

Lectures | **Reading**
de | ***La Nouvelle***
La Nouvelle | ***Héloïse***
Héloïse | **Today**

publié sous
la direction de

edited
by

Ourida Mostefai

Pensée libre, n^o 4

Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau
North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Ottawa 1993

**CANADIAN CATALOGUING IN
PUBLICATION DATA**

**DONNÉES DE CATALOGAGE
AVANT LA PUBLICATION (CANADA)**

Main entry undert title:

Vedette principale au titre:

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Text in French and English.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Texte en français et en anglais.
Comprend des références
bibliographiques.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. North American Association for the
Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III.
Title: Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse
today. IV. Series.

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. Association nord-américaine des
études Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III. Titre:
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today. IV.
Collection.

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5E

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5F

Ouvrage publié grâce au concours de l'Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau, grâce à une subvention des Services Culturels français de Boston, et grâce à l'aide de la Faculté des Arts et des Sciences de Boston College.

The publication of this volume was made possible by the cooperation of the North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by a grant from the French Cultural Services in Boston and by the support of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Boston College.

© Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau / North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1993.

ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

Collection « Pensée libre » dirigée par Guy Lafrance.
Revision de textes, typographie et mise-en-page par Daniel Woolford.

Pensée libre series editor: Guy Lafrance.
Text editing, typesetting and layout by Daniel Woolford.

Imprimé au Canada
Printed in Canada

READING JULIE AMOUR-PROPRE-LY

Amour-propre

L'amour-propre, as described in the *Discourse on Inequality*, is a late stage in the process of self-evaluation and self-knowledge. It is preceded by stages of valuing objects as necessary to self-preservation, pride in doing well, consciousness of oneself and others as valuers, consciousness of others as having values, and consciousness of oneself as one who is being given a value. Complementing it, and complicating its removal, is a style of society that feeds, then feeds on, egoism: it is observable today in watching television commercials. Amour-propre is an artificial passion in that it is caused by persons valuing others. Sometimes the valuing is based on natural qualities such as strength or beauty, more often it is based on artificial qualities such as wealth or influence. One defining characteristic is that it is a desire not only to be desired or desired as an equal of others; but rather one of being desired above others, as superior to others, first among the many, the best of the rest. Amour-propre is the desire to stand highest and shine brightest, forever king of the castle. A second defining characteristic is that this mode of self-evaluation is dependent, and necessarily dependent, on the esteem of others. If one wanted to be Hegelian about it (and why not?) one should say that amour-propre is "self-in-other-esteem." One obtains one's evaluation of oneself solely from the valuing of others: as Rousseau puts it, one "exists only in the eyes of others." Since all want to distinguish themselves, those afflicted with amour-propre suffer a sad frustration: frustration because each desires to be preferred over others, which is impossible, sad because we voluntarily yield to irresponsible others our most precious belonging, freedom with its rights and its duties (*Contract*, Book I, chapter 4).¹

-
1. J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social, Œuvres complètes*, Tome III, 356, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, éditeurs B. Gagnebin et M. Raymond, Dijon, 1966. All references to Rousseau's writings are to volumes two and three of this edition. Since *Julie* is in volume two, I will abbreviate to the part, letter and page numbers within the text.

Hence the consequence of amour-propre, and the conclusion of the *Discourse on Inequality*, is self-alienation, the unavoidable selling of one's sense of self to others, a loss of self-respect in its profoundest sense. Amour-propre is, then, voluntary slavery. The richest idea in Rousseau's philosophy is amour-propre. Indeed so rich is it, it is a mistake to try to give a one-word translation of it.² The correct way to understand it is to follow J. L. Austin's rule "its meaning is its use" and thus to understand it in context wherever it is used.

That one can read *Julie* along with the *Contract* and *Émile* as attempts to deal with the problem of amour-propre is implied in a "Note" by Alan Bloom in his translation of *Émile*, one judged by Bloom to be of such importance that it is given a page to itself. It is quoted here almost in its entirety:

Émile was published in 1762, almost simultaneously with the *Social Contract* and two years after the *Nouvelle Héloïse*.³ Together these three works constitute an exploration of the consequences for modern man of the tensions between nature and civilization, freedom and society, and hence happiness and progress which Rousseau propounded in the *Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences* (1750) and *The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1754). They each experiment with resolutions of the fundamental human problem, the *Social Contract* dealing with civil society and the citizen, the *Nouvelle Héloïse* with love, marriage and the family, and *Émile* with the education of a naturally whole man who is to live in society. They provide Rousseau's positive statement about the highest possibilities of society and the way to live a good life within it.⁴

An Experiment In Living

It seems that Bloom is here encouraging us to read the novel *Julie* "amour-propre-ly": that is, that the fundamental human problem involves amour-propre as Rousseau presents it in *Inequality* where

-
2. M.B. Ellis offers an interesting suggestion that covers several instances of use in *Inequality*: "This is the principle of 'amour-propre,' by which he compares himself with his fellows, seeking distinctions, and which may be termed 'self-preference' as distinguished from 'love of self.'" M.B. Ellis, *Julie or La Nouvelle Héloïse, A Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought (1749-1759)*, 54, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1949.
 3. *Émile* and *The Social Contract* were published in 1762 and *Julie* in 1761. The *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* was published in 1755.
 4. Alan Bloom, editor and translator, J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile or On Education*, Basic Books, New York, 1979, 29.

it is a problem.⁵ But in spite of Bloom's encouragement, it should be admitted that there are obstacles that limit the study of amour-propre in *Julie*.

The first obstacle is expressed by M. B. Ellis in her book *Julie*: "Amour-propre" is consistently denounced in favour of 'amour de soi', which is consistently recommended." (Ellis, *Julie*, footnote 1, 17) "The following words, uttered by Wolmar in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, give expression to an idea to which Rousseau consistently clung: . . . Je conclus que le caractère général de l'homme est un amour-propre indifférent par lui-même, bon ou mauvais par les accidents qui le modifient . . ." (Ellis, *Julie*, 28). Ellis's first comment applies accurately to the use of amour-propre in *Inequality* but she fails to notice and emphasize the important change of meaning uttered by Wolmar. Amour-propre now is a neutral passion ("indifférent par lui-même").

A second obstacle to understanding amour-propre in *Julie* is somewhat complex. One might believe that amour-propre is most easily identified through impressionable personalities: that some more easily catch the infection and allow us to see it more clearly. Rousseau's play *Narcisse* provides a good illustration. But apart from St. Preux, there is a noticeable shortage of impressionable persons in *Julie*. Julie herself, Wolmar, Claire, Lord Bomston *et al.* tend to be, as we say, "very much their own persons" and do not "exist only in the eyes of others." Indeed, Rousseau goes out of his way to note this regarding Julie: "si peu sensible à l'amour-propre apprend à s'aimer dans ses bienfaits." (*Julie*, Cinquième Partie, Lettre II, 533.) St. Preux stands out, in contrast, by reason of his susceptibility to the judgment of others. For example, his susceptibility shows up in being unwilling to break up the party with the boys when visiting with the ladies of the night; especially in his claim that he thought he was adding water to his wine only to discover, to his horror, that he was adding white wine to red wine! A third limitation is the absence from the dramatic site of the novel of what one may call a society afflicted with amour-propre. There are, truly, helpfully and importantly, parts of St. Preux's description of Paris that are remarkably similar to descriptions of amour-propre in *Inequality*:

5. In language representative of the meaning in *Inequality*, Bloom writes: "Or, to describe the inner workings of his soul, he is the man who, when dealing with others, thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others . . ." The problem is "'man's dividedness.'" (Alan Bloom, "Introduction to *Émile*," in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or on Education*, 5, 10, Basic Books, New York, 1979.)

for instance, “chacun songe à son intérêt, personne au bien commun . . . c’est un choc perpétuel de brigues et de cabales, un flux et reflux de préjugés.” (*Julie*, Seconde Partie, Lettre IV, 234.) This third limitation is most useful to this essay, for it suggests that if Julie is to be interpreted by means of amour-propre and if meaning is to be given to Bloom’s words then the spotlight must be put on Clarens as one of the ways of preventing the incidence of amour-propre and as a way of “living the good life” within society.

In this essay, I shall take it that the “fundamental human problem” involves avoidance of amour-propre as it is presented in *Inequality*: that is, that we interpret *Julie*, in part, as one more attempt to deal with the problem of alienation of self and an example of how to live the good life. This interpretation implies, contrary to the impression one is left with at the end of *Inequality*, that amour-propre is not universal and can be avoided — in somewhat the same way in which Rousseau suggests in the *Contract* that Corsica might be capable of self-rule. There are places in the body of humanity where the disease has not spread. Corsica is one, and, perhaps, Clarens is another. It implies, as well, an awareness of amour-propre plus knowing, caring persons who have ways and means of dealing with it. All of these circumstances can be found in the novel.

Two Questions

However, evaluating Clarens as a defence against amour-propre and as an instance of the good life for persons involves a problem that may have been overlooked by both Rousseau and Bloom: avoiding amour-propre and living the good life are not the same, a distinction that may be hidden by the fact that both are good. The difference is that some set of conditions may enable an individual or group of individuals to escape amour-propre and yet fail resoundingly as an instance of how to live the good life. The analogy between amour-propre and disease may make the difference clearer. A set of conditions can serve to prevent the occurrence of a disease and yet it doesn’t follow that the set of conditions produces health. All that it produces is the absence of that disease. In the same way Julie and Wolmar may install a set of circumstances at Clarens that plausibly prevents the presence and development of amour-propre and yet Clarens is not a well-qualified instance of the good life even if Rousseau and Bloom believe that it is: the mere absence of amour-propre, evil though it be, is not the same

as the good life. Admittedly, we can't have the good life when amour-propre is present, but its mere absence is no guarantee of the good life. Absence is only a negation and hence is not, to use Bloom's own words a "positive statement about the highest possibilities of society and the way to live a good life within it." That Clarens may prevent amour-propre and yet prove to be an unacceptable candidate for the good life is the conclusion that I aim to draw at the end of this essay.

Clarens and Prevention of Amour-propre

But prior to making an argument for that conclusion, we need to see a picture of Clarens as a place that should prevent the emergence of amour-propre. Let me quote some passages that provide the best picture:

Si je voulois étudier un peuple, c'est dans les provinces reculées où les habitans ont encore leurs inclinations naturelles . . . (*Julie*, Seconde Partie, Lettre XVI, 242). . . . Quand il est question d'estimer la puissance publique, le bel-esprit visite les palais du prince, ses ports, ses troupes . . . le vrai politique parcourt les terres et va dans la chaumière du laboureur. Le premier voit ce qu'on a fait, et le second ce qu'on peut faire." (*Julie*, Cinquième Partie, Lettre II, 535.) . . . (L)es hommes ne sont pas faits pour les places, mais les places sont fait pour eux. (Cinquième Partie, Lettre II, 536) Ouvriers, domestiques, tous ceux qui l'ont servie, ne fut-ce que pour un seul jour deviennent tous ses enfans Ah! Milord! l'adorable et puissant empire que celui de la beauté bienfaisante! (*Julie*, Quatrième Partie, Lettre X, 444.) . . . Mais l'aspect de cette maison et de la vie uniforme et simple des habitans répand dans l'ame des spectateurs un charme secret. . . Un petit nombre de gens doux et paisibles, unis par des besoins mutuels et par une réciproque bienveillance y concourt par divers soins à une fin commune: chacun trouvant dans son état tout ce qu'il faut pour en tre content et ne point desirer d'en sortir, on s'y attache comme y devant rester toute la vie, et la seule ambition qu'on garde est celle d'en bien remplir les devoirs. Il y a tant de modération dans ceux qui commandent et tant de zèle dans ceux qui obéissent que des égaux eussent pu distribuer entre eux les mêmes emplois, sans aucun se fut plaint de son partage. Ainsi nul n'envie celui d'un autre; nul ne croit pouvoir augmenter sa fortune que par l'augmentation du bien commun; les maîtres mêmes ne jugent de leur bonheur que par celui des gens qui les environnent. (*Julie*, Cinquième Partie, Lettre II, 547-8)

Sir Robert Filmer could not have described better this ideal society. We can note Rousseau's strategy most quickly if we revert to the description of Paris and assume, which I am sure is correct, that what is true of an amour-propre society is true of Paris: "chacun songe

à son intérêt, personne au bien commun.” At Clarens, by contrast, it would not be true to say simply that the interest of all is the interest of each, with no one seeking her or his own interest. It would be fairer to Rousseau’s intention to say that each fulfills her or his interest through the common interest. And, indeed this identification with the common good is the insulation from amour-propre that Rousseau recommends.

Julie and Wolmar carefully choose suitable children from large country families as servants and inculcate love for one another, for their master and mistress, and hence love for the common good — to the extent that duty and happiness merge. Despite much evidence to the contrary in the novel, Rousseau assures us that the master and mistress of Clarens are no more than equal to their servants but, comically, this equality seems plausible only during the vendange (Cinquième Partie, Lettre VII, 607, 608). In effect, Clarens is a species of Platonic paternalism despite Rousseau’s assurance that all are equal. For that reason, it is doubtful that Clarens will remain an effective protection against amour-propre. Everything in the strategy depends upon the persons and actions of Wolmar and Julie, which puts the lie to equality, and “(i)l n’y aura jamais qu’une Julie au monde.” (Cinquième Partie, Lettre II, 532.) Her uniqueness also establishes brevity.

May I introduce briefly a hypothesis. I have indicated above that the problem of amour-propre is one of rampant egoism stimulated by a society that supports it. Rousseau does not have to look far to convince himself that this is so, and will be more so. Evidence of it is present in the writings of Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld and Mandeville, in Paris, and inside Rousseau himself. The hypothesis is that Rousseau comes to believe that one might combat amour-propre by using amour-propre: one encourages being good to others by flattering self-esteem when that good is done. The strategy presupposes that amour-propre is not essentially evil (even though Rousseau gives no argument for a *volte-face*); indeed it presupposes that amour-propre is indifferent, is good or bad depending upon the circumstances. The circumstances in *Julie* are an interesting part of the hypothesis. J.L. Mackie provides the language to express them when he speaks of one’s preference for one’s family as “minimal altruism”: the minimal altruist who favours her or his brother isn’t egotistical, but is not altruistic either. To sum up, Rousseau may have thought that amour-propre could be overcome by, so to speak, spreading it out over an extended family, in *Julie*, and over one’s fellow citizens, as is suggested in his later political writings. According to this hypothesis, love of family and of one’s country are

attempts at minimal altruism, ones of extending amour-propre. I turn now to my conclusion.

At Best A Brief Defence, But a Poor Life

Despite the incongruity of combining Julie's importance as the mother of Clarens with the label Platonic paternalism, it is necessary to my criticism of Clarens as a place for the good life that I expand on the description of Clarens as a species of Platonic paternalism. In the *Republic*, Plato argues that only the philosopher can know the common good, the good that is good for all. He is like a father who knows what is good for his children, who are incapable of knowing what is good for them. Knowing the good, the paternalist has the moral right and moral duty of doing what is good for the ignorant others. Julie and Wolmar are the Platonic paternalists of Clarens. In his other writings on political morality, Rousseau is markedly critical of Sir Robert Filmer, the author who strenuously argued paternalism as a political morality in the seventeenth century. But neither Filmer nor his work *Patriarcha* are mentioned in the index of names and works cited for *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in Tome II of the Pléiade edition.

It is especially important to mention the presence of paternalistic theory in *Julie* for the following reason. In an earlier essay that referred to the Lawgiver in Rousseau's *Social Contract*, I suggested that the Lawgiver should be understood as an "ad hoc" paternalist. Doubtless, the same could be said of Jean-Jacques, tutor of Émile. The reason for the qualification "ad hoc" is that Rousseau believes that the good life of freedom and equality cannot come about on its own, that another being who does not act for his own good, but who acts for the good of others who are unable to act for themselves, must intervene at the right time in the course of history to provide the appropriate grounds for a life of freedom, grounds for the self-rule of a people or a person. Once the appropriate intervention of the "ad hoc" paternalist has occurred, then there is no longer a justification for paternalism.

But what is startling about *Julie*, when one considers that it was published only one year before the *Contract* and *Émile*, is that there is not the slightest hint that Julie and Wolmar are "ad hoc" paternalists: on the contrary, they are full-time paternalists. If *Julie* is one of Rousseau's experiments in good living then the full-time paternalism of Julie and Wolmar is more than inconsistent, it is

astonishing. Rousseau's greatness as a philosopher is allied most closely with his moral justification of democracy. A more likely reason for the advocacy of the paternalistic communal family of Clarens is that in the absence of the actuality of his democracy, paternalism for a common good is an acceptable alternative.

Whatever the precise cause of the choice of Clarens may be, three things seem clear: first, Clarens is a choice, second, it is a choice of an ideal life, third, the model chosen is a family. In Part Four, Letter Ten, where the domestic economy of Clarens is being explained to Milord Édouard, the community is referred to as a family on four occasions. In a typical example, Rousseau says: "Ai-je tort, Milord, de comparer des maitres si chéris à des peres, et leurs domestiques à leurs enfans? Vous voyez que c'est ainsi qu'ils se regardent eux-mêmes." (*Julie*, Quatrième Partie, X, 447.) What is less clear is the extent to which Rousseau appreciates the contradiction between the family and democracy as models of the ideal life.

Hence, it would be helpful to have before us a bare-bones comparison between paternalism and Rousseauist democracy. Paternalism is the doctrine that one or a few, the father or patriarchs, know the good of all or of the subjects, the subjects do not know their own good, thus, those who know have the right and the duty to do good for the ignorant. The knowers are justified morally on three counts. One, they do what is good, two, it is the good of others, three, they do not act for their selfish good. Thus, paternalism can be morally powerful. It was favoured, for example, by missionaries such as Albert Schweitzer. Rousseauist democracy is the doctrine that all members of a community should do what is good for all and, moreover, all must judge what is good for all. We shouldn't say, simply, that the common good is what all decide it is, for that may suggest that the common good is only an arithmetic sum of opinions on a particular occasion. Rather, Rousseau believes that for any group there exists a common good that differs from private goods, that judging that common good is within the competence of any sane adult, and that we all act morally when, and only when, each of us seeks to express and act for the common good of the community.

Perhaps the easiest way of emphasizing the difference between Wolmar's paternalism and Rousseau's general will democracy is to view both from the perspective of decision-making. In general will democracy there are three aspects: one, all give decisions, two,

aiming for the good of all, three, the good of all is achieved.⁶ By contrast, Wolmar's paternalism is merely one-third of general will democracy. When the issue is the good of the community of Clarens the decision-makers are Wolmar and Julie and, Rousseau assures us, the common good is achieved. What is not achieved is moral growth in the rest of the members. That is achieved by all members accepting the responsibility of willing the good of all. By treating the members of Clarens as children, and they regarding themselves as children, Wolmar denies them their moral freedom.⁷

Rousseau should have had greater faith in general will democracy, although that is too easy to say since general will democracy has yet to be tried. Rousseau's democracy, in contrast to Wolmar's paternalism, is the moral coming of age of politics. Wolmar's paternalism, on the other hand, deserves the same telling criticism that Rousseau made of representative democracy: paternalism and representative government are similar in being kinds of political activity wherein the political agents, Wolmar or elected representatives, decide what is good for others. The evil, as Rousseau argues so well in the *Contract*, is not so much that the agents may be mistaken in their choice of what is good for others, for they may not be. It is rather that Wolmar and elected representatives deny freedom and equality to their "family" members or subjects. The only morally justifiable kind of political activity is one in which all citizens are political agents, namely, one in which all decide what is good for all. In that way, and only in that way, do persons obtain a moral education and moral maturity in politics. There is, embedded in Rousseau's conception of democracy, a curious intermin-

-
6. Despite what I say here and in the paragraph above, I remain unsure which of two alternatives Rousseau really intends: the common good of a group exists independently of the decision-maker or is the decision of decision-makers who decide according to appropriate standards, that is, the standards of the general will. If general will democracy is the latter, a method of decision-making, then the third aspect is redundant. However, my argument is not affected much.
 7. After I had written this essay, I found James Jones Jr.'s interesting *La Nouvelle Héloïse: Rousseau and Utopia* (Librairie Droz, Genève, 1977). Its contention is in partial agreement with Bloom's "Note," viz, that *Julie* contains a deliberate statement of an ideal life (28, 44, 84). In Chapter IV Jones contends that Rousseau destroys Clarens as a Utopia within the novel ("... destroyed it textually himself," 92). He claims, mistakenly, that Rousseau's essence of ideal existence is absolute harmony (88). Absolute harmony may have this role in *Julie*. In Rousseau's other major writings, freedom and quality are fundamental to the ideal.

gling of morals and politics that has yet to be understood fully. It has to do with the sense in which Rousseau politicized morality and moralized politics. Moral freedom and equality necessitate treatment of other agents as persons capable of deciding what is good for all, this kind of moral democracy is the first step, and it is one that we have yet to take. The second is that politics is other than power and manipulation. As Rousseau put it in the *Contract*: “the strongest is never strong enough unless we transform force into right and obedience into duty”: somehow we must find together that which is morally right in political reality, either by seeing it as a matter of substance or as a method of agreement amongst free and equal agents. There is, in the *Contract* and *Emile*, a vision of moral politics that makes Clarens a silly, shabby, poor pretense of the good life. Rousseau is right when he says that moral politics begins with the sovereignty of the people. And I don’t really accept the defence that Rousseau’s only purpose in writing *Julie* was to invent a Harlequin romance “avant la lettre.” How nice it is when the children do not talk at table is not good enough. If Bloom is right, that *Julie* is meant to be a “positive statement about the highest possibilities of society and the way to live a good life within it,” then the author of *Julie* is very wrong.⁸

Jim MacAdam
Champlain College,
Trent University

8. I should like to thank my research assistants, Christopher MacDonald and Lisa Kucman, for their careful and useful help.