he proposes is based on a rejection of the accepted view of human nature we derive in part from our observations of those around us, including children. Rousseau's solution to getting us to accept a reality hidden from our eyes is thoroughly paradoxical:

I have hence chosen to give myself an imaginary pupil. ... This method appears to me useful to prevent an author who distrusts himself from getting lost in visions; for when he deviates from ordinary practice, he has only to make a test of his own practice on his pupil. He will soon sense, or the reader will sense for him, whether he follows the progress of childhood and the movements natural to the human heart. (50–51)

In short: he will make his imaginary pupil the test case for the "vision" he has been able to see because he does not see like other men. A perverse procedure. Rousseau's imaginary pupil and his vision of human nature are only persuasive once we accept his teaching concerning "the movements natural to the human heart." Rousseau's imaginary pupil is depicted according to this true vision of human nature, but he will be unlike the children we ordinarily have before our eyes. In order to instantiate this imaginary pupil, Rousseau fashions him out of the flesh and blood born of pen and paper: "I have been content with setting down the principles whose truth everyone should sense. But as for the rules which might need proofs, I have applied them all to my Emile or to other examples" (51).

Note that Rousseau will adduce two kinds of examples: his imaginary pupil, Emile, and "other" examples.¹⁴ As we shall see, in *Emile* Rousseau typically juxtaposes important methodological statements concerning the fundamental principles of his thought with comparisons between "his pupil," who exists only in the mind's eye, and "your pupil," the child actually visible to the reader. The education of the reader advances as he or she becomes more persuaded by the "reality" of the imaginary pupil through these comparisons. Part of the education of the reader will be to learn to differentiate those examples. The distance between Emile and other examples will grow as the work progresses:

The result of this procedure is that at first I have spoken little of my Emile, because my first educational maxims, although contrary to those which are established, are so evident that it is difficult for any reasonable man to refuse his consent to them. But in the measure I advance, my pupil, differently conducted than yours, is no longer an ordinary child.

¹⁴For another interpretation of *Emile* that notes the device of comparing examples of other children to the exemplary case of Emile, see Laurence Mall, *Emile, ou les figures de la fiction* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002).

He requires a way of life special to him. Then he appears more frequently on the scene, and toward the last times I no longer let him out of sight for a moment. (51)

As the author already indicates near the outset of his work, *Emile* becomes more novelistic as it progresses. The rationale for this procedure is in part that his imaginary pupil becomes more and more unlike the children we have before our eyes. If he succeeds, Rousseau will have educated his reader to accept the character in his education novel as a true depiction of human nature.

In order to highlight Rousseau's method of composition in *Emile*, it is instructive to consider how the final version of his work differs from the earlier version.¹⁵ The so-called Favre version of Rousseau's educational treatise covers approximately the same material as the first three books of the final version. The first version of Rousseau's educational treatise is in large measure just that: an educational treatise. Or at least that is the form the work takes, for, more accurately, it is a philosophical exposition of human nature and moral psychology based on Rousseau's principle of the natural goodness of man. As Rousseau explained to one of the many correspondents who wrote him in puzzlement over his purposes in the work: "You quite rightly say that it is impossible to make an *Emile*; but could you believe that *this* was my goal and that the work bearing that title was a true treatise on education? It is a more or less philosophical work on that principle put forward by the author in other works, that *man is naturally good*."¹⁶

The striking feature of the first version of *Emile* is what it lacks in comparison to the final version: *Emile*. Or almost so: toward the end of the manuscript of the earlier version, "*Emile*" is suddenly introduced and becomes the name of the pupil through what little remains of the text of the manuscript. This point in the text of the original version corresponds roughly to the half-way mark of book 3 of the final version.¹⁷ It is as though Rousseau suddenly thought of the novelistic form he might give the work, ceased writing, and then began anew. Perhaps as much as eighty or ninety percent of the original material is incorporated into the final version, often without change, but in the final version Rousseau interweaves this material with stories of *Emile* and also of other children. The closest student of the genesis and revisions of *Emile*, Jimack, in essence suggests that Rousseau got carried away as he

¹⁵For a general discussion of the "Favre version" of *Emile*, see the editor's introduction to the Pléiade edition, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–95), 4:xlii–lxxxvii.

¹⁶Rousseau to Philibert Cramer, October 13, 1764, quoted in Josué V. Harari, "Therapeutic Pedagogy: Rousseau's *Emile*," *MLN* 97, no. 4 (1982): 788; my translation.

¹⁷Specifically, *Emile* is introduced at p. 110 in the *Collected Writings* edition of the Favre version (*Favre Manuscript of "Emile,"* trans. Christopher Kelly, in *Collected Writings*, 13:1–154), which is equivalent to p. 180 in the Bloom translation of *Emile*.

wrote, turning to the novel form to bring to life his imaginary pupil and then awkwardly inserting him into the original text. He further suggests that Rousseau himself also became confused in his own role as “I” (*je* or *moi*) in the text, with author and imaginary tutor becoming hopelessly jumbled.¹⁸ In response to such a reading, which privileges the psychological state of the author and the process of composition over its content, Coleman rightly argues: “In the context of *Emile* as it comes to us, that is, in its hybrid form, we must ask for whose sake examples are adduced and by which ‘moi,’ before we can locate any possible contradiction.”¹⁹

An indication of Rousseau’s authorial control over what he does in the final version comes from the hints of the literary devices he would ultimately adopt that are present in nascent form in the Favre version and how he developed these devices in the final version to both substantive and rhetorical effect. An interesting example for present purposes comes soon into the manuscript and just after recommending that we harden the physical constitution of children—“Steep them in the waters of the Styx”—which in the final version is just before Rousseau first introduces his “imaginary pupil.” In the earlier version, Rousseau describes the results of the usual education among coddling women and pretentious tutors and how “this child, slave and tyrant” is “cast out into the world, showing there his wretchedness, he becomes the basis for deploring that of humanity. This is a mistake. He is the man of our whims; the man of nature is differently constituted.”²⁰ Rousseau here hints both at a philosophical position, the natural goodness of man, and at a device he will use to persuade his reader of that position, asking the reader to visualize a comparison between two children. Both the philosophical position and the rhetorical device are made more explicit in the final version. As for the philosophical position, in the final version Rousseau strengthens the sense of the earlier version with a more programmatic statement: “It is thus that we fill up his young heart at the outset with the passions which later we impute to nature and that, after having taken efforts to make him wicked, we complain about finding him so” (48). As for the device he uses to persuade his reader of this statement, it is slightly after this same point in the final version of the text that Rousseau introduces his pupil, Emile (51). In sum, then, Rousseau appears to have rethought his

¹⁸Peter D. Jimack, *La Genèse et la rédaction de l’Emile de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Geneva: Voltaire Foundation, 1960).

¹⁹Patrick Coleman, “Characterizing Rousseau’s *Emile*,” *MLN* 92, no. 4 (1977): 767. See also Mall, *Emile, ou les figures de la fiction*: “la fiction—hypothétique ou romanesque—ne vient pas s’ajouter au traité, n’est pas ornement ou une facilité, n’est pas une faiblesse du livre, mais constituée au contraire la seule condition de possibilité du texte, et peut seule établir son autorité” (3).

²⁰Rousseau, *Favre Manuscript of “Emile,”* in *Collected Writings*, 13:14–16. For other instances in the original version of comparing pupils or other similar devices, all of them rather incidental, see 37–38, 57, 94, 101.

presentation and in particular the way in which he would persuade his reader through an imaginary pupil and through comparisons of “his pupil” and ordinary examples. This rethinking resulted in the creation of *Emile* himself, the most important systematic change in the final version of the work that would, after all, bear the title *Emile*.

Rousseau in his role as author explains to the reader that he has chosen to give himself “an imaginary pupil” in order to prevent himself “from getting lost in visions.” This imaginary pupil will be the guinea pig for implementing his educational principles: “But as for the rules which might need proofs I have applied them all to my *Emile*, or to other examples, and I have shown in very extensive detail how what I have established could be put into practice” (51). The “I” in this passage slides from the authorial “I” of Rousseau the author into a new character who is introduced after having imagined and named the pupil: the governor. That governor turns out to be Jean-Jacques himself, although in idealized form. Rousseau the author now stands apart from his own work, as the “implied author” who addresses the “implied reader.”²¹ The gap between Rousseau the author and Jean-Jacques the tutor affords Rousseau several luxuries as a writer aiming to persuade his reader. Among these possibilities is one that will be discussed at greater length below, namely, Rousseau’s ability to appeal to “other examples” besides *Emile* that he has supposedly witnessed in his role as author of the work. More specifically, in recounting these examples Rousseau is able to admit that he—unlike the tutor Jean-Jacques—is fallible and has misinterpreted the evidence before his eyes, thus enabling the reader to enter into sympathetic recognition with the author and thereby learn to revisualize the world.

Finally, a prefatory note on the role of *Emile* in the text. As just noted, Rousseau introduces his imaginary pupil as a kind of guinea pig on whom he will demonstrate the possibility of putting into practice what he preaches. However, as we know from the letter quoted above, Rousseau himself states that his intention was *not* to offer a pedagogical recipe book for making more *Emiles*. Instead, his aim was to exhibit his principle of the natural goodness of man. In this light, *Emile* is not a laboratory animal in the hands of his omniscient tutor (although he often seems to be such), but is an *exemplary* figure.²² With this in mind, it is illuminating to examine the context in which Rousseau introduces his imaginary pupil. *Emile* is presented in between two references to Achilles, the exemplary hero of classical Greek and also the figure represented in the frontispiece to *Emile*. Just before

²¹For the concept of the “implied author,” see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

²²On exemplarity in *Emile*, see Coleman, “Characterizing Rousseau’s *Emile*.” See also Irene E. Harvey, *Labyrinths of Exemplarity: At the Limits of Deconstruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), esp. 85–96.

introducing Emile, Rousseau, writing about the need to let children experience the pains as well as pleasures attendant on mortal life and complaining of mothers who coddle their offspring, states: "Thetis, to make her son invulnerable, plunged him, according to the fable, in the water of the Styx. This allegory is a lovely one, and it is clear" (47). Whether the allegory is in fact clear is questionable, but it is in any case the scene illustrated in the frontispiece of the work and so deserves our attention.²³ Shortly after introducing Emile, Rousseau again refers to Achilles: "By dint of arming Achilles against peril, the poet takes from him the merit of valor; every other man in his place would have been an Achilles at the same price" (55). The context in which Rousseau introduces his pupil, then, suggests that Emile is somehow a new Achilles, a new exemplary figure. This interpretation is buttressed by the epigraph to the work, which is drawn from Seneca's *On Anger* and reads: "Sanabilibus aegrotamus malis; ipsaque nos in rectum genitos natura, si emendari velimus, iuvat" (We are sick with evils that can be cured; and nature, having brought us forth sound, itself helps us if we wish to be improved).²⁴ Given that Achilles's most prominent characteristic, the characteristic with which the poet introduces him in the very first line of the *Iliad*, is his wrath or anger, the epigraph is telling. Rousseau replaces the traditional understandings of human nature, which see anger, pride, and other aspects of human nature as simply natural or as part of our fallen nature, with a new understanding of the natural goodness of man. Rousseau's overall intention in the work in its final form, therefore, requires the reader to take seriously how he presents Emile in order to persuade the reader to see anew.

Rousseau the Author as Fallible Teacher

If Rousseau introduces Emile relatively early on in book 1 of *Emile*, this first book is hardly novelistic at all and is instead largely devoted to general subjects such as breast feeding, giving it the appearance of an eighteenth-century

²³Close examination of the allegory reveals that it is not, in fact, what it seems to be. Two considerations immediately suggest the complexity, nay deceitfulness, of Rousseau's use of the allegory. First, he introduces Thetis dipping Achilles into the Styx immediately after complaining of mothers keeping their offspring away from threats to their mortality, a lesson exactly opposite to the allegory. Second, note that he sets off "according to the fable" as a kind of parenthetical set off by commas, suggesting that his own version of the story is different from the original. This line of interpretation would be supported by what he later in the work says about fables (112–16). For an extended analysis of the engravings for *Emile*, see John T. Scott, "Re-Presenting Achilles in Rousseau's *Emile*," presented at UCLA Clark Memorial Library, October 4–5, 2002.

²⁴Seneca, *De ira* II.13.

Dr. Spock.²⁵ Emile as a character is scarcely present and there are very few examples of children, with the exception of one important example that will give us a sense of Rousseau's complex narrative techniques to involve and thereby persuade his reader of his vision.

This example is a case of Rousseau as author, as opposed to Jean-Jacques as governor, relating to the reader an experience he had of observing a child and being initially mistaken about what he had observed. The subject is crying children, and here the child is not Emile but an ordinary child. "I shall never forget having seen one of these difficult criers," he begins. The difficult crier is struck by his nurse, is immediately quiet. "I believed he was intimidated. I said to myself, 'This will be a servile soul from which one will get nothing except by severity.' I was mistaken." Note that Rousseau is himself mistaken, meaning that a reader can be excused for making the same mistake, and can realize it was a mistake without embarrassment. Rather than being servile, the struck infant was in fact angry. "A moment after came sharp screams; all the signs of the resentment, fury, and despair of his age were in his accents. ... If I had doubted that the sentiment of the just and the unjust were innate in the heart of man, this example alone would have convinced me" (65–66). This example is deceptively simple, and in fact deceptive.

Interpreting this example requires realizing that the "I" who reports witnessing this child and then draws the conclusion about the natural sentiment of justice and injustice (note the past tense: "If I had doubted...") is not necessarily the same "I" —Rousseau the author—who relates the story in his book. Or at least these may be the same "I" at two moments in time, perhaps pre- and post-Illumination. Rousseau the witness attributes resentment, fury, and despair to the child and allies these attributes to an innate sentiment of justice. Does Rousseau the author believe that children are naturally resentful, angry, and despairing? No. In fact, immediately after this story he counsels the reader to be wary of introducing these unnatural sentiments into the child and makes his first programmatic statement about the natural goodness of man against philosophers who would explain children's behavior as a result of "natural vices: pride, the spirit of domination, *amour-propre*, the wickedness of man" (67). Indeed, we have been alerted by the epigraph to *Emile* that anger is an important issue. In short, Rousseau the author does not agree with Rousseau the witness. Does Rousseau the author believe that there is an innate sentiment of justice? This is a more complicated issue concerning the innateness of pity, its relationship to conscience, and so on. Certainly the *Discourse on Inequality* does not teach that humans naturally have a sentiment of the just and the unjust. Rousseau does argue in that work that pity is natural to humans, although his later accounts of pity in

²⁵Echoing Allan Bloom's apt characterization of *Emile* as "a *Phenomenology of the Mind* posing as Dr. Spock" (introduction to *Emile*, 3).

the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and, indeed, *Emile* seem to suggest that pity is in fact a developed sentiment that requires the imagination that natural man does not possess.²⁶ The sentiment of the just and unjust and especially conscience appear, in Rousseau's account in *Emile* at least, to be developed forms of self-love and pity, and therefore acquired and not natural. This is not the place to enter into the extensive debates about the status of pity and conscience in Rousseau's thought, but we at least have reason to conclude that the statement by Rousseau the witness about a natural sentiment of justice is not quite as simple as what Rousseau the author would argue.

This example of Rousseau the witness who realizes his mistake, but who is perhaps still mistaken in light of Rousseau the author's philosophical system, is instructive. The example works on at least two levels. On the first level, having also seen infants cry, the reader can sympathize with Rousseau the witness. The reader may also regard such an infant as a servile soul, and may thereby be susceptible to learning from the same mistake that Rousseau the witness admits he fell into. This reader might also be comforted by the purported conclusion that the sentiment of justice and injustice is natural to humans. However, the "attentive reader" (to evoke the phrasing Rousseau uses in summarizing his teaching at the end of the *Discourse on Inequality*) who has imbibed Rousseau the author's system of the natural goodness of man is prepared upon rereading the example to realize yet a further mistake on his or her part. Now the reader is, so to speak, in on the game. Both kinds of mistakes are forms of educating the reader. The admitted mistakes make the reader into Rousseau's ally: "Yes, you are mistaken, but so was I. Learn from my mistake. You will be persuaded by me." The unadmitted mistakes are a form of challenge: "Have you correctly read me? You cannot correctly read me unless you have understood me, unless you have been persuaded by me." Rousseau's technique here is analogous to what Fish notices about the engagement of the reader in *Paradise Lost*, or what he felicitously refers to as "Milton's program of reader harassment."²⁷ Fish notes that Milton seduces his reader into false judgments, for example leading the reader to admire Satan as a heroic figure, in order ultimately to render the reader ever vigilant against sin. "The result of such encounters is a new way of reading him. The reader proceeds determined not to be caught out again; but invariably he is," Fish writes, going on to explain in a vein that will resonate with many readers of *Emile*, "and always the irritatingly omniscient voice is there to point out a deception even as it succeeds. As the poem proceeds and this little drama is repeated, the reader's only gain is an awareness of what is happening to him; he understands that his

²⁶For Rousseau on pity, see *Discourse on Inequality*, 130–33; *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, in *Collected Writings*, 7:305–6; *Emile*, 221–23.

²⁷Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 4.

responses are being controlled and mocked by the same authority, and realizes that while his efforts to extricate himself from this experience are futile, that very futility becomes a way of knowledge.²⁸ Or, more generally, Rousseau will have succeeded in making the reader “actively participate in bringing out the meaning” of the work, “and this participation is an essential precondition for communication between the author and the reader,” as Iser notes in his analysis of the “implied reader.”²⁹

Now, the example from *Emile* of the crying child takes the deception yet a further step not by invoking the irritatingly omniscient tutor or author to point out the deception to the reader, but rather by giving the reader the responsibility for discovering it. However, there are numerous examples in *Emile* where Rousseau does point out the mistake. One such example is a story in book 2 in which Rousseau relates another experience he had. He does so after an authorial address to the reader that can only be read ironically: “Readers, always remember that he who speaks to you is neither a scholar nor a philosopher, but a simple man, a friend of the truth, without party, without system; a solitary who, living little among men, has less occasion to contract their prejudices and more time to reflect on what strikes him when he has commerce with them” (110). With this flourish, Rousseau turns witness and enters into a story of once having visited a family that trotted out their young boy in the fashion of the French to parade his learning before the assembled guests. The child ably relates a story from Plutarch of Alexander the Great, who downed a potion prepared by his physician Philip despite rumors that the doctor aimed to poison him. The child’s governor and the other adults admire Alexander for his courage. Rousseau the witness, and bad houseguest, tells the assembled guests they are wrong: Alexander’s action was if anything foolhardy rather than courageous, and the true lesson lies elsewhere. Before he has the opportunity to explain, a woman sitting beside him stops him and whispers, “‘Keep quiet, Jean-Jacques, they won’t understand you.’ I looked at her; I was struck; and I kept quiet” (111).

A warning to readers? Will readers understand? But first, what about the child? Rousseau the witness queries the child as to what lesson he took from the story he told, and is not surprised to learn that he admired Alexander for bravely downing the potion, for he himself recently had to take a bitter-tasting medicine. This is as he expects, since he knows that a child, like natural man, has no conception of death. Indeed, Rousseau later alludes in *Emile* to the story of the physician Philip when he relates a misapplied lesson in the dangers of adulterated wine he claims he once gave to a child, not realizing that the child had no conception of death (182–83). Yet another example of Rousseau claiming to have been deceived and allowing

²⁸Ibid., 14.

²⁹Iser, *Implied Reader*, 30.

the reader to learn from his mistakes. Apparently Jean-Jacques has learned something by the time he encounters the young admirer of Alexander.

Thus far Rousseau has been explicit about the series of mistakes being made by the people in his story: the adults are mistaken about the moral of the story of Alexander and equally mistaken about the child being capable of understanding this moral. But what is the proper moral? Having been unusually taciturn, Rousseau taunts the reader:

Some readers, discontented with the “Keep quiet, Jean-Jacques,” will, I foresee, ask what, after all, do I find so fair in Alexander’s action? Unfortunate people! If you have to be told, how will you understand it? It is that Alexander believed in virtue; it is that he staked his head, his own life on that belief; it is that his great soul was made for believing in it. Oh, what a fair profession of faith was the swallowing of that medicine. No, never did a mortal make so sublime a one. If there is some modern Alexander, let him be showed to me by like deeds. (111)

The reader is no longer deceived, or at least uninformed. Or is he? The further complications raised by this story need not be pursued, but only raised. First, Alexander was said to have admired Achilles, and he also deified himself. This being so, did he consider himself to be “mortal” and therefore susceptible to death by poisoning? If not, what is the proper lesson to be drawn from the story? Second, what does Rousseau’s characterization of Alexander’s action as related by Plutarch (and, not unimportantly, by the child) as a “profession of faith” say about the status of *the* “Profession of Faith” later to come in *Emile*? Perhaps the techniques used by Rousseau in the story of the young admirer of Alexander can be applied to many examples in *Emile*, including the “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” and perhaps the work as a whole. If Rousseau’s story wrapped in a story is a kind of fable with a proper moral, the key to solving the riddle lies not in being told, but in becoming the kind of reader who comes to see and feel in such a way as to grasp the meaning.

My Pupil vs. Your Pupil

If book 1 is largely devoid of *Emile* and stories of other children, such examples become more prominent in book 2. This is appropriate, for at the outset of the book Rousseau states: “It is at this second stage that, strictly speaking, the life of the individual begins” (78). Here also begins Rousseau’s dialogue with his reader and his increasing use of examples of *Emile* and other children to carry on that conversation.

As elsewhere in *Emile*, in book 2 Rousseau characteristically introduces major programmatic arguments through an imaginary dialogue with his dubious reader and through examples in which he compares *Emile* and other children. Near the beginning of the book, then, having urged his readers to love childhood, Rousseau imagines his reader interrupting

him: "How many voices are going to be raised against me! I hear from afar the clamors of that false wisdom which incessantly projects us outside ourselves, which always counts the present as nothing. ... This is, you answer me, the time to correct man's bad inclination" (79). The interruption by Rousseau's imagined reader gives him the opportunity to counter the prevailing view of human nature as corrupted and to introduce various aspects of his own argument that man is naturally good. "And how will you prove to me that these bad inclinations, of which you claim you are curing him, do not come to him from your ill-considered care far more than from nature?" (80).

Having introduced the basic idea, then, Rousseau sets the ground for a reiteration of the principle by using a literary technique that asks his reader to visualize something, in this case a comparison between Emile and ordinary children. After developing his argument concerning happiness consisting in a proportion between desire and the ability to satisfy it, the dangers of imagination, the unnaturalness of anger, and such, Rousseau is ready to return to his dubious reader and educate him through example. "With each lesson that one wants to put into their heads before its proper time, a vice is planted in the depth of their hearts. Senseless teachers think they work wonders when they make children wicked in order to teach them what goodness is. And then they solemnly tell us, 'Such is man.' Yes, such is the man you have made." Yet Rousseau knows his reader remains unconvinced: "I already see the startled reader judging this child by our children. He is mistaken." With this comparison between Emile and "our children," he is ready for his programmatic statement: "Let us set down as an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right." This fundamental principle of his thought contains a corollary for his method of education: "Dare I expose the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of all education? It is not to gain time but to lose it. Common readers, pardon me my paradoxes" (92–93).

Rousseau directly addresses the reader from almost the outset of *Emile*, but his direct communication with the reader increases as his vision and the vision of the reader—or at least the unpersuaded reader—diverge. Iser notes the use of this technique in the novel form, which he argues introduces innovation or novelty through presenting a world similar to and yet different from the world we actually inhabit. "For innovation itself to be a subject in a novel, the author needs direct cooperation from the person who is to perceive that innovation—namely, the reader. This is why it is hardly surprising that Fielding's novels, and those of the eighteenth century in general, are so full of direct addresses to the reader."³⁰ Rousseau engages in this technique in *Emile* for similar reasons, although his addresses to the reader at least initially are less solicitations for cooperation than challenges, which is appropriate

³⁰Iser, *Implied Reader*, 29.

given the gap between the world he is portraying, or rather the child he is portraying, and the reader's experience.

The pattern of "reader harassment" continues through book 2, as through the rest of the work. We find, for example, an amusing bout of authorial toying with the reader, where Rousseau argues for saving children from the plague of books and suggests that teaching a child to read and write is no business of education. "Shall I speak now of writing? No. I am ashamed of playing with this kind of foolishness in an educational treatise" (117). Rousseau again engages his reader in dialogue. "The more I insist on my inactive method, the stronger I see your objections grow" (117). The author is becoming increasingly familiar with his dubious reader, and is attempting to make him his ally. "If, according to the plan I have begun to outline, you follow rules directly contrary to the established ones" (117). Of course, if the reader does not go along with the plan, he is dismissed: "If you are only a pedant, it is not worth the effort to read me" (118). Here again, then, Rousseau supplements his dialogue with the reader with a comparison of pupils. "Learned preceptor, let us see which of our two pupils resembles the savage and which resembles the peasant." The recalcitrant reader/preceptor's pupil relies on the tutor's judgment and learns nothing. "As for my pupil, or rather nature's, trained early to be as self-sufficient as possible" (118–19). Has the reader been persuaded? "I have a right to assume that you know the natural development of the human heart, that you know how to study man and the individual" (121). This assumption is, of course, the premise which the book seeks to establish and is therefore really evident to the reader only after having read the book and having been persuaded by it.

Further examples of this conversation with the reader through a comparison of visualized children throughout *Emile* might be adduced, but a few will suffice. Near the beginning of book 4, a portion of the text rich with programmatic statements about the character and limits of the natural passions, natural goodness, and so on, Rousseau admits the methodological hurdle to his argument. "These observations are difficult because in order to make them, we must reject the examples that are before our eyes and seek for those in which the successive developments take place according to the order of nature" (220). Of course, that example is Rousseau's imaginary pupil Emile. Rousseau seeks the moment in the child's development when the child is capable of truly identifying and commiserating with his fellow human beings. "If this moment is not easy to notice in your children, whom do you blame for it? ... But look at my Emile" (222). And then after his explanation of the maxims of properly cultivating pity through exposure to suffering, Rousseau returns to the comparison. "More than one reader will doubtless reproach me for forgetting my first resolve and the constant happiness I had promised my pupil. ... I promised to make him happy, not to appear to be. Is it my fault if you, always dupes of appearance, take it for reality?" Having said this, Rousseau returns to the comparison of pupils: "Let us take two men, emerging from their first education and entering

into society by two directly opposite paths." The first is thrust into society with the ordinary education: "You see him attentive, eager, curious. His initial admiration strikes you. You take him to be satisfied; but look at the condition of his soul. You believe he is enjoying himself; I believe he is suffering" (227). And so on. "This is your pupil. Let us see mine" (229). Needless to say, Rousseau's pupil is happy, and having elaborated on the condition of his soul, he returns to the comparison. "I cannot prevent myself from imagining on the face of the young man of whom I have previously spoken something impertinent, sugary, affected, which displeases and repels plain people; and on that of my young man an interesting and simple expression that reveals satisfaction and true serenity of soul, inspires esteem and confidence" (230). Having said enough on this matter to persuade "a reasonable reader," Rousseau concludes: "I return, therefore, to my method" (230).

Yet Rousseau's reader remains recalcitrant. Somewhat later in book 4, Rousseau ceases the narrative starring Emile and turns to ordinary children and enters into a dialogue with his reader. (This is also the narrative framework that contains the "Profession of Faith," which may suggest that the religious teaching offered there is not intended for Emile, but for a more ordinary child.) This narrative break is abrupt: "I go forward, attracted by the force of things but without gaining credibility in the judgment of my readers. For a long while they have seen me in the land of chimeras. I always see them in the land of prejudices." This passage recalls the preface to *Emile*, where Rousseau announces that he will give himself an imaginary pupil in order to prevent himself from getting lost in illusions. "I have learned from experience to take it for granted that my readers will not imitate me. I know that they persist in imagining only what they see; and therefore they will take the young man whom I evoke to be an imaginary and fantastic being because he differs from those with whom they compare him. ... This is not the man of man; it is the man of nature. Assuredly he should be very alien to their eyes" (253). The "man of nature" is alien to readers' eyes if they have not yet been persuaded by Rousseau. "In beginning this work, I supposed nothing that everyone cannot observe just as I do, because there is a point—the birth of man—from which we all equally begin. But the more we go forward, I to cultivate nature and you to deprave it, the farther we get from each other" (253–54). The reader who persists in taking what is before his eyes, "the man of man," as natural will view Rousseau as having strayed; the reader who has learned to observe as Rousseau does will see himself as having been mistaken.

Who Is the "Real" Emile?

The continual use of contrasts between Emile and other children, "my pupil" and "your pupil," is a relatively straightforward device used by Rousseau to educate his reader to see children properly and thus to persuade the reader of

his argument. Less straightforward is his testing of the reader concerning Emile himself to see whether the reader can properly identify the “real” Emile. This device occurs several times in the work.

A relatively simple example of this technique occurs in book 2. Rousseau presents one of his many “set pieces,” that is, illustrative stories, in this case to illustrate his stricture that the utility of a given educational lesson should be the touchstone for providing it. The story involves poor short Emile getting lost in the forest of Montmorency with the taller and somewhat sadistic Jean-Jacques, who, unlike Emile, can see over the bushes and therefore knows the way to town and lunch. The apparent lesson learned is that astronomy is good for something, since Emile is able to locate the town by reasoning from the direction of the shadows. Rousseau sets up the story with the following statement: “Let us suppose that while I am studying with my pupil the course of the sun and how to get one’s bearings” (180). Our immediate assumption is that “I” is the tutor Jean-Jacques and “my pupil” is Emile. But are they? In the next paragraph, Rousseau writes that “our Emile” will not heed the elaborate explanations of the utility of the lesson. He imagines a hapless tutor, the hapless tutor being himself: “What a fine speech I will make to him!” Apparently “I” here is not the tutor Jean-Jacques, but his alter ego.

This alter ego in turn parallels a story, alluded to above, that Rousseau tells immediately following the story of getting lost in the forest north of Montmorency, in which he recalls a singularly inapt lesson he claims he once gave to a child concerning the danger of adulterated wine, an inapt lesson because the child did not understand death (182–83). Rousseau thus surrounds the story of the forest with two examples of misapplied lessons. Returning to the setup of the story, after saying “our Emile” will have none of that, he begins the story: “We were observing the position of the forest north of Montmorency” (180). Who is “we”? We are soon answered by an imagined dialogue between our two heroes: “Emile” and “Jean-Jacques.” But is this right? Within the dialogue, the tutor asks his charge, “Let me see your watch. What time is it?” Does Emile possess a watch? A half-dozen pages after the story, Rousseau reveals his trick. “In assuming he has a watch as well as making him cry, I gave myself a common Emile, to be useful and to make myself understood; for, with respect to the true one, a child so different from others would not serve as an example for anything” (188). Now we have a “true” Emile and a “common” Emile. The contrast between them tests the reader: Would the “true” Emile possess a watch? The imaginary pupil has now become somehow real. Such, in fact, is Rousseau’s aim: to persuade his reader to take Rousseau’s “visions” for true and what he sees before his eyes as false.

Another example of Rousseau challenging his reader to identify the “real” Emile involves two stories of running, the first involving Rousseau as author relating a story and the second involving the novelistic story of Emile and Sophie within *Emile*. The first story is introduced abruptly into Rousseau’s

account of how to train sight and does so with an almost “once upon a time” beginning: “There was an indolent and lazy child who was to be trained in running.” The child is likened to an Achilles who would require the skill of Chiron to get him to run, and Achilles and Chiron are in fact featured in the frontispiece to the book (book 2) in which the story is related. Suddenly “I” is introduced: “The difficulty was all the greater since I wanted to prescribe to him absolutely nothing.” Is “I” Rousseau the author, or Jean-Jacques the tutor, or someone else? At any rate, “I” teaches the lazy lad to run by appealing to his gluttony, making cake the reward for winning a race. And then the story ends as abruptly as it began (141–43). The second story involving running comes within the romance of Emile and Sophie in book 5. Their flirtation proceeds under the gaze, and indeed godlike control, of Jean-Jacques the tutor, now not likened to Chiron but to Mentor (435), the tutor of Telemachus (and thus the allusions to the engraving for book 4, which shows Odysseus resisting Circe’s charms, are planted by Rousseau). Sophie and Emile walk together and picnic, Jean-Jacques and Sophie’s father eating cakes and drinking while Emile, sitting with Sophie and her mother, fleetingly steals some custard into which Sophie has dipped her spoon. In the course of this sappy account, Rousseau suddenly writes: “Apropos of cakes, I speak to Emile of his former races” (436). The reader is obviously meant to recall the earlier story about racing for cakes. But the earlier story involved “an indolent and lazy child,” assuredly not Emile! Admittedly, this may be an instance of a Homeric nod on the part of the author, but the reaction of the “attentive” reader is nonetheless instructive. That reader objects, “that wasn’t *really* Emile in the earlier story!” Such an objection would be evidence of Rousseau’s success: he has thoroughly persuaded his reader to take Emile as somehow “real,” the exemplar to which the other child, who is after all the real child or at least like a real child, must be compared.

One final example of this technique of creating “real” characters on Rousseau’s part involves Emile’s beloved, Sophie. After a lengthy (and controversial) description of Sophie and her education, Rousseau begins as author—and shortly as the tutor Jean-Jacques—to bring Emile and Sophie together. As with the earlier story of Alexander the Great, where Rousseau states that only a reader who believes in virtue will grasp the true meaning of the story, in putting Sophie into motion he states that only readers who believe in decency and virtue will accept Sophie, whereas other readers will not. In this light, he writes:

To these people one must speak only with examples; so much the worse for them if they persist in denying these examples. If I said to them that Sophie is not an imaginary being, that her name alone is of my invention, that her education, her morals, her character, and even her looks have really existed, and that her memory still brings tears to every member of a decent family, they undoubtedly would believe nothing of it. ... Whether it is believed to be true or not, it makes little difference. I shall,

if you please, have told fictions, but I shall still have explicated my method, and I shall still be pursuing my ends. (402)

This whole peroration is reminiscent of Rousseau's playful manipulation of and challenge to the reader of his novel *Julie*.³¹ At any rate, Rousseau now tests the reader of *Emile* by creating a "false" Sophie: "The young person with the temperament I have just given to Sophie also resembled her in all the ways which could make her merit the name, and I shall continue to call her by it" (402). Rousseau then goes on for several pages to tell the story of this "false" Sophie, which does not proceed as happily as the story of the "true" Sophie.³² "Shall I bring this sad narrative to its catastrophic end? ... No, I put aside these dreadful objects" (405). But wait: the "false" Sophie whose "narrative" Rousseau the author refuses to continue seems to be the "real" Sophie who Rousseau just said actually existed. Instead, he takes up the story of the "true" Sophie: "Let us render his Sophie to our Emile. ... I went astray myself. Let us retrace our steps" (405–6). Rousseau and his readers ("our steps") now proceed to bring Emile and Sophie together.

Just as Emile becomes the exemplar by which the persuaded reader will judge actual human beings, especially boys it seems, Sophie is the exemplar by which actual women will be measured. "This is man"—*ecce homo*—Rousseau therefore states (437) immediately following the "apropos of cakes" episode, which has forced the attentive reader to compare Emile to a "real" child in the earlier story and yet find Emile more "real." "This is woman," he writes shortly afterward of Sophie (442). Rousseau has made his imaginary pupil and his imaginary wife exemplars for the reader who has been successfully educated by the book itself.

Conclusion: Surprised by Goodness

What, then, in the end, are we persuaded of if we are persuaded by Rousseau? In order to address this question, let us first entertain two misreadings of *Emile*.

First, has Rousseau persuaded us to imitate the tutor Jean-Jacques by fashioning our own pupils after the example of Emile? In this reading, Rousseau's giving himself an imaginary pupil would be in the service of moving the reader's imagination to see the plausibility of the education he receives. Likewise, the novelistic portions of the work, especially the romance of Emile and Sophie in book 5, would have an intended effect similar to that of Rousseau's portrayal of rural happiness in *Julie*. Without speaking

³¹See especially the preface and the second preface ("Conversation about Novels") in *Julie, or the New Heloise*, in *Collected Writings*, 6:3–22.

³²Elizabeth Rose Wingrove notices the difference between the two Sophies, although she offers a very different interpretation. See *Rousseau's Republican Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 77–84.

further of Rousseau's intentions in *Julie*, which he explicitly presents as a novel, to take Emile and Jean-Jacques in Rousseau's treatise-novel as simply exemplary characters would be to make the same mistake as the perplexed reader, evoked above, who wrote Rousseau to ask whether the work was meant to provide guidance in producing imitations of Emile.³³ Yet how do we account for this reader's experience? For this reader is not at all unusual: John Dewey is hardly alone in taking Rousseau's work to be just that, a pedagogical treatise.³⁴ If Rousseau's stated aim concerning *Emile* is that it is rather meant to illustrate the central tenet of the natural goodness of man, an aim he explicitly states outside of the text but that is sufficiently obvious in the work itself, then one might say that the experience of many readers suggests that the intended *content* of the work is obscured by its *form*, that Rousseau's *rhetoric* has outstripped his *argument*. Yet Rousseau might agree that following the pedagogy in *Emile* would be better than persisting in the current educational practices. In fact, he says as much in the work. Readers persuaded of at least this much have, after all, been persuaded of something useful. Perhaps the author intends this misreading of the work, which is not so much a *mis*-reading of the text as a partial understanding of the author's argument.

Second, and more importantly, in trying to persuade us of the truth of his "visions," is Rousseau, wittingly or not, persuading us of something that is just that, a "vision"? Certainly, his generally low reputation among academic philosophers, at least of the analytic persuasion and at least until recently,³⁵ owes much to the fact that Rousseau does not present his argument in anything like syllogistic form, at least outside of the *Social Contract*. Certainly not in *Emile*, or in the *Discourse on Inequality*, for example, where he often appears to argue through assertion, assertion often first posed in the form of an image. Thus his "proof" of the natural goodness of man is conveyed by images—the statue of Glaucus and the initial portrait of natural man alone beneath a tree in the *Discourse on Inequality* or the imaginary pupil in *Emile*. These images, these hypotheses given visual form, are somehow supposed to be guarantors of the truth of the argument. If Rousseau is trading in mere visions, then he is certainly not worthy of the attention of philosophers

³³It is interesting to note in this regard that the title *Emile* evokes the Latin *aemulare*, to imitate or emulate.

³⁴See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

³⁵Rousseau's reputation among philosophers nonetheless seems to be on the rise. In addition to Rawls's sustained attention to Rousseau in his *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (cited above), see Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Gauthier, *Rousseau: The Sentiment of Existence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

beyond the question of his historical influence. Yet Rousseau himself claims to be a philosopher of a certain kind: not a “systematic” thinker along the lines of Locke or Leibniz, but a thinker with a “system” that consistently grounds all of his works, including *Emile*. If we are seriously to entertain Rousseau’s claim, then, interpreting as essentially nonphilosophical his use of rhetorical devices in order to persuade his reader of his “visions” would indeed be a misreading.

Why, then, does Rousseau use the rhetorical techniques analyzed here in *Emile* and throughout his works? As noted at the outset, Rousseau’s dilemma as a writer—and as a philosopher—is that he must persuade his reader that things are not as they seem. The reader has been misinformed by his experience and by a centuries-old philosophical and theological apparatus that has only reinforced this mistaken way in which we interpret what we believe we observe. Rousseau cannot point *to* experience in any simple way to prove his point; he must point *beyond* experience. The natural goodness of man is not obvious: it seems to be belied by our observations, including our observations of children. The crying infant stands as proof of the willfulness, pride, and anger natural to human beings. In order to educate, Rousseau must involve the reader in Rousseau’s own mistaken observations and in his alternative visions, so that the reader will see anew through the prism of the doctrine of the natural goodness of man.

In short, Rousseau might have agreed with Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* concerning his relationship to the reader: “no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good-breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own.”³⁶

³⁶Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (London: Cochrane, 1832), 1:98, quoted by Iser, *Implied Reader*, 31; see also Iser, 275.