

Fate and Consolation in the Late Rousseau

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Article abstract

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Rousseau

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Abstract

In his last writings Rousseau attempts to understand the events of his life as the products of fate. This essay analyzes the valences of fate in relation to concepts such as fatality and Providence. Rousseau engages with a diverse and at times contradictory corpus of ideas (stoicism, epicureanism, materialism, Protestantism) and an eclectic set of anecdotes (visit to the Invalides, personal memories of times spent with Madame de Warens) that aim to console him in his misfortunes. Only philosophizing and consolations allow Rousseau to ultimately free himself from the influence of his adversaries.

Résumé

Dans ses derniers écrits, et plus particulièrement dans *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Rousseau se livre à des réflexions très poussées sur sa propre vie et les singuliers événements qui l'ont conduit au triste état auquel on l'a réduit. Comment comprendre que le plus innocent des hommes soit l'objet d'une vindicte si cruelle et si injuste ? L'examen de cette destinée, aussi sombre qu'exceptionnelle, lui donne plus largement l'occasion de méditer sur le hasard, la fatalité et la Providence. Ces pages décisives se nourrissent d'influences diverses et même contraires (le stoïcisme, l'épicurisme, le matérialisme et le protestantisme) et de diverses anecdotes (sa visite aux Invalides, le souvenir d'une anecdote vécue auprès de Mme de Warens) qui visent ultimement une forme de consolation des malheurs qu'il essuie. Seule la philosophie et les consolations qu'elle permet donnent en effet l'occasion à Rousseau de se libérer de l'emprise de ses féroces ennemis.

Mot-clés : Rousseau, Lumières, stoïcisme, épicurisme, matérialisme, protestantisme, Providence, fatalité

Keywords: Rousseau, Enlightenment, stoicism, epicurism, materialism, Protestantism, Providence, fatality

Fate and Consolation in the Late Rousseau

Masano Yamashita

In his latest work, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes about his days, walks and thoughts from the perspective of an aging writer. This life-writing registers the movements of what Rousseau unequivocally understands as his “destinée,” an orientation or a bend that his existence has supposedly taken on, throughout the nefarious influence of his contemporaries. In his autobiographical writings, Rousseau repeatedly refers to his life as a fated existence, one shaped both by his temperament—an internal destiny or inner nature that will, according to Rousseau, condemn him to being taken advantage of by others (“né le plus confiant des hommes,” “[m]a destinée semble avoir tendu dès mon enfance le premier piège”)—and by external forces that seriously threaten to determine his existence (“tout ce que la nature a mis d’heureuses dispositions dans mon cœur est tourné par ma destinée, et par ceux qui en disposent au préjudice de moi-même ou d’autrui”¹). Rousseau considers the concept of “destinée” as the meeting point of religious thought and secular concerns: in his struggle against materialist philosophers, he crafts a narrative according to which his fellow thinkers have usurped the role of divinity by imposing themselves as the new gods of eighteenth-century Paris, “authoring” Rousseau’s destiny². According to this logic, the influence that these modern thinkers have on his life appears so powerful that Rousseau is led to wonder whether God has planned these challenges as a spiritual test.

In the eighteenth century, the term “destinée” covers a very broad range of meanings: it is understood historically as an ancient concept used by

¹Rousseau (1959, 1:1056 and 1055). I have modernized the spelling in all the references to this edition.

²His fellow philosophers are represented as “directeurs de ma destinée” in the First Walk. *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1959, 1:996).

pagan philosophers, often employed interchangeably with “fatalité.” The Stoics submitted to the notion; the Epicureans rejected it. Destiny lends itself to providential readings of the world as well as to materialist interpretations of overdetermination in human behaviour that limit freedom and personal agency. It resonates, in other words, in religious and philosophical contexts. It is both ancient and modern. In the memoirs of earlier eighteenth-century writers such as Prévost and Marivaux, “destinée” serves as a leitmotif, drawing the reader’s attention to the narrative art of plotting and to the characters’ self-knowledge. In the early twentieth century, Freud described a phenomenon that he labelled “fate neurosis,” a personal belief upheld by individuals who were convinced that they were besieged by an external malignant force when, in truth, they could also be understood as depicting internalized perceptions of personal life patterns (Freud 1990, 21–22). Traces of all these understandings of destiny can be found in Rousseau’s autobiographical writings. The thinker conceives of destiny as a mode of storyshaping, that is, an art form perfected by his contemporaries who have, according to this view, elaborated the most pernicious of plots (a “complot”), an ever refined “art de me faire souffrir,” so as to poison his everyday life³. In response to this masterful infliction of suffering, Rousseau will, in his *Rêveries*, carefully elaborate an “art,” a series of *techné* and practices designed to manage pain⁴. The premise of a “destinée” might be understood as the first step in constructing a grid of intelligibility that makes sense of the seemingly senseless “chaos incompréhensible” (995) that obscures Rousseau’s life in his later years as a famous writer. Rousseau uses the term “destinée” in relation to his own life twenty-six times in the *Rêveries*, a relatively high number for a such brief text⁵. The use of the term “destinée” heuristically affords Rousseau the opportunity to confront the limits of reason and assess the insufficiency of rationalizing explanations. Moreover, the self-conscious use of this classical term allows the writer to place the reader and the activity of interpretation at the centre of the text. The inscriptions of “destinée” are

³Rousseau, “Histoire du précédent écrit,” *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* (1959, 1:985).

⁴In another iteration that compares Rousseau’s plight to Job’s, he writes: “Le persécuteur de Job aurait pu beaucoup apprendre de ceux qui vous guident, dans l’art de rendre un mortel malheureux,” (“Copie du billet circulaire dont il est parlé dans l’écrit précédent,” (1959, 1:990)).

⁵James Swenson explains that the word “destinée” is, in total, used by Rousseau twenty-seven times in the *Rêveries*. “The Solitary Walker and the Invention of Lyrical Prose,” (Swenson 2008, 229).

used provocatively as an invitation to reflect upon the compromised ability of reading life as if it were a text, as was common in both the ancient and medieval allegorical traditions⁶ (Whitman 1987). This confrontation with the symbolizing practice of allegorization forces readers to reflect on the extent to which it is still possible to resort to allegorical readings of a world that is marked, according to Rousseau, by modern philosophers, i.e., eighteenth-century materialists whom he views as the leading thinkers of the Enlightenment, who deny divine Providence and free will by their obdurate belief in the automatized overdeterminations of human behaviour.

I propose a reading of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* and, more specifically, of its program of pain management through the generic lens of *consolatio*, a term referring to the tradition of consolatory writing⁷. In the Western tradition, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* has served to establish some paradigmatic themes in this genre, namely the question of theodicy, the search for clarity in what one can and cannot do amidst the experience of misfortune, as well as the act of coming to terms with the disruptive role that Fortune can play in relation to Providence. I do not intend to exhaustively parse the religious and philosophical discourse of consolation in the *Rêveries*, only to locate particular instances allowing us to more deeply understand the effects of Rousseau's rhetorical construction of a "destinée" and its relation to the practice of consolatory writing. Rousseau's hypothesis of a personal "destinée" draws attention to those who have wielded the most power over his life, his fellow participants in the public sphere. These contemporaries do not form a single group and appear all the more powerful because they are diffuse. According to Rousseau, his peers threaten to overtake the traditional "authoring" function of God with regard to his personal existence, as the *Rêveries* recount their repeated attempts to assume authorship over his life. The overtaking of his life by materialist thinking forces Rousseau to focus on theological questions regarding the status of particular providence versus general providence (how could one explain the acute attention paid to the creation of his misery, if not through a theological lens or at the very least via a quasi-biblical narrative?) but also, more pragmatically, brings

⁶On the uses of allegory in literary history, see Theresa Kelley (1997).

⁷See Victor Watts' introduction to Anicius Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (1999). Boethius's *Consolation* was original in that it was more pagan and philosophic than Christian, and hence distinct from a heterodox religious writing such as Jean Gerson's *On the Consolation of Theology*.

Rousseau to think about literary form as a means of crafting a philosophic life that resists his peers' way of thinking.

The debate regarding particular and general providence is, of course, not new, and was animated in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by theologians and philosophers such as Bossuet, Descartes, Malebranche, Fénelon and Bayle. Bossuet and Fénelon defended the existence of "providence particulière," while Descartes, Malebranche and Bayle rejected the notion⁸. In the wake of the Lisbon earthquake (1755), such theological questioning was revisited during the Enlightenment by Voltaire and Rousseau. As for the secondary literature, Victor Gourevitch, Marie-Hélène Cotoni and, more recently, Heinrich Meier, have been sensitive to the particularities of religious thought and the place of providence in Rousseau's writings (Gourevitch 2000, 193–246; Cotoni 1998 ; Meier 2016). Despite my intention to build on their insights, my essay pursues a slightly different path of reasoning. I wish to examine Rousseau in light of what Clément Rosset terms, in his discussion on the tragic, "la logique du pire," an idea which Rousseau, assuming the worst of his situation, harnesses so as to free himself from the expectation of further moral suffering by turning to the art of consolation, which soothes his acute moral pain, transforming it into pleasure.

Before the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Rousseau had already developed literary practices that served explicitly as coping mechanisms for overcoming adversity. We can briefly turn to the tactics deployed in the *Lévite d'Ephraïm*, that in fact set a precedent for the literary project of the more overtly personal text of the *Rêveries*. Rousseau turned to the lyric form of prose poetry in *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm*, a highly valued text that Rousseau conceived of as an exercise in consolation during a tumultuous period, when he was persecuted following the publication of *Émile*. *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm* serves as a testimony of his unique ability to convert a violent biblical story into a product of lyrical expression⁹. Rousseau explicitly highlights in the Confessions

⁸Patrick Riley provides a comprehensive overview of the dominant theologians' and philosophers' views on *providence particulière* in *The General Will before Rousseau* (1986). See also Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman's recent *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Sheehan and Wahrman 2015, 49) and Patrick Riley's essay, "Rousseau's General will," (Riley 2001, 124–53).

⁹Music also serves an analogous therapeutic function. In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, Rousseau writes about the consolatory powers of music: "Quand des sentiments douloureux affligent son cœur, il cherche sur son clavier les consolations que les hommes

a therapeutic function: “Jamais je ne l’ai relu, jamais je ne le relirai sans sentir en dedans l’applaudissement d’un cœur sans fiel qui loin de s’aigrir par ses malheurs s’en console avec lui-même et trouve en soi de quoi s’en dédommager” (586-587). By switching from the first-person singular to the third person, Rousseau mimics the passage between the way in which one sees oneself and the way in which one would like to be seen by others, as he writes in the second preface drafted for the *Lévite d’Ephraïm*: “Pour moi je me console. Le seul éloge que je désire et que je m’accorde sans honte parce qu’il m’est dû. Dans les plus cruels moments de sa vie il fit *Le Lévite d’Ephraïm*¹⁰. Significantly, Rousseau alludes to this anxious period as a “*rêverie*,” here meant in the pejorative sense of the English “raving”: “J’imaginai de *donner le change à ma rêverie* en m’occupant de quelque sujet; celui-ci me vint à l’esprit.” For the purposes of this essay, I will not delve further into the various meanings of *Le Lévite d’Ephraïm*; I will, however, draw a parallel between Rousseau’s therapeutic need to write *Le Lévite d’Ephraïm* (as he sought to distract himself from a troubling “*rêverie*”) and his final work, the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*¹¹. As a text, *Les Rêveries* operates analogically to the *Lévite d’Ephraïm* because it presents a method for managing personal suffering and implicitly develops a specific relationship to temporality. Both texts consider the practice of self-reading and rereading as consolatory for affording Rousseau the possibility of converting suffering into pleasure and enjoying “*jouissance*” from the temporal vantage point of repetition. In the First Walk, he writes:

Chaque fois que je les relirai m’en rendra la jouissance. J’oublierai mes malheurs, mes persécuteurs, mes opprobres, en songeant au prix qu’avait mérité mon cœur. [...] Si dans mes plus vieux jours

lui refusent. Sa douleur perd ainsi sa sécheresse et lui fournit à la fois des chants & des larmes” (1959, 1:873).

¹⁰Rousseau conceives of writing as a ruse in this instance; he uses the expression “*donner le change*” to allude to the logic of substitution and replacement of pain for pleasure. See Geoffrey Bennington’s deconstructionist study of this expression in Rousseau: *Dudding: des Noms de Rousseau* (1991). The act of “*donner le change*” requires, in a sense, “*mental gymnastics*” in that it is felt as being therapeutic for Rousseau. Jacques Derrida’s study on substitution and supplementarity in Rousseau remains, however, invaluable: Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (1967).

¹¹See Mira Morgenstern’s study of the text for an overview of the principal themes and lines of interpretation regarding the treatment of violence, community and suffering in this story (Morgenstern 2008).

aux approches du départ, je reste, comme je l'espère, dans la même disposition où je suis, leur lecture me rappellera la douceur que je goûte à les écrire, et faisant renaître ainsi pour moi le temps passé, doublera pour ainsi dire mon existence. En dépit des hommes je saurai goûter encore le charme de la société et je vivrai décrépit avec moi dans un autre âge, comme je vivrais avec un moins vieux ami. (999-1001)

Repetition is, for Rousseau, far from a re-enactment of trauma. On the contrary, it is a voluntary activity that enables a restorative and therapeutic economy of time. The temporality of repetition allows Rousseau to remain in a pure present by creating an impression of timeless eternity, as it neither projects forward into an uncertain future, nor dwells on the past. It is a key component of neutralizing human suffering.

By reflecting on the art of alleviating suffering, Rousseau distinguishes two distinct temporal regimes of suffering related to the passion of hope: one relates to the corrective temporality of anticipatory hoping for the empirical future, while the other pertains to the temporality of a metaphysical hope that rests on the afterlife. Both temporalities are prospective, and yet vastly different in their ability to assuage moral pain. The playing cards associated with the project of the *Rêveries* work towards disentangling the two temporalities. A playing card that Rousseau jotted notes on during his walks presents a critique of the worldly passion of hope¹². According to this note, “espérance” heightens, rather than dispels, anxiety: “L’attente de l’autre vie adoucit tous les maux de celle-ci et rend les terreurs de la mort presque nulles ; mais dans les choses de ce monde l’espérance est toujours mêlée d’inquiétude et il n’y a de vrai repos que dans la résignation”¹³ (631). Rousseau distinguishes between a consolatory hope in the afterlife, and hope in real time,

¹²The playing cards are generally considered by scholars as preliminary drafts for the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. Scholars have debated the nature of the relations between the playing cards and the *Rêveries*. They have also examined the ways in which the cards can illuminate other writings of Rousseau. See Béatrice Didier (2006) ; Marc Eigeldinger (1998) ; Robert Ricatte (1959). On eighteenth-century genetic scholarship, see Claire Bustarret (2012). Didier also alerts the reader to the echoes that these cards present to other writings of Rousseau, in “À propos des cartes à jouer de Jean-Jacques Rousseau” (Didier 2006, 361).

¹³Playing card 15, verso.

which triggers a self-renewing worry through expectation¹⁴. Worldly hope is an ambivalent, mixed passion, creating anxiety and fear in its very anticipation¹⁵. Old age in the *Rêveries* in this regard is distinctly salutary in that it enables Rousseau to free himself from the uncertainty of the future. Since the *Rêveries* and the playing cards were redacted during Rousseau's old age, hope thankfully recedes into the background: "Tout est fini pour moi sur la terre. [...]. Il ne me reste plus rien à espérer ni à craindre en ce monde" (999). Old age does not lead to daydreaming about the days to come; it corresponds to the time of life during which one can finally remain in and focus on the present. This was also Montaigne's conclusion in the closing chapter of his *Essais* (1993).

It is therefore fitting that, during his walks, Rousseau finds himself drawn to the Invalides¹⁶. In the Ninth Walk, Rousseau maps out an urban stroll intended to assist his self-care. The Invalides was created by Louis XIV to treat and house disabled and aging veterans. Rousseau describes his admiration for these veterans, whom he views as modern avatars of the soldiers of ancient Sparta and also, to some extent, as a mirror image of his own "vieille figure" (1087). Although the thinker does not draw an explicit analogy between his experience of feeling morally wounded and the physical infirmities of the veterans, the reader can perhaps appreciate this interpretation in Rousseau's

¹⁴On hope and fear as harmful passions linked to uncertainty, see Lorraine Daston, "Fortuna and the Passions" (1994). The First Walk presents Rousseau finally letting go of hope. In surrendering the passion of hope, he describes the process by which he finally finds peace. In this walk, he alludes to the *Dialogues* as a text that was condemned to fail for being overly steeped in expectancy (Rousseau 1959, 1:998). For a perspective that contrasts with Rousseau's treatment of "espérance," one can turn to Voltaire's *Candide*. The eponymous hero, Candide, turns to hope in the near future as a spur to action. Candide is, however, clear to distinguish between an adherence to metaphysical "espérance" and a down-to-earth hope that keeps him wishful for a future reunion with his lover, Cunégonde.

¹⁵Rousseau further links the mental operations of anticipation to an overly active imagination: "Mon imagination effarouchée les [maux réels] combine, les retourne, les étend et les augmente. Leur attente me tourmente cent fois plus que leur présence, et la menace m'est plus terrible que le coup. Sitôt qu'ils arrivent, l'événement leur ôtant tout ce qu'ils avaient d'imaginaire, les réduit à leur juste valeur" (Rousseau 1959, 1:997). The imagination establishes a destabilizing hiatus between the actual and the prospective.

¹⁶Rousseau writes: "Ce bel établissement m'a toujours intéressé. [...] Une de mes promenades favorites était autour de l'École militaire et je rencontrais avec plaisir ça et là quelques Invalides qui ayant conservé l'ancienne honnêteté militaire me saluaient en passant" (Rousseau 1959, 1:1095).

allusion to the Invalides. According to the article entry devoted to the monument in the *Encyclopédie*, the Invalides houses a “quantité d’officiers et de soldats estropiés, qui ne sont plus en état de servir [...]. Plus de deux mille soldats et un grand nombre d’officiers y peuvent trouver une *consolation dans leur vieillesse*, et des secours pour leurs blessures et pour leurs besoins. [...] l’autel et la chapelle sont magnifiques.”¹⁷ Rousseau, fatigued by his own high-profile visibility in the public sphere, finds himself no longer suitable to serve (“plus en état de servir”) the general public. The Invalides, with its spiritual offerings (the chapel and the altar) and modern medical amenities, provides a soothing locale for Rousseau’s strolls. The luxury afforded by old age offers comfort and solace. The space also seems fitting for an aging author who finds himself reading and re-reading Plutarch, and who attempts to live a philosophical life in the manner of the ancients: the motif of life as battle is a Stoic metaphor that Rousseau was well acquainted with. Of course, Rousseau is simultaneously quick to point out the irony of his contact with this space and its patients: once the veterans realize who Rousseau is, he writes, they become openly unpleasant towards him, considering him with “un air repoussant” and “un regard farouche” (1096). In spite of the veterans’ frosty reception, Rousseau appreciates the Invalides for its symbolism and function as a restful sanctuary for the embattled.

In contrast, the repeated inscription of hope was one of the shortcomings of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* as a consolatory text. In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, the author could not help but write thinking only of the possible appreciation of a future reader. The prospective orientation of the work was, in this sense, condemned to come to an unsatisfactory conclusion (*Rêveries*, 998). One could explain the shift in registers of life-writing, and trace the trajectory that takes Rousseau from writing the painful literary experiment of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* to the pacified text of the *Rêveries*, as tactical in the sense implied by Michel de Certeau’s presentation of the term in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Certeau 1984). The *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* presents Rousseau’s attempts to counterbalance the power dynamics

¹⁷Louis de Jaucourt, *Encyclopédie*, entry “Hôtel des Invalides,” t. 8, p. 847. The Invalides accommodates two kinds of veterans: “Ceux qui par leur grand âge & la longue durée de leurs services ne sont plus en état d’en rendre ; & d’autres auxquels des blessures graves, la perte de quelque membre ou des infirmités ne permettent pas de soutenir la fatigue des marches, ni de faire le service soit en garnison, soit en campagne” in entry for INVALIDES, (*Hist.*) *addition à cet article* (Jaucourt 1781, 802).

in the public sphere between himself and his contemporaries, without trying to make a bid for power himself. But it is also a text that revisits some of Rousseau's fundamental ideas on what he can and cannot know. In this sense, it can be considered a self-questioning work. Despite offering a starkly different approach, both *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* and the preceding text of the *Confessions* question the validity of Rousseau's thoughts on how providence may or may not intervene in his personal "destinée." In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, the author clearly appears, on several occasions, to denounce himself as having relied excessively on theological explanations. The *Dialogues* suggest that Rousseau was mistaken in having nestled the human plane of existence within the theological when these two spheres should have been considered separately. His search for a sympathetic audience and the anticipation of an appropriate *destination* resulted in personal errors of judgment, including his attempt to view with a theological lens what could have been interpreted as purely social phenomena¹⁸. There are numerous passages in the *Dialogues* that allude to this type of interpretive error. When Rousseau recounts his meetings with various figures whom he insisted on viewing as elect individuals destined to read his work, Rousseau denounces his obstinacy in interpreting chance events as signs of providence:

Je fis comme tous les malheureux qui croient voir, dans tout ce qui leur arrive une expresse direction du sort. Je me dis; voilà le dépositaire que la providence m'a choisi; c'est elle qui me l'envoyé, elle n'a rebuté mon choix que pour m'amener au sien. [...] Tout cela me parut si clair que, croyant voir le doigt de Dieu dans cette occasion fortuite je me pressai de la saisir.
(Rousseau 1959, 1:983)

The use of the past definite signals the punctual nature of these beliefs. *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* stages a despondent self who is pushed to express the need for a miracle which, elsewhere, he claims to have difficulty believing in¹⁹. In other words, the text highlights Rousseau's bafflement at

¹⁸Rousseau emphasizes the hold of the passions on his judgment in *Histoire du précédent écrit*, "je crus dans mon premier transport voir concourir le Ciel même à l'iniquité des hommes" (Rousseau 1959, 1:980).

¹⁹Marie-Helene Cotoni does allow, however, for Rousseau's concessions to miracles by referencing his allusions to the miracles of Christ in *Lettres de la montagne* (Cotoni 1998, 72).

his own incoherent thought, overburdened as he is by an unusual degree of personal turmoil.

Rousseau's inscriptions of providence (the word is used fourteen times in *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*) lead us to his thoughts on the possibility of a *particular* providence. In his 1750s debate with Voltaire on the nature of providence, prompted by the 1755 earthquake that devastated Lisbon, Rousseau unwaveringly affirmed his belief in a general, non-particularizing, Providence²⁰. In Rousseau's later life writings, however, he writes about himself as falling prey, on a fairly frequent basis, to the desire to explain his personal "sort" through a theologically particularizing lens. He repeatedly insists that the singular nature of his social miseries begs explanation from a religious perspective; the ubiquitous reach of the attacks on Rousseau makes sense only if the writer understands it as part of God's plan for him. This recourse to a religious framework is tactical in that it allows him to rhetorically foreground the massive influence that the materialists have had in positing themselves as the rivals and dangerous analogues of God in the eighteenth century. Instead of minimizing the importance of theological issues raised in the *Rêveries*, which are of genuine concern to Rousseau, I consider the *Rêveries* a forceful meditation on his final understanding of the struggle for influence in the public sphere and the pressing need for intellectual flexibility in making sense of modern fate²¹. The materialists have been so powerful in their appropriation of Rousseau's life that their grip on his existence is read as quasi-supernatural in both its reach and impact. Rousseau's interpretation of their impact falls within what the philosopher Clément Rosset would qualify as the "logic of the worst," ("la logique du pire") which he relates to "le fait de ne voir rien que ce soit dans l'ordre du pensable et du désignable." (Rosset 1971) The materialists' œuvre confounds Rousseau by reaching the threshold of the inconceivable and undefinable and is therefore, on first appearance, seemingly intolerable. In reality, however, Rousseau finds comfort in this abysmal state of misfortune as he can then adopt the perspective of writing from the other side of pain. In other words, he portrays himself as

²⁰Victor Gourevitch offers an attentive analysis of Rousseau's theological polemics with Voltaire in "Rousseau on Providence" (2000).

²¹On the theological implications of the *Rêveries*, I refer to Laurence Mall's fine-grained analysis of Rousseau's phrase: "Dieu est juste; il veut que je souffre ; et il sait que je suis innocent" (Mall 2008). Mall does not, however, take into consideration Rousseau's playing cards and the way these cards can illuminate the *Rêveries*.

already having hit rock bottom. In other words, the worst has already occurred; things can therefore only get better: “Ne pouvant plus empirer mon état, ils ne sauraient plus m’inspirer d’alarmes. L’inquiétude et l’effroi sont des maux dont ils m’ont pour jamais délivré : c’est toujours un soulagement” (997).

The materialists have succeeded in transforming a man’s life into a living hell and have negated the possibility of freedom of action and the aleatory (an ironic move on the part of the materialists)²². Hence, we are provided with the terrifying image of Rousseau as a “mort vivant,” that is, someone who no longer appears to be alive: “ils ont trouvé l’art de me faire souffrir une longue mort en me tenant enterré tout vif” (985). I therefore propose that the allusions to religious discourse and providence in the *Dialogues* are perhaps not uniquely intended as prompts to theological reflections, but also operate as rhetorical gestures that invite the reader to gauge the usurpations and mimicry of divinity by Rousseau’s peers. In the Eighth Walk of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, the overpowering influence of Rousseau’s contemporaries on his life opens a reflection on the personification of destiny. Rousseau uses the image of the gambler, who rails against “le sort” as a personified enemy, in order to describe the thought-habits that people have recourse to when faced with grave misfortunes. He warns that such a personification tends to direct attention to guessing the intention behind a harm done to a person, rather than dealing with its effect:

Dans tous les maux qui nous arrivent, nous regardons plus à l’intention qu’à l’effet. Une tuile qui tombe d’un toit peut nous blesser davantage mais ne nous navre pas tant qu’une pierre lancée à dessein par une main malveillante. [...] et quand les infortunés ne savent à qui s’en prendre de leurs malheurs ils s’en prennent à la destinée qu’ils personnifient et à laquelle ils prêtent des yeux et une intelligence pour les tourmenter à dessein. C’est ainsi qu’un joueur dépité par ses pertes se met en fureur sans savoir contre qui. Il imagine un sort qui s’acharne à dessein

²²The character of “Rousseau” writes about “J.-J.”: “Il prétend que tous les événements relatifs à lui qui paraissent accidentels et fortuits ne sont que de successifs développements concertés d’avance et tellement ordonnés que tout ce qui doit lui arriver dans la suite a déjà sa place dans le tableau, et ne doit avoir son effet qu’au moment marqué” (Rousseau 1959, 1:781).

sur lui pour le tourmenter et trouvant un aliment à sa colère il s'anime et s'enflamme contre l'ennemi qu'il est crée. (1078)

Rousseau contrasts the figure of the rash gambler, who rails against destiny as if it were a person and who capriciously assigns it, intentionality, to the sage, a man wise enough to depersonalize his travails and accept his misfortunes, acknowledging these difficulties as “the blows of blind necessity” (“les coups de l’aveugle nécessité”, 1078).

The figure of the gambler is in fact significant, as he is relatable to Rousseau himself, even though he was not much of a gambler and rarely identified with gamblers in his writings, as we see in a letter he once wrote to Saint-Germain: “Le jeu, je ne puis le souffrir, je n’ai vraiment joué en ma vie qu’une fois aux redoutes à Venise. Je gagnai, je m’ennuyai, et ne jouai plus. Les échecs où l’on ne joue rien, sont le seul jeu qui m’amuse.” (Rousseau 1980, 253) However, there was one occasion in the *Confessions* when Rousseau does imply that as a child he had once conducted himself in the manner of a gambler. This anecdote serves as an example of lapsed judgment, as it intertwines the folly of Rousseau as a child gambler and his fear of divine punishment. In Book Eleven of the *Confessions*, Rousseau tells a childhood tale of how he became terrified by reading Jansenist texts on predestination. He recounts how he adopted the perspective of a gambler betting on his salvation through a game in an attempt to quell his theological fears. Rousseau the child proceeded to throw rocks against a tree in order to determine whether he would be saved or not:

Un jour, rêvant à ce triste sujet, je m’exerçais machinalement à lancer des pierres contre les troncs des arbres, et cela avec mon adresse ordinaire, c’est-à-dire sans presque en toucher aucun.

Tout au milieu de ce bel exercice, je m’avisai de m’en faire une espèce de pronostic pour calmer mon inquiétude. Je me dis, je m’en vais jeter cette pierre contre l’arbre qui est vis à vis de moi. Si je le touche, signe de salut ; si je le manque, signe de damnation. Tout en disant ainsi je jette ma pierre d’une main tremblante et avec un horrible battement de cœur, mais si heureusement qu’elle va frapper au beau milieu de l’arbre ; ce qui véritablement n’était pas difficile, car j’avais eu soin de le choisir fort gros et fort près. Depuis lors je n’ai plus douté de mon salut. Je ne sais en me

rappelant ce fait si je dois rire ou gémir sur moi-même. (Rousseau 1959, 1:243)

The image of the gambler conjured here is tainted with self-deprecation, denouncing Rousseau's falsification of an exercise of chance into a fixed game. However, we know that in the early modern European intellectual tradition, gambling in itself was not considered irreligious nor unequivocally immoral, since it could also be considered a way of placing faith in God's will. Thinkers such as La Placette, Barbeyrac and Joncourt debated the divine nature of lots and the occurrences of lots in Scripture²³. Barbeyrac thus presented a theological and legal defence of gambling in his 1691 treatise, *Le Traité du jeu*. However, philosophers (including Barbeyrac) were firm in denouncing self-interested recourse to games of chance, describing it as a form of moral dishonesty born out of unchecked pride. Barbeyrac stressed the unreasonable nature of assuming that God might have a hand in trivial games:

Ceux qui jouent aux Dés & aux Cartes, engageroient Dieu tous les jours à se déclarer en leur faveur par des Miracles perpétuels ; & dans les Académies de Jeu il se feroit infiniment plus de Miracles, qu'il ne s'en est jamais fait dans le Temple de Dieu, ni en aucun autre lieu, quand même on joindroit ensemble tous ceux dans lesquels Dieu en a fait sous l'Ancien & sous le Nouveau Testament. D'ailleurs, quelle apparence que lorsque deux Laquais ou deux Crocheteurs se mettent à jouer aux Dés ou au Lansquenet, la Providence Divine s'applique d'une façon plus particulière à diriger tous les incidens de ce Jeu, qu'elle ne s'applique à décider le destin des Peuple, le succès des Batailles, les révolutions des Etats [...] A quoi persuadera-t-on de tels Paradoxes. Il y a même quelque chose de ridicule à s'imaginer, que lorsque deux hommes jouent aux Dames ou au Billard, leur Jeu ne soit l'objet que d'une Providence commune & ordinaire [...] (Barbeyrac 1709, 23)

What role does Rousseau carve out for chance in his final elaborations of pain management? During his walks, he wrote notes on playing cards which, in themselves, evoke chance and gaming, bringing to mind a culture of Epicureanism. The playing card numbered twenty-six introduces a significant separation between man-made Fortuna and divine Providence: "Tout me montre et me persuade que la providence ne se mêle en aucune façon des

²³For an overview of early modern discourses on biblical lots, see John Dunkley (1985).

opinions humaines ni de tout ce qui tient à la réputation, et qu'elle livre entièrement à la fortune et aux hommes tout ce qui reste ici-bas de l'homme après sa mort."²⁴ This statement conforms to the Epicurean conviction that God is indifferent to the minutiae of human matters and appears to contradict Rousseau's proposition in his Second Walk relating to a God who ordains and is complicit in worldly affairs: "Dieu est juste ; et il veut que je souffre et il sait que je suis innocent" (1010)²⁵. Rousseau's inclusion of Epicurean thought provides a counterweight to the narrative of fatalism in the *Rêveries*. While Marie-Hélène Cotoni reads the *Rêveries* as an exercise in pain management via providentialism, I emphasize the co-existence of Epicurean discourse and providential explications in Rousseau's last writings as challenging the possibility of identifying a single, stable doctrinal position that would allow us to close off the meaning of the *Rêveries*²⁶. Rather, the various essays of the *Rêveries* set into place a practice of philosophy understood as a way of living, rather than a set of doctrinal discourses. Live thought requires openness to heterogeneity. This is what Levi-Strauss would call *bricolage*, which are intellectual tools that come in handy at specific moments in time. (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 31–32)

The articulation of chance and freedom was a key feature of Epicurean thought that Rousseau sought to revisit²⁷. For Rousseau, the emphasis on the intrusion of chance mitigates the burden of living a fated life shaped by

²⁴Carte à jouer n° 26, dans *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire, cartes à jouer* (Rousseau 2015, 653).

²⁵Condorcet approvingly summarizes the Epicurean gods' silent indifference towards human life in the following terms: "il [Épicure] avait admis les dieux; mais, indifférents aux actions des hommes, étrangers à l'ordre de l'univers, et soumis, comme les autres êtres, aux lois générales de son mécanisme, ils étaient en quelque sorte un hors d'œuvre de ce système". (Condorcet 1970, 73).

²⁶See Cotoni (1998). This is not to say that the *Rêveries* present a philosophically undecided Rousseau. In his *Lettre à Voltaire*, Rousseau had expressed his distaste for skepticism: "l'état de doute est un état trop violent pour mon âme, quand ma raison flotte, ma foi ne peut rester longtemps en suspens, et se détermine sans elle; enfin, mille sujets de préférence m'attirent du côté le plus consolant et joignent le poids de l'espérance à l'équilibre de la raison" (Rousseau 1969, 1070).

²⁷Rousseau intermingles reflections on chance with the vocabulary of destiny in *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*: "Une rencontre fortuite, l'occasion, le besoin du moment, l'habitude trop rapidement prise, ont déterminé tous ses attachements et par eux toute sa destinée" (Rousseau 1959, 1:847). This combination is decisive in understanding his relationship with Madame de Warens. This will be developed in the last section of the present essay.

others. He therefore includes *micro-récits* of accidents that act as powerful reminders of the element of chance, which opens up new possibilities in human experience and temporality. For example, an accident in Ménilmontant involving an encounter with a dog provides a felicitous occasion for rebirth, where social identity is forgotten and gives way to a sensation of pure aliveness to the world²⁸. The accident miraculously ends with no broken limbs, an element which Rousseau describes as a “bonheur qui tient du prodige dans une chute comme celle-là” (1006).

Recent scholarship focuses on this accident, considering it central to Rousseau’s experience of selfhood, which is marked as being philosophically modern in its undoing of Aristotle’s devaluation of accidental experiences as inessential and secondary in the formation of the self²⁹. The last *rêverie* of the collection similarly records another instance of a beginning that serves as a rupture, a moment that marks the beginning of his moral destiny and sentimental journey: the encounter with Madame de Warens coincides with a religious celebration, a “jour de Pâques fleuries” (1098). This moment seals his fate, as it inaugurates the day that Rousseau retrospectively sees himself as restored, or born into himself: “ce premier moment décida de moi pour toute ma vie, et produisit par un enchaînement inévitable le destin du reste de mes jours.” The marking of this beginning also brings into focus the activity of the daily remembrance of this relationship history: “Il n’y a pas de jour où je ne me rappelle avec joie et attendrissement cet unique et court temps de ma vie où je fus moi pleinement sans mélange et sans obstacle et où je puis véritablement dire avoir vécu” (1098-1099). In the Tenth Walk, then, Rousseau elevates destiny into an agential concept which coincides with the practice of self-creation and the experience of moral freedom: “durant ce petit nombre d’années aimé d’une femme pleine de complaisance et de douceur je fis ce que je voulais faire, je fus ce que je voulais être, et par l’emploi que je fis de mes loisirs aidé de ses leçons et de son exemple je sus donner à mon âme encore simple et neuve la forme qui lui convenait davantage et qu’elle a gardée toujours” (1099). This inaugural

²⁸Laurent Jenny remarks that the fall in Ménilmontant allows for a regressive temporality in *L’expérience de la chute* (1997, 71–72).

²⁹Ross Hamilton very persuasively describes the emphasis on the accident as constitutive of the modern self in *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (2008). The philosopher’s fall is also a literary motif that forms the subject of Laurent Jenny’s *L’expérience de la chute: de Montaigne à Michaux* (1997) and Jacques Berchtold’s “Chutes de philosophes: entre tragédie et farce” (2015, 97–115).

moment of happiness envelops and absorbs his current, unfortunate “sort.” The experience of having lived for a number of years alongside his mother in a mountainside retreat sustains Rousseau in time: “c’est là que dans l’espace de quatre ou cinq ans j’ai joui d’un siècle de vie et d’un bonheur pur et plein qui couvre de son charme tout ce que mon sort présent a d’affreux.” (1099). And yet, when read in the context of Rousseau’s other autobiographical writings, slight inconsistencies appear to surface. Marcel Raymond notes that this description presents palpable differences from other narratives covering the same period. Raymond explains that, according to the *Confessions*, for instance, Rousseau did not experience a continuous period of unadulterated bliss while at the Charmettes³⁰. This discrepancy between the diegetic events of the *Confessions* and remarks referring to the same period in the Tenth *rêverie* need not be dismissed, however, as a sign of incoherency or a bad case of selective memory; they can instead be appreciated for highlighting the way in which the last stroll presents a carefully calibrated and reflexive story about a personal destiny that is ultimately construed as self-empowering. In addition, in another personal writing of Rousseau’s, in which he positions himself as a personal witness to the miracle, it is telling that a rare mention of miracles occurs in reference to Madame de Warens. Jean-Luc Guichet judiciously draws attention to this little-noted fire incident that occurred in Annecy in 1729³¹. A fire that threatened to destroy a building adjacent to Madame de Warens’s lodging was diverted when a bishop feverishly led a last-minute prayer. This act of religious speech, in Rousseau’s account, occurs at the same time as a sudden change in the direction of the wind:

il (M. l’évêque) se mit à genoux, ainsi que tous ceux qui étaient présents, du nombre desquels j’étais, et commença à prononcer des oraisons avec cette ferveur qui était inséparable de ses prières. L’effet en fut sensible; le vent, qui portait les flammes par dessus la maison jusques près du jardin, changea tout à coup, et les éloigna si bien que le four quoique contigu fut entièrement consumé sans que la Maison eut d’autre mal que le dommage qu’elle

³⁰Marcel Raymond in Rousseau (1959, 1:1831).

³¹Jean-Luc Guichet, “Le chien de Ménilmontant” (Guichet, in Berchtold (2015), p. 162).

avoit receu auparavant. C'est un fait connu de tout Annecy, et que moi Écrivain du présent mémoire ai vu de mes propres yeux.³²

In this remarkable anecdote, an ostensible act of divine providence hence combats the wind, the archetypal motif of Fortuna. By virtue of association (Palm Sunday, a miraculous change in the wind), Madame de Warens herself becomes vested with a quasi-sacred function in regard to life-shaping, a force that counters the materialist sweep of fate. In the last walk of the *Rêveries*, the representation of an enabling destiny that also combats rather than submits to Fortuna renders clear a personal tale of emancipation and an acceptance of fate. This empowering understanding of Rousseau's "destinée" effectively counters the implied passivity of social victimhood, thereby mitigating the pain of an externalized fate.

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³²Rousseau, "Mémoire remis le 19 avril 1742 à M. Boudet, Antonin, qui travaille à l'Histoire de feu M. de Bernex, Evêque de Genève," in *Mélanges* (Rousseau 1796, 495). The fire incident is also recorded in the *Confessions*: "Durant la prière du Saint homme le vent changea, mais si brusquement et si à propos que les flames qui couvraient la maison et entraient déjà par les fenêtres furent portées de l'autre côté de la Cour, et la maison n'eut aucun mal" (Rousseau 1959, 1:120).

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