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ROUSSEAU FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FAMILY¹

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether Rousseau's writings on the family yield a structure providing both personal and political authenticity for all of its members. In this paper, we will concentrate on Rousseau's literary output, particularly his novels. While Rousseau does speak of the family in his more overtly "political" works, his remarks there are rather cryptic and take on further resonance only when viewed against Rousseau's more overtly "literary" writings. In this connection, it is important to note that Rousseau's literary works do not merely reflect the themes presented in his political tracts, but further expand upon them. When viewed in this light, Rousseau's statements on the family take on a less rigid quality, yielding a positive and dynamic ambiguity that further illuminates the acknowledged tensions of Rousseau's political system in general and his conception of the family in particular.

In Rousseau's political works, two seemingly intractable contradictions appear in connection with the family. One is historical in nature: Rousseau defines the family as the product of a "revolution" but also insists that it is a "natural" structure.² The second tension exists

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1. This article is part of larger study on Rousseau and the politics of ambiguity. I would like to thank Ourida Mostefai for her help in preparing this article for publication.
 2. The tensions in these definitions derive from two sources. One is the different moral values ascribed to the categories of "nature" and "revolution." In Rousseau's lexicon, those structures rooted in the State of Nature are basically good in character and orientation, or at least bereft of evil. On the other hand, an institution arising from the first "great revolution" that results in the socialization of Savage Man heralds the advent of evil in human existence although, to be sure, there are some other benefits that accrue as well. The second source of the tension between "revolution" and "nature" is the operational consequences that ensue. On the one hand, the family is both the outcome of and the catalyst for major changes in the operation of daily life and social norms. On

as a result of this dual account of the family's origin, and consists in the different conceptions that Rousseau has of the operational goals of the family. Rousseau clearly states that the family is supposed to provide each individual member with a sense of personal authenticity.³ At the same time, the family is also viewed as the source of political socialization, educating each member to identify primarily as a citizen of the authentic State.⁴ While ideally these two goals should complement each other, Rousseau recognizes that the tensions that would evolve between them would likely jeopardize the attainment of one or both of these aims. In his novels, Rousseau demonstrates how his analysis of women and the family serves as a universal metaphor for the personal and political concerns that affect us all.

The Family in Society

In writing of the family in his novels, Rousseau situates them in the society of his day: the society of France during the Ancien Régime. Rousseau's aim in doing that is to illustrate the concrete application of his theoretical concepts in the "real world." If his theories are correct, it stands to reason that stable families, and hence happy individuals and productive citizens, would ensue. This would be an important justification of Rousseau's social and political theory. In addition, by situating his families in positions that are emphatically not ideal, Rousseau is illustrating the importance of families in maintaining and fostering authenticity even in an inauthentic world. This has important theoretical and practical implications. Rousseau views the family as a potential revolutionary vehicle — true to its revolutionary origins — in being the keeper of the flame of personal and political authenticity. Eventually,

the other hand, the family as a social unit works to counter change and solidify the status quo.

3. This is particularly evident in *Émile*, which opens with a personal appeal to the mother to look after her child, and whose basic goal is the development of an individual who would be authentic for all times and seasons.
4. Because Rousseau believes that pure rationality alone cannot provide a stable and permanent basis for the cohesiveness of an authentic State (in *Émile*, Rousseau links even the fundamental emotion of pity to a rationalistic egotistical calculation of self-interest), he must ground the development of the citizen of the authentic State in the emotional cradle of the individual family. Essentially, "le moi particulier répandu sur le tout est le plus fort lien de la société générale" (*Social Contract*, first version II, 4, p. 330), but it is Rousseau's hope that the family in the authentic State will nurture the authentic citizen.

Rousseau maintains, this grassroots movement will blossom into revolution on the political plane as well. Even in a society as corrupt and depraved as that of eighteenth-century France, it would still be possible to attain personal and political authenticity without resorting to the chaos of cataclysmic revolution.⁵

This second aspect of the family's importance to authentic revolutionary change is brought out particularly at the end of *Émile*, when Sophie and Émile are given careful instructions about married life. The importance of Émile and Sophie's happiness is not just personal in nature. In addition, their felicity is to serve as the catalyst to foster personal and eventually political authenticity all over the country. By living a happy family life in the countryside, close to the people, Émile and Sophie will afford their neighbors the opportunity to examine the advantages of an authentic life.⁶ Soon, Rousseau surmises, their neighbors will follow their example. It is Rousseau's hope that this ever expanding circle of authentic existence will eventually redeem the corrupt social and political structures and transform them into institutions that will foster both personal and political authenticity.

In view of the long and carefully planned educational programs undergone by both Émile and Sophie — Sophie is educated solely to be Émile's helpmeet and to facilitate the achievement of his life's goals — it is puzzling that their family life totally disintegrates within a few years of their marriage. In the sequel to *Émile*, entitled *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*, Émile describes his short marriage in letters written to his Tutor. According to Émile's narrative, things started to go sour when they moved to Paris — which in Rousseau's lexicon is the symbol of inauthenticity and depravity — to help Sophie get over the death of their daughter. There Sophie falls in with a bad crowd and is unfaithful to Émile. Upon his discovery of that fact, Émile declares that their marriage is over and leaves Sophie. Eventually, Émile winds up as a slave, thereby giving up any hope of true political authenticity while declaring himself to be free in his chains.⁷

5. "Comme quelques maladies bouleversent la tête des hommes; les révolutions font sur le peuple ce que certaines maladies font sur les individus" (*Social Contract*, II, 8, p. 385).

6. "De leur simple retraite Émile et Sophie peuvent répandre de bienfaits autour d'eux . . . [l'âge d'or] semble déjà renaître autour de l'habitation de Sophie" (*Émile*, Book V, p. 859).

7. *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*, letters 1 and 2.

On a facile level, of course, it is easy to point to Sophie as the author and therefore the culprit of this chain of events: after all, it was her infidelity that prompted the dissolution of her marriage to Émile. However, that point of view overlooks the fact that Sophie's action was not totally of her own doing. Even Émile admits to some complicity in her actions by acknowledging that he had been ignoring Sophie for quite some time and had not been a good husband to her. Furthermore, by leaving Sophie so precipitously, Émile reveals his lack of empathy and lack of love for his wife. The self-centeredness of Émile's love for Sophie becomes especially apparent in view of the fact that Émile had been taught by his Tutor that true love is more concerned with the Other than with one's own selfish feelings.⁸ Finally, the education that Sophie receives actually works against her being able to withstand the vicissitudes and temptations of Paris. This is because Sophie's education, in emphasizing her subservience to Émile, deprives her of any ability to think or make judgements on her own. Consequently, her moral lapse in Paris is, in its own way, inevitable.⁹

The injustice that exists even within the confines of a "natural" structure founded on love, and the implications of this injustice for the inevitable failure of the family to achieve its revolutionary goal of personal authenticity for its members and, ultimately, political authenticity for society at large is not openly acknowledged in the text of *Émile*. Still, this approach provides the only useful method for making sense of a narrative whose protagonists inexplicably fail to achieve the goals for which they are singlemindedly trained. A similar paradox marks Rousseau's romantic novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. There too the heroine Julie is clearly unhappy and unfulfilled even in the midst of a

8. "Émile amoureux et jaloux ne sera point colére . . . il sera plus allarmé qu'irrité . . . il redoublera de soins pour se rendre aimable" (*Émile*, Book V, pp. 788-789; Bloom, pp. 430-431).

9. In detailing Sophie's education, Rousseau emphasizes the extent to which Sophie is merely "prepared ground" for Émile, created as a contingent being only to help fulfill Émile's goals. However, Sophie's inability to think — which prevents her from coming up with her own agenda that might negate her subservient role vis-à-vis Émile — effectively renders her incapable of meeting the challenges of the world around her. When she is forced to make a choice, Sophie has no inner voice to fall back on as a guide: that has been most effectively squelched in the interests of making her totally passive and eagerly accepting of everything Émile has to tell her. Pierre Burgelin expresses it best in his notes to the Pléiade edition of *Émile* when he writes: "Les femmes risquent d'être singulièrement déchirées entres deux morales" (*O. C.*, IV, p. 1647).

family that adores her and is seemingly devoted to actualizing her quest for authenticity in every area of life. In attempting to understand why the story of Julie and her idyllic estate at Clarens doesn't "work out" the way it should, the reader is brought face to face with the dissonances within Rousseau's conception of the family, especially as they are embodied in Rousseau's depiction of women.

Unlike *Émile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* presents us with a far more complex and variegated view of the different types of family structures. First, Rousseau introduces the patriarchal d'Étange family. This family unit is run autocratically by the Baron d'Étange, who makes decisions according to his notion of what is due to his class and social status. Personal feelings are of no importance to him. This approach becomes a source of tension when his only daughter Julie attempts to defy him in her choice of a marriage partner. Rousseau's presentation of the narrative gives the impression that Rousseau himself favors the young lovers Julie and Saint-Preux. By implication, this serves as a moral critique of the traditional patriarchal family.¹⁰

In the face of this black-and-white presentation of the d'Étange family, it is interesting that Julie is not allowed to marry her morally upright, albeit socially undistinguished, lover and proceed to set up a family that will preach the truths of authenticity to the surrounding society. Instead, Julie winds up marrying M. de Wolmar, an old comrade-in-arms of her father, whom she most emphatically does not love. Because Julie has not given up in her search for perfect authenticity, she must radically alter her notion of what constitutes authentic family life. Indeed, reflecting upon her marriage, Julie insists that love, far from aiding the dissemination of authentic living from the family to the world at large, is in fact inimical to authenticity's existence. This is because romantic love concentrates the couple's attention exclusively on each other, thereby making them forget their responsibilities to the

10. Rousseau's bias reveals itself in three ways. First, Julie's beloved, the socially undistinguished Saint-Preux, is introduced as a man of high moral standards who refuses to compromise with the hypocritical and self-serving standards of French society. Second, Lord Eduard Bomston, the avowedly impartial observer of events, himself criticizes the Baron d'Étange's dismissal of his daughter's happiness. This likewise condemns the traditional notion of the patriarchal family as inimical to the achievement of personal authenticity. Finally and most tellingly, Julie's father is described as "denatured." D'Étange's denial of the moral imperative inherent in the "natural" love of two people for each other makes it clear that his approach, based as it is on the *amour-propre* fostered by society and its selfish values, is inherently inauthentic.

surrounding community.¹¹ Julie claims that the validation of her new beliefs can be found in the estate at Clarens, which Wolmar has deliberately fashioned as a model of rational order. The combination of Wolmar's quest for perfection together with Julie's desire for transparency — i.e., authenticity — is supposed to yield a fully realized authenticity that would transform the surrounding environment.

At first glance, it would appear that perfect transparency has been achieved at Clarens. However, tensions soon surface that reveal the depth of the deception surrounding the self-proclaimed structures of authenticity at Clarens. Three examples are particularly compelling and receive special attention in the novel itself. First, the supposed spontaneous happiness of the servants in serving their masters is revealed to be based on a carefully nurtured network of spies.¹² The question of duplicity regarding the servants has important theoretical ramifications, because a major justification of Wolmar's system at Clarens is that it promotes the spread of authenticity to the surrounding society. If the "authenticity" of the servants' lives turns out to be a sham, the entire structure of Clarens is similarly indicted. In fact, this is what indeed happens. In describing the details of the spying system and the staged confrontations and leisure activities among the servants, the novel reveals the pervasiveness of dishonesty throughout the estate.

The second example of the deception that runs rampant throughout Clarens concerns the extended Wolmar family, including Julie's cousin Claire and Julie's former lover Saint-Preux. The fact that Wolmar must in effect command their transparency with each other to the point of telling them exactly how to go about achieving it raises the suspicion that this transparency is not at all authentic.¹³ Similarly, the fact that these good friends must assemble in a special room in order to fully enjoy their transparency invites the thought that their vaunted

11. "L'amour est . . . peu convenable au mariage . . . on ne s'épouse point pour penser uniquement l'un à l'autre, mais pour remplir conjointement les devoirs de la vie civile" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, III, 20, p. 372).

12. "Ces ouvriers ont des surveillants qui les animent et les observent" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, IV, 10, p. 443). Also: "M. et Mme. de Wolmar ont sù transformer le vil métier d'accusateur en une fonction de zèle, d'intégrité, de courage" (*ibid.*, p. 463).

13. "Ne fais ni ne dis jamais rien que tu ne veuilles que tout le monde voye et entende . . . vivez dans la tête-à-tête comme si j'étois présent, ou devant moi comme si je n'y étois pas" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, IV, 6, p. 424).

transparency may be more imagined than actual.¹⁴ The third example of this pervasive inauthenticity makes itself felt on the personal level, as Julie admits that she is bored and unhappy.¹⁵ Julie's unhappiness is an example of deceptive authenticity because throughout the novel, "true" happiness is used as a barometer of moral rectitude. As a young girl, Julie refuses to run away with Saint-Preux because she insists that an ethically acceptable solution to her dilemma must include a sense of *repos*, i.e., peaceful happiness, which cannot be hers if she knows that her parents are upset with her choice. In his letter to her, Lord Bomston attempts to make Julie understand the difference between inner moral certainty and the security of social approbation, but this distinction escapes Julie who winds up acquiescing to her father's choice of a marriage partner.¹⁶ At Clarens, the sense of *repos* is similarly the guiding principle in setting up the estate in which happiness is supposed to be assured by the maintenance of rational order: a place for everything and everything in its place. Only with the persistence of her disorderly feelings for Saint-Preux threatening the stasis of Clarens does Julie begin to recognize, albeit in a limited fashion, that stability can be stultifying instead of liberating, and that stasis is the harbinger of death rather than the continuity of life. Julie's unhappiness means that the social experiment of Clarens fails on its own terms, because it has failed to guarantee the happiness of its most important member.

In his depiction of the family in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau goes beyond describing the ways in which family life can be inauthentic. In addition, Rousseau shows how inauthenticity can drape itself in the colors of authenticity and thus jeopardize the possibility of even clearly recognizing the parameters of one's situation. Julie is effectively

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14. Rousseau notes that the need to talk ceaselessly about the achievement of authenticity, as the characters in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* do, indicates that authenticity has probably not been achieved: "Celui qui le goûte est tout à la chose, il ne s'amuse pas à déclarer, j'ai du plaisir" (*Project for Corsica*, p. 937). Similarly: "Entre la chose même et sa jouissance il n'y en a point [d'intermédiaire]" (*Confessions*, Book I, p. 39). Also: "Le vrai bonheur ne se décrit pas, il se sent, et se sent d'autant mieux qu'il peut le moins se décrire" (*ibid.*, Book VI, p. 236).
 15. "Mon imagination n'a plus rien à faire, je n'ai rien à désirer . . . O mort viens" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, VI, 8, p. 689). In that same letter, Julie adds: "Malheur à qui n'a plus rien à désirer! . . . Vivre ainsi c'est être mort . . . Je ne vois partout que sujets de contentement et je ne suis pas contente . . . cette peine est bizarre j'en conviens; je suis trop heureuse, le bonheur m'ennuie" (*ibid.*, p. 693-694).
 16. "Vous serez honorée et méprisée. Il vaut mieux être oubliée et vertueuse" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, II, 3, p. 200).

prevented from ever realizing her own potential, chiefly because she becomes convinced that the methods used to achieve her compliance are really those that will guarantee her transparency. Instead of serving as a haven for the achievement of authenticity in an inauthentic world, the family in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* functions in a way that destabilizes meaning, thereby calling into question the notions of freedom and consent that can legitimate an authentic political system. It would be incorrect, however, to surmise that Rousseau ends his novel on a nihilistic note, despairing of the possibility of even enunciating, let alone achieving, his goal of personal and political authenticity. Along with his complex portrayal of the ways in which people can be duped into negating their own authenticity, Rousseau also presents a character who manages to retain some sense of Self within the charade of masks in Clarens. That person is Claire, Julie's cousin. Throughout the novel, Claire freely confesses that she is not capable of feeling or loving as completely as Julie. Unlike Julie, Claire does not strive to fully integrate all aspects of her life: for Claire, it is not important that her private and public personae merge. Thus, Claire can participate in the masquerade of sentiment at Clarens without destroying her own integrity. Because of her own Self-awareness, and her developed sense of irony, Claire is able to survive the dishonesty at Clarens and even independently venture out into the world.¹⁷ Although it is clear that Claire does not possess the depth of personality that Julie does, her survival demonstrates the possibility of maintaining some sense of Self intact in an inauthentic world which is also a prerequisite for starting to propagate authenticity within the world at large.

New Theoretical Directions

What then can Rousseau teach us about our own situation — the situation of women, families, and the surrounding social and political structures of the late twentieth century? My reading of Rousseau suggests that there is a great deal we can learn from his formulations. We can identify three major aspects of Rousseau's contribution in this realm. First, Rousseau opens up many new avenues of inquiry by raising questions and drawing new theoretical conclusions about the significance of

17. "Je me suis mise à faire le veuve coquette assés bien pour t'y tromper toi-même. C'est un rôle . . . j'ai employé cet air" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, IV, 2, p. 407; emphasis mine). Also: "Je suis en femme un espèce de monstre" (*ibid.*, I, 69, p. 174).

quotidian structures like the family and its relationship to both the individual and to society at large. In contrast to the received tradition of his day,¹⁸ Rousseau insists that the concrete minutiae of daily life have immense political significance which could revolutionize the conduct of people's lives. It is also significant that Rousseau brings a new understanding of the processes and consequences of revolution to this discussion. As we have already noted, the revolution that would bring about authenticity does not have to be cataclysmic in nature. On the contrary, Rousseau prefers an incremental type of revolution, based upon the structures of everyday life, that would avoid the bloodshed and upheaval that accompanies total revolution. By infusing everyday life with revolutionary possibilities, Rousseau is also making a significant statement about the locus of power and revolutionary political change. The revolution in everyday life is necessarily a revolution from below: it derives its force from the combined efforts of ordinary people who lead their lives in a way that radically alters its previous structure. In avoiding a revolution imposed from above by elite groups, Rousseau achieves two things. First, he eschews the violence inherent in imposed revolutions. Second, he empowers the ordinary individual, traditionally perceived as lacking significant power, with a force that has potentially far-reaching political and social consequences. In this connection, it should not be forgotten that it is women who are the focus of Rousseau's formulations regarding the revolutionary aspects of the quotidian. Although Rousseau remains firmly ensconced in the traditional notions of women's "place" and "proper sphere," it is significant that Rousseau empowers women by charging them with the responsibility for infusing everyday life with the authenticity that would eventually transform both private and public existence for all of society.¹⁹

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18. In his approach to the political significance of daily life, Rousseau distinguishes himself from both his classical and liberal precursors. Unlike Plato, who viewed the structures of daily life as inherently antithetical to the higher consciousness required for the attainment of the just political State, Rousseau demonstrates the positive contributions of everyday structures like the family to political life. Contemporary liberal political thought of the 17th and 18th centuries, on the other hand, tended to see the private sphere as completely separate from the public realm; hence irrelevant to it and therefore unimportant. Rousseau is likewise unsympathetic to this view, demonstrating the interconnectedness between the private and public realms and consequently the immense *political* significance of the quotidian.
19. This is seen in the importance Rousseau places on lactation, and the fact that (through their educative function within the family) women are placed in charge

Rousseau's second major contribution to our understanding of the family is a direct consequence of his formulation of the political significance of the quotidian. As a result, Rousseau challenges the strict division of life into mutually exclusive private and public spheres. This is seen as particularly in the way Rousseau structures the problem that he is trying to solve. In the beginning of *Émile*, for example, he phrases the issue as making either a man or a citizen, i.e., as choosing between private or public education.²⁰ Yet, in the development and resolution of this issue, it becomes apparent that no successful solution can exist if this dichotomous structure is slavishly upheld. In fact, the course of *Émile's* education proves that these two realms of public and private are not mutually impenetrable in real life. It is significant that this realization becomes clear at the point that *Émile* is ready to assume his adult duties of starting a family, for it is when discussing the role and duties of the good spouse that Rousseau begins to formulate intellectually the extent of women's domestic influence over the surrounding political landscape.

A nascent awareness of the porousness of the categories of public and private is evident also in the workings of Rousseau's novels. This is seen most clearly in the way that Rousseau handles the lives of his fictional women. If women, working from the domestic sphere, can be responsible for coping with as well as transforming the personal and political inauthenticity that surrounds them, it stands to reason that a theory that persists in accounting for the personal and political as mutually exclusive categories is both useless and misleading. This is in line with *Sophie's* own fate: as we have seen, her enforced limitation to the traditional private realm of women can be blamed for the eventual failure of Rousseau's tailored educational system to attain its goals of authenticity for its participants and for society at large. Furthermore, this implies that the beginnings of a new theory that can accurately describe the interrelationship of the personal and the political must have its genesis in reality as it is experienced by women, for it is their lives that serve as the source of the critique for the private/public dichotomy

of preserving the standards of morality and decency in inauthentic society. On this, see especially Book I and Book V in *Émile*.

20. "Ce qui fait la misère humaine est la contradiction qui se trouve . . . entre l'homme et le citoyen; rendez l'homme un vous le rendrez heureux autant qu'il peut l'être. Donnez-le tout entier à l'état ou laissez-le tout entier à lui-même, mais si vous partagez son cœur vous le déchirez" (*Du bonheur public* in *Fragments politiques*, in *O.C.*, III, p. 510).

now exposed as artificial.²¹ This is particularly obvious in the lives of Julie and Claire in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Julie's refusal to deal with the dissonance in her own life as seen in the chasm between her private and public incarnations — expressed in the novel as the conflict between Self and Other — dooms her to inauthenticity. On the other hand, Claire's effort to deal with this tension merits her at least a certain measure of autonomy if not the full achievement of authenticity. The fact that Rousseau sees the tension between the private and the public as requiring positive resolution indicates that for him, mere exclusivity of choice is not the pathway to authenticity.

This insight is directly applicable to our own dilemmas regarding the relationship between the private and the public — especially as reflected in the tension between the private arena of the family and the public world of work. If, as demonstrated by Rousseau's writings, the forced choice between the private and public spheres is itself inherently inauthentic, it becomes clear that the women obliged to make such a choice can actually only pick between two pathways to inauthenticity.²² What is left intact in such an arrangement is the existing structures of power that continue to enjoy immunity from having to justify the perpetration of inauthenticity upon women and through them on all members of society.

The interpenetration of the private and public arenas is grounded on a much broader premise, which marks Rousseau's third contribution to our concept of the family and its relationship to the surrounding social and political network. This is Rousseau's continued insistence on the ambiguity that pervades modern life, and the challenge that this raises to the achievement of authenticity.

Rousseau emphasizes the complexity and ambiguity of modern life as he sees it by placing on a continuum concepts that are normally

21. In *Gender and History*, Linda Nicholson demonstrates the historicity of the perceived impenetrability of the categories of private and public.
22. Evidence of the tensions between the private and public realms as felt in the workplace especially by parents is attested to in many contemporary newspaper and magazine articles. On the other hand, awareness of these tensions does not automatically imply the search for new ways to restructure the social and political environment that enforces these inauthentic options. The traditional ways of coping remain attractive because, as we have suggested, they demand adjustment from only one part of society — i.e., the women who have always had to cope with this opposition. Thus, it is reported that even corporate women are "dropping out" to raise families, convinced that this is the only option remaining to them if they want to fulfill their responsibilities in the private sphere (*The New York Times*, Thursday, April 20, 1988, p. C1).

considered to be contradictory.²³ In so doing, Rousseau is closer to contemporary feminist criticism of the politics of domination than might at first appear.²⁴ Throughout his novels, Rousseau demonstrates that it is the false insistence upon dichotomies that destroys authenticity and the possibility for its achievement. Rousseau understands the ambiguity of life as a message of hopefulness rather than cause for despair. He maintains that there is no one “right” way to attain authenticity: rather its achievement is a function of particular people and circumstances.²⁵ Thus, Rousseau insists that authenticity can be maintained even in an inauthentic world, and that a life spent coping with inauthenticity (the situation of Claire) is better than a life wasted in the denial of the ambiguities of existence (the case of Julie).

Conclusion

With all the theoretical complexities in Rousseau’s writings, it is nonetheless clear that Rousseau himself does not transmit practical blueprints for the future regarding the achievement of authenticity through the structures of everyday life. Neither does Rousseau reveal how to go about positively integrating the private and public spheres, or how to implement the cognitive re-ordering of the categories of existence. What Rousseau does is teach by example. First, Rousseau’s writings are a testimony to the enduring importance of theory. Although certain contemporary writers have questioned the efficacy of theoretical

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23. This is in direct opposition to the classical and liberal penchant for dichotomy: nature vs. civilization; private vs. public; emotional vs. rational; “worst” and “best” types of government. While Rousseau presents certain of his concepts as polar opposites, this is done for ease of explication and it soon becomes obvious that one end of the continuum implies the other. For example, although Rousseau talks about a “good” and “bad” kind of love (*amour de soi* and *amour-propre*, respectively), certain aspects of *amour-propre* are found in *amour de soi*: “L’amour de soi mis en fermentation devient amour-propre” (*Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, in *O.C.*, IV, p. 936).
24. See Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”: “Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western tradition: they have all been systemic to the logic and practices of domination of women . . .” in Linda G. Nicholson, ed.: *Feminism/Postmodernism*, p. 219.
25. “Quand donc on demande absolument quel est le meilleur Gouvernement, on fait une question insoluble comme indéterminée; ou si l’on veut, elle a autant de bonnes solutions qu’il y a de combinaisons possibles dans les positions absolues et relatives des peuples” (*Social Contract*, III, 9, p. 419).

investigations in the quest for personal and political authenticity,²⁶ Rousseau's efforts in the different forms of the written word reveal his commitment to exploring and even pushing the frontiers of critical thought. Second, Rousseau's critique of contemporary liberal categories of thought itself demonstrates his close ties with some of the values espoused by that school of thought. In this context, a rereading of Rousseau's works can prove rewarding for the insights it can still yield in the formulation of contemporary political and social theory. Instead of a wholesale rejection of liberal values, resulting in the espousal of socialist or Marxist constructs which themselves are found wanting,²⁷ it may be worthwhile to analyze and retain those concepts of liberal thought — e.g., the valorization of personal identity and individual freedoms — that could still be useful in a robust feminist theory of authenticity.²⁸

It is noteworthy that two hundred years after Rousseau first remarked on the importance of the family to the resolution of crucial political issues, the family still remains at the center of political debate. It would seem that we have finally come to understand the importance of the health of the private sector to the public welfare at large, and the futility of trying to maintain artificial walls between those realms. The next step is to actually restructure our cognitive categories of Self and Other, private and public. It is then that the revolutionary change inherent in Rousseau's writings can be realized, and the ideal of authenticity in all spheres be achieved.

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26. It is possible to read Carole Pateman's conclusion in *The Sexual Contract* as doubting the possibility of political theory to conceive of a just society: "The political fiction is still showing vital life signs and political theory is insufficient to undermine the life supports" (p. 234).
27. See, for example, Nancy C.M. Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Towards a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Northeastern University Press 1983) and Zillah R. Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (Northeastern University Press 1981).
28. Virginia Held does this in her analysis of love in "Marx, Sex and the Transformation of Society" in *The Philosophical Forum*, volume 5, 1973-1974, pp. 168-185.