Without going so far as agreeing with Diderot, who called the *Emile* "une espèce de galimatias," critics have generally had difficulty in appreciating this work fully, viewing many of its sections as digressions, paradoxes, or outright contradictions. The same can be said for parts of the *Contrat social*, which usually are dismissed as mere "padding." What is even more typical in modern Rousseau criticism—and an author such as he seems to provoke it—is the tendency to interpret these texts from a twentieth-century viewpoint, anachronistically ascribing to the author motives he could not even have conceived in his time, or pushing some of his statements to conclusions he never intended. Not that such studies are invalid: there are in the works of all great authors implications of which they themselves were not always aware. That is why, for example, Diderot could refute Voltaire's objections to the materialism in the *Lettre sur les aveugles* by reminding him that his own statements in the *Lettres philosophiques* substantiated the blind Saunderson's position. That is why both Voltaire and Rousseau were regarded as heroes in the French Revolution despite their comparative political conservatism.

And a monumental work like Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* does not lose its validity or utility because he imposes a systematic, Hegelian "synthesis" on an author like Diderot even though it does not correspond to the Encyclopedist's own temperament or methodology.

But there comes a time in the explication of any significant work when we must ask ourselves, What was the
author's intention when he wrote it? Has he given us any clues as to what plan he followed or as to how we are to interpret his writings? Not to do so is to risk misinterpreting or overlooking passages that are essential to that plan and to understanding their artistic and philosophical significance. It is to these questions that Professor Ellis addresses herself. Rousseau more than once claimed that his *Emile* and *Contrat social* were of one cloth and formed an organic whole; but critics have either taken him at his word or dismissed it as another Rousseauistic paradox. It is not surprising that no one until now has fathomed that unity and proved it. The task requires a painstaking collation of texts, a complete familiarity not only with Rousseau's works but with those of the classical sources on which he relied, and, finally, a dispassionate, scholarly will to understand the author whether one agrees with him or not. This last requirement is particularly difficult to achieve when dealing with an author like Rousseau who somehow brings out the polemicist in some critics and leads them to write either hagiography or demonology. Not the least of this book's merits is its calm, matter-of-fact approach that is neither advocacy nor condemnation but explication in the highest sense. One reads its "revelations"—for that is what they are—with a sense of discovery that, because of the tightly reasoned and convincing evidence, compels assent.

Professor Ellis has found the key not only to *Emile* and the *Contrat social* but to the central core of Rousseau's writings. Through her lucid and entirely convincing demonstration, she has come as close to the intentions, methodology, and meaning of these texts as anyone can hope to do. She captures the Genevan's mythical (and mystical) bent and clarifies many an obscure and heretofore baffling allusion that can only be understood in the context of the master plan he followed. In so doing, she gives us a new insight into the artistry of this author who so personalized Socratic and biblical imagery that without Dr. Ellis's
quotations of chapter and verse we would not have recognized them as such. There will always be new and “contemporary” interpretations of Rousseau’s works; but Dr. Ellis has brought us once and for all back to the intentions and sources of the author himself, without which knowledge much of what he wrote remained for us enigmatic and obscure. Her book was sorely needed! And it will necessitate the abandonment or reevaluation of many an ingenious but henceforth untenable interpretation that our profession had hitherto taken for granted.

Words like *masterful* or *brilliant* are so often used in contexts such as this that they tend to lose their meaning. Yet how else underline the importance of Dr. Ellis’s impressive accomplishment, which represents years of thorough preparation? *Rousseau’s Socratic Aemilian Myths* is not just another book on Rousseau. It is bound to become required reading for anyone wishing to understand him; for it is a touchstone for the comprehension of the Genevan’s allegorical language and, thus, to a truer interpretation of what he himself regarded as the *summa* of his writings: *Emile.*

John Pappas
Fordham University