Rousseau’s Antifeminism in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* and *Emile*
In 1949, long before the current movement for women's rights brought the issue of feminism to the forefront of the American social and political consciousness, Simone de Beauvoir had published her now classical analysis of woman's role in human society in a two-volume work entitled *Le Deuxième Sexe*. A basic premise of that work is that, as far back as history records, women have always had a subordinate role to men and that insofar as this relationship to men seems to escape the accidental character of historical events, the separate status of women, or their "otherness," as Mme de Beauvoir calls it, takes on the quality of an absolute.

The author of *Le Deuxième Sexe* devotes a good part of the first volume of her work to demonstrating how, through various historical periods, woman has been man's vassal if not his slave, how the two sexes have always been unequal, and how, despite the evolution of woman's status in the post-World War II period, she still remains seriously disadvantaged. Mme de Beauvoir provides the details to show that the legal status of woman has almost never been identical to that of man and that even when rights have been granted to her in principle and by law, long tradition and habit have prevented these rights from assuming concrete significance.

According to Mme de Beauvoir, men have always displayed satisfaction in believing themselves to be the divine objects of creation; and to illustrate this characteristic male attitude, she uses the Hebrew morning prayer in which the Orthodox
Jew chants: “Blessed be our Lord and the Lord of all the universe for not having made me a woman.”

Literature provides Simone de Beauvoir with a convenient source to prove her case.¹ She calls her reader’s attention to the antifeminine stance of writers throughout French literature and considers this part of a well-defined tradition going back to Jean de Meung in medieval literature and continuing to our day in the writings of Henry de Montherlant. It is in the eighteenth century, however, that she notes the development of a new democratic spirit among certain writers who approached the question of the status of women in an objective manner. She particularly singles out the utterances of Diderot in praising some of these unusually impartial philosophes. It is likely that she had in mind Diderot’s presentation of the condition of women in the eighteenth century in his novel La Religieuse and some of his contes as well as his plea on behalf of women in the Essai sur les femmes. Among other examples of an enlightened attitude toward women in the eighteenth century, she notes Voltaire’s denunciation of the injustice of their condition, Montesquieu’s paradoxical statement that women ought to be subordinate to men in the home but play an important role in the outside world of politics, Helvétius’s and d’Alembert’s criticism of the absurd education to which women in their time were subjected and which these philosophes saw as a principal cause of their inferior status, and Condorcet’s egalitarian position on women’s rights.² But perhaps, curiously, a more typical reflection of the prevailing attitude toward women in eighteenth-century France is to be found in the works of another contemporary author—himself an “outsider”—whose writings on education, society, and politics were innovative and radical, yet whose attitude toward women would seem to illustrate rather well the traditional antifeminine literary bias noted by Mme de Beauvoir. That writer is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and in light of Simone de Beauvoir’s thesis, I should like to examine Rousseau’s attitude toward women in two of his major theoretical writings, the Lettre à d’Alembert and Emile.³
Rousseau’s commentary on women and their status in society is broached in his *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1758) in the context of a broad critique of the social role of the theater. The general subject of the relationship of the arts and sciences to society had attracted the author’s attention in two earlier works, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and the *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité* (1755), two pioneering and heterodox treatises that shocked the eighteenth-century literary world. In all three of these works Rousseau adopted a position that seems paradoxical for a writer in the Age of Enlightenment, since the general line of his argument was that the evolution of the arts and sciences had been to the detriment and corruption of humanity and that if it was not practical for man to return to the ideal of a state of nature, at least the arts and sciences should be discouraged—especially those that were related to a spirit of luxury and were therefore a reflection of the unacceptable social conditions of the eighteenth century. In this connection, Rousseau took particular umbrage at d’Alembert’s article “Genève” in the *Encyclopédie*, in which the Parisian mathematician recommended the establishment of a permanent theater in Rousseau’s home town, the Calvinist city of Geneva.

In his lengthy public letter to d’Alembert, Rousseau offers an analysis of the French theater of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and thoroughly condemns it as an instrument of immorality. The Calvinism of Rousseau’s birthplace, Rousseau’s difficult Parisian experience, and his own dissatisfaction with the intellectual spirit of the Enlightenment were the principal factors that influenced his conclusions. Among other reasons for Rousseau’s discontent with the theater was what he judged to be the excessive role of women in theatrical life. Rousseau particularly pointed to the vital importance of love as a dramatic theme, especially in French classical tragedy; the manner in which the theme was generally treated seemed to show that women exercised great influence and power over men, much to the annoyance of Rousseau. It is in his analysis of the role of women in the theater that Rous-
sean's antifeminist bias emerges rather sharply. This analysis brings Rousseau to a more general consideration of the role of women in society in the course of which he argues seriously that decision-making is a masculine prerogative with which women should not interfere. As a matter of fact, Rousseau was quite disturbed by what he considered to be the over-influential role of women in contemporary French society. In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, a description of the type of woman he particularly found objectionable emerges: she was socially active, she determined new style trends, she articulated definite opinions about cultural and moral values, and, in general, she was sought after because of her socially influential position. As a model for this antipathetic type, Rousseau no doubt had in mind some of the women prominent in the eighteenth-century French literary salons. That was an institution with which he had been acquainted at first hand, of course, in his early years in the French capital as an aspiring writer who had tried Father Castel's advice of making his way in Paris through the influence of women and later as a lionized figure of the literary and musical world of the French capital. It was also an institution he was now rejecting and castigating as typical of the hypocrisy and artificiality of eighteenth-century French culture.

Underlying Rousseau's thesis condemning the theater was his conviction that it was a literary genre that reflected and restated social mores and not an instrument that would change them. He was particularly incensed at the image of woman he found reflected in the theater. If it was true, he proclaimed, that in contemporary society women really were quite ignorant but foisted themselves on men as arbiters of everything, the situation was even worse in the theater: "Au théâtre, savantes du savoir des hommes, philosophes grâce aux auteurs, elles écrasent notre sexe de ses propres talents. . . . Parcourez la plupart des pièces modernes; c'est toujours une femme qui sait tout, qui apprend tout aux hommes. . . ." Not only are dramatic authors chastised for present-
ing this assertive image of women to the theater-going public, but one has the sense that Rousseau felt that women themselves, if left unbridled, represented a serious danger to male authority and prerogative.

In attacking the theater, Rousseau was comfortably subscribing to the status quo of his native Geneva, where the institution was officially proscribed. He harshly criticized the acting profession on the traditional grounds of being licentious, disorderly, and dishonorable. The actor typified for him essentially a person whose existence was predicated on an enterprise that was counterfeit and artificial; and to succeed in this profession, one had to mask one's true thoughts and feelings. Although any actor was considered a morally suspicious person in Rousseau's treatise, his censure of the profession was even more stringent as he focused on its female members. Clearly Rousseau thought it necessary to use different moral standards in judging men and women. In general, it was appropriate for men to occupy the center of the social and political arena, and inappropriate for women to do so. To Rousseau's way of thinking, a woman of good morals had to lead a secluded and domestic life; her principal concern had to be for the care of her family and household; and the dignity of her sex necessarily resided in her humility.

In the portrait of the actress that Rousseau conjured up in his imagination, she was aggressive, was knowledgeable only in the ways of coquetry and love, dressed immodestly, was constantly surrounded by sensual and unbridled youth, and frequented an atmosphere where she was habitually subjected to the mellifluous voice of love and pleasure. Could one be so naïve as to believe that an innocent girl would be able to preserve her moral integrity in such an environment? On the contrary, for any woman who decided to become an actress thereby attracted the attention of men and corrupted herself. Any woman who exhibited her person brought herself dishonor; and indeed, as Rousseau extends the argument, a woman who performed in public for compensation would also
not be reluctant to offer her own person up for sale for a price. Being an actress was really only one step away from prostitution.

In the course of these ruminations, Rousseau brings himself to reflect briefly on the general problem of sexual ethics, and here again his views are decidedly conservative and traditional. Arguing on behalf of female sexual decency, Rousseau maintains that the principle of sexual modesty for women is not merely a social invention designed to protect the rights of fathers and husbands and to preserve the integrity of the family structure. He rejects any notion of sexuality as an inherently amoral natural phenomenon, and holds that a distinction must be made between the propriety of male and female sexual conduct even though both sexes may be driven by similar instincts. Rousseau attempts to remove the entire question of sexual ethics from the context of social philosophy by asserting that the dictates of sexual propriety are determined by nature and not by society. He specifically maintains that nature requires that the needs of human sexuality be fulfilled with an inherent feeling of shame. However, he backs away from explaining why nature would particularly endow human beings with such feelings: "Est-ce à moi de rendre compte de ce qu'a fait la nature?" (p. 190). Yet, Rousseau does suggest that a feeling of shame associated with the sexual act is nature's way of protecting human beings from their own weakness. All the same, Rousseau attempts to justify a more rigorous code of sexual conduct for women by asserting the importance of guaranteeing to the child the authenticity of his father. Men may be assertive and audacious; indeed, that is their destiny, says Rousseau, since one of the two sexes must make the overtures. The same standard applied to women would be odious: "Toute femme sans pudeur est coupable et dépravée, parce qu'elle foule aux pieds un sentiment naturel à son sexe" (p. 191).

In Rousseau's portrait of the ideal woman, she is a mother surrounded by her children, instructing the servants in the
administration of the household, assuring her husband a happy life, and wisely governing her home. A woman outside her home loses her greatest splendor, and her place cannot be in public life. Of this, Rousseau is firmly convinced: "Partout on considère les femmes à proportion de leur modestie . . . partout on voit qu'alors, tournant en effronterie la mâle et ferme assurance de l'homme, elles s'avilissent par cette odieuse imitation, et déshonorent à la fois leur sexe et le nôtre" (pp. 193-94).

Typically, Rousseau reverted to antiquity to find a reaffirmation of his ideal models, and one of these models to which he consistently referred was the city of Sparta. Rousseau evoked for his contemporaries the image of the idealized woman of Sparta. She conducted herself virtuously by living a very circumscribed existence, rarely displaying herself in public and never with men. Significantly, in the context of the Lettre à d'Alembert, the virtuous woman of Sparta attended the theater only on rare occasions. If she ever exceeded the bounds of female modesty, her conduct was usually met with public censure, Rousseau notes. As he moved on from this model of antiquity to consider the evolution of mores in modern Europe, he was saddened to see in them a demonstration of how thoroughly women's morals had declined. The origin of this change is ascribed by Rousseau, in his rapid historical reconstruction, to the invasion of Europe by barbarian hordes accompanied in their military camps by their women. He traces another source of corruption of European mores to the literature of chivalry in which beautiful ladies spent their lives being carried off by men with no evident harm to their well-being or honor. The freedom that this literature inspired spread to the royal courts and to large cities, where chivalry degenerated into a cruder way of life. The end result of this historical deterioration was that "la modestie naturelle au sexe est peu à peu disparue et . . . les mœurs des vivandières se sont transmises aux femmes de qualité" (p. 195). That Rousseau's evocation of the virtues of Sparta and his imaginative
rewriting of history had their source more in his need to provide a corrective to the decadence of modern culture than in actual history did not seem to have as much importance as their usefulness in highlighting the corruption of contemporary Paris. How good it was to have an ideal moral model with which to confound modern vice and to prove such personal and firmly held convictions.

D'Alembert replied to Rousseau's critique in a public letter that illustrates interestingly the more liberal eighteenth-century attitude toward women noted by Simone de Beauvoir. In his reply, d'Alembert attempted first to undermine Rousseau's antifeminist position through an *ad hominem* argument, suggesting that his reaction might be ascribed to some personal problems he had had with the opposite sex—perhaps a twitting allusion to Rousseau's difficulties with Mme d'Epinay and her sister-in-law, Mme d'Houdetot. Then, coming to grips more fundamentally with the actual reasons for the sorry plight of women in eighteenth-century France, d'Alembert speaks eloquently and passionately against the disastrous and almost "murderous" education to which they were subjected. If these women were to be faulted on their morality, d'Alembert lays the blame squarely on an education that consciously taught them to conceal their true feelings, thoughts, and opinions in order to survive in a society dominated by men. Women had been consistently deprived of any training that could have enlightened them or elevated them from their inferior status, but with the advent of enlightenment the *philosophe* d'Alembert predicted a reformation of the condition of women and a more moral relationship between the sexes: "Nous cesserons de tenir les femmes sous le joug et dans l'ignorance, et elles de séduire, de tromper et gouverner leurs maîtres. L'amour sera pour lors entre les deux sexes ce que l'amitié la plus douce et la plus vraie est entre les hommes vertueux; ou plutôt ce sera un sentiment plus délicieux encore . . . sentiment qui dans l'intention de la nature, devait nous rendre heureux, et que pour notre malheur nous avons su altérer et corrompre."
Rousseau paid no heed to d'Alembert's advice and certainly not to his remarks on the need to reform the education of women. This is a subject with which Rousseau dealt at length four years later in his educational treatise *Emile*, and though his analysis of the role of women and their familial and social relationship to men is elaborated upon in that work in greater detail, his premises remained essentially those already laid in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*.

Characteristically, the first four books of *Emile* are devoted to the education of the male child, and it is only in the final book that Rousseau is forced to broach the question of feminine education, since the capstone of the work is Emile's marriage and his future paternity. It is Emile's relationship to women and his new family life that bring Rousseau eventually to reflect on the education of his spouse. Every reader of *Emile* will recall that Rousseau had urged preceptors of male children not to be too severe and deprive them of the joys of their childhood; he had argued that childhood had its own status and rights and was not to be viewed as a mere preparation for adult life. Girls, however, were apparently not to enjoy the same privilege; according to Rousseau's scheme, their childhood was to be a preparation for their future adult position of subservience. Thus, Rousseau remarks with some consistency in the fifth book of *Emile*: "Ne souffrez pas qu'un seul instant dans leur vie elles ne connoisissent plus de frein."

Accordingly, Rousseau offers two pedagogical models: a boy, Emile, who is to be raised in such a way that he will escape the prejudices of eighteenth-century society or at least be in a position to examine them critically, and a girl, Sophie, who is not to question but will simply reflect the *idées reçues* of a culture that Rousseau had repeatedly condemned as corrupt and fallen. Jean-Jacques apparently saw no contradiction in a marriage between an enlightened and free man and a socially conditioned woman who has all her life been taught not to doubt. In his view, the overriding principle was for the ideal wife not to usurp the male's prerogative by concerning herself with social or political matters. A woman's fulfill-
ment of her familial role, and thus her role in life, could best be achieved by a preservation of, and a hearkening to, the innocence of her instinctive feelings rather than through the critical use of her intellectual faculties. How such good instinctual feelings were to survive an upbringing in a corrupt and despicable society Rousseau does not seem to make clear in *Emile*.

Rousseau’s vantage point in considering the role of Sophie, Emile’s future wife, is her function vis-à-vis Emile. Rousseau tells us in the opening lines of the last book of *Emile*: “Il n’est pas bon que l’homme soit seul; Emile est homme; nous lui avons promis une compagne, il faut la lui donner. Cette compagne est Sophie. En quels lieux est son azile? Où la trouverons-nous? Pour la trouver, il la faut connoître” (p. 692). Thus, Sophie is of interest to Rousseau mainly in her capacity of completing Emile’s life, since throughout his treatise there seems not to have been much consideration given to the nature, psychology or education of women per se.

As in the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, Rousseau’s fundamental premise regarding the role of woman is based on her place in the natural order of things, an order not subject to social mutation. Once again, Rousseau attempts to eliminate any argument about modifying the social and intellectual position of women by insisting that their role is predetermined by nature and not subject to significant change. In *Emile*, Rousseau provides his reader with significant additional details regarding this ostensibly natural role. He informs us, for example, that by nature woman was created particularly to please man; man’s virtue, on the other hand, lies in his strength, and if he should also happen to please woman, his need to do so is less direct. Since woman’s role is to provide pleasure and to be subjugated to man, she must make herself agreeable to him. Any possible complaint about the inequality of the sexes is both wrong and futile since such inequality is not a product of human institutions or prejudice but of reason. Although disapproving of marital infidelity by either of the partners and
calling the man who deprives his wife of the "austere duties" of his sex unjust and barbaric, Rousseau clearly considers such activity on the part of women a much more serious matter: "La femme infidelle fait plus, elle dissout la famille, et brise tous les liens de la nature; en donnant à l'homme des enfants qui ne sont pas à lui elle trahit les uns et les autres, elle joint la perfidie à l'infidélité" (pp. 697-98). A wife must not only be faithful but must give others the impression of being so. Woman's natural destiny is also to produce children, and her ability to do so in abundance is socially important. For Rousseau, women who are diverted from this essential occupation become unworthy, and he particularly singles out for his contempt those who live "licentiously" in the larger cities and produce few children. That "civil promiscuity" which confuses the functions of the two sexes by advocating that they both may have the same jobs and do the same work can only lead to the most intolerable abuses. Having demonstrated to his satisfaction that men and women must have different functions in society, Rousseau concludes that their education must also be essentially different.

As a general principle discriminating the role of the two sexes, the author of *Emile* warns his reader that as soon as a woman attempts to usurp the rights of the male sex, she is condemned to a position of inferiority. At the same time, he assures us that the educational implication of his position is not that she must be kept in ignorance or reduced to the status of a household slave. Yet Rousseau quickly qualifies his recommendation for feminine education by asserting that though she must learn many things, these must include only that which it is appropriate for her to learn. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is inadmissible as a principle, and a significant implication of Rousseau's position is that the acquisition of inappropriate knowledge can be harmful. As a guiding principle in the whole matter of feminine education, Rousseau believes that nature dictates that women are to be at the mercy of male judgment. A corollary of his position is
that her education must be the opposite of man's. If we may judge from his basic tenets regarding the social relationship of men and women, it is quite apparent that Rousseau's attitude toward the education of women is structured totally from the male point of view and that he is determined to preserve the superiority of male prerogatives. All of a woman's education must be conceived in terms of its relationship to man and its usefulness in serving man. Her pedagogical experience must have the following goals with respect to the masculine sex: "Leur plaire, leur être utiles, se faire aimer et honorer d'eux, les élever jeunes, les soigner grands, les conseiller, les consoler, leur rendre la vie agréable et douce, voilà les devoirs des femmes dans tous les temps, et ce qu'on doit leur apprendre dès leur enfance" (p. 703).

As in the case of Emile himself, Rousseau stresses the importance of not hurrying formal intellectual education for girls, particularly in the matter of reading and writing. Rousseau had postponed the process of active education for boys as late as possible so that the student would not be burdened with the prejudices of the educational system or of his teacher before he was rationally capable of judging their validity. Rousseau felt that it was even more desirable not to subject girls to compulsory learning or reading before they were really able to sense the value of their reading. He was convinced that more was to be lost than to be gained by teaching girls how to read and write too early, a feeling that was reinforced by his professed hostility to such intellectual disciplines. He wrote: "Il y en a bien peu qui ne fassent plus d'abus que d'usage de cette fatale science, et toutes sont un peu trop curieuses pour ne pas l'apprendre sans qu'on les y force quand elles en auront le loisir et l'occasion" (p. 708).

In Emile's education Rousseau had stressed the importance of not subjecting boys to a pedagogy predicated on authority or of forcing them to learn something whose utility they could not comprehend. This approach was basic to his liberal philosophy of education. However, in the matter of educat-
ing girls, Rousseau clearly and specifically prescribes the opposite course and turns to a program based on the principle of constraint. Logically, Rousseau reasoned, if the role of the female is to be subjugated to her male counterpart and to assume a position of obedience and servility, then a program of education allowing for personal development in an atmosphere of freedom would not only be out of order but also harmful, since it would not prepare a young woman for the realities of life but turn her into a misfit. Although he thought that a program of work and constraint for young ladies should be justified, Rousseau nevertheless insisted that it was fundamental to their education. Idleness and indocility are dangerous habits for a girl to assume and difficult to cure once acquired; girls must always be laborious and attentive, and they must feel subjugated at an early age. As with his general analysis of the role of women in society, Rousseau removes these pedagogical principles from the domain of the social sciences, insisting that they are derived from women's inherent and natural sexual role. Regardless of the social or historical context, Rousseau argues: “Elles seront toute leur vie asservies à la gêne la plus continuelle et la plus sévère. . . . Il faut les exercer d'abord à la contrainte, afin qu'elle ne leur coûte jamais rien à dompter toutes leurs fantaisies pour les soumettre aux volontés d'autrui” (p. 709).

Whereas in the case of Emile the development of understanding and judgment is fundamental to the educational enterprise and every aspect of his education must be justified in terms of its usefulness and applicability, the education of women is based on the principle of authority and specifically on the decisions of superior male judgment. The role of women throughout life is not merely to be physically subjugated to man but to his judgments as well. Therefore, they must not be allowed to think for themselves or substitute their judgments for those of men. Rousseau does not attempt to justify this position intellectually and even admits its possible injustice, but he does argue that this relationship is an immutable
fact of human existence and that the education of women must prepare for it: "Faite pour obéir à un être aussi imparfait que l'homme, souvent si plein de vices, et toujours si plein de défauts, elle doit apprendre de bonne heure à souffrir même l'injustice, et à supporter les torts d'un mari sans se plaindre . . ." (pp. 710-11). Emile's education was constantly subjected to the question: "Of what use is that?" Sophie's must be based on a question no less difficult: "What effect will that have?" Consequently, in the early years of education when they can still not distinguish between good and evil or form judgments about other persons, girls must be inculcated with the rule of never uttering anything disagreeable whenever they speak. They must also be taught never to lie. Rousseau admits, however, that obedience to both of these principles may be quite difficult in practice.

In this system of ideal education, Rousseau was determined that Sophie would not be overburdened with excessive formal instruction nor did he find any reason for her to be. He had suggested, after all, at the beginning of Book IV that in many respects women would remain childlike all their lives. At the moment of marriage Sophie would be ready to be educated by her husband according to his desires and lights. She will not have acquired much formal knowledge, but her mind will have been nurtured so as to be receptive to learning. She will have never read a book except Barrême's Livre des comptes faits (1689), a work on home economics, and Fénelon's Télémaque (1699), a novel that had accidently fallen into her hands. Rousseau relishes over his "lovable ignoramus" ("ô l'aimable ignorante!")), is delighted that Emile will now assume the task of educating her and that he has not lost his masculine prerogative to do so: "Elle ne sera point le professeur de son mari mais son disciple; loin de vouloir l'assujettir à ses gouts elle prendra les siens. Elle vaudra mieux pour lui que si elle étoit savante: il aura le plaisir de lui tout enseigner (pp. 769-70). More important than woman's erudition is the satisfaction of the male's ego in being able to impart to her all
she need know. The completion of her education must remain his privilege.

As we have seen, Jean-Jacques's ideal of female domesticity was based on the principle that women confine their sphere of activity largely to the home and family and that they avoid mingling with, or becoming involved in, the community at large. In the opening pages of Book V, therefore, the author of *Emile* takes direct issue with Plato's views on the equality of the sexes and the desirability of eliminating the role of the family expressed in the *Republic*. In his fifth book Plato had argued that despite women's physical weakness, the natural capacities of both men and women were alike and women ought to share "naturally" in all of men's pursuits. Hence, the education of both sexes ought to be alike. Moreover, Plato had argued for dispensing with the family unit and for substituting a community where men and women cohabit collectively and "the children shall be common, and . . . no parent shall know its own offspring nor any child its parent." Rousseau castigated Plato's notion of sexual equality in employment as a form of "civil promiscuity" and his dissolution of the family as a plan that would undermine civic duty because in his view the very foundation of civic-mindedness was in the family. Rousseau argued that it was the good son, the good husband, and the good father who ultimately became the good citizen. His circumscribed model of female activity would ensure that women concentrate on their essential duties as wives and mothers. Significantly, his model was also intended to promote their adherence to a life of virtue by reducing their opportunity for extramarital sexual activity, which Rousseau looked upon as a constant danger to their morality.

As an ideal woman, Sophie will personify perfect moral values. The practice of virtue is the *sine qua non* of her moral existence as well as an aesthetic attribute that transforms her from a state of human imperfection and endows her with quasi-angelic qualities. More concretely, the feminine prac-
tice of virtue implies not only honesty but a vow of extra-
marital chastity that Sophie solemnly assumes although she
is rather aware of the sacrifices that may be necessary to ful-
fill it. Curiously, the institution of marriage is not questioned
in this work, although Jean-Jacques himself avoided his own
personal commitment to matrimony until quite late in life, at
the age of fifty-six, and twenty-three years after the begin-
ning of his liaison with Thérèse Levasseur. Nevertheless,
Rousseau declares that Sophie must think about marriage in
a positive way early in life because “du mariage dépend le
sort de la vie” (p. 755). As part of the advice her parents pro-
vide her in preparation for marriage, they warn Sophie of
the dangers of the senses and of the misfortunes that will be-
fall her if she succumbs to them. Sensual love is presented as
a clearly insufficient criterion for choosing a partner, and in
her quest for a husband Sophie’s heart rejects those men to
whom she is attracted by her senses. After it has been deter-
mined that she will marry Emile, Rousseau does offer advice
that will enable her to exercise some authority over him. The
secret lies in her ability to control her love life with Emile,
and this involves a rather delicate mastery of her will and her
senses. She must make her physical favors to him rare and
precious, but in such a way that Emile will also have no doubts
about her love for him. Rousseau’s prescription is expressed in
the following terms: “Voulez-vous voir vôtre mari sans cesse
à vos pieds? tenez-le toujours à quelque distance de vôtre per-
sone. . . . Faites-vous chérir par vos faveurs et respecter par
vos refus; qu’il honore la chasteté de sa femme sans avoir à
se plaindre de sa froideur” (pp. 865-66).

Rousseau’s analysis of the male-female relationship, as a
number of critics have pointed out, is a dialectical one, and
the whole question of which of the sexual partners ultimately
predominates and which is reduced to subservience and obe-
dience remains ambivalent in his presentation.¹² Rousseau’s
argument runs along the following lines: Man is the physi-
ically stronger and woman the more passive partner whose
RICHARD A. BROOKS

destiny is to be subordinate to the male and to provide him with pleasure. However, woman's frailty is only superficial since nature has imparted her with the ability to arouse the male's physical desires to a degree stronger than his capacity to gratify them; ultimately, therefore, the male is reduced to dependence. Hence, according to Rousseau, the artful woman will always keep her mate in a state of uncertainty, not letting him know finally whether she has yielded to him because of natural weakness or her own real desire to do so. In his dedication to the Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité, Rousseau had addressed womankind in the following manner: “Aimables et vertueuses Citoyennes, le sort de vôtre sexe sera toujours de gouverner le nôtre. Heureux! quand vôtre chaste pouvoir exercé seulement dans l’union conjugale, ne se fait sentir que pour la gloire de l’Etat et le bonheur public. C’est ainsi que les femmes commandoient à Sparte, et c’est ainsi que vous méritez de commander à Genève.” And in a rather revealing passage of the Lettre à d’Alembert, Rousseau postulated that love is the dominion of women because nature had arranged things in such a way that the male can only subjugate her at the expense of his own freedom. Thus, if man's happiness is dependent on his mate and his sexuality can prevail only with the sacrifice of his independence, the master-slave relationship becomes a seesaw situation in which the two partners remain interdependent. Nevertheless, Rousseau predicates the education of women on the principle of subjugation and constraint not only because this reflected the reality of her social and political condition in eighteenth-century Europe—and significantly, this was one aspect of the educational program in Emile where Rousseau was consistently determined to adhere to the status quo—but perhaps more fundamentally, as Pierre Burgelin has suggested, because he considered women too dangerous to be free.

Rousseau's rather reactionary and repressive stance with reference to women's involvement in public affairs, to women's education, and to the general question of women's free-
dom and equality apparently belies the basically radical social and political ideas of such works as the Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité and the Contrat social. This seeming contradiction in Rousseau's thought may be explained in a number of ways. The importance of the conjugal bond as the basis for the only "real" nucleus of the social structure may have loomed large in Rousseau's mind precisely because it was largely a notion foreign to his own unstable experience as a child deprived of a secure family relationship and as an adult whose experiences with women were largely outside the bonds of matrimony. Rousseau, then, perhaps understood the family unit to be the source of order and stability that he as an individual had lacked. On a more theoretical level, Rousseau may have wanted women to remain within a status quo sanctifying the marriage vow in order to guarantee the moral validity and viability of a "primitive social contract" that would be the foundation or nucleus of a larger social compact that would likewise be based on the principle of contractual responsibility and duty.

Significantly, in Rousseau's idea of the Social Contract, society assumes an existence of its own that is necessarily superior to the desires and freedom of the individual. Although Rousseau posited the need for new social institutions and was radical in envisaging a completely new political order, he may be seen as essentially conservative in limiting the freedom of the individual within the new society. Ultimately, the moral sanctity and order of the family—to be achieved by severely limiting the scope of women's activities to the sphere of the family nucleus and guaranteeing her integrity through the morality of female obedience and subservience—would contribute to the moral sanctity and order of the state. It is not surprising, then, that so many of the proponents of political authoritarianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would look back to Rousseau as a spiritual ancestor. In this context Rousseau's attitudes on the relationship of the sexes expressed in the Lettre à d'Alembert and Emile may be
seen as a rather cogent confirmation of Simone de Beauvoir's thesis in *Le Deuxième Sexe* regarding the historical status of women.

2. Ibid., 1:23 and 1:181-82.
3. The subject of Rousseau and women is obviously a complex one, deserving of the extensive treatment of a monograph. In this essay, however, I should like to concentrate my discussion on these two significant and revealing Rousseau texts.
4. A primary example might have been his erstwhile friend Mme d'Epinay, a leader of an important salon at which such luminaries as Voltaire, Diderot, Grimm, and Rousseau himself had gathered. Mme d'Epinay was not only socially influential but an author in her own right. Coincidentally, Rousseau and Mme d'Epinay had quarreled and terminated their relationship in the year preceding the publication of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*.