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On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life: Reflections on Rousseau's *Rêveries* in Two Books

By Heinrich Meier



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On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life: Reflections on Rousseau's *Rêveries* in Two Books By Heinrich Meier

On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life presents Heinrich Meier's confrontation with Rousseau's *Rêveries*, the philosopher's most beautiful and daring work, as well as his last and least understood. Bringing to bear more than thirty years of study of Rousseau, Meier unfolds his stunningly original interpretation in two parts.

The first part of *On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life* approaches the *Rêveries* not as another autobiographical text in the tradition of the *Confessions* and the *Dialogues*, but as a reflection on the philosophic life and the distinctive happiness it provides. The second turns to a detailed analysis of a work referred to in the *Rêveries*, the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," which triggered Rousseau's political persecution when it was originally published as part of *Émile*. In his examination of this most controversial of Rousseau's writings, which aims to lay the foundations for a successful nonphilosophic life, Meier brings to light the differences between natural religion as expressed by the Vicar and Rousseau's natural theology. Together, the two reciprocally illuminating parts of this study provide an indispensable guide to Rousseau and to the understanding of the nature of the philosophic life.

"[A] dense but precise and enthralling analysis."—*New Yorker*



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Editorial Review

Review

“Meier is deeply impressive in his mastery of Rousseau’s oeuvre. With *On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life*, he presents a startlingly original interpretation of one of Rousseau’s most beautiful and elusive works—the *Rêveries*. His interpretation is sure to be controversial, but it is presented with an elegance, intensity, and thoroughness that will command the attention of all serious Rousseau scholars and those broadly interested in the history of political philosophy.”

(Susan Meld Shell, Boston College)

“No one before Meier has described Rousseau’s philosophic ‘revolution’ with more plausibility and subtlety; his book sets a standard hardly surpassable over the long-term.”

(*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, praise for the German edition)

About the Author

Heinrich Meier is director of the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Foundation in Munich, professor of philosophy at the University of Munich, and permanent visiting professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. He is the author of eight books, including *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss* and *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*. **Robert Berman** is professor of philosophy at Xavier University of Louisiana.

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