

Rousseau on Health: A Study of Our Relations

Kelsey N. Borrowman
Philosophy

“I would say that our society has been afflicted by a disease, for which we haven’t yet found a name; and this mental disease has a very curious symptom, which is that the symptom itself brought the mental disease into being.”

- Michel Foucault, 1971¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is rare among eighteenth century philosophers for his enduring commitment to the interrelation of the body and mind. For Rousseau, the body and mind are not independent, and, as such, each must be cultivated, if not simultaneously, then with regard to the other, for the other (Rousseau 1979, 125).² However, he remarks on the body in a contradictory manner, valorizing the “strong” and “robust” as “healthy” and admonishing weakness in the body. In what follows, I begin by addressing what Rousseau says about the body in a general sense, highlighting the causal connections he draws between the strength of body and the development of mind and, secondly, the importance they each hold for the cultivation of virtue. Then, I turn to his comments regarding the body, which are more troublesome, particularly with regard to sickness. However, while he is using the negative claims *as* negative claims – for example, the way he deplores sickness because it “constricts” us to ourselves and focuses our attention on our body, disallowing other senses to develop – to over emphasize this negativity is to miss something in what is essential to Rousseau’s project: namely, that the experience, knowledge, and recognition of sickness is the condition for the proper cultivation of pity.

Regarding pity, Rousseau marks out two different paths: (1) *amour-propre* and (2) “properly cultivated” pity, or what is now called compassion.³ The latter

¹ Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 59.

² Unless otherwise noted, page numbers refer to Rousseau 1979.

³ I use compassion in order to distinguish between properly cultivated and, to use Frederick Neuhausser’s language, “inflamed” *amour-propre*. While the debates about this doubling or dividing of *amour-propre* are contentious within scholarship on Rousseau, the primary

gives us a different account of sickness and suffering than the earlier pages of *Emile: Or, On Education*, Rousseau's lengthy treatise concerning the proper education of man, in which he creates the character "Emile" to represent not a *universal* education applicable in all scenarios but, rather, a general guide to use and modify for particular pupils. Sickness, precisely because it is common to all, becomes the occasion for the proper development of pity; sickness is how Rousseau gets intersubjectivity – that is, the recognition of others – off the ground. This is not a moot point, as it is through compassionate recognition of others that equality among men becomes self-evident. Based on this reading, I argue that the body becomes the site of the development of a social life based in equality and that, moreover, health, itself a relational accomplishment, is facilitated by affective sensibilities and relational capacities. Thus, Rousseau can be read – especially, but not exclusively, in *Emile* – as explaining the experiences and relations through which bodies, individually and collectively, become healthy and man becomes virtuous.

Introduction to the Problem

As Jean Starobinski notes, "Rousseau does not hesitate to yoke opposites in his narrative, to join them inextricably" (Starobinski 340). This tendency of Rousseau's, his ostensible contradictions, has led to his being referred to as the philosopher of paradox. The ostensible contradictions are in part due to the invocation of the body and its health at both the level of the individual and of the state. Rousseau anticipated this problem and recognized that the metaphor of the "body politic, which he also employs, is common, but imprecise (Rousseau 1997a, 6). What we are able to glean, however, is that, for Rousseau, there is a healthy constitution of the individual and of the state, and the conditions for each mirror one another. Secondly, Rousseau moves almost imperceptibly between multiple voices, at times prescriptive and others descriptive. As I argue below with regard to sickness as constricting, Rousseau is not only making evaluative judgments, but statements based on personal experience.⁴ There is an autobiographical element to be aware of. In other instances, Rousseau sees himself as describing the state of things in his particular historical conjuncture. That is, Rousseau is aware that there is a relationship between "bodily integrity and political opportunity" (Wingrove

motivation for this decision is to highlight a certain sweetness in compassion whereas pity has since acquired a tone of condescension. See Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴ See, especially, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, but I will argue that this element also undergirds the negative statements found early in *Emile*.

12). He recognizes that the body – whether we are considering gender norms or able-bodied assumptions – is a “figure of political possibility” (Wingrove 17). This is not simply an aside; rather, his awareness of the role the body plays in political and social life is precisely why it is important to cultivate its strength and why it must not be lost, as it is when reason is our sole guide.

It is worthwhile to take Rousseau at his word when he writes that the apparent contradictions that his reader will lambast him for are not contradictions of ideas, but of expressions (108). In *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* – a later text in which the character “Jean-Jacques,” who is not the writer Rousseau but someone familiar with his works, converses with “Frenchman,” who has listened to popular opinion concerning the works of “Rousseau,” and, thus, does not think highly of him – Rousseau asserts, via his formerly disparaging interlocutor, that he has offered a “coherent system” of “nothing contradictory” (Rousseau 1990, 209). As I see it, the task becomes locating and extracting tendencies and putting them to work within his coherent system, to bring, I hope, something new and useful to his theory while remaining faithful to its principles. We must first, however, contend with Rousseau’s negative remarks regarding ill-health and sickness.

Sickness and Learning How to Live Well

In multiple places throughout his *oeuvre*, Rousseau asserts the importance of a vigorous, robust body for the education of the soul. In the *First Discourse*, for example, the maintenance of the body’s vigor is the soil out of which the soul grows (1997a, 98). I suggested in the introduction to this essay that Rousseau gives us reason to be suspicious of any diametric between the mind and the body and asserts that the cultivation of body and soul or of body and mind are *for* one another: they “grow together,” and each is “extended by the other” (118).⁵ Nonetheless, his insistence on the importance of exercise “*in order to make [Emile] wise and reasonable*” (118; emphasis mine) implies that the healthy body is a necessary condition for intelligence and virtue, and that one is inaugurated by the other. In turn, this implies that a “weak” or “ill-constituted” body is precluded from the development of mind and virtue. We could, as Rousseau would like us to do, account for this implied diametric as a contradiction of expression; that is, it is not because one is the condition for the other, but developmentally speaking – in

⁵ In *Emile*, where Rousseau also writes that the body and soul must be exercised together: “The more he makes himself strong and robust, the more he becomes sensible and judicious. This is the way one day to have what are believed to be incompatible and what are united in almost all great men: strength of body and strength of soul; a wise man’s reason and an athlete’s vigor” (119).

the sense of childhood development – the capacity for reason comes long after the capacity for bodily strength, and hence, the latter is developed first.

However, when Rousseau expresses his preference for Emile to be “well-formed, vigorous, and healthy” (53) he seems to be suggesting that an ill constitution forecloses the possibility of education in the way he imagines it for Emile. It would, at the least, look very different than how our tutor proceeds with his healthy pupil (Rousseau 1997b, 135).⁶ In what follows, I recount his preference for a healthy pupil, expressed primarily as a condemnation of its opposite, then turn to the reasoning behind his reluctance. This project should by no means be taken as reconciliatory, nor is the intention to resuscitate or validate the socio-historical sentiments that undergird Rousseau’s arguments, and which still inform our perceptions of disabled or chronically ill persons and the (lack of) value we attribute to their lives. This reconstruction intends primarily to argue that even his most egregious expressions, themselves not redeemable, are undergirded by a logic consistent with his treatise on education. In order to make clear that Rousseau is not expressing a universal contempt for sickness, I then illustrate the value he sees in the experience of sickness and show how, in fact, experiencing and learning to bear sickness is critical to Emile’s education both with regard to his personal strength and, as I argue in the following section, the development of compassion.

Nowhere is Rousseau more contemptuous of the “sickly” or “ill-constituted” than in his reasoning that his pupil ought to be healthy. Rather than elucidating the positive reasons for this, such as the many privileges health affords, and despite granting equality to the “crippled or not,” the “sickly or robust,” he refers to the ill constituted child as “useless to himself and others” as he is the one “whose body does damage to the education of his soul” (53). He would never take on a “valetudinarian,” one who is weak or sickly, but, especially, one who is *morbidly* concerned with their health (53). But *why* does he not want to take a “sick” pupil for his educational treatise? What does a healthy constitution afford Emile and his education? I would like to suggest two related attributes or effects – constriction of freedom and occupation with death – that Rousseau, here, strongly attributes to the ill-constituted. It should be noted, however, that these attributes do not pertain *only* to the ill-constituted individual, but inform how he distinguishes between—and *what he means by* – a “healthy” society and a “sick” one.

When Rousseau writes that the ill-constituted child is “useless to himself and others,” his contention is that the child is “involved uniquely with preserving himself” (53). This unique involvement is problematic for Rousseau in three ways. First, as he states later in *Emile*, sickness divides our attention, even “shackles” the

⁶ Rousseau writes, “Just as the regimen of healthy people is not suitable for the sick, one should not want to govern a corrupt people by means of the same laws that are suited to a good people.”

mind, disallowing one the freedom “to be *me* without contradiction or division” (53, author emphasis). In *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, his more apparently autobiographical work, he writes that only when he was able to forget about the interests of his body was he able to find “any real charm in the pleasures of the mind” (Rousseau 1980, 111). These statements share the common argument that the sick body *demand*s attention, drawing it away from other pursuits. It is in this sense that he means that sickness constricts our freedom. When he suggests that we must make our body obedient, through both exercise and convalescence, it is so that we may recover this freedom (54). For Rousseau, docility is not constriction, but a condition allowed for by the state of freedom and, thus, a virtue; that is, when one is free, one has no reason to revolt or to become angry and, thus, has the *freedom to be docile*.

The second way in which this unique self-involvement is problematic for Rousseau is even more important than the first as it affects our relations with others. The concern for self-preservation “concentrates us within ourselves” (168), constricting our ability to recognize and attend to the sufferings of others. With this in mind, he writes that “in a state of power and strength the desire to extend our being takes us out of ourselves and causes us to leap as far as is possible for us” (168). Emile, quite young in the treatise, has not yet developed the capacity for imagination, which enables one to imagine the suffering of others. He is still limited in his ability to see “farther than [his] eyes.” At this point, then, Emile is still developing his strength so that he has the power to extend beyond himself (229). One must be strong to be able to be concerned with others, or, rather, strength *means* being – that is, is the condition that allows oneself to be – able to be concerned with others. Without it, one cannot be in a social relationship based on equality, which is what Rousseau means when he says the valetudinarian is “useless to others.”

There is at least one other concern that prohibits Rousseau from even considering an ill-constituted pupil. Here, again, the involvement with self-preservation is at issue. When Rousseau writes that the “sickly and ill-constituted child” is one “whose body does damage to the education of his soul,” it is not the sickness *itself*, but the *morbid* concern with death that damages the soul. Here, Rousseau assumes that a sickly person is “one who thinks of nothing but how to keep himself from dying” (53). To reiterate, this is troublesome for the reasons Rousseau discusses earlier in the treatise: namely, because it consumes both time and thought, keeping the mind from other pursuits and foreclosing the possibility of extending beyond oneself. But, secondly, one who is afraid of death does not make use of her life (54). To not make use of one’s life is to consider oneself already dead, and it is not Rousseau’s talent, nor his concern, to “make cadavers walk” (54). His insistence on his pupil’s healthy constitution is the fear of death he

presumes comes with its opposite.⁷ To fear death is, he writes, to hasten it, to “make it felt ahead of time” (54). This is why his use of valetudinarian is telling: it is not simply that Rousseau’s concern is sickness or weakness, but rather that he is concerned with people having a constant preoccupation with their own health. The preoccupation with one’s health is equally poisonous for those of a healthy constitution, and it will be a part of Emile’s education to not worry constantly about that which will naturally occur at times. For instance, in our tutor’s parting words to Sophie, he warns that one ought not to be so concerned with health that it comes at the expense of happiness (479).

Sickness is unavoidable – it is a natural ill and, therefore, common to us all. Before one is able to recognize suffering in others, they must themselves be familiar with this suffering. Learning to bear sickness not only is a preparatory stage for the cultivation of pity, but it strengthens the individual as well. Learning to bear suffering is “nature’s art” (55). As such, Rousseau does not protect Emile to the extent that he never experiences suffering: “I would be most distressed if he were never hurt and grew up without knowing pain. To suffer is the first thing he ought to learn and *the thing he will most need to know*” (78; emphasis mine). The necessity of learning how to bear suffering – where, for Rousseau, sickness and suffering are explicitly connected—is also the justification of Rousseau’s insistence on exercise, the hardships of which prepare Emile for the hardships of illnesses (126).⁸ In learning to bear “slight pains without terror, one gradually learns to bear great pains” (78). If we do not know how to suffer, we suffer more, Rousseau writes, “and we give ourselves more torment in curing our maladies than we would have in enduring them” (82). Thus, learning to suffer well is learning how to *live well*. It is, in part, a cultivation of patience and an early lesson in the art of discernment, insofar as one learns to discern between what ills are of a natural suffering and those that are “of our own making.” In becoming familiar with suffering, which “does not admit of exceptions” (131), Emile is “cured” of the common impatience that drives us toward medicine, that “lying art” (54). Notably, a lengthy condemnation of doctors and medicine follows the pages in which Rousseau admonishes the valetudinarian, further illustrating that it is the constant concern with our health – which bespeaks a fear of death – that “weakens the soul.” It drives us into the hands of the doctor, along with the priests and philosophers, who all teach us how to die. Thus, Rousseau advises, “Live

⁷ We should be suspicious of this claim, that the ill-constituted think only of death. Queer Theory and Crip Theory challenge this on a number of fronts, asserting a different relationship with death and even conceptions of “health.”

⁸ See also the discussion of submitting Emile to various temperatures of both climate and bath water (68, 127-28).

according to nature, be patient, and drive away the doctors. You will not avoid death, but you will only feel it once” (82).

For Rousseau, sickness is only “disabling” if one does not learn how to bear it and instead turns to those doctors who give us more remedies than cures. While it is true that he asserts that a frail body risks weakening the soul, it is also true that if “the physical prospers,” if one goes untouched by the wounding, bruising, and other pains of the body, then the moral is corrupt (87), hence his insistence that the mind and body must be cultivated continuously and *together*. Rousseau, then, decides to tutor a healthy child while also allowing him to become sick so that the child will know *how* to be sick. To know how to be sick, to learn how to cure oneself, is not the opposite of health, but *essential to it*.

Pity as Compassionate Recognition

As discussed above, Rousseau argues that the experience of suffering comes to play an important role in the recognition of others. Without having suffered himself, Emile could not know “the tenderness of humanity or the sweetness of commiseration. His heart would be moved by nothing. He would not be sociable. He would be a monster among his kind” (87). At this stage, however, though Emile already knows suffering, he does not know that others suffer, too. He knows only his own ills (222).

“Little by little,” however, “the blood is inflamed,” and “a superabundance of life seeks to extend itself outward” (220). It is at this point that we begin to take notice of those around us and “one begins to feel that one is not made to live alone. It is thus that the heart is opened to the human affections and becomes capable of attachment” (220). Having first experienced the desire to extend beyond oneself, even though he does not know yet what it is that he desires, Emile is no longer isolated (214). Now that his senses have lit the “fire of imagination” (222), its first act must be “to teach him that he has fellows” (220). Rousseau warns, however, that lest his inflamed blood become too intense and become carried away or angered, sentiment must “enchain imagination” (219). This is to say that he must develop the sentiments that correspond to the imagination that puts him in proximity to his fellows. And it is here that sickness – which, as I have argued, entails learning how to bear suffering as well as learning how to discern that suffering which is natural to man – becomes the occasion for Emile to recognize others and enter into a relationship – friendship or courtship are our examples in *Emile* – that is based on equality.

To become sensitive to others, one must recognize his fellows as beings *who suffer like him*. Rousseau writes that we are connected to others “by the sentiment of their pains” because in them we can see “the identity of *our* natures with *theirs*

and the guarantees of *their* attachment to *us*” (221; emphases mine), an early foreshadowing of the reciprocity in proper recognition that I will turn to in greater detail below. As it is our nature to experience suffering, and because Emile’s imagination is still nascent, we ought not expose him to “the pomp of the courts, the splendors of palaces, or the appeal of the theatre” (221-222), as this will turn him back on himself and he will wallow in his own suffering for not living in such pomp. This can only come after he has properly trained pity; that is, after he has the capacity to judge “the deceptive image of the happiness of men” in itself. Rather, Emile ought to be exposed to that which is common to us all:

Men are not naturally kings, or lord, or courtiers, or rich men. All are born naked and poor; all are subject to the miseries of life, to sorrows, ills, needs, and pains of every kind. Finally, all are condemned to death. This is what truly belongs to man. This is what no mortal is exempt from. Begin, therefore, by studying in human nature what is most inseparable from it, what best characterizes humanity. (222)

Thus, the ideal moment for Emile’s first lesson in pity, and the one that Rousseau chooses, is seeing his sick father, mother, or governor. Emile, having not been shown “the art of affecting sadness he does not feel,” cannot put on the proper countenance. Because he has himself experienced sickness and, moreover, has already formed a bond with his sick governor, he does not need to affect sadness, in the sense of displaying an emotion he does not feel. Rather, he recognizes that which commonly befalls each of us and, in seeing the suffering of his fellow, he feels himself in their suffering. This recognition, enabled by the development of imagination, transports “ourselves outside of ourselves” and toward humanity. It is this first “picture of suffering humanity” that brings “to his heart the first tenderness it has ever experienced” (222). Thus is born pity.

Sickness, as it makes no exception, becomes the occasion and opportunity for compassion through gestures of pity toward one another. Pity is the “first *relative* sentiment, which touches the human heart according to the order of nature” (222; emphasis mine). Pity arises in accordance with nature “because it is that sentiment that arises out of and responds to each our common human experience of pain, weakness, suffering and need, setting aside issues of rank, privilege and power which, if they intrude at all, tend to silence the voice of pity” (Dent 332). The suggestion that human vulnerability sets aside social rank and privilege is to say that each of us, despite our station in life, risks suffering equally. Knowing this is a *condition* for pity. Rousseau’s second maxim for the proper cultivation of pity speaks to this point: “One pities in others only those ills from which one does not feel oneself exempt” (224). By being able to imagine that, the

next day, he could be in the position of the one he helps today, Emile is bound to his fellows. In other words, recognizing that the plight of a fellow could befall him equally, Emile does not differentiate himself from this other on the basis of the present condition, but, rather, identifies the very possibility of succumbing to such a condition as forming, in part, the commonality that exists between Emile and his fellow person.

For Emile, having just been introduced to the suffering of others, pity is still a “nascent sensibility,” and, thus must be attended to with great care in order “to excite in him goodness, humanity, commiseration, beneficence, and all the attractive and sweet passions pleasing to men, and to prevent the birth of envy, covetousness, hate, and all the repulsive and cruel passions which make sensibility, so to speak, not only nothing, but negative” (223). The significance of pity’s nascent quality is that it can potentially develop in two opposing directions. The first, which we have begun to introduce above, is based in an understanding of human nature, and which will set the conditions for a social life rooted in equality. The second, motivated by self-interest, uses reason to think abstractly about man’s character, but is also inherently blinded by prejudice and vanity, and compels Emile to think that he is happier than his fellows, making him naturally superior to them. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau (1997a) writes that pity, “a disposition suited to beings as weak and as subject to so many ills as we are” (152), produces commiseration, which “is nothing but a sentiment that puts us in the place of him who suffers” (153). He continues:

Indeed commiseration will be all the more energetic in proportion as the Onlooking animal identifies more intimately with the suffering animal: Now this identification must, clearly, have been infinitely closer in the state of Nature than in the state of reasoning. It is reason that engenders *amour propre*, and reflection that enforces it; reason that turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him: It is Philosophy that isolates him; by means of Philosophy he secretly says, at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe. (1997a, 153)

Here, we have the image of the philosopher as the one who does not know how to be compassionate in the face of suffering. When he sees suffering, he believes himself to be safe from what Rousseau understands as our common plight. Incapable of the “super-abundant sensibility” that leads one into a relationship with his fellows, his philosophy constricts him only to himself. This is reinforced by the vain assumption that he—the philosopher without compassion—is naturally superior, that he is above the sufferings that “truly belong to man.” He cannot,

then, but conceive of equality abstractly. The vanity that amounts to mistaking inequality as natural is a sickness of memory: “some illnesses overwhelm men’s minds and deprive them of the memory of the past” (Rousseau 1997b, 72). Without the experience of suffering and without the memory that allows the recollection necessary to see oneself in others’ sufferings, one is unable to properly discern, or perhaps remember, what is common to us all.

This sort of vanity, for which there is no cure, is precisely what must be avoided for Emile, and it is why the proper cultivation of *amour-propre* is the ground upon which we construct a society based on equality.⁹ As soon as we have the desire to extend beyond ourselves, to see the others around us, “the relative *I* is constantly in play, and the young man never observes others without returning to himself and comparing himself with them” (243). But Emile, through experience, has been equipped to discern between the hearts of men and to discern himself from others without being deceived by the source of his superiority:

Therefore, if as a consequence of my care Emile prefers his way of being, of seeing, and of feeling to that of other men, Emile is right. But if he thus believes himself to be of a more excellent *nature* and more happily born than other man, Emile is wrong. He is deceived. One must undeceive him or, rather, anticipate the error for fear that afterward *it will be too late to destroy it*. (245; emphasis mine)

If one believes they are more worthy of happiness than their suffering fellow by nature – and let us be reminded that “men are not naturally kings, or lords, or courtiers, or rich men” (222) – there is nothing to engender the mutual dependence that, in replacing the dependence on individuals, allows for freedom and equality.

The question then becomes one of extending the principles of compassionate recognition beyond individual relationships. That is, how does a healthy society – one that takes equality and freedom as its basic principles – amount from or depend on the proper cultivation of pity? Or, how do we transition between a relationship of equality between men to relations of equality among men?

Sickness, then, is implicated in society in two distinct ways. There is, first, sickness as a natural state of the body that implicates culture as the demand for and cultivation of compassion, and, secondly, the sickness that is the society of individuals who lack the proper cultivation of compassion toward our shared

⁹ “The sole folly of which one cannot disabuse a man who is not mad is vanity. For this there is no cure other than experience—if, indeed, anything can cure it.” In the proceeding statement, he notes that if one arrives at this level of vanity, he is deceived. “One must undeceive him, or, rather, anticipate the error for fear that afterward it will be too late to destroy it.” (Rousseau 1979, 245)

human vulnerability. Having established that sickness operates differentially, we can understand the coexistence of both positive and negative attitudes, as well as the alternating accounts of ills as natural and, elsewhere, as of our own making; Rousseau writes, “take away the pains of the body” and “all our ills are imaginary” (81). In other words, we can distinguish a different attitude toward the body such that the troublesome comments of the earlier pages in *Emile* take on a new meaning: the illnesses for which there are no cures or remedies, the ill-constituted, and the weak bodies that Rousseau admonishes are not instances of natural and equal-opportunity suffering, those that remind us of our common vulnerability and thus demand our attention and care. Rather, they are instances of cultural diagnosis, where sickness, in its negative sense, “belongs primarily to man living in society” (Rousseau 1997a, 136-137). To echo the methodological points made in the first section of this essay, Rousseau’s contrasting statements are neither for the sake of being opaque nor an unintentional contradiction, but remind us of the problem he is identifying – namely, the problem of man and his relations (214).

Health as Equality

The discussion of the specific relations that are necessary for a healthy society for Rousseau, as he addresses especially in the *Second Discourse* and *The Social Contract*, would entail a lengthier discussion than what I am able to offer within the scope of this essay. However, it is necessary to gesture toward the importance of our relations within society in order to illustrate, firstly, that the cultivation of pity is the condition for equal relations between men. This, in turn, encourages our return to the meaning of health. This final section, then, entails the extension of pity to mankind, the importance of this generalization, and, more specifically, how it reveals that health depends on the proper cultivation of our relations.

Now that Emile has experienced a “superabundance of life,” “his heart is no longer alone” (214). Previously, when he was limited to his own experience, his actions were not morally guided: “It is only when [his sensibility] begins to extend outside himself that it takes on, first, the sentiments and, then, the emotions of good and evil which truly constitute him as a man and an integral part of his species” (219-220). After he takes an interest in others, he is social. Or, from the first ‘sight,’ from the moment one’s eyes extend beyond oneself, the *I* becomes relative; that is, we are in relation to the others around us; we are *in a relation with* the others around us. Though Rousseau introduces this instinct to extend beyond oneself with reference to love and one sex desiring the other, he also notes that the first sentiment, once the heart has been opened to others, is *not* love, but friendship. When he writes, “love must be reciprocal,” we should hear this as a more general sentiment. In other words, to say, as he does, that “to be loved, one

has to make oneself lovable,” despite the invocation of love, this is reflective of his more general statement that “one wants to obtain the preference that one grants” (214). As Emile recognizes his fellows as equal, they, in turn, ought to return the sentiment. As discussed earlier, suffering binds us *to one another*. Let us recall that, as our common miseries unite us, as we recognize this attachment to others, it is “the identity of *our* natures with *theirs* and the guarantees of *their* attachment to *us*” (221; emphases mine). While Rousseau tends to express reciprocity with regard to relationships between the sexes, the importance of reciprocity is apparent even in the first moment of recognition. It is *our* nature that we see; their suffering binds them to us and, because of our capacity for imagination and memory, binds us to them. In this way, what was a developing sentiment becomes a noble one.

In order to prevent pity from developing into jealousy, envy, and hate, “it must, therefore, be generalized and extended to the whole of mankind” (253). In extending it to other beings, pity transforms into a virtue (252). By concentrating on others to such an extent that it is his “first interest after his private interest,” Emile avoids any preference for individuals, which has a basis in an unjust bias:

The more one generalizes this interest, the more it becomes equitable, and the love of mankind is nothing other than the love of justice. [. . .] Then one yields to [mankind] only insofar as it accords with justice, because of all the virtues justice is the one that contributes most to the common good of men. For the sake of reason, for the sake of love of ourselves, we must have pity for our species still more than for our neighbor (252-253)

Pity and recognition are now no longer limited to a relationship between individuals. As Bertrand de Jouvenel depicts it, “it is a question of forming, in a small and closely connected society, a common sensitivity that is so lively that society guides itself by the same natural reactions found in an individual man” (Jouvenel 130). Pity must be generalized and extended, given to humanity even before a loved one. Rousseau demonstrates this through a profession spoken by Emile. He addresses Sophie after our tutor recalls their adventure in helping the man who has fallen off of his horse, thus delaying their expected arrival: “You can make me die of pain. But do not hope to make me forget the rights of humanity. They are more sacred to me than yours. I will never give them up for you” (441). She, recognizing his virtue, is overwhelmed by his pity, his duty to others over his self-interest and inclination, even in the face of his persistent and nearly feverish impatience for their visits. Sophie, too, cares for the sick. Despite her concern for hygiene, she is “rebuffed neither by the dirtiness [. . .] nor the bad smell and knows how to make both disappear without ordering anyone about and without the sick

being tormented” (442).¹⁰ She does not shame the sick, knowing the same fate could befall her, and privileges charity even over modesty. The point here is that, even in *Emile*, we see that Rousseau does not think of pity as merely a preferred characteristic in an individual. Rather, the extension and generalization of pity begs us to consider society as a whole. To borrow from Allan Bloom in his introduction to *Emile*, “the recognition of our sameness and our common vulnerability dampens the harsh competitiveness and egotism of egalitarian politics” (Bloom 19). It is “compassion resulting from equality,” an equality which considers our material conditions and our embodied commonality, that Rousseau uses “as the glue binding us together” (Bloom 19).

Rousseau has given us a man who loves truth and reason, but does not let this reason guide him, at least not at the expense of forgetting his body. As Jouvenel points out, “a man who reacts to what menaces or harms the body, which he considers as his body, reacts with a very different energy, according to Rousseau, than the man who consults universal Reason” (Jouvenel 130). In wanting to avoid what he sees as the pitfalls of living guided by reason, the consequence of which is un- or wrongly cultivated pity, Rousseau injects the body with a weighted importance in the development of virtue. By highlighting the body’s vulnerability, in making it that which binds us to others by offering the occasion for the proper cultivation of pity, pity becomes a “code of democracy and it is always and primarily an embodied code” (Slattery, 86). Pity is intelligible through invocations of the body, and we are connected to the outside world through this embodied sensibility.

The “suitable study for man is that of his relations” (214). What I hope to have shown in this essay is how *Emile* can be read as a study of the cultivation of healthy relations among men in such a way that they are lively enough to guide society. A relationship of equality is only possible through the development of the proper form of comparison, one based not in self-interest or egoism, but facilitated by our affective sensibilities and relational capacities. A society’s health depends on proper relations, and, so, to be healthy, we study our relations. In other words, it is our relations that must be judged as healthy or sick, and health, for Rousseau, is, if anything, vigorous freedom.

¹⁰ The significance of this comes from the earlier discussion of the senses, where Rousseau suggests that women have a stronger sense of and sensitivity to smells.

Works Cited

- Bloom, Allan. "Introduction." In *Emile: Or, On Education*. New York: Basic Books Press, 1979.
- Chomsky, Noam and Michel Foucault. *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature*. New York: The New Press, 2006.
- de Jouvenel, Bertrand. "An essay on Rousseau's politics." In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers, vol. 1*, Edited by John T. Scott. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Neuhouser, Frederick. *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile: Or, On Education*. New York: Basic Books Press, 1979.
- . 1997a. *Rousseau: "The Discourses" and Other Early Political Writings*, Edited by Victor Gourevitch. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- . 1980. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, London: Penguin Books, 1980.
- . 1990. *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*, Translated by Judith R. Bush et. al., University Press of New England, 1990.
- . 1997b. *Rousseau: "The Social Contract" and Other Later Political Writings*, Edited by Victor Gourevitch. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Slattery, Dennis Patrick. *The Wounded Body: Remembering the Markings of Flesh*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Starobinski, Jean. "The Antidote in the Poison: The Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau." In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers, vol. 1*, edited by John T. Scott, 340-387. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Wingrove, Elizabeth Rose. *Rousseau's Republican Romance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.