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Principle of Selection

The selection combines the theoretical side of Rousseau's thought, which is primarily of interest to students of political science and of intellectual history, with the more purely literary components of the works. It also provides the means to make connections between these two aspects of the work, by including such texts as the Essay on the Origins of Language in which the link between Rousseau's reflections on language, and his political theory becomes manifest. The book could therefore be used in courses in European civilization, in political theory, in the history of the Enlightenment, in the European novel, in romanticism or even in linguistics. The inclusion of the two main theoretical texts in in unabridged form (The Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality and The Social Contract) weighs the contents in the direction of political theory, but the literature-oriented interpretation, in the introduction, notes and explanatory comments, restores the balance. The inclusion of shorted and lesser-known literary texts serves the same purpose, since the two main literary texts (Julie and The Confessions) are too lengthy to be included in toto. The integrity of the texts is maintained as faithfully as
possible, by respecting the author's own internal divisions. For instance, the extracts from the epistolary novel Julie are always the complete units of the individual letters, given in their entirety. The excerpts have to be fragments but, whenever possible, the fragments are complete in themselves.

The religious and educational elements that are parts of Rousseau's contribution are represented in the selections from Emile and Julie and especially in the famous public letters (to Voltaire, to Mr. de Franquieres, etc.) in which his views on providence and faith are stated with particular clarity.