IV. Theotropic Allegory

When the vicaire savoyard has completed the doctrinal part of his exposition, his listener (presumably the preceptor of Emile?) is impressed enough by the fervour of his tone to compare him to Orpheus but less inclined to praise the originality of the doctrine conveyed with such inspired conviction: “Les sentimens que vous venez de m’exposer, lui dis-je, me paroissent plus nouveaux par ce que vous avouez ignorer que par ce que vous dites croire. J’y vois a peu de chose prés le theîisme ou la religion naturelle que les chrétiens affectent de confondre avec l’atheïsme ou l’irréligion, qui est la doctrine directement opposée.” (p. 606) It is indeed well known that even Voltaire, despite many reservations, expressed basic agreement with the doctrine of the Profession and that Blake could, with some justice, link Voltaire and Rousseau together as the proselytes of the “natural religion” he despised. Unquestionably, on a first level of understanding, the Profession de foi is a straightforward theistic document, basing religious conviction on the manifestation of innate and natural moral feelings (conscience). “Bornons-nous aux prémiers sentimens que nous trouvons en nous-mêmes, puisque c’est toujours a eux que l’étude nous ramène, quand elle ne nous a point égarés. /Conscience, conscience! instinct divin, immortelle et céléste voix, guide assuré d’un être ignorant et borné, mais intelligent et libre; juge infaillible du bien et du mal, qui rends l’homme semblable a Dieu . . .“ As for understanding what this voice is telling and where this guide is leading us, there seems to be no serious difficulty: “S’il parle a tous les coeurs, pourquoi donc y en a-t-il si peu qui l’entendent? Eh! c’est qu’il nous parle la langue de la nature ” (601). This is presumably the same language in which
the Book of Nature has been written: “Je n’ai jamais pû croire que Dieu m’ordonât sous peine de l’enfer d’être si savant. J’ai donc refermé tous les livres. Il en est un seul ouvert a tous les yeux, c’est celui de la nature.” (624) Hence the spectacular natural setting chosen for the vicar’s discourse: “On eut dit que la nature étaloit a nos yeux toute sa magnificence pour en offrir le texte a nos entretiens.” The text of nature has its equivalence in the “effigie intérieure” whose voice speaks clearly enough if we are willing to silence the distracting noises of worldliness: “Rentrons en nous-mêmes, ô mon jeune ami! . . .” (596). “Il est donc au fond des ames un principe inné de justice et de vertu, sur lequel, malgré nos propres maximes, nous jugeons nos actions et celles d’autrui comme bonnes ou mauvaises, et c’est a ce principe que je donne le nom de conscience.” (598) To the vain teachings of philosophy, the vicaire opposes the innate wisdom of “lumiere intérieure” (569).

The affirmation of belief in a natural religion, founded in the transcendental valorization of such concepts as inwardness, innateness (inniété), voice (blank—used by Burgelin in Preface), natural language, conscience, consciousness, selfhood, etc. represents, of course, a considerable change from the inferences drawn from the linguistic and epistemological critiques that have concerned us up till now. No such considerations play a part in the historical and political speculations of anthropological texts such as the Second Discourse; when God is mentioned, it is primarily in order to demonstrate that there is no such thing as natural language (or theological progress). These rhetorical models and their (equally rhetorical) deconstructions persist well into various other texts, very different in tone and theme from the Second Discourse, but nevertheless generated by the same linguistic patterns. The first part/half of the Nouvelle Heloïse, for instance, is organized as the operation and the critique of substitutive exchanges patterned on the general model of metaphor.
As a result of these deconstructions, the positively-valued terms from the *Profession de foi* (selfhood, consciousness, etc.) all become ambivalent; none of them certainly would have to be discarded as simply aberrant, but none could remain as a stable category of undisputed transcendental authority—none could ever be transferred to a theological level without a thorough-going blank of the explicit and implicit conception of language that, up till then, had structured Rousseau’s thought. Once more, we confront the enigma of two entirely incompatible modes of thought subsumed under the single name of Rousseau. Unless, of course, we assume a dramatic change in Rousseau’s development, either because his misgivings about the reliability of language were made to appear trivial after a religious revelation as sudden and theatrical as Julie’s “conversion” in the Temple, or because he repressed or sublimated his epistemological anxieties by means of religious convictions. If the latter were indeed the case, there also would be no necessity to get involved in the blank of repressive strategies that take us back to an intellectual case-history which might well be fascinating but by which one’s curiosity should only be tempted if its existence is established beyond doubt. For one might end up looking quite foolish if after enjoying oneself by showing the naiveté of Rousseau’s slyness, it turns out that he
The usual temptation arises blank account for this discrepancy in various thematic and empirical ways. One can argue, with Marron and, to some extent Starobinski(1) that the development of Rousseau’s thought tends towards conversion, a hypothesis that receives some support from the fact that the Nouvelle Heloïse can be read to make conversion the central statement of the book. Or one can simply accuse Rousseau of inconsistency and, in accordance with one’s own philosophical or religious convictions, dismiss the one or the other fact of his schizophrenic theoreetization. More productively, one can consider the religious aspect of his work as an ideological superstructure resulting from the repression or sublimation of psychological or political contradictions, in a movement that runs parallel to Althusser’s diagnosis about the literary sublimation of Rousseau’s political confusions. Before engaging in any of these speculations, one should begin by establishing if, on the basis of the existing texts, the discrepancy indeed occurs in such a philosophically uninteresting way.

At first consideration, the texts seem to make the divisions even deeper. The gap between the theophany of the Profession de foi (confirmed, to some degree, by the central and the concluding letters of Julie in the N. Hél.) and the political writings, especially the Social Contract, is too obvious to have remained unnoticed.
But this is, of course, no valid argument either way. The fact remains that the narrative of La Nouvelle Héloïse is structured in such a way that it can be read as the conversion which several critics, including Starobinski,\(^{(1)}\) consider to be the central statement of the book; the structure of the Rousseau corpus as a whole has, in this respect, less authority than that of a fiction not as clearly at the mercy of empirical contingencies.\(^{(2)}\)

Be this as it may, the gap between the theophany of the Profession de foi (paralleled to some degree in the central and the concluding letters attributed to Julie in la Nouvelle Héloïse) and the political writings of Rousseau is too obvious to have remained unnoticed. \{endnote\} [Next to the question of the priority of the self, and the presumed logo and (blank)centrism of Rousseau’s linguistic theory\(^{(3)}\)] It remains one of the
major cruxes in the tradition of Rousseau interpretation.\(^{(1)}\) The critical rigor of the political
texts contrasted with the piety of religious sentiment in the *Profession* always again forces
commentators, depending on their temperament, as when Pierre Burgelin claims of the
discrepancies between statement and tone in the *Profession de foi* that “Ces disparates
tiennent à la distance entre l’analyse intellectuelle et l’élan du coeur” (O.C. CXLIII), still and
again the Schillerian dichotomy between Rousseau’s *Denkkraft* and his *Empfindlichkeit*. The
conflict emerges perhaps most strikingly when one juxtaposes the Vicar’s natural piety with
the pre-Nietzschean denunciations of christianity as a political force, in the chapter on civil
religion in (Book IV, chapter VIII) the *Social Contract*: “Ce fut dans ces circonstances que
Jésus vint ‘tablir sur la terre un royaume Spirituel; ce qui, séparent le sistème théologique du
sistème politique, fit que l’Etat cessa d’être un, et causa les divisions intestines qui n’ont
jamais cessé d’agiter les peuples chrétiens. . . Ce que les payens avoient craint est arrivé;
alors tout a changé de face, les humbles Chrétiens ont changé de langage, et bientôt on a vu ce
prétendu royaume de l’autre monde devenir sous un chef visible le plus violent despotisme
dans celui-ci.” (462) “La (religion du Prêtre) (which includes Roman catholicism as a major
instance) est (a considerer politiquement) si évidemment mauvaise que c’est perdre le temps de
s’amuser a le démontrer . Tout ce qui rompt l’unité sociale ne vaut rien: Toutes les
institutions qui mettent l’homme en contradiction avec lui-même ne valent rien.” (464) Jean-
Robert Tronchin, the Procureur général of the City of Geneva, whose report led the decision of
the municipal Petit Conseil to order the burning of *Emile* and the *Social Contract* (as “tendant
à détruire la religion et tous les gouvernements”) was certainly justified in referring to these
texts in his cogent attack on Rousseau published under the title of *Lettres de la Compagne.*\(^{(3)}\)

On this occasion the theoretical crux
just alluded to became a very practical matter of political life and death. Consequently, Rousseau’s reply to Tronchin \{note\} (especially in his first *Lettres de la Montagne*), is that of a lawyer rather than a philosopher; without retracting the assertions of the *Social Contract* he maintains that there is nothing impious in a critique of christianity aimed only at religion as a political institution and pleads, in fact, for a strict secularization of politics and an equally strict depolitization of religion. Christianity is, as it were, too “good” to be politically usable\(^1\) and it sharply distinguishes salvation of the human being from the well-being of the citizen and the state. [This leaves unanswered the accusation of the *Social Contract* that this very separation was used to establish the worst of tyrannies; it forces Rousseau into reducing the Reformation to a purely individual interpretation of Scripture (713 etc.).] There is no need to enter here into the various historical and political ramifications of his argument, however interesting they may be.\(^2\) The challenge of Rousseau’s thought in general is precisely that such various categories as selfhood, truth and falsehood, good and evil, social and political order, man and god necessarily enter into systems of relationship structured—such is our contention—like linguistic models and that, therefore, to isolate any of these categories from the other (the epistemological from the ethical, for example, or the religious from the political) is just as impracticable, and for the same reasons, as to isolate a signifier from its signification, a denotation from a connotation, or a figural from a literal meaning. Anthropology, morality, politics, and religion are not, in fact, distinct categories but conceptual conventions engendered by the common epistemological aberrations that produce them. In *Julie*, in the *Social Contract* and in *Emile* politics and religion are inextricably intertwined—which curiously does not mean that they are happily reconciled
as is all too clear from the history of families, of classes or of nations, the unavoidability of structural interactions has never been a guarantee of peace.

On the somewhat more specific issue of the source of legal and moral power, the discrepancy between the *Profession* and the *Social Contract* is not less striking. In political decisions having to do with conflicts between the general will and individual interests, the “inner voice” of conscience, which the Vicar held up as the source of all truth, is of no use: “Quand il faudroit consulter la volonté générale sur un acte particuliere . . . que fera (le commun des hommes) pour se garantir de l’erreur? Ecoutera-t-il la voix intérieure? Mais cette voix n’est, dit-on formée que par l’habitude de juger et de sentir dans le sein de la société et selon ses loix, elle ne peut donc servir a les établir et puis il faudroit qu’il ne se fut élevé dans sons coeur aucune de ces passions qui parlent plus haut que la conscience, couvrent sa timide voix, et font soutenir aux philosophes que cette voix n’existe pas.” (C.S. 1ère version, 287) This same “shyness” of conscience (although it is the voice of god) is stressed in the *Profession* (and in the Letters to Sophie d’Houdeteot which are closely connected to the *Profession*): “La conscience est timide, elle aime la retraite et la paix . . .” and, in the long run, it can even fall silent altogether: “Elle ne nous parle plus; elle ne nous répond plus, et après de si longs mépris pour elle il en coute autant de la rappeler qu’il en coûta de la bannir” (601). At other times, however, the voice can be so outspoken that only the deaf fail to hear it: “(Les materialistes) sont sourds, en effet, a la voix intérieure qui leur crie d’un ton difficile a méconoitre: Une machine ne pense point . . .” (585). A great deal of ambivalence, historical, metaphorical, and logical, blurs a point that, according to all specialists of R’s political theory, is of crucial importance, “Tout cela nous paraît fort important pour l’interprétation de la pensée de Rousseau.” (1562)

Indeed, the entire question of the relationship between generality and particularity (volonté générale et volonté particulière), between public and
private morality (Lettres a Franquieres), between public and private well-being (bonheur) (Du Bonheur public), between man and god, hinges upon the uncanny timidity of the divine voice. Is god timid just because he is so exquisitely sensitive or because he is not himself certain of what he has to say? There is certainly nothing timid about the laws which are assumed to be dictated by this voice, and which confer, for example, the right of life and death over individuals. (Soc. Contract, II, chi. 5) [Is the entire question as to whether Rousseau can be taken seriously as a political philosopher, for if, for him, social and public life is indeed only a lot of noise that hides a divine will that only needs a little tranquility to overcome its shyness, then the political writings are close to triviality and the theology close to silliness.] It is difficult to see how Burgelin, as one instance among others, can slide so easily over the difficulties: “Ces deux textes ont l’air de se contredire. Il n’en est rien: la justice universelle vient de la raison éclairée par Dieu (par la conscience), elle n’a d’application que par la loi. Ainsi la loi passé de la situation de voix céleste a l’état de condition d’application, la voix céleste est transférée à la conscience et finalement à Dieu.” (1562) Burgelin moves from “God” to “voice,” from divine voice to human conscience, from human conscience to practical morality, from practical morality to political law, in a chain of mediations threatened, at all points, by numberless aberrations. For a mind as suspicious as Rousseau’s, inclined to have little trust in such a chain of linguistic derivations, the authority of all voices including his own could be free of contradictions is not easy to believe.

La Nouvelle Heloïse confronts us with a specific configuration of political, ethical and religious language, as well as with a deconstructive critique of the epistemological authority of metaphorical figures of speech. The existence of a relationship between both is suggested by the strongly blank articulation that connects the deconstructive treatment of metaphor with the political and theological considerations that follow. But the significance of this connection is unclear; the existing interpretations of the novel all gravitate towards this question but remain inconclusive. When we then turn to the religious and political writings of Rousseau for assistance, we are confronted with similar difficulty: the valorization of religion
is founded on a set of concepts that are not compatible with the demands of the political world or with the critical impact of R’s theories.

The nature of the relationship (or, possibly, the hierarchy) between the linguistic, the political and the religious order is thus in question; blank existence of the relationship is undeniable (the religious and the political texts overlap or, at the very least, have important areas of concern in common\(^{(1)}\) but it is enigmatic. The mere juxtaposition of explicit statements or the appeal to extra-textual causal explanations does nothing to alleviate the difficulty. But since the difficulty focuses precisely on the possible understanding or misunderstanding of voices that restate other voices, meanings that restate other meanings, our reading of the texts should be less monologic than has been the case, with very few exceptions, in the interpretation of Rousseau’s religious and political writings. It is obvious, for example, that none of the passages quoted from the Profession are attributed to Rousseau himself but are spoken by a fictional character; the same is true, of course, in Julie’s letters. This primitive observation is not to be simply explained as a strategy to blank responsibility for subversive opinions.  {en note. Refer to Strauss?} [There were good enough reasons to use such shelter in the intellectual climate of the 1760’s, and Rousseau has no doubt availed himself of the device. In the case of these major texts, however, the situation is different, and he certainly never pretended to use Julie or the Vicaire as alibis—he was always foolhearty in doing the exact opposite. The situation is determined by rhetorical and epistemological differences rather than by strategic considerations: it is not as if Rousseau was in possession of a single, stable conviction he could call his own but which he could not, for political reasons, state openly and had to then set up instead an intricate system of masks and ruses.] The presence of a narrator is a rhetorical necessity in
any discourse that has doubts about the possible truth or falsehood of its statement; even more clearly in novels or epics, discursive texts are necessarily mimetic and dialogical, which means that they cannot be quoted without first having being read. The unwarranted separation between the way of reading and interpreting “literary” as opposed to “philosophical” or discursive texts—a separation due in large measure to ideologies derived from the misuse of aesthetic categories—has often deprived the criticism of philosophical texts of elementary refinements that are taken for granted in literary interpretation. Paradoxically enough, this seems to happen even more so in the case of rhetoricly conscious writers like Rousseau or Nietzsche than in that of the more formally technical philosophers.

The quotations that support the reading of the Profession de foi as a defense of natural religion frame an extended argument, one of the most sustained philosophical developments in the whole of the Rousseau corpus. This argument is in part polemical, and primarily directed, as is well known, against Helvetius’s De l’Esprit, the article “Evidence” in the Encyclopédie (1A), and, beyond that, the orthodoxy of a materialistic and hylozoistic interpretation of nature associated with the works of Buffon, d’Holbach, Maupertuis, la Mettrie, and certain aspects of Diderot. The place of the Profession de foi in the intellectual history of the 18th century, as a belated cartesian text that resists both the spinozistic and experiential trends of the times, has been well documented and concerns us only on the most superficial level of intelligibility. The historical approach to the Profession de foi has been an obstacle to the reading of the text, if only because it promotes a simplistic tendency to oppose the sentimentalism of the pious passages to the progressive rigor of 18th century rationalism. It forces upon the Profession de foi a system of valorization that is alien to its argument. Rousseau’s apparent anti-materialism, which leads him, for example, to oppose current ideas on the relationship between matter and movement in terms that are closer
to Malebranche (and anticipatory of Maine de Biran {Bergson?}) than to Diderot\(^{(1)}\), does not justify the application of an ideological polarity (materialism versus idealism) to a text which denounces the existence of such simple antithetical models. [The argument of the Profession begins in Montaigne rather than in Descartes, in a condition of radical doubt that is more empirical than philosophical. As is consistently the case in Rousseau, the reduction to a condition of mere self-presence, be it as an individual consciousness or, as in the Essai sur l’origine des langues, as a political society\(^{(2)}\), does not result in a constitutive cogito. It is a moment of genuine and intolerable confusion that allows for no statement but its own intolerability. Consequently, it is more likely than any other moment to lead astray: tortured by doubt, “(l’esprit humain) . . . aime mieux se tromper que ne rien croire.” (568) But since the original confusion is itself caused by error, by the inaccessibility of truth (“j’aime la vérité, je la cherche, et ne puis la reconnoître . . .”) (567), the addition or more error to an existing state of aberration is not likely to improve things. The invocation of Descartes (567) has from the outset placed upon the argument an epistemological constraint that makes it impossible to valorize such terms as “error” or “illusion” in a positive way. Rousseau can then reiterate the classical gesture of a tabula rasa and reject all existing wisdom as the product of mere conceit, but whereas this gesture should traditionally be a prelim to the counterassertive integrity of autonomous self-reflection, it fails to lead, in this case, to any such assurance. The only claim made for the “inner light” that the mind is able to throw upon its powers is a dubious, unfounded hope for a lesser evil, entirely unable to resolve the condition of uncertainty that engendered the mental activity in the first place: “. . . consultons la lumière intérieure, elle m’égare moins que (les philosophes) ne m’égarent, ou du moins mon erreur sera la mienne, et je me dépraverai moins en suivant
mes propres illusions, qu’en me livrant a leurs mensonges.” (569) The shift to an ethical valorization (“me depraver”), suggesting that the distinction between “ illusion” and “mensonge” is primarily a question of Rousseau’s good faith against the false pride of the “philosophes”, is at the very least premature since, at this point, the question at issue is one of truth and falsehood and not of good and evil. Rousseau never claimed that good faith suffices to give authority to the truth of a knowledge or a statement.¹

Neither does he claim it here. Still guided by the same valorization that privileges inside conviction over outside opinion, a polarity that has been introduced by the conventional rejection of all received knowledge as coming from “outside”, we glide without discontinuity from sight to sound (from light to voice) and are told to follow “l’assentiment intérieur” (569) in accepting or rejecting the results of our attempts at understanding. Does this “inner assent” then acquire the paradigmatic quality of a Cartesian cogito as the foundation of all judgments? This is hardly the case, for the description of its workings indicates that the “sentiment intérieur” operates only with regard to “ideas” that have themselves been identified (i.e., understood) by means of an act of judgment that has nothing to do with an immanent assent. “Alors repassant dans mon esprit les diverses opinions qui m’avoient tour-a-tour entraîné depuis ma naissance, je vis que . . . l’assentiment intérieur s’y prêtait ou s’y refusait à différentes mesures. Sur cette première observation, comparer entre elles toutes ces différentes idées dans le silence des préjugés, je trouvais que la première et la plus commune était aussi la plus simple et la plus raisonnable . . .” (569 (my italics)) “Comparer” is, for Rousseau, the distinctive quality of judgment², thus making it clear that the inner assent is itself dependent on a prior act of judgment
which it does not control. The structure of the argument is in fact more deceptive, for the “idée . . . prémière et la plus commune” is precisely identified as the theistic claim for the immanent authority of conscience, here stenographed under the name of Clarke (570). The only thing to which the “inner assent” assents is itself; it sets up a tautological structure devoid of the deductive power inherent in a cartesian cogito. We are indeed advised, in the next paragraph, to decide upon the truth of further units of knowledge deductively, by ascertaining their “liaison nécessaire” with the original evidence of the “inner assent”. But this apparent deduction is illusory, since the necessity of the link can only be verified by means of the same rule of evidence that established the priority of the original principle and thus infinitely repeats itself without modification: I assent, therefore I assent, etc. Unless, of course, one makes the principle of verification into an independent act of judgment (as was already the case in postulating the possibility of comparing ideas), but then the evidence of immanence is no longer the “premiere”. Regardless of how one construes the passage, it indicates that the principle of immanence is in fact being superseded by an act of judgment which does not necessarily lay claim to the constitutive or generative power of a cogito. In this respect, the Profession de foi may well be a pre-kantian rather than a cartesian text. For, despite the apparent confusion of its pseudo-cartesian point of departure, it is not in fact confused by its own inconsistencies. It immediately draws the correct inferences from difficulties that could have paralyzed the argument from the very outset. The problem now becomes, not how to construe an interpretation of the world by means of a rule of inner assent, but to account, by a critical act of judgment, for the occurrence of such an assent and to establish its epistemological status. Rousseau acknowledges at once
the indeterminacy of his self-reflection by moving into a critical vocabulary: “.”

(570). The main informing concept of this text is that of “judgment”, not inner light or inner assent. The argument of the Profession de foi serves to reveal the structure of judgment in Rousseau and to establish its relationship to other key-concepts as “freedom”, “pity”, “man” etc. used in the other theoretical writings.

Rousseau works out the structure of “judgment” dialectically, in opposition to that of narration. Moreover, what will be said about judgment will apply, albeit with a different and independently interesting thematic “content”, to three concepts that the text will show to be the correlatives of judgment: will, mind? and freedom (volonté, intelligence or entendement and liberté). No inherent priority exists between the four terms (judgment, will, mind and freedom), and it seems that the decision to start out the argument in terms of judgment is to a large extent arbitrary. They form a coherent conceptual chain in which each can be derived from the other at will: “Quand on me demande quelle est la cause qui détermine ma volonté je demande a mon tour quelle est la cause qui détermin mon jugement: car il est clair que ces deux causes n’en font qu’une, et si l’on comprend bien que l’homme est actif dans ses jugemens, que son entendement n’est que le pouvoir de comparer et de juger, on verra que sa liberté n’est qu’un pouvoir
Rousseau’s theory of judgment restates the implicit theory of metaphor we had found underlying the argument of the Second Discourse, though in a less reductively bewildering manner than in the earlier work. Nowhere are the conclusions/assumptions on which the argument of the Discourse is founded being revised or contested. The fundamental ambiguity remains: judgment is, first of all, the deconstruction of a model that divides the world into a binary system of oppositions organized along an inside/outside axis and then proceeds to exchange the properties on both sides of this axis on the basis of analogies and potential identities [of a greater or lesser degree of subtlety]. The systems conceived by the contemporaries against whom Rousseau polemicizes are all structured in accordance with this fundamentally metaphorical pattern: by means of empirical considerations on the nature of perception, they oppose body to soul, sensation to judgment, nature to mind (or art), res extensa to res cogito, outside to inside, death to life, and then reconcile the antinomies with varying degrees of dialectical rigor. In the hylozoistic vision of biologically alive matter, even death and life can be reconciled: to see the world as a live animal is to push to its limit, as Diderot will ironically suggest in De l’interprétation de la nature (LI and LVIII), the metaphorical model of inside/outside correspondences. Rousseau, in the discussion of judgment, categorically rejects the unwarranted totalization of metaphorized synecdoches: “Cependant cet univers visible est matière, matière éparse et morte qui n’a rien dans son tout de l’union, de l’organisation, du sentiment
commun des parties d’un corps animé; puisqu’il est certain que nous qui sommes parties ne
nous sentons nullement dans le text.” (575) Sensation unadulterated by judgment is in fact
inconceivable, but if it is posited as a hypothetical possibility (like the state of nature in the
Second Discourse), it is totally incapable of setting up any relationship whatever between the
entities it perceives. It would not be adequate to call the rhetorical structure of such a world
of pure sensation metonymic rather than metaphorical, since it could not even conceive of
contiguity, let alone of resemblance. Rousseau feigns to admit the principle of an
inside/outside polarity (“je conçois donc clairement que ma sensation qui est moi, et sa cause
ou son objet qui est hors de moi, ne sont pas la meme chose.”) (571), but this “hors de moi” is
then so entirely devoid of any semblance of coherence or signification as to be nothing at all,
in itself or for us. To a pure sensation, it would appear as entirely chaotic, contingent and
unpredictable, much more so even than the picture of the organic world gone awry that
Diderot conjures up in the Lettres sur les aveugles. Specifically, a universe of pure sensation
would be unable to conceive of number (“… les idées numeriques d’un, de deux, etc. ne sont
certainement pas des sensations, quoique mon esprit ne les produise qu’a l’occasion de mes
sensations.”) (572) or of measure. The “outside” attribute of space is therefore always on the
theoretical level of pure sensation, “outsideness” is the only disjunction that creates and
articulates even the smoothest appearance of identity, since it can not be said that the
sensation of an entity situated in X is identical with the sensation of the same entity situated
in Y: “quand les sensations sont differentes, l’être sensitif les distingue par leur differences:
quand elles sont semblables, il les distingue parce qu’il sent les unes hors des autres .” (572)
Spatial models—and the same would have to apply to
temporal models—are metaphorical conceptualizations of differential structures, which is why they engender such redoubtably effective, and misleading, powers of unification and categorization. Rousseau however introduces outsideness (with its implicit train of spatial and temporal correlatives) as a principle of differentiation that could never legitimately be made to function in the opposite direction: the “outside” in the sentence just quoted is not the outside of a corresponding “inside”. In the mode of pure sensation, everything is “outside” everything else; there are nothing but outside differences and no in-tegration is possible.

This version of differentiation is similar to the distinction made in the Second Discourse, between denomination and conceptualization, also on the basis of difference and resemblance. The very concept of judgment coincides with the ability to postulate relationships, the possibility of elaborating systems based on the correlation of differential with integrative moments. This activity is called “to compare” or, more explicitly, “pose(r) (les objets) l’un sur l’autre pour prononcer sur leur difference ou sur leur similitude.” (571) The process is a manipulation, a displacement that upsets the “truth” of things as they are, for sensation, unlike judgment, is truthful to the extent that it leaves things in their proper places and does not pretend, nor even conceive of, making what is distinct identical: “par la sensation, les objets s’offrent a moi séparés, isolés, tels qu’ils sont dans la nature . . .” (571) and therefore “je sais seulement que la vérité est dans les choses et non pas dans mon esprit qui les juge, et que moins je mets du mien dans les jugemens que j’en porte, plus je suis sûr d’approcher de la vérité . . . “ (573). Since judgment is also associated with what, in this particular paragraph, is positively valorized as “l’honneur de penser,” it follows that thinking and truth are not necessarily compatible/coextensive notions.
Judgment, also called “attention”, “méditation”, “reflexion”, or “pensée”, and always described by verbs of motion such as remuer, transporter, replier, neither reveals things for what they are nor leaves them undisturbed. It shuffles them around in transportations that blank the very etymology of the term metaphor, or Aristotle’s *epiphora*: “par la comparaison, je remûe (les objets), je les transporte, pour ainsi dire, je les pose l’un sur l’autre . . .” (571). It does this in order to establish systems of relationship that are not substantial but merely structural; from a formal point of view, these systems are not arbitrary but, since they possess no ontological authority, they are not controlled by considerations of truth and falsehood. As such, it is the privilege of these structures to be capable of error, to open up the very possibility of error: “Pourquoi donc est-ce que je me trompe sur le rapport de ces deux batons, surtout s’ils ne sont pas parallèles? Pourquoi l’image qui est la sensation n’est elle pas conformer à son modèle qui est l’objet? C’est que je suis actif quand je juge, que l’opération qui compare est fautive, et que mon entendement qui juge les rapports mêle ses erreurs a la vérité des sensations qui ne montrent que les objets.” Hence the disconcerting double valorization of judgment, said to be the source of all value as well as of all aberration. The falsehood does not have a contingent cause that could be corrected by trial and error, by experimental or methodological refinements, since the act of thought is itself, by its very manifestation, a falsification. The structure of this falsification is the same as that of the concept in the Second Discourse: it uses structural resemblances in order to conceal differences that obliterate the very notion of structure.

The consistency, or repetitiveness, of Rousseau’s thought on this point suffices to indicate that the polemics of the *Profession de foi* against the “philosophes” that figure so prominently in the foreground are by no means of determining importance.
of its demonstration. Rousseau’s earlier critique of an epistemology based on blank
denomination {Helvetius or la Mettrie(1)} owes little to rationalistic speculations on
the philosophy of nature or of sensation, derived from Locke or Newton. The parallel
between the argument of the Profession de foi on the disputation between sensation
and judgment and that of the Second Discourse on the divergence between name and
concept, is determined by the same pattern of rhetorical deconstruction. The equation
of judgment with language, quite explicit in the 2nd Discourse, is not less clear in the
Profession de foi: it is asserted in a single sentence, when it is said of judgment that:
“Selon moi la faculté distinctive de l’être actif ou intelligent est de pouvoir donner un
sens a ce mot est.” (571)

In this sentence, the ambivalence of “judgment” stands fully revealed. The
stability of the natural world is by itself devoid of meaning and cannot become a
source of knowledge. Being is for us only “ce mot est”, and the copula has no
transcendental referent by natural or divine right. This negative, deconstructive
insight, achieved in the differentiation between “juger” and “sentir”, is itself an act of
judgment, and this act is primarily verbal: “transferer” and “replier” become “donner
un sens” (thus implying that the verb to be, as matrix of all referential language, has
no meaning by itself) “prononcer”. The scene of judgment is that of a verbal
pronouncement, an oracular verdict, like in the plays of Kleist. But after having thus
undone any possible association between relationship and necessity, the same
“judgment” goes on to do, in its own name, what it had undone in the name of
sensation, and to set up structures (such as concepts) which lay claim to meaning in
the same
manner that sensation lays claim to the existence of matter ("Ainsi non-seulement j’existe, mais il existe d’autres êtres, savoir les objets de mes sensations. . . (que) je l’appelle matière") (571). As language, judgment engenders the very reference that it also excizes. Its error can therefore not be localized or identified in any way; one could not say, for example, that the error stems from language, as if language were an entity that existed independently of judgment or judgment a faculty that could exercise its activity in a nonlinguistic way. To the extent that judgment is a structure of relationships (and not a substance) capable of error, it is also language. Being language, it is also bound to consist of the very figural structures that can only be put in question by means of the language that produces them. And to the extent that language is judgment, it is bound to imply reference. The term language here goes well beyond what is empirically understood as articulated verbal utterance. In his version of the Lockean Problem of Molyneux (Locke, Essay blank, II, 9 blank 8) <see Burgelin> and of the sensus communum, Rousseau distinguishes between sensation and perception as he distinguishes between verbal and non-verbal drives (pulsions) ("passions" and "besoins"). The unity of perception is an act of judgment that, as such, denies that a synaesthesia could be rooted in an exchange of properties held in common by mind and matter. But, although it therefore denies that perception could ever be a way of access to true knowledge, it acknowledges, by the same token, that it is still structured like a metaphor and thus has to be called an act of judgment or a language. Rousseau’s universe is pan-logical but not logocentric, since the linguistic blank it assumes can never (reach a decision with regard to) <be certain of> its own centrality. Like “man”, terms such as judgment, perception, language etc. are forever escaping from the metaphorical signification that tries to circumscribe their proper meaning.
Summarizing the characteristics of “judgment” (Urteilskraft), we can say that Rousseau describes it as the power to set up politically aberrant systems of referential relationships that deconstruct the referentiality of their own elaboration; this description warrants the equation of judgment with figural language, extensively conceived.

Different versions of the same aporia organize the description of the related concepts of will, mind and freedom. In the discussion of the will, the argument against Toland and la Mettrie denying the immanence of movement within matter and defining the will as the transcendental cause of all motion, reintroduces the outside/inside structure that was also adopted at the beginning of the description of judgment. Just as Rousseau begins by sounding like an orthodox disciple of Locke <Condillac?> when he asserts the truth-value of sensation, he sounds like an orthodox disciple of Fénelon in asserting the need to postulate a transcendental *primum mobile*. The outside structure becomes productive however (and potentially aberrant) only when it is conceived as a polarity rather than a mere positional relationship—that is, from the moment that a principle of articulation connects an inside with the outside in a way that permits for an exchange of properties; in Fénelon, for example, the benevolence of the relationship between man and god are derived from such metaphorical models. In the midst of so many borrowed arguments and philosophical commonplaces on the transcendental will, the specificity of Rousseau’s insight manifests itself in the sudden refusal to grant intelligibility to the very principle of articulation on which the possibility of understanding depends and by means of which the “outside” could engender a corresponding “inside”, a transcendental will converted into an immanent knowledge: “Il ne m’est pas plus possible de concevoir comment ma volonté meut mon corps, que comment mes sensations affectent mon ame. Je ne sais pas meme pourquoi l’un de ces mistéres a paru plus...
explicable que l’autre. Quant à moi, soit quand je suis passif, soit quand je suis actif, le moyen d’union des deux substances me paroit abolumen incompréhensible. Il est bien étrange qu’on parte de cette incomprehensibilité même pour confondre les deux substances, comme si des operations de natures si différentes s’expliquoient mieux dans un seul sujet que dans deux.” (576) What is called “incomprehensible” are precisely such notions as analogy, resemblance, sympathy or even proximity\(^{(2)}\) that are at the basis of comprehension and that 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century rationalism and theism try to reclaim. Far from clarifying the obscure link between will and motion by means of the apparently more verifiable (because observable and quantifiable) link between matter (or body) and mind (or “soul”), Rousseau lets the darkness of the former encroach upon the latter. We know as little about the outside (sensation) becoming inside (soul) as about the inside (will) becoming outside (motion). As a matter of fact, the individual will is unable even to get outside itself\(^{(2)}\) and to establish a corresponding principle of exteriority: “Je ne connois la volonté que par le sentiment de la mienne, et l’entendement ne m’est pas mieux connu.” (586) This does not imply that judgment (entendement) is enigmatic because, like the will, it blank for its metaphorical representation in the guise of a self; it merely states that judgment is as enigmatic as the will, though the mode of indeterminacy or undecidability may vary depending on whether one considers the aporia from a voluntaristic or from an epistemological point of view, from the point of view of the will or of that of judgment. The patterns of error engendered by the will are not the same as those engendered by judgment, since both engender their own referential systems (and are commonly in error to the extent that this referentiality is their error). The referent produced specifically by the will is that of selfhood, which is open to the same deconstructive ambivalence as the more general meaning derived from judgment. The explicit linkage of judgment with error thus extends to the idea of selfhood, product of the
same metaphorical illusion of proper meaning as the relational constructs of judgment. We
find back, by theoretical inference, the deconstruction of selfhood as metaphor that could also
be derived more directly from the self-reflective and autobiographical texts of Rousseau
(chapter II).

The pairing of judgment with will engenders in turn the mental activity called
“intelligence”. But the more we advance in the degree of conceptualization associated with
each of these terms—the text being set up in such a way that, as we move from judgment to
will to intelligence and finally to freedom, we are further and further removed from the
critical deconstruction that established the epistemological ambivalence of judgment at the
outset—the more the aporia, still quite clearly thematized as such in the analysis of judgment,
becomes embedded within the texture of the narrative, to the point of making the text into the
dramatization of its own confusions. Examples abound, especially in the closely linked
discussions of intelligence, as the systematic manifestation of the power to will, and of
freedom. It is in these pages (577-606) that one can find the strongest statements in support
of the orthodoxy of Rousseau’s theistic convictions, his awe before the deity as a principle of
natural harmony and order, the pietistic statements about the innate goodness of a divine
parousia, the definition of moral conscience as innate: “Il est donc au fond des ames un
principe inné de justice et de vertu, sur lequel, malgré nos propres maximes, nous jugeons nos
actions et celles d’autrui comme bonnes ou mauvaises, et c’est a ce principe que je donne le
nom de conscience.” (598) One should remember that these assertions occur within a context
in which the concepts being described are consistently equated with and derived from acts of
judgment (as when it is said, in the above quotation, that “nous jugeons nos actions et celles
d’autrui . . .”) which
have been shown to be constitutively associated with aberrant totalization. And one should also notice that each of these affirmative statements of piety and trust is always coupled, sometimes explicitly, sometimes by implication, with a statement that undermines it.

Consider for example, the case for the existence of intelligence, as opposed to mere chance or probability. It is made by analogy with a literary text (quoted, p. 579). Such a text, asserts Rousseau, could never be considered to be the contingent result of infinitely combining (un jet fortuit de caractere 1071) the letters of the alphabet.(1) The statement comes in fact a lot closer to the famous Mallarmean sentence which seems to say the opposite (“Jamais un coup de dés n’abolira le hazard”), if one remembers that, for the author of the Preface to the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, the intentionality (unité d’intention, 580) of a literary text is so undecidable that no author can be certain of his own authorship. If God is to be present to his own creation in the same manner that an author is present to text, this leaves very little authority to the divine intelligence. Rousseau can therefore posit himself, so to speak, on both sides of Diderot’s position with regard to the element of chance in the creation of the organic world: on the one hand, the natural world is, for him, much more radically contingent, disjointed, and inarticulated than the floating organs that la Mettrie and Diderot are so fond of deriding,(2) but, on the other hand, the mere contingency of the purely combinatory system of a “loi des grands nombres” seems equally inadequate as an analogy for the workings of the mind. The ability of the mind to set up, by means of acts of judgment, formally coherent structures is never denied, but the ontological or epistemological authority of the resulting systems, like that of a literary text, escapes determination.

More explicit instances of controlled contradiction also appear in this section of the *Profession de foi*. They are dramatically emphasized in the contrast between
the harmony of a universe conceived as a teleological system without known telos\(^1\), or the glorification of man as “king of the earth”\(^2\), with, on the other hand, the utter misery of the human mind incapable of understanding the principles of its own working and torn apart by the contradictions of its condition: “En me sentant entraîné, combattu par ces deux mouvemens contraires, je me disois: non, l’homme n’est point un; je veux et je ne veux pas, je me sens a la fois esclave et libre etc.” (583) The contradiction comes fully into view in the conception of God as it relates to man <the blank?>. Since Rousseau rejects any idea of divine revelation, the idea of god is derived, by analogical extension, from the attributes of human judgment (and not of nature, for whenever he considers the possibility of patterning the relationship between god and man on the relationship between man and nature—or subject and object—he rejects the possibility by means of arguments derived from the distinction between judgment and sensation.)\(^3\) Therefore divine activity is described by the same terms that were used to define judgment: “Agir, comparer, choisir, sont des operations d’un être actif et pensant. Donc cet être existe . . .” (578); “Cet Être qui veut et qui peut, cet Être actif par lui-même, cet Être, enfin, quel qu’il soit, qui meut l’univers et ordonne toutes choses, je l’appelle Dieu. Je joins a ce nom les idées d’intelligence, de puissance, de volonté . . .” (581) The mind of god therefore resembles the mind of man; man and god are each other’s metaphor\(^4\). Hence the fact that they can be substituted at will: god can be said, for example, to want man’s good for him, and man’s freedom to err is accounted for as his opportunity to prove himself equal to a divine principle that shares this freedom with him. (p. 587) Hence also that the relationship between man and god can be called love: “J’adore la puissance suprême et je m’attendris sur ses bienfaits. Je n’ai pas besoin qu’on m’enseigne ce culte, il m’est dicté par la nature elle-même. N’est-ce pas une consequence naturelle de l’amour de soi, d’honorer ce qui nous protège, et
This spontaneous aberration can then, like the wild metaphor “giant” becoming “man”, be institutionalized and quantified into a contractual relationship in which god can be said to owe something to man, and to pay him for the price of his labours accomplished in his behalf. The pro or re-gression from love to economic dependence is a consistent characteristic of all moral or social systems based on the authority of noncontested metaphorical systems.

On the other hand, however, this god who is so much like us turns out to be as completely alien, unknowable, and “outside” as the pure sensation before it had been organized by judgment: “...sitôt que je veux...contempler (Dieu) en lui-même, sitôt que je veux chercher ou il est, ce qu’il est, qu’elle est sa substance, il m’échappe, et mon esprit troublé n’apperçoit plus rien.” When coupled with all the previous passages on the indeterminacy of judgment and on its irresistible tendency to see seductive similarities where they do not exist, this passage is not at all similar to the theological humility expressed for example by Malebranche.\(^{(1)}\) The manner in which god is called incomprehensible with regard to his being is precisely the same in which he is made all too comprehensible in his relation to man: the mystery of a parousia is incompatible with the conception of a divine presence showing providential concern as the voice of an individual moral conscience.

The logical structure of each of these developments is always the same and repeats the aporia of judgment. The same concept operates deconstructively as a principle of differentiation but then, because of the referentiality inherent in its linguistic structure, re-integrates by an act of the mind (noema) what it had taken apart on the level of intuition. As the referent of a linguistic sign, the noematic correlative of this second operation (regardless of whether it be called the meaning of a judgment, the subject that controls the will, or the god that freely invents), regains in its turn the attributes of (natural) existence, and can therefore again be deconstructed by means of the same conceptual system. The
original denominative metaphor is said (blank) to be based on a misleading assumption of identity, but the utterance of this negative insight is itself a new metaphor that engenders its own semantic correlative, it own proper meaning: we move from sensation to judgment, for example, or from nature to God, but what appears to be a hypostasis is in fact even more vulnerable, logically speaking, than the entity it claims to supersede. A system of this type is bound to produce bewildering patterns of valorization.

The text we are considering indeed becomes increasingly value-laden: it begins in a relatively detached analytical mode (pp. 570 blank) but modulates, as the argument progresses, towards highly theatrical oratorical effects [“Les animaux sont heureux, leur Roi seul misérable! O! blank, ou sont tes lois? Ô! Providence, est-ce ainsi que tu blank le monde? Etre bienfaisant, qu’est devenu ton pouvoir? Je vois le mal sur la terre.”] There is a corresponding shift from the relatively “cold” values of truth and falsehood (which become “values” only because of the possibility of error) to the “hot” values of good and evil. The dynamic emphasis was present from the start, since the active nature of judgment, always conceived as a movement and as a power (“puissance”), is consistently being stressed. From the moment, however, one reaches such metaphors as the will, that allow for the localization of the active principle within particular entities (such as the self), the tension is bound to increase: the incomprehensibility of the link between will and movement problematizes the relationship of motion’s intent to its direction, and the solipsistic immanence of the will threatens the very possibility of motion with paralysis. The binary pattern of inside and outside, which can be considered as a mere structure without implying valorization, thus becomes activated and intensified by a play of resistances and impulses associated with positive and negative values therefore called favorable or unfavorable (good and evil) with regard to this movement; the epistemological language becomes ethical. But since the prime
mover of judgment is aberrant, and represents as a decisive pattern of motion what is, in fact, a suspended inability to know whether or where it should go (and is thus, in fact, neither “prime” nor “mover”), the system of valorization that links the modalities of judgment to the values of the will cannot be consistent. Aberrations of moral judgment are a consequence of epistemological and rhetorical indeterminations, an aberration that was already suggested by the reading of the Préface to the Nouvelle Héloïse and that is confirmed by this more systematic text.

The Profession de foi acts out this inconsistency in the transformation of structures into values. The referentiality inherent in judgment becomes more and more manifest and moves the text closer and closer to a world of practical reason that should eventually open up into political realities. The theistic orthodoxy always associated the structures of inwardness and exteriority with the values of good and evil by linking inside with good and outside with evil. Such a positive valorization of inwardness is part of the historical tradition out of which Rousseau is writing, the combination of a neo-cartesian trend that can be associated, for example, with Malebranche and a pietistic trend that could be summarized in the name of Fénelon but that, as Matton, among others, has well established, is prevalent in many of the authors that Rousseau read with interest. Whatever the antecedent, the entire doctrine of natural religion to which the Profession is generally being reduced certainly depends on the unequivocal association of the “inside” with the “good”. We remember the vicar’s exhortation: “Rentrons en nous-mêmes, Ô mon jeune ami . . .” Inwardness is the metaphor of virtue, and vice-versa. The text however by no means repeats the necessity of this connection; it crosses and uncrosses the system established by the inside/outside and good/evil polarities at will. We are told, for instance, that “En méditant sur la nature de l’homme j’y crus découvrir deux principes distincts, don’t l’un l’élevait a l’étude des vérités éternelles, a
l’amour de la justice et du beau moral, aux régions du monde intellectuel, don’t 
contemplation fiat les délices du sage, et dont l’autre le ramenait basement en lui-même,
l’asservissoit à l’empire des sens, aux passions qui sont leur ministres et contrairait par elles
tout ce que lui inspироit le sentiment du premier.” (583) More explicitly still, a few pages 
later, evil is again associated directly with inwardness and, by implication, the love of beauty 
and of virtue directed towards the outside: “Otez de nos coeurs cet amour du beau, vous ôtez 
tout le charme de la vie. Celui dont les viles passions ont étouffé dans son âme étroite ces 
sentiments délicieux; celui qui, a force de se concentrer au-dedans de lui, vient a bout de 
n’aimer que lui-même, n’a plus de transports . . . le malheureux ne sent plus, ne vit plus; il est 
déjà mort.” (596) Yet, separated from this passage by only one paragraph, the following 
statement again reverses the pattern: “Le méchant se craint et se fuit; il s’égaye en se jettant 
hors de lui-même; il tourne autour de lui des yeux inquiets, et cherche un objet qui l’amuse; 
sans la satire amère, sans la raillerie insultante il serait toujours triste; le ris moqueur est son 
seul plaisir. Au contraire la sérénité du juste est intérieure; son ris n’est point de malignité 
mais de joye, il en porte la source en lui-même; il est aussi gai seul qu’au milieu d’un cercle; 
il ne tire pas son contentement de ceux qui l’approchent, il le leur communique.” (597) One 
can of course argue that, psychologically speaking, there can just as well be a “bad” as a 
“good” inwardness. But this has little bearing upon a text that is not set up along 
psychological lines, but categorically structured in terms of a differential inside/outside axis.
The values associated with these two categories will therefore have to be of decisive 
hermeneutic importance.

The very occurrence of such systematic value-displacements becomes even more 
decisive for an understanding of the Profession de foi. They are not simply chiasmic 
reversals in which, by an exchange of attributes the (inside) good can be called “evil” and the 
(outside) evil called “good.” The system is not symmetrical since it postulated, from the start, 
the non-
identity of inside and outside, the supplementarity of the one with regard to the other. On the level of judgment, the asymmetry leads to the play of contradictions and paradoxes, the logical tensions that have earned Rousseau the frequent accusation of sophistry.

Deconstructive readings can point out the unwarranted identifications achieved by substitution, but they are powerless to prevent their recurrence and to uncross, so to speak, the aberrant exchanges that have taken place, in a gesture that would merely reiterate the rhetorical defiguration that caused the error in the first place. They leave a margin of error, a residue of logical tension that prevents the closure of the deconstructive discourse and accounts for its narrative and allegorical mode. When this process is spoken of terms of will or freedom and thus transferred to the level of reference, the differential residue is bound to become manifest, an empirical awareness that affects and indeed constitutes an entity in which it now appears to be “taking place”: a mind, a consciousness, a self. The abstract attributes of truth and falsehood grow more and more concrete and find themselves a space, a scene, on which to act out the temporal sequence of their occurrence. It becomes a “spectacle”, a pathetic action that affects us like a theatrical representation. Trying to persuade his interlocutor of the affective quality of virtue, the vicaire resorts as by instinct to theatrical analogies: “Pour qui vous interessez-vous sur vos théâtres?” (596), asks the vicaire.

As the confusion between structure and value increases, the tone and the terminology of the text glides almost imperceptibly from the language of judgment to the language of the affections, and judgment finally openly declares itself to be the covering/name for sentiment (at first still distinguished from sensation which, it will be remembered, was what judgment defined itself against). The ambiguously valorized “inner” world of consciousness, of which it can no longer be said whether it is the siege of good or of evil, becomes the affective space engendered by this ethical indecisiveness: “Les actes de la conscience ne sont pas des jugements
The principle of valorization according to which this “application” can be carried out has itself to become increasingly literal or referential. An eudaemonic polarity of pleasure and pain replaces the moral polarity of good and evil. The text behaves as if, at this point, the question that had opened up its entire inquiry had been decisively answered. We are now supposed to know the answer to the critical “Mais qui suis-je?” (570) that was to permit the recourse to immanent evidence in the understanding of our being-in-the-world. What has in fact been established is the gradual loss of authority of any immanent judgment or any immanent value whatsoever. At the same time, and by means of the same argument, the alternative recourse to a transcendental source of authority, such as nature, or god, has also been definitively foreclosed. The aporia of truth and falsehood has turned into the confusion of good and evil, and finally ends in an entirely arbitrary valorization in terms of pleasure and pain. Virtue finally becomes justified in terms of an erotic pleasure principle, a kind of moral libido that seems almost ludicrously out of tone with the pious affirmations about the inner voice of conscience, but that consistently acts out the text’s rhetorical system.

The shift to eudaemonic valorization is more apparent, for obvious reasons, in the so-called *Lettres morales* to Sophie d’Houdetot, ancillary to the *Profession de foi*, than in the main text. Virtue is spoken of in terms of a narcissistic economy of personal well-being, accessible only to those who can afford a great deal of leisure. “Prenez tous les mois par exemple, un intervalle de deux ou trois jours sur vos plaisirs et sur vos affaires pour le consacrer a la plus grande de toutes . . . Je ne demande pas que vous vous
livriez d’abord a des méditations profondes, je demand seulement que vous puissiez maintenir
votre âme dans un état de langueur et de calme qui la laisse replier sur elle-même, et n’y
ramène rien d’étranger à vous.

Dans cet état, me direz-vous, que ferai-je? Rien. Laissez faire cette inquiétude
naturelle qui dans la solitude ne tarde pas d’occuper chacun de lui-même malgré qu’il en ait .
. . Comme on rechauffe une partie engourdie avec des frictions légères, l’âme amortie dans
une longue inaction se ranime à la douce chaleur d’un mouvement modéré . . . il faut lui
rappeler les affections qui l’ont flattée, non par l’entremise des sens, mais par un sentiment
propre et par des plaisirs intellectuels . . . Dans quelque état qu’une âme puisse être il reste un
sentiment de plaisir à bien faire qui ne s’efface jamais et qui sert de première prise à toutes
les autres vertus, c’est par ce sentiment cultivé qu’on parvient a s’aimer et a se plaire avec
soi.” (1115-1116) The language of self-seduction is less blatant in the mouth of the vicaire,
but he is saying nothing different when virtue is called “le charme de la vie” (596) or “la
volupté pure qui naît du contentement de soi-même” (591).

The point at issue is not that the foundation of moral judgment in the pleasure
principle is in any way ethically or psychologically aberrant. Such returns to the
physiological foundations of the very notions of right and wrong are not at all surprising in
the 18th, nor for that matter in any other century; we can refer, for instance, to the importance
given to the pleasure/pain polarity in Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysical concepts. What
matters here is that the reintroduction of these notions illustrate the viciously circular
structure of the Profession de foi and of Rousseau’s theological writings in general. For he
has no illusions about the consistency of eudaemonic systems of valorization. The
association of pleasure with virtue can at once be reversed and the self-love turn into the
amour-propre which is at the base of bad faith and of bad
judgment: “L’exercice de la bienfaisance flate naturellement l’amour propre par une idée de supériorité on s’en rappelle tous les actes comme autant de témoignages qu’au de la de ses propres besoins on a de la force encore pour soulager ceux d’autrui. Cet air de puissance fait qu’on prend plus de plaisir a exister et qu’on habite plus volontiers avec soi.” (1116) Yet the ambivalence of this will-to-power morality is not the main textual complication. The gliding pro- or regression from judgment to sentiment, from epistemology to eudaemony, a motion which takes place entirely within the conceptual system that constitutes the text and is therefore accounted for, at all times, by its logic, exposes, as a thematic assertion, the necessary reintroduction of the rhetorical structure that was explicitly rejected/banned at the start. The serpent bites its own tail. The vicaire has to reaffirm, at the end of his argument, the priority of the category against which his argument has been consistently directed. He has to restate his belief in the metaphorical analogy between mind and nature: “. . . nous sentons avant de conoître, et comme nous n’apprenons point a vouloir nôtre bien et a fuir nôtre mal, mais que nous tenons cette volonté de la nature, de même l’amour du bon et la haine du mauvais nous sont aussi naturels que l’amour de nous-mêmes.” (599) The equation of will with nature is precisely what Rousseau’s judgment persistently puts in question. Within the context of his deconstructive procedures, the final part of this sentence can be read ironically, since nothing could be more problematic than the naturalness of self-love, a passion which, like all passions, duplicates the mimetic? aberrations of figural language. Nothing prevents the deconstructive process that has taken us up to here from starting all over again.
methodological instructions necessary to its deconstruction. It becomes impossible to obey the voice of conscience, which can indeed not be silenced, in good conscience. This is an impossible situation: the text has to continue; its continuation is called the *Social Contract.*

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The religious dimension enters the text of Rousseau’s work as the possibility of authoritative enunciation departs for good. The *Second Discourse* could still speak with the deconstructive authority of its devious rigor and, therefore, needed blank only as a measure for the absurdity of those who believe in natural origins and causes. But the *Profession de foi,* like the *Nouvelle Héloïse,* knows that the deconstructive text too remains unreadable to its own author. The apparent relapse into naiveté and empirical silliness, as compared to the dialectical blank of the earlier work, is a trap for the reader, who is never being pushed to deliberately found his own folly as when he is invited to enjoy the spectacle of Rousseau making a fool of himself.

The link between Rousseau’s theory of rhetoric and his religious thought should now become a little more apparent. A text like the *Profession de foi* has to be called literally “unreadable” in that it leads to a set of mutually exclusive enunciations. These enunciations, moreover, are not neutral propositions but illocutionary utterances that, as a consequence of their referentiality, necessitate the passage from speech to action. They force one to choose but, on the other hand, they undermine the grounds of all choice. They tell the allegory of a judicial decision that can never be judicious or just; again, the trial scenes in Kleist’s
plays come to mind as the best literary equivalence of the situation. The judgment condemns the crime of error, of false choice, but the act of judgment is itself criminal. The verdict repeats the crime it condemns. The judge is unable to read a legal judgment that condemns a man for his inability to understand the law. If, after we read the Profession de foi, we decide to become theists, we are condemned as fools in the court of the intellect. But if we decide that religious faith (in the broadest possible sense of the term, which includes all forms of idolatry and ideology) were mystification that can once and forever be overthrown by the enlightened mind, then this Götzendämmerung is all the more foolish in not perceiving that [it] is itself the primary target of its execution. One should not take the inability to read too lightly. It leads into a great deal of trouble, all the worse for not being tragic trouble.

<something one did not know (like Oedipus, for example)> To err out of ignorance can be heroic, but Rousseau knows that human error is the shameful or fearful disgrace of persistently having to lie in order to make the incomprehensible more understandable.

Although it thus takes the affective blank of a practical act, the structure of the complication with which we are dealing has not changed between its most theoretical manifestation as a unit of pure judgment and its most empirical manifestation as practical behavior. The deconstruction of rhetorical models that ban the referential power of a language on a substantial relationship between sign and meaning (and thus on their implied polarity), is an invariant of Rousseau’s thought. It
articulates the political to the linguistic code in the Second Discourse; the individual to the constitutional order (love and ethics) in Julie; monological to dialogical discours in the second Preface to Julie and, finally, it governs the theory of judgment (as distinct from sensation) in the Profession de foi. What the latter text also “clarifies” (though the clarification is more enigmatic than the original problem) is the necessary extension of the rhetorical deconstruction into the transcendental realm of religious experience. This experience coincides, moreover, with a paradoxical shrinkage (or reduction) of the semantic field to particular and quantitatively restricted areas, not unlike the fatal blank by means of which, in the Second Discourse, the calamities of economic blank begin to unfold. The topographical agitation of the first part of the Nouvelle Héloïse becomes the static and clearly marked-off world of Clarens; the omnipresent and incomprehensible god of the Profession de foi becomes the intimate voice of conscience exhorted to well-defined deeds of virtue, etc. The paradox is built within the double-faced notion of referentiality that we keep rediscovering, by various itineraries, as the point through which all the roads that make up Rousseau’s intellectual garden could be said to pass—though nothing could be more misleading than any geometrical metaphor, from point to Möbius surface, to describe the referential structure. For, on the one hand, reference indeed means the reduction of a sign which, by itself, would remain entirely undetermined in the infinity of its possible significations, to the finite horizon of a specific semantic “space”. Like Julie’s garden, it sets up a fence, and it provides the key with which the properly initiated readers can open the gate that leads into the privileged, private property of the referential meaning. As such, referentiality is always a concretization, a specification. Since, moreover, judgment is, for Rousseau, an active principle of movement, referentiality metamorphizes (or metaphorizes) meaning into the specific actions of a praxis, defined in space.
time and intent. On the other hand, referentiality is also, and simultaneously, the very movement of transgression or transcendence that prevents any judgment from being anything but a sign, compels it to turn always again into a signification that radically differs from it by its (fallacious) claim <of> to be a meaning. As such, referentiality is constitutively metaphysical, in the Nietzschean sense of the term as taken over by Heidegger and his best French reader, Jacques Derrida. It is also constitutively theotropic, since the only conceivable name for transcendental signification that would no longer be itself a sign, the only word that would have a truly proper meaning, is “god”. The only “meaning that one can give the word to be” (Profession, p. 571) is that of “god”. Yet, at the same time, the referentiality resulting from this paradigmatic denomination must lead to the performance of a finite, practical or, as we say, “historical” act—such as, for example, the acts performed or the emotion experienced by the readers of the second part of the Nouvelle Héloïse under the impact of their reading. The possibility of practical action is inherently linked to the (fallacious) coinage of the word “god”. [This close relationship between practical action and transcendental meaning is what is referred to, in the Social Contract, as justice.] Hence the redoubtable instrumental effectiveness of any political action (conquest, colonization but also legislation) combined with religious faith. The Gott mit uns mentality accounts for the military and civic achievements of the pre-Christian era: “La guerre politique étoit aussi Théologique . . .” but “Loins que les hommes combatissent pour les Dieux, c’étoient, comme dans Homere, les Dieux qui combattoient pour les hommes; chacun demandoit au sien la victoire, et la payoit par de nouveaux autels.” (C Soc. IV, 8 “De la religion civile”, pp. 460 + 461). The same political power passes in the hands of the
The collective union of all priests by the power of communion and excommunication is said to be “un chef-d’œuvre en politique” (463, note**) and it is for the same reason that the legislation has to go through the elaborate simulacrum of pretending to speak with the voice of god: “. . . le Législateur ne pouvant employer ni la force ni le raisonnement, c’est une nécessité qu’il recoure a une autorité d’un autre ordre, qui puisse entraîner sans violence et persuader sans convaincre./ Voila ce qui força de tout tems les peres des nations a recourir a l’intervention du ciel et d’honorer les Dieux de leur propre sagesse . . .” (C Soc, 383)

The notion of referentiality, as it emerges from the reading of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Discourse, the Preface dialoguée to Julie and from the Profession de foi, thus accounts for the “politicality” of Rousseau’s theoretical discourse, not by establishing an opposition between individual and collective needs or passions, but as a consequence of the “blank” element that is part of all verbal utterance. At the same time, it establishes the indeterminacy of the epistemological and ethical valorizations that are bound to result from a theory which remains primarily a theory of rhetoric and reading of texts. It blank, moreover, the (artificial thematic) isolation that separates the political from the religious terminology and that lead to such confusion in the life as well as in the interpretation of Rousseau; we alluded earlier to the apparent impossibility of coordinating the conclusions to be derived from the Profession de foi with those stemming from the Social Contract or even from the Second Discourse. Since our purpose is directed towards
the epistemology of the Clarens episode in the allegory of the *Nouvelle Heloïse*, the passage from individual to collective fictions remains a problem that cannot be avoided, although it is subsidiary to the category of praxis that constitutes it. The predominance of the rhetorical, textual model leads to the necessarily political connotation of all literary language, regardless of whether the subject of the statement is a singular *I* or a collective *we*. A categorical opposition (or reconciliation) of self and society—regardless of which of the two antithetical concepts is being positively valorized at the expense of the other—would be alien to Rousseau’s thought, for which neither the self, nor consequently “society”, could ever have categorical status. “Self” and “society” are mere figures susceptible to being deconstructed. The same is true, of course, of such simplifying conceptual labels that pretend to distinguish between political, ethical, or even epistemological *texts*. We have persistently been writing as if such distinctions could be taken for granted, only because the best way to subvert false metaphors is by following them up to the point where they reveal their own fallacy. The same applies to less superstructural—and hence perhaps less obviously, though no less actually ideologized—metaphors such as “man” or “self” or “love”. This is not true of such terms as *praxis* or *figure* or *text* (are they categories?), which are truly ineluctable in their manifestation, despite (or because of) their falsehood.

Nevertheless, the *Nouvelle Heloïse* is organized as if the deconstruction of the metaphorical model that underlies the theme of love (Letter *<conversion>* , part III) implied a transition from the individual world of Julie and St. Preux to the collective world of Clarens (W!). The same structure repeats itself in the contract between the self-centered inwardness of the *individual* will in the *Profession de foi* and the *general* will in the *Contract Social*. The polarity is carried over into the text of the *Social Contract* itself, for example in the distinction made, in the last chapter (known to be an expression of the seventh chapter of book II on the Legislator)
between “religion de l’homme” and “religion du citoyen”. (464) It keeps producing parallel binary oppositions such as “religion naturelle” and “religion civile”, “droit naturel” and “droit civil”, “liberté naturelle” and “liberté civile” (especially since it is specified that “la liberté naturelle n’a pour bornes que la force de l’individu”) (293) (C Soc, 1ère version; also p. 364), “volonté générale” (and the individual will of a man) volonté particulière “qui ne suit que son penchant” (287). In the fragment that the editors of the Pléiade edition have entitled “Du Bonheur public” (III, 509-515), “bonheur public” and “bonheur particulier” (512)(1) are similarly opposed. And the famous opening pages of Emile contain perhaps the strongest statement of opposition between individual man and the citizen: “Celui qui dans l’ordre civil veut conserver la primauté des sentiments de la nature, ne sait ce qu’il veut. Toujours en contradiction avec lui-même, toujours flottant entre ses penchants et ses devoirs il ne sera jamais ni homme ni citoyen; il ne sera bon ni pour lui ni pour les autres. Ce sera un de ces hommes de nos jours; un Français, un Anglois, un Bourgeois; ce ne sera rien.” (249-250)(6)

The main controversies about Rousseau’s political thought(3) still center around this polarity; Rousseau’s historical valorizations such as, for example, the admiration for Lycurgus and the Lacedomians(5) or for <the> Rome, as well as the allusions to Plato’s Republic and the Politics, all cluster around the tensions between the individual and the public man. So does the at times striking “relevance” of Rousseau’s political writings with regard to contemporary political questions [- as well as, be it said in passing, his resemblance to that other admirer of the Rousseau state, Friedrich Nietzsche]. The controversial impact of the question is so far-reaching that it would be impossible to deal with it less than book-size length. Yet, the fact remains that, within the perspective of Rousseau’s theory of figural language, itself an indispensable preamble to the consideration of the
anthropological, ethical, theological or political areas of his concern (as well as to the legitimacy of dividing the work by means of such thematic categories), this polarity is by no means theoretically privileged over many of the others we have already encountered such as denomination and conceptualization, figural and literal meaning, self and other, judgment and sensation, man and god, “tableau” and “praxis”, and many others. Nor can its significance be understood if it is not placed within the repetitive sequence of these previous antinomies. Why then would it escape the thrust of the deconstruction that takes all the other polarities, as polarities, for its target? The concluding part of our Rousseau reading will have to deal with this question, not because it is the necessary prolegomenon to the reading of Rousseau as a political theoretician (a subject I am not competent to consider), but because its prominence in most of Rousseau’s political texts makes it impossible to ignore it. By encountering the question in this way, the limits of our territorial claim are clearly staked out, confined by a specific exegetic question (the interpretation of the second half of the Nouvelle Heloïse in terms of the Profession de foi and the Social Contract) and by a specific rhetorical, or textual, question: the referential status of allegorical narratives. Both depend on the question that the text forces upon us: why is it that Rousseau’s political theory remains governed, to all appearances, by the binary antinomy of a private versus a public order, when his theory of rhetoric seems to have dismissed the authority of such naïve models? And can this very question lead, in turn, to a further understanding of the rhetorical functions of language?