SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN LE NEVEU DE RAMEAU

AND JACQUES LE FATALISTE

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The purpose of this thesis is to study Denis Diderot's two masterpieces, *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le Fataliste*, from the point of view of human relations. The thesis seeks to show what Diderot feels are the bases for conduct between members of a given social class, as seen in examples from *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le Fataliste*. In the course of this study it was discovered that in the earlier work, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, Diderot's criticism of bourgeois society carries within it suggestions for improving all of society. In the work of some ten years later, *Jacques le Fataliste*, Diderot returns to these suggestions by means of presenting a relationship that exemplifies them.

The thesis is divided into six chapters; the first is an introduction and the last, a conclusion. The Introduction gives several presuppositions with which Diderot comes to the writing of these novels. It discusses the common theme of the two novels: 'the good, the true, and the beautiful, showing how the areas of philosophy or the true and art or the beautiful are handled in the novels. Because the theme of the good or morality and conduct is the province of the thesis, it is not treated in the Introduction. The Introduction also points out why these particular novels are treated together in this study.
Chapter II gives Diderot's social comment about the bourgeoisie of his day as seen in the person, comments, and pantomime of the Neveu de Rameau. The bourgeois deal with one another on the basis of mutual contempt, intent to deceive one another, and a desire to conform to what others of their class are doing. In this very criticism, however, Diderot implies that society might be improved if individuals attempted to earn the respect they expect, if they were sincere in expressing emotions while being self-controlled, and if they understood themselves. Society could be improved if the social group had the goals of sincerity, tolerance, frankness, and naturalness of expression and behavior.

In Chapter III examples of relationships among the nobility are given, taken from narrations in Jacques le Fataliste. The nobility is found to base its interpersonal dealings on selfishness, manipulation of other people, hypocrisy, and trickery. In Chapter IV are examined relationships among the common people as presented by Jacques' encounters with his own class. Their conduct is seen to be based on self-interest, mutual obligations, and accommodation to life shared closely with others. Jacques himself is discussed from the point of view of his unusual degree of flexibility and accommodation to situations and people.

Chapter V presents the relationship between Jacques, a commoner, and his master, a nobleman. An oral agreement
to which they come is discussed and is shown to be a key expression of their relationship. They are seen to deal with one another with frankness and sincerity, to know their own and one another's strengths and weaknesses, and to be sensitive to and to accept one another. These qualities of their relationship are seen to be the very ones the Neveu implied were necessary for improved social encounters. Chapter V concludes by speculating about whether Diderot intended this unusual couple to be a prototype for social relationships.

The Conclusion summarizes the preceding chapters and indicates that Diderot was making a positive statement about human relations in the form of the lifelike relationship between Jacques and his master.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human relations have become increasingly important as a field of study for political, religious, and educational organizations in this century. Ever ahead of his time, Denis Diderot saw the necessity for social classes to learn to live together agreeably even before the French Revolution. The novels in which he takes up these considerations are Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le Fataliste. Diderot had a horror of systems, and fought to avoid codifying his convictions about morality.1 A concern throughout his life, however, was moralité, which in English is rendered by "ethics" or "morality." Webster's dictionary defines morality as "a doctrine or system of ideas concerned with conduct; conduct conforming to the customs or accepted standards of a particular culture or group."2 Ethics is defined in essentially the same terms. Because the term "morality" tends to have religious overtones which Diderot did not intend, and because both "morality" and "ethics" refer to standards and systems which he disliked, we shall attempt in this thesis to avoid the use of these


terms in general. We are concerned with the actions a man takes which impinge upon the lives of others, with his conduct, with his dealings with other men. We shall call such conduct "social relationships," implying by the term not only people's conduct with one another, but their feelings about and attitude toward one another. When men come together to live in the same area they form a "society." For this thesis, "society" will refer to France of the last half of the eighteenth century. This society is divided into three classes: the "bourgeoisie" or middle class usually consisting of tradesmen and merchants; the "nobility" or those high born and wealthy; and the "common people" or peasants and small tradesmen of neither lofty birth nor wealth. We are grouping clergymen with one class or another, according to their birth or, more importantly, their social commerce with a certain class.

This thesis does not deal with social structure or with society as a whole. Our concern is personal relationships between individual members of society. Of course, conclusions may be drawn from such relationships for society at large. Nonetheless, it is not our purpose to draw extensive conclusions, but, rather, to see the sort of relationships Diderot is setting before our eyes in dramatized dialogue.

There is no need, for the purposes of this study, to go into the background of ethics, either in the realm of secular philosophy or in theology. Diderot is not concerned, in the works we are considering, with the motives behind men's actions.
Although we shall attempt to find the bases for conduct, it will be after the fact; that is, having seen how people behave with one another, we shall try to group the actions under a name, such as those based on selfishness. Whether such a motive actually did influence the actions Diderot describes is neither his concern nor ours. The concern is, rather, practical: how would a man have to feel and act in order to get along with another man of, for instance, a different social class? Again, however, the concern is with sentiment and attitude rather than with psychological analysis, and with actions and words, not with underlying motives. Therefore we shall not attempt what would probably prove to be a superficial summary of systems of morality up to the time of Diderot, nor shall we attempt to classify him with a rubric. We want to investigate what Diderot himself has to say about social relationships in the society of his day, and his suggestions for progress in human relations. It is the vibrancy, fluidity, and fertility of the mind of Diderot that make him a relevant thinker for our century. He defies classification, and we ought not to attempt it.

Although Diderot is chiefly known today for his novels, in his lifetime his claim to fame and his own consuming task was l'Encyclopédie, for which he was general editor and contributor of innumerable articles. He did many of the plates illustrating the techniques of artisans himself. He was also an art critic. Such work required acute observation. In others
of his writings in addition to his *Encyclopédie* articles, he showed himself a very daring thinker; many have thought that he was a direct forerunner of Darwin in his work on biology, for example.\(^3\) Such keen observation, so fertile a mind, and one of such scope bring to the writing of novels such as these, which go beyond the strict telling of fictitious tales, certain ready-formed concepts.

Therefore, it will perhaps be helpful to the reader to bear in mind some of Diderot's presuppositions pertinent to our study. First, Diderot bases his conclusions about people's relationships on what he observes them doing. That is, he does not start with the assumption that man is either innately depraved or that he is inherently good. He makes no moral judgment on the species "man," as Hermand points out:

\[
\ldots \text{l'homme dans cet état (de nature) n'est pas bon, puisqu'il est innocent, puisqu'il ignore vices et vertus; il offre seulement un terrain vierge, propice à la culture morale, au rebours du civili\-\text{isé en qui il faudrait détruire tant de choses avant que de remplacer.}^4
\]

Second, Diderot believes at the same time in a certain amount of biological determinism. That is, man is born with certain tendencies:

\[
\text{Si l'on ne peut donner le nom de bon qu'à celui qui a fait le bien, et le nom de mâchant qu'à celui qui a fait le mal, assurément l'homme en naissant n'est ni bon ni}
\]

\(^3\)Mornet, p. 47.

méchant... Mais l'homme apporte-t-il en naissant des dispositions organiques et naturelles à dire et faire des sottises, à se nuire à lui-même, et à ses semblables, à la justice ou à la colère, au respect ou au mépris des lois? ... L'homme ne naît rien, mais chaque homme naît avec une aptitude propre à une chose. (II, 406)

Hermand explains this passage thus:

L'homme en naissant n'a rien de formé, rien d'achevé, rien de complet; mais il apporte des prédispositions, des virtualités—prédispositions et virtualités morales autant qu'intellectuelles—qui commandent son développement futur, et qui étroitement liées à son organisation, sont aussi comme l'expression psychique du tempérament. 5

Third, Diderot thinks of man as living in an existent society. That is, man is not an individual living alone, neither does he exist in some hypothetical "state of nature" nor in an idealized primitive society. To quote Hermand again:

Et en effet son état de nature n'est point un état de dispersion, où tous les hommes seraient comme autant de Robinsons isolés les uns des autres; c'est un état social, il le dit expressément, différent seulement en complication, non en essence, des sociétés où nous vivons. 6

Furthermore, in La Religieuse we find the following:

L'homme est né pour la société; séparez-le, isolez-le, ses idées se désuniront, son caractère se tournera, mille affections ridicules s'éleveront dans son coeur; des pensées extravagantes germeront dans son esprit, comme les ronces dans une terre sauvage. (V, 119)

Hornet captures the essence of Diderot's orientation in these questions of ethics: "Car sa morale est une morale sociale; et tout progrès y est un progrès social." 7 Fourth and finally,

5Denis Diderot, Œuvres Complètes, edited by J. Assézat (Paris, 1875), II, 406. Henceforth references to Diderot's works will be from this edition and referred to in the text only with volume and page numbers.

6Hermand, p. 78.  7Ibid., p. 100.  8Hornet, p. 8.
Diderot believes that social change and social progress are possible. Mornet brings out this point:

Toute son œuvre, si on la regarde de haut, est fondée sur la croyance au progrès. L'immense entreprise de l'Encyclopédie doit être le bilan des progrès de l'humanité et le point de départ de nouveaux progrès. Toutes les prédications moralisantes de Diderot, incessamment reprises et prolongées, supposent qu'on doit espérer rendre l'homme meilleur et plus heureux.

These, then, are several of Diderot's presuppositions which will help the reader in understanding this thesis.

Although Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le Fataliste might appear at first glance to be unrelated, they are actually companion pieces, as we shall see further on. One of their most unifying features is their overall theme: the true, the good, and the beautiful, representing philosophy, morality, and art. The original comment in these works using the three words is found in Le Neveu, when Lui and Moi begin to discuss music:

. . . le vrai, le bon, le beau ont leurs droits, on les conteste, mais on finit par admirer; ce qui n'est pas marqué à ce coin, on l'admire un temps; mais on finit par bâiller. . . . L'empire de la nature et de ma trinité, contre laquelle les portes de l'enfer ne prévaudront jamais; le vrai, qui est le père qui engendre le bon qui est le fils, d'où procède le beau qui est le saint-esprit, s'établit tout doucement. (V, 462)

Fabre explains the significance of this passage when he says, "... cette trinité ... signifie que par l'intermédiaire du beau, qui est 'le saint esprit', l'homme accède à la moralité et à la vérité."10 Wade feels the same:

9Ibid., p. 7.

Diderot does not, like Voltaire, reduce all science to morality. But he does try to equate the good, the true, and the beautiful, that is, he feels that esthetic values enhance moral values, and moral values augment metaphysical values.

The three areas of philosophy, morality, and art are all present in Le Neveu de Rameau. Perhaps the most diffuse is philosophy, for it is not discussed as such in the novel. However, in Le Neveu philosophy comes into play in two ways: by the inquiring attitude of Lui and Moi, and by the deterministic point of view that both protagonists take for granted. At one point Moi utters piously, "A quoi que ce soit que l'homme s'applique, la Nature l'y destinaît." (V, 481) On another occasion Moi says:

Acceptons donc les choses comme elles sont. Voyons ce qu'elles nous coûtent et ce qu'elles nous rendent, et laissons là le tout que nous ne connaissons pas assez pour le louer ou le blâmer, et qui n'est peut-être ni bien ni mal, s'il est nécessaire, comme beaucoup d'honnêtes gens l'imagineent. (V, 396)

Lui has learned his determinism from trying circumstances in his life:


It is clear that this attitude taken to its logical limit would result in complete irresponsibility on the part of the individual for his actions. Moi wonders, in fact, why Lui seems to

have so little inclination toward an ethical point of view.
Lui's response blames both heredity and environment:

... j'ai toujours vécu avec de bons musiciens et de
méchantes gens, d'où il est arrivé que mon oreille est
devenue très fine et que mon coeur est devenu sourd. Et
puis c'est qu'il y avait quelque chose de race... La
molecule paternelle était dure et obtuse, et cette maudite
molecule première s'est assimilé tout le reste. (V, 468-
469)

Thus both Lui and Moi accept a mild biological and environmental
determinism.

Morality and art are key themes in Le Neveu. Because the
discussion of people's conduct is the province of this thesis,
we shall not take it up here. As for art, opera is discussed
by the protagonists at some length. They both assert the pri-
macy of the Italian over the French opera.

Let us now look at the treatment of these themes in Jacques
le Fataliste. Loy verifies that Jacques has these main themes:
"the problems of the novel as a realistic literary medium," the
philosophical question of fatalism, and the broader human atti-
tude toward morals.12 The contention of this thesis is that
Jacques le Fataliste takes up suggestions about human conduct
or morality found in Le Neveu de Rameau and carries them further.
By way of general background, and in order to take into account
the other two main themes of these novels, philosophy and art,
let us briefly see what conclusions Jacques comes to on these
subjects. For in the sense that Jacques concludes themes which

12J. Robert Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, A Critical
were introduced in *Le Neveu*, Jacques may be thought of as a companion piece to *Le Neveu*. The most striking examples of Jacques' extension of a theme from *Le Neveu* is the theme of morality. The themes of philosophy and art are not so completely connected between the two works as is the theme of morality. Whereas the moral theme is actually continued from one work to the other, the philosophical point of view taken for granted in *Le Neveu* is carried to its extreme in *Jacques*, and is ridiculed and refuted. The general conclusion we may make about art is the same for both novels. So, philosophy and art are each treated differently in the two works, and they are both differently handled than morality, which is treated as a continuum from one work to the other. Let us see first what Diderot does about the philosophical theme.

The great philosophical issue in *Jacques*, and indeed for Diderot himself, is the question of fatalism. The problem is that if everything is "written on a great scroll up yonder," as Jacques says so many times, then man has no role but to accept whatever Fate metes out to him. His role is passive, and there is no place for morality. If a man does only what it is predetermined he will do, where is his choice, his possibility for ethical decision? This is the great dilemma of Diderot's materialistic point of view for his ethics. In fact, there would be no progress possible for mankind if one held inflexibly to a thoroughgoing fatalistic point of view. Why try to improve society, to nourish the hungry or help the poor, to cure disease
or redistribute wealth if all is predestined? It can be seen that such a position is untenable for a "philosophe" who is committed heart and mind to the enlightenment of men by knowledge and to the progress of society in general. In *Jacques le Fataliste*, Diderot sets up a rigid fatalism, shows it to be ridiculous in part by means of frequent repetition of the phrase "écrit là-haut," and comes to a workable solution to the problem.

The reader may recall that in a key passage near the end of the book, Jacques has been trying to show his master that we cannot choose as freely as the master seems to think; that we spend much of our time doing what we do not want to, and that not from choice. To prove his point, Jacques purposely neglects to tighten the cinches on his master's saddle. When the master dismounts, he nearly falls to the ground. Jacques is standing ready and catches him; the master is angered by Jacques' carelessness and chases him with whip upraised to beat him. Jacques dodges him, laughing uproariously all the while. He finally explains to his master that this was all planned by him to prove that one does not do what one wants a good deal of the time, for neither he nor his master really wanted to chase each other around a horse for half an hour (VI, 280-281). However, this passage proves something more than the fact that we have less free choice than we might like. It shows as well that there is a place for the human will in the chain of events. Jacques planned for the incident to take place in order to prove to his
master that our freedom is limited. Yet by his will he determined what would happen. That is, the reader's actual conclusion from the incident is the opposite of what Jacques' avowed intent was. The will has a role in determining conduct; one causal factor in the chain of events can be choice. Thus the philosophical point of view which is taken for granted in a mild form in Le Neveu is pushed to its logical conclusion in Jacques and is found to be untenable. In order to allow for man's freedom of choice and assure a role for moral responsibility in human society, Diderot finds it necessary to pull back from the extreme outcome of a materialistic determinism. Because he is able to maintain a less-than-extreme deterministic point of view, Diderot is able to discuss morality as he does in these two novels.

Let us now take up the third theme, art. We saw that Le Neveu specifically discusses opera, and that Jacques contains a running discussion with the reader on the methods and principles involved in writing a realistic novel. Yet both of these works are more than discussions of art. They are themselves examples of avant-garde art. Critics have found them to be so forward-looking, in fact, that they are considered direct forerunners of the new novel written in France in the middle of the twentieth century. Thus we see that the overall conclusion we may make about the theme of art in these two novels is that

Diderot, ever prone to show rather than tell, demonstrates art by writing the novels.

These novels, we have said, have three related themes, philosophy, morality and art: the true, the good, and the beautiful. We have seen here the conclusions to which the themes of the true and the beautiful come, by way of background for our discussion of the remaining theme in this thesis, the good.

Let us turn now to a consideration of why we are singling out *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le Fataliste* to treat together. While it is true that others of Diderot's works use the same dialogue method found in these two, and that others treat the same general subject of eighteenth-century society with implications beyond the era in question, these two novels are particularly related in several ways. First, they are both novels of Diderot's maturity. Brady refers to May on this point, saying that Diderot's tales and novels reach "a culmination of formal progress from traditional allegory (*Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, 1747) through the didacticism of the sentimental-moral novel (*La Religieuse*, 1760-96) to the balance of ideas and form in the dialogue novel (*Le Neveu de Rameau*, 1761-78, *Jacques le Fataliste*, 1773-96)."¹⁴ At the same time, *Le Neveu de Rameau*

was begun some ten years before *Jacques le Fataliste*. Not only, then, do we have in these two novels the considered mature opinion of an observer and thinker, but we have the growth and change in his thinking in his later years.

Secondly, these two novels are considered to be Diderot's masterpieces. Assézat says, "*Le Neveu de Rameau* est, parmi les chefs-d'oeuvre de Diderot, celui qui est le plus universellement accepté comme tel." (V, 361) Referring to *Jacques le Fataliste*, Assézat says, "Il serait, à notre avis, beaucoup plus juste de dire comme le disait Goethe, que c'est un chef-d'oeuvre . . ." (VI, 4) In our day Crocker16 and Fellows17 refer to these two works as masterpieces.

A third reason for studying just these two works is that they both can be considered to be very difficult works, perhaps Diderot's most difficult. They intrigue the reader in the same way that a jigsaw puzzle intrigues. They are both diffuse, disjunctive. At first there seems to be no coherent plot. No sooner is a plot isolated than it is broken off for discussion of another subject. For their very difficulty, then, these works deserve to be considered together.

Fourthly, Diderot uses the same technique in both of these works; he tests out his theories. He attacks them with


17Fellows, p. 48.
opposing, paradoxical ideas. As Dieckmann explains,

Le paradoxe, par la liberté qu'il concède aux idées hardies---il dénote, pour ainsi dire, la limite d'une pensée---permettait à Diderot de suivre ses idées aussi loin qu'elles voulaient l'entraîner et de conduire une pensée jusqu'à ses ultimes conséquences, sans pour autant s'identifier avec elle. . . . Diderot restait, jusqu'à un certain point, attaché à la société, à la communauté, à la tradition, ou à l'opinion reçue, contre laquelle il s'insurgeait ou qu'il contredisait. De ce dilemme, il s'échappe par la "pensée paradoxale".18

Diderot also gives his theories flesh and bones and lets them act out the consequences of his thought before us. According to Crocker, Diderot conceived of his fictional works as moral experiments "to explore the nature or quality of human moral experience"; that is, to test out his "radical ethical theories" in life situations.19 Le Neveu and Jacques do this more fully than either of his other two novels, Les Bijoux indiscrèts or La Religieuse. Les Bijoux, an early work, expresses some philosophical ideas, but they are not the framework of the book. La Religieuse shows the logical consequences of what Diderot considered to be a deplorable aspect of society, that is, the almost compulsory sequestration of some members of society in convents. It carries, as well, certain implications about the ensnaring nature of all belief, whether religious or political. However, the scope of La Religieuse is limited and its purpose would seem to be polemical. The two novels that deal most

18Herbert Dieckmann, Cinq Leçons sur Diderot (Paris, 1959), p. 84.

widely with society as a whole and that act out different aspects of Diderot’s thought are Le Neveu and Jacques.

A fifth reason why these two works are being studied here together is that they share common themes: “le vrai, le bon, le beau.” As the reader will remember, we have already discussed these themes of philosophy, morality, and art and seen that, particularly in the realm of morality, the works form a continuum.

Sixthly, the overriding characteristic of both of these novels is social comment. Taken together, their commentary on society can be seen to cover the whole spectrum of Diderot’s society. Le Neveu deals with bourgeois society, and treats it harshly. Jacques deals with the nobility even more harshly, and with the common people, who are presented realistically but sympathetically. Each book takes up the clergy, who, while theoretically classless, in practice fall by virtue of birth or associations into one or another of the three main social groupings of eighteenth-century France. For their social criticism, then, these novels deserve to be taken together.

The final and most important reason why these two novels are treated together is that much of the social comment implying that certain improvements in society are desirable found in Le Neveu is taken up again in Jacques and made to work. That is, of all the themes and points of contact of these novels, the aspects chosen for this thesis are those which most solidly unite the two works: people’s conduct with one another,
hints in Le Neveu de Rameau about a better society, and their
dramatization in Jacques le Fataliste.

In the general field of Diderot studies, it is the intent
of this thesis to place Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le
Fataliste side by side, and to examine them for their comments
and conclusions on the subject of social relationships. Al-
though it is generally accepted that Le Neveu de Rameau scath-
ingly satirizes bourgeois society, we have found that there is
a kernel of positive suggestion in the Neveu's social commen-
tary. We have found, further, that these hints in Le Neveu are
taken up in Jacques in a key relationship which we shall study.
It is as if an artist's hasty charcoal sketch were completed,
and we have, beside the sketch, the full scale, lifelike por-
trait. From vague hints about possible improvements in men's
dealings with one another Diderot has built a model relationship
embodying those hints and much more besides.

Before proceeding to Chapter I, we can comment on the divi-
sion of the thesis. The natural points of division and struc-
ture of these novels have become evident after studying them.
Although there are several conceivable ways of dividing this
thesis into sections, the one chosen seems both the most natur-
al for treating the subject and the clearest for the reader to
follow.

The thesis is divided into the following four areas of
study. In Chapter I we discuss social relationships among the
bourgeoisie as seen in Le Neveu de Rameau and delineate the
implications found in the Neveu's social criticism for improving society. Chapter II discusses social behavior among the nobility. In Chapter III we discuss conduct among the common people. Both of these chapters draw upon Jacques le Fataliste as their primary source. Chapter IV examines the relationship Jacques has with his master, relates it to the implications in Le Neveu, and suggests some possible conclusions one might draw for society at large and in other times.

The plots of these novels, as we said, are disjunctive at best. Therefore, in order to refresh the reader's memory about a specific incident to which the thesis refers, a minimal summary will be given of incidents to which we refer.

Briefly, then, this study juxtaposes Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le Fataliste in order to see what each says about that segment of society in which it is set and to see if there are implications in Diderot's social comment for improving social relationships. The implications will be seen to work themselves out in a relationship, which in turn has implications beyond itself for society at large. We have here the thoughts of one of the most fertile minds of the eighteenth century on a subject of continued concern today, human relations.
CHAPTER II

THE NEVEU CARICATURES THE BOURGEOISIE

Both the mind of Denis Diderot and his masterpiece, Le Neveu de Rameau are many-faceted. Le Neveu is a provocative work, lending itself to many interpretations. Critics principally find it to be about genius, morality, art, and social satire.¹ One very important facet of Le Neveu is its emphasis on social relationships. Although most critics mention Diderot's social criticism, and, indeed, Doolittle² finds it the chief raison d'être of the novel, none has seen Diderot's social comment as containing both negative and positive aspects. We see the negative side in people's shabby conduct toward one another. The positive aspect is found in certain implications for a better basis for men's relationships in society, contained within the criticism itself. It is by placing Le Neveu de Rameau in juxtaposition with Jacques le Fataliste that these implications become evident.

One might recall that Le Neveu de Rameau is cast in dialogue form. One of the protagonists, Moi, is accosted by another, Lui, in the Café de la Régence in Paris. They converse

¹Amy L. Karsland, "Identity and Theme in Le Neveu de Rameau," The Romanic Review, IX (February, 1969), p. 34.

on a number of subjects. Lui does most of the talking. An
unusual feature of his comments is his pantomime of the con-
versation. At the height of the dialogue he even pretends he
is playing the instruments of an entire orchestra performing
the music that he and Koi have just been discussing. Sometimes
his pantomime is mimicry of someone's life style and is meant
to be a caricature. At other times his pantomime is in dead
earnest, particularly when he pantomimes a musical performance,
and it serves to emphasize both the point he is making and his
obvious talent for mime. The first and longest section of the
dialogue deals with bourgeois society and morality; the follow-
ing section is about music; the final part fuses the themes of
morality and art, taking up the many subjects of the conversa-
tion and giving some of them conclusions.3

It is through Lui that Diderot makes his social comment in
Le Neveu de Rameau. Lui bitterly criticizes bourgeois society
of which he has intimate knowledge. He ridicules it with clever
mimicry of its members. However, his very comments and panto-
mime imply that there is a better way for men to act. Many of
these implications are taken up again and given life in Jacques
le Fataliste. Since our area of concern in this thesis is
people's relationships, we shall look first at the attitude of
Koi and Lui toward each other, and note Koi's change in atti-
tude. From there we may proceed to examine how the protagonists
deal with one another. We shall find that it is not the

3 For this particular breakdown of the dialogue into sec-
tions, I am indebted to Doolittle, pp. 17-20.
relationship between Lui and Moi in the Café de la Régence that will interest us, but the relationships among the bourgeoisie that Lui describes. We shall try to determine the bases for these relationships. We shall note the explicit criticism of society spelled out in Lui's comments. Finally, we shall examine some implications of this criticism which may suggest a better basis for men's dealings with one another.

Let us first take up Moi. An important aspect of Moi's character is his reticence. Even a casual reading of Le Neveu shows how few long statements Moi makes. He much more frequently asks questions of Lui, makes brief encouraging or contradictory comments which he does not emphasize lest Lui stop talking. Lui spouts forth tirade after tirade, accompanied by or interspersed with mimicry of the things he and Moi have been discussing. Any time that Lui tries to refer to Moi's private life, Moi demurs. He does not want Lui to refer to his earlier poorer days. He would rather not discuss his daughter specifically, even to the point of not wanting to tell Lui her age. He will not admit that he is comfortably well-off (V, 412). Why should Diderot place Moi in such a position?

In order to make him a credible vis-à-vis in a conversation, Diderot must give the reader some information about Moi. But in having Moi admit as little about himself as possible, and by his paucity of expression, there is room left for what may be Diderot's real intent: to place the reader in a position

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4 Marsland, p. 36.
to answer for himself Lui's comments. Dieckmann discusses at some length the intense need that Diderot felt for a vis-à-vis when he was writing:

Diderot est de ceux qui se trouvent dans l'autre et par l'autre; c'est dans la conscience de l'autre que son unité s'établissait, c'est dans la conscience de celui à qui il s'adressait---ami et lecteur---que ses idées s'ordonnaient. Si forte était cette nécessité de se communiquer à une personne réelle qu'en son absence, Diderot la recréait dans toute la proximité d'un échange vivant.5

In keeping Moi's comments to a minimum, and leaving certain blanks, as it were, in his reactions to Lui's remarks and to his implications, Diderot encourages the reader to take an active part in the dialogue. Marsland has suggested this same intention:

I could argue convincingly, I think, that the sketchiness of some of Moi's ripostes is a deliberate artistic device to involve the reader personally in the dialogue by forcing him to elaborate his own answers to Lui's heterodoxy.6

Another interesting aspect of Moi's role in this dialogue, which also relates to his identification with the reader, is the change in his feelings towards Lui during the course of the dialogue. Brady brings out this change by pointing up one possible division of the dialogue into four parts, each terminating with an aside by Moi, relating his state of mind regarding Lui at that point in the dialogue.7 In his first comment, he expresses his confusion; he feels amusement and indignation at the same time. After the tale of the Renégat d'Avignon Moi is

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5 Dieckmann, pp. 33-34.  
6 Marsland, p. 39.  
frankly horrified. But after the discussion of music, he expresses admiration for Lui, tinged with fear for what his son might become with such a tutor. By the end of the dialogue, Moi openly admires Lui and even borrows a page from his book by imagining some of the people he has known in the form of stock comic characters or animals. We have seen that Moi's attitude toward Lui changes from caution to horror and fear and at last to admiration. We have also seen that the reader tends to associate himself with Moi and make responses to Lui in Moi's place. Taking these two points together, we may conclude that Diderot is making an optimistic comment about human relations; just as Moi and the reader find their attitude toward Lui improving, so other members of society can, through association, grow in their understanding of one another. This is one of many hints found in *Le Neveu* that will be taken up again in *Jacques*. Let us now discuss the title character, le *Neveu de Rameau* or Lui.

We are especially interested in the social satire and criticism aspects of Lui's comments and pantomime. They have particular meaning because Lui stands outside the circle of the accepted society of his day. As Hérubel puts it:

La beauté du Neveu vient de sa situation exceptionnelle. C'est un solitaire, un outlaw, un être prédisposé au cahotique et au sublime. Il ne connaît ni le bien ni le mal. . . . C'est un homme libre, un exilé, une espèce de Robinson du Palais-Royal . . . .

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8 Doolittle, p. 36.

From this vantage point Lui is admirably well situated to criticize his social milieu. In addition, he has a deep insight into society. Standing apart from it, seeing it as it really is, the Neveu yet lives off society by preying upon it.

Again, we are presented with a new manner of man—the man who is a law unto himself, who defies the ordered morale and social frame of things so much at the heart of early Enlightenment thought. No longer is he the vibrant original who injects sparks into the tedium of society life; he is antisocial by choice and by insight into the structure of society. That is not to say he lives outside of society; rather, he preys upon it.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Neveu is his freedom. Fabre points out, "Celui-là (Rameau) peut ramper, s'aviler, mais la pleine conscience de cet avilissement le libère. En faisant du mensonge une farce et un art, il sait, au moins, qu'il ne construit pas sa vie sur le mensonge . . ." Yet even the Neveu finds himself enmeshed in the social organization; in order to live, he has to play a role.

As far as Lui's attitude toward Moi is concerned, he appears to treat Moi the same throughout the novel: with tolerance and amused respect. Their relationship is not the important one for us, for it is a casual one. Lui's more steady relationship can be seen to be with the Bertin household, rather than with Moi. After all, Moi explicitly states that he only sees Lui occasionally, perhaps only about once a year (V, 389).

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11Ibid., p. 39

12Fabre, p. LXIX.
has so little information about him that he has to ask him what he is doing presently (V, 391). The more permanent relationship discussed here, then, is that between Lui and his patron, Bertin, and his patron’s mistress, Mlle Hus, an actress. Doolittle calls Bertin’s household "the house of Bertin."\(^{13}\) The house of Bertin is a caricature of all of bourgeois society at the time of Diderot. Doolittle describes the house of Bertin thus:

... Bertin is the extremely rich bourgeois having pretensions to taste in matters artistic and literary, who relies upon his money, and above all upon his table, to procure the favors of an actress and the adulation of literati whose lack of talents or of professional success makes them amenable to such attractions. His little court owes its existence to a twofold lie: Bertin is not a member of that nobility whose ways he is aping, nor has he either taste or genuine interest in matters of taste. The so-called artists and intellectuals with whom he surrounds himself are without exception hirelings and failures whose presence in his house is to be attributed to either hunger or vanity. Bertin and his household thus form a collection of shams founded upon the single reality of appetite.\(^{14}\)

Bertin and his circle treat the Neveu without respect and almost as if he were a chattel.

That is to say that in the master's eyes, Lui is simply a chattel, a device or toy whose function is to amuse, and to amuse by the display of his baseness; a mechanism devoid of personality, devoid of humanity, fed, clothed, and housed in consideration of his depravity, but on condition, apparently, that the depravity be always amusing, always flattering, never embarrassing. The penalty for deviation, for malfunction, is banishment; let the mechanism become a man and the rewards are cut off. The price of admission to Bertin's table is the renunciation of dignity. He who would batten on Bertin

\(^{13}\) Doolittle, p. 18.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 39.
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must mask himself, must disguise his manhood—if he has any.15

Although Lui is outside society, he has, nonetheless, a relationship to that society. His role has been assigned him by the middle-class, moneyed society in which he moves and he has accepted it of his own will. It is the role of parasite.

Let us look for a moment at what Diderot means by "parasite," what such a role involves, and its implications for social relationships. A parasite for Diderot is an artist, either of mediocre talent or of insufficient success to live independently. Nouveaux riches bourgeois patronize these artists by taking them into their homes. There they receive bed and board, clothing and allowance. This custom dates at least from classical times and is well-known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France. In return for their keep, they are expected to amuse the master of the house, to flatter and play valet to his mistress, to care for the pets of the household, to seek out new artistic talent, to make that talent appear more than it is by leading claqués during performances, and to bring the new artist home (V, 431, 439, 447-448, 482). In a sense the parasite resembles the court fool.16

15 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

16 We are reminded of Cervantes' use of a fool or a crazy man to criticize society. For example, the very intelligent Licenciado Vidriera, who thinks himself made of glass, reveals truths about people a sane man would not dare utter. When his wits are repaired, his knowledge and learning are not valued. He cannot find anyone who will support him sane, although he had ample patrons while demented.
Lui often speaks of himself as "fool" or "clown" (V, 443).

One discussion of the fool says:

The court fool, however, frequently was not mentally deficient. For the freedom to indulge in satire, tricks, and repartee, many men of keen insight and caustic wit obtained powerful patronage by assuming the role of fool. The clown or jester was common in Elizabethan drama, and with the fool's garb the actor gained the freedom of the fool.17

The fool may be, then, very intelligent. He exchanges a certain amount of respect for a certain amount of freedom.

As the Neveu finds out, however, that freedom goes only so far. It is possible to make one true but indiscreet comment too many, which Lui does, and then to be expelled from the household.

Lui's offense consists in his refusal to disguise a truth whose veracity is attested by the fact that it gives offense. . . . Lui is condemned not for knowing what everyone knows, but for publicly stating the fact, for shattering the perfectly false convention which this society tacitly agrees should be maintained. . . . That he should do so is explained by his momentary delusion that he was "un homme essentiel." Too late he has returned to the realization that his membership in the household is owing to the mask that he wears and not to the man that he is.18

The plot of sorts that holds this novel together is Lui's expulsion from the Bertin household and his struggle to humble himself enough to be reinstated. As the novel develops, it becomes evident that Lui has known all along that he will return but he fights this knowledge. He squirms

18 Doolittle, p. 43.
and struggles all through the conversation, which draws him inevitably, by means of Moi's questions, to the point of admitting that he is no genius; he has neither the creative talent nor the self-discipline necessary to create an original work of art. His attempts to earn his living in the performing arts have failed miserably. His charming little wife, both talented and seductive, has died. He has no choice but to return to doing what he does best, assuming poses and playing the fool. He weeps at the very end of the dialogue, partly for his wife, but partly out of defeat; he has come to realize clearly that he has no other alternative but to do what he really does not want to do very much, return to the house of Bertin. He weeps for the loss of his independence and for the constraints he will have to exercise in his role of fool.

In the bitterest part of the dialogue, the Neveu describes what the patrons really get in return for their hospitality. This section includes also the counter-attack on Palissot, whose play Les Philosophes had particularly ridiculed Diderot. Incident after incident is described, in which the parasite tricks his patron. Palissot writes verse against one patron. Another complains that Palissot then attributes these verses to him. Palissot steals another's mistress from him. Another complains that Palissot seduced his wife (V, 450).

In each case, the Neveu is emphatic that it is the offended patron who is at fault in not expecting such a return for his hospitality. There exists, explains Lui, a "pacte tacite" between the patron and the parasite which is defined for Moi when he objects to a particularly amusing and scabrous incident about Bertin and Mlle Hus:

MOI. ---C'est qu'il est au moins indécent de donner des ridicules à ses bienfaiteurs.

LUI. ---Mais n'est-ce pas pis encore de s'autoriser de ses bienfaits pour avilir son protégé?

MOI. ---Mais si le protégé n'était pas vil par lui-même, rien ne donnerait au protecteur cette autorité.

LUI. ---Mais si les personnages n'étaient pas ridicules par eux-mêmes, on n'en ferait pas de bons contes. . . . Quand on nous prend, ne nous connaît-on pas pour ce que nous sommes, pour des âmes intéressées, viles et perfides? Si l'on nous connaît, tout est bien. Il y a un pacte tacite qu'on nous fera du bien et que tôt ou tard nous rendrons le mal pour le bien qu'on nous aura fait. Ce pacte ne subsiste-t-il pas entre l'homme et son singe ou son perroquet? (V, 449-450)

The conclusion that Lui draws from these incidents is that if the patrons lived decently and quietly, there would be nothing for their hangers-on to tell about them. In fact, these very despicable parasites are a means of giving them their just reward.

LUI. ---Tout cela est écrit dans le pacte tacite; tant pis pour celui qui l'ignore ou l'oublie. Combien je justifierais par ce pacte universel et sacré de gens qu'on accuse de méchanceté, tandis que c'est soi qu'on devrait accuser de sottise! . . . Si Bertinhus vivait doucement, paisiblement avec sa maîtresse . . . croyez-vous qu'on en eût fait ni bons ni mauvais contes? Que leur est-il donc arrivé? ce qu'ils méritaient. Ils ont été punis de leur imprudence, et c'est nous que la Providence avait destinés de toute éternité à faire justice des Bertins du jour, et ce sont nos pareils d'entre nos neveux qu'elle a destinés à faire justice des Monsauges et des Bertins à venir. (V, 451)
Let us add to this discussion of the parasite and his patron other incidents indicating the sort of relationships that are to be found in bourgeois society as seen through Lui's eyes. For instance, he explains to Hoi the way he used to give a piano lesson and the way he gives it now. His relaxed charm has been replaced by a brusque manner and the implication that he has little time because of the large number of lessons he must give (V, 416-418). In another example, Lui shows another duty of the parasite: by means of a thousand little lies and poses, he must daily bolster the self-esteem of the patron's mistress (V, 431). Again, Lui had been especially taken by the clever methods of the parasite Bouret, who made his own little dog dislike him and like instead a minister whose favor Bouret needed badly and whose little dog had just disappeared. He wore an ingenious mask of the minister when he treated the dog well, and mistreated him as Bouret (V, 434-435). In another example, Lui contemptuously describes two thoroughgoing hypocrites: the coward who poses as a brave man until his bluff is called, and the passion-ridden woman who poses as a model of piety and decorum (V, 428-429). These incidents make Diderot's indictments of

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Diderot's own society, which he is here satirizing, to quote Fabre: "Ce mépris de Diderot pour ceux qui ont réussi une notable carrière, dans le milieu de la bourgeoisie commercante dont il est lui-même sorti, contraste avec la littérature de son époque, toute à l'éloge du négociant."

P. 136, note 45.
bourgeois society of his day—and perhaps all society—become plainer.

Diderot shows the real motives behind relationships between people in bourgeois circles to be mutual contempt, intent to deceive, and desire to conform with what others are doing. Taking up contempt first, we see that the parasite is beneath the consideration of the patron and his peers. "Je vous l'ai déjà dit, nous sommes sans conséquence. Nous injurions tout le monde et nous n'affligeons personne." (V, 440) That is, the parasite is contemptible—yet necessary: "Oh! je suis sûr qu'à présent qu'ils ne m'ont pas pour les faire rire, ils s'ennuient comme des chiens." (V, 402, 447) The parasite in turn feels nothing but contempt for his patron, based on an intimate knowledge of all that goes on in the household. Mutual contempt, then, is one mainspring of relationships in bourgeois society. "... what we have here is a relationship in which, on both sides of the equation, the terms are negative. Contempt meets contempt, but the formalities of a social relationship are met and each party can freely go his own way."21

Regarding deceit and conformity taken together, we see that after Lui's description of the present-day piano lesson, Moi questions the ethics of implying that he has many more lessons to give than he does in fact have. Lui then explains

21 Marsland, p. 43.
his idea of generally accepted best procedures and their exceptions, which he calls "occupational idioms."

MOI. ---Et pourquoi employer toutes ces petites viles ruses-là?
LUI. ---Viles! et pourquoi, s'il vous plaît? Elles sont d'usage dans mon état; je ne m'avilis point en faisant comme tout le monde. Ce n'est pas moi qui les ai inventées, et je serais bizarre et maladroit de ne pas m'y conformer. Vraiment, je sais bien que si vous allez appliquer à cela certains principes généraux de je ne sais quelle morale qu'ils ont tous à la bouche et qu'aucun d'eux ne pratique, il se trouvera que ce qui est blanc sera noir, et que ce qui est noir sera blanc. Mais, monsieur le philosophe, il y a une conscience générale, et puis des exceptions dans chaque langue... auxquelles je donnerais volontiers le nom d'idiotismes de métier... un idiotisme commun est de se procurer le plus de pratiques que l'on peut; une sottise commune est de croire que le plus habile est celui qui en a le plus. Voilà deux exceptions à la conscience générale auxquelles il faut se plier. (V, 419-420)

We see here the two other mainsprings of relationships in this society: deceit and conformity. What but deceit are the "occupational idioms" that Lui discusses? What but conformity to employ them? All hypocrisy is based on deceit; one tries to show on the outside something that is not true of one's inner feelings. The real disaster is that more often than not, one fools oneself. It is self-flattery rather than flattery by another. As Lui says, "On avale à pleine gorgée le mensonge qui nous flatte, et l'on boit goutte à goutte une vérité qui nous est amère." (V, 438) Lui has grasped the real nature of bourgeois social relationships; he feels that conformity to the pattern is the most lucrative life style. His philosophy of life might be these words of his: "Garde des vices qui te sont utile; mais n'en aie ni le ton, ni les
apparences qui te rendraient ridicule. . . . Je suis moi et je reste ce que je suis, mais j'agis et je parle comme il convient." (V, 442-443) The real motivating forces of men's actions toward one another in bourgeois society are, then, seen to be rather unsavory: mutual contempt, mutual deceit, and unreasoned conformity to what others are doing.

As well as by means of his description of certain bourgeois and his pantomime of them, the Neveu states plainly some of his social criticism. As an example of this sort of criticism, let us take the following realistic appraisal of society:

Moi. ---Quoi! défendre sa patrie?
Lui. ---Vanité! Il n'y a plus de patrie, je ne vois d'un pôle à l'autre que des tyrans et des esclaves. . . .
Moi. ---Avoir un état dans la société et en remplir les devoirs?
Lui. ---Vanité! Qu'importe qu'on ait un état ou non, pourvu qu'on soit riche, puisqu'on ne prend un état que pour le devenir. Remplir ses devoirs, à quoi cela mène-t-il? à la jalousie, au trouble, à la persécution. Est-ce ainsi qu'on s'avance? Faire sa cour, morbleu! faire sa cour, voir les grands, étudier leurs goûts, se prêter à leurs fantaisies, servir leurs vices, approuver leurs injustices: voilà le secret. (V, 423-424)

As we have mentioned, Diderot's very choice of the Neveu to convey his social comment says much about that society. That his like could develop and continue to exist is in itself an indictment of society.

Lui. ---Et que puisque je puis faire mon bonheur par des vices qui me sont naturels que j'ai acquis sans travail, que je conserve sans effort, qui cadrent avec les moeurs de ma nation, qui sont du goût de ceux qui me protègent, et plus analogue à leurs petits besoins particuliers que des vertus qui les gêneraient en les
accusant depuis le matin jusqu'au soir, il serait bien singulier que j'allasse me tourmenter comme une âme damnée pour me bistourner et me faire autre que je ne suis, pour me donner un caractère étranger au mien, des qualités très estimables, j'y consens pour ne pas disputer, mais qui me coûteraient beaucoup à acquérir, à pratiquer, ne me mèneraient à rien, peut-être à pis que rien, par la satire continuelle des riches auprès desquels les gueux comme moi ont à chercher leur vie. On loue la vertu, mais on la hate, mais on la fuit, mais elle gèle de froid, et dans ce monde, il faut avoir les pieds chauds. (V, 427-428)

We have seen now that in Le Neveu de Rameau one important theme is a satire of society. Through the person of the Neveu, through his comments about society, through his narration and pantomime about certain social types, Diderot makes a forceful condemnation of the motivating forces of bourgeois society: mutual contempt, deceit, and conformity. The Neveu serves yet another and perhaps more important purpose. Diderot does not stop with social criticism. He goes on to imply certain changes that could improve people's relationships in society. As an original, one of a kind, a law unto himself and an outlaw, the Neveu is in a good position to present these implications. Fabre has hinted at this in the following words:

Cet être aberrant prouve, au moins, que la nature se charge d'elle-même de rompre cette "fastidieuse uniformité" où risquerait de s'enliser l'espèce. Dans son matérialisme même, Diderot compte sur cette perpétuelle plénitude de hasards qu'il appelle la Nature, pour empêcher l'homme de régler tyranniquement le devenir humain. C'est pourquoi il réfute avec tant de force Helvétius, philosophe de la "modification", en lui opposant l'inévitée. Il sait, ou il sent trop bien que la société, sous quelque forme qu'elle manifeste son être collectif, est nécessairement entraînée à niveler et à brimer l'individu, en l'enfermant dans des cadres qu'elle revêt d'une sorte de caractère
sacré: famille, corporation, nation---nous ajouterions aujourd'hui d'autres termes---alors qu'ils ne sont que des créations conventionnelles et contingentes. La nature aide, fort heureusement, à les assouplir, sinon à les briser.22

It is the contention of this thesis that Diderot takes up these suggestions again and sets them in motion in Jacques le Fataliste. We shall examine these suggestions in this chapter and come back to them in Chapter IV.

We shall divide the implications for improvements in society into two groups: those which pertain more to the individual, and those which concern the group. The Neveu implies in his tirades to Moi that certain aspects of an individual's character or his comportment, if improved, might lead to better relationships among people. For instance, just after relating an incident about the personal life of Bertin and Mlle Hus to Moi, who takes offence at the thought that such things would be told about one's patron, Lui evokes the "pacte tacite" and further says, "Si Bertinhus vivait doucement, paisiblement avec sa maîtresse, si par l'honnêteté de leurs caractères ils s'étaient fait des connaissances honnêtes, croyez-vous qu'on en eût fait ni bons ni mauvais contes?" (v, 451) That is, a meritorious life would not be a cause for gossip. Again, Lui is further offended by Mlle Hus' insipid artifice in the theater. He prefers the "simple" to the "figuré," the frank and unembellished to the insincere
and garnished. Knowing her as well as he does from his intimate connections with the household, he finds Mlle Hus' inability to express sincere emotions on stage particularly galling. After all, does he not know from personal experience the extent of her wrath (V, 437)? Moreover, Lui objects to the boorish disposition of his uncle, of Racine, of Voltaire, and of many other geniuses. Since they have to live among people, Lui implies that it would be better for those around them if they could control themselves at least enough to be pleasant to people, even though Lui cannot discipline himself enough to make a serious attempt at musical composition.

The whole impact of Le Neveu as far as plot is concerned involves self-knowledge. When the Neveu realizes that he is neither capable of nor willing to make the effort to earn his living in any other way, he is forced to decide to return to the Bertin household. He accepts the solution to his situation against which he has been rebelling when he comes to understand himself. On the individual plane, Le Neveu de Rameau implies that one must earn the respect he expects to receive from others and that one ought to be sincere in the expression of his emotions, while exercising self-control in order to avoid offending others. One ought also to try to understand oneself.

From these clues about improved relationships based on correction of individual characteristics, we may move to the
broader realm of group relationships. The Neveu has ridiculed hypocrisy by word and pantomime. He implies that dealings between people ought to be based on sincerity and honesty rather than on hypocrisy and deceit. We have seen how each person exercises his "idiotismes de métier" in order to assure his livelihood and to conform to others in society. The Neveu is opposed to such conformity, yet is forced to go along with the system in order to eat. He rebels against the affront to his pride and self-respect that subjecting himself to another's orders imposes on him. For in the realm of social relationships the Neveu is cast as a fool, having to demean himself with gestures and pretenses. He thereby gains the freedom to express biting truths, but only up to a point. His position is precarious and usually distasteful. He implies that frank encounters between people, where each says what he feels to be the truth, are preferable to forcing some to take the role of fool in order to point out verities that need to be brought to light. The cure for these ills is tolerance based on mutual respect and understanding. The Neveu's objection to his treatment in Bertin's household is that he is not accepted for all that he is as a person and tolerated in his peculiarities. If all are not going to be exactly alike, and the Neveu is personifying originality, then each must be accepted for what he is. Under such conditions encounters between people would be at their optimum. That is, each would feel free to be himself without constraint.
makes so many pious people so unpleasant to associate with, says the Neveu, is their attempt at unnatural constraint of their normal sentiments (V, 428)! In addition, then, to the requirements of the individual for improved social relations which we discussed above, we have here added the group requirements of sincerity, tolerance, frankness, and naturalness. In Chapter IV we shall again consider these suggestions for better social intercourse.

Perhaps the most striking implication of all to be found in Le Neveu that is taken up again in Jacques is that of the "pacte tacite." The "pacte tacite" is, if you will, a rule of conduct, or a presupposition to be born in mind at all times: the good that you do another of whom you are contemptuous will be repaid with evil by that "contemptee." It shows in exaggerated form the horrendous point to which bourgeois society has come. This, in the eyes of the Neveu, is justice.

Surely, surely there is some other basis for men's dealings one with another!

Georges Kay has studied extensively Diderot's state of mind at the time that he wrote much of Le Neveu de Rameau. It was a period of dark pessimism for him, due to a number of crises over L'Encyclopédie and in his personal life. His
natural buoyancy had reasserted itself by the time he began writing *Jacques.* 23 We can be glad for this change and growth in Diderot's thinking that left us a vital relationship as example of a society that could be.

CHAPTER III

TALES OF THE NOBILITY

Having now seen that Diderot criticized social relationships among the bourgeoisie through the person, comments, and pantomime of the Neveu de Rameau, we shall proceed to examine Diderot's commentary in *Jacques le Fataliste* about relationships among the nobility. These stories are presented in whole blocks of third-person narration interspersed on occasion with conversation between the protagonists. There is some description of the characters. There are fewer interruptions than in Jacques' own story and no flashbacks; the language is more elegant than that used to narrate incidents occurring among the common people. Narrations about the nobility include the stories of Mme de la Pommeraye, the Marquis des Arcis, M. Desglands' cheek patch, Jacques' captain and his comrade, and Jacques' master. We shall look at Jacques' master as a character in the fourth chapter where he plays an important role. We shall look also at le Père Hudson.

The story of Mme de la Pommeraye (VI, 110-159) is the best known, and, according to some (V, 4), the best part of *Jacques le Fataliste*. As the reader will recall, the protagonists of this story are Mme de la Pommeraye, the Marquis des Arcis, and Mme d'Aisnon and her daughter. About Mme de la
Pommeraye, Diderot says, "C'était une veuve qui avait des moeurs, de la naissance, de la fortune et de la hauteur... Cette femme vivait très retirée." (VI, 111-112) As for the Marquis des Arcis, "C'était un homme de plaisir, très aimable, croyant peu à la vertu des femmes." (VI, 111) The Marquis is attracted to Mme de la Pommeraye. Without intending to marry, he makes himself so attractive to her that she becomes his mistress. After a time he finds her quiet life without enough variety; he induces her to move among the haute société and to give little supper parties. She complies with his wishes in everything. Soon she suspects that he no longer loves her. To test her theory, she pretends that she no longer loves him; he is delighted to be spared having to make the first confession and admits the waning of his affection. Deeply hurt, Mme de la Pommeraye determines to avenge herself. By inducing the Marquis to fall passionately in love with Mlle d'Aisnon, who with her mother has been a prostitute, and to marry her, Mme de la Pommeraye takes her revenge "d'une manière à effrayer tous ceux qui seraient tentés à l'avenir de séduire et de tromper une honnête femme." (VI, 127) Although it takes her a year to bring him to the point of marriage, and "elle éprouvait qu'un ami tel que lui suffisait au bonheur de la vie...", she persists in her intent. She says, "Je souffre, mais je ne souffre pas seule. Cruel homme! j'ignore quelle sera la durée de mon tourment; mais j'éterniserai le tien..." (VI, 145)
For a long time the reader and the d'Aisnons are unaware of the lengths to which Mme de la Pommeraye intends to go. The two ladies are even unaware of her motives in manipulating them as she does. The Marquis, maddened with desire for Mlle d'Aisnon, wants to offer half his fortune in order to obtain her. "Faites, lui dit la marquise; je n'interdis que la violence; mais croyez, mon ami, que l'honneur et la vertu quand elle est vraie, n'ont point de prix aux yeux de ceux qui ont le bonheur de les posséder." (VI, 151) He apparently takes her comments to be about Mlle d'Aisnon. The reader is aware that Mme de la Pommeraye is speaking about herself. One begins to realize the depth of her feeling over the loss of his love. The d'Aisnons glimpse Mme de la Pommeraye's intentions when they are offered half the Marquis' fortune, and Mme de la Pommeraye will not let them accept it:

La Pommeraye leur répondit sèchement: Est-ce que vous imaginez que ce que je fais, je le fais pour vous? Qui êtes-vous? Que vous dois-je? A quoi tient-il que je ne vous renvoie l'une et l'autre à votre tripot? Si ce que l'on vous offre est trop pour vous, c'est trop peu pour moi. (VI, 151)

One wonders what they have thought Mme de la Pommeraye's motives are in her dealings with them.

In other incidents, as her year's plotting draws to a close, Mme de la Pommeraye shows her masterful use of the means at her disposal, and her trickery. When the Marquis has decided to marry Mlle d'Aisnon, Mme de la Pommeraye
background of the young lady, even though the Marquis thinks such a procedure entirely unnecessary. She reports to him with excellent references about the d'Aisnons. Thus Mme de la Pommeraye assures herself that the Marquis will not investigate the ladies' background and thereby assures the success of her scheme. At one point the Marquis wants to know why she herself does not marry; she answers that she would be concerned about the faithfulness of her husband.

LE MARQUIS. --- ... Mais il me semble qu'on se passe aisémente de la fidélité d'un mari.
MADAME DE LA POMMERAYE. --- D'accord; mais si le mien était infidèle, je serais peut-être assez bizarre pour m'en offenser; et je suis vindicative. (VI, 154)

She hints to him here about her true nature, but he is so overwhelmed by his need to marry Mlle d'Aisnon that he takes no notice of this warning. We have seen here the quality of Mme de la Pommeraye's dealings with others. She manipulates people for her own ends, using them with absolutely no concern for their own good. Yet her appearance of friendship and concern is so credible that it is months before the d'Aisnons realize that what happens to them, except in so far as it serves her purposes, is of absolutely no consequence to her. Diderot's point in his apology for Mme de la Pommeraye (VI, 162-164), that she was disinterested, really makes no difference for our understanding of the basis for her relationships with others. The wealthy have no need to operate out of material interest. Another aspect of her relationships can be seen in the frequent hints she drops about her real
character. She tells the d'Aisnons that if they do not do as she says, she will take no responsibility for them (VI, 132). She tells the Marquis that she is vindictive, that one ought to beware of a woman scorned, that, speaking of Mlle d'Aisnon, "Celle que vous allez avoir vous convient en tout point mieux que moi." (VI, 155) It is as if she wants to be understood as she really is; and yet, with her clever use of trickery and her agile maneuvering, one cannot help but feel that she would turn any understanding one had of her to her own advantage.

Crocker has hit upon the true nature of Mme de la Pommeraye's revenge:

She seeks a poetic revenge: by inducing des Arcis to marry a prostitute, she will reciprocate the worst hurt a woman can receive with the worst that can be inflicted on a man. The results, for pride, self-respect, and social prestige will be equivalent.¹

Diderot does bring out one possible reason for the depth of Mme de la Pommeraye's hurt, and hence for the thoroughness of her revenge.

Elle jouissait de la plus haute considération dans le monde, par la pureté de ses moeurs; et elle s'était rabaisée sur la ligne commune. On dit d'elle, lorsquelle eut agrée l'hommage du marquis des Arcis: "Enfin cette merveilleuse Mme de la Pommeraye s'est donc faite comme une d'entre nous . . ." Elle avait remarqué autour d'elle les souris ironiques; elle avait entendu les plaisanteries, et souvent elle en avait rougi et baissé les yeux; elle avait avalé tout le calice de l'amertume préparé aux femmes dont la conduite réglée a fait trop longtemps la satire des mauvaises moeurs de celles qui les entourent; elle avait supporté tout l'éclat scandaleux par lequel on se venge des imprudentes bégueules qui

¹Crocker, "Jacques . . ., an 'Expérience Morale'," p. 84.
affichent de l'honnêteté. Elle était vanne; et elle serait morte de douleur plutôt que de promener dans le monde, après la honte de la vertu abandonnée, le ridicule d'une délaissée. (VI, 163)

In effect, what the Marquis has accomplished is to shame her by seducing her and then to make her ridiculous by abandoning her. Lesser affronts to honor than these were regularly avenged by duel, as Diderot points out:

Un homme en poignarde un autre pour un geste, pour un démenti; et il ne sera pas permis à une honnête femme perdue, déshonorée, trahie, de jeter le traître entre les bras d'une courtisane? (VI, 163)

As we saw in the introduction, Diderot can only conceive of man as a member of society. By inducing Mme de la Pommeraye to become his mistress by every charming trick he knows, and then by abandoning her after she has been completely won, the Marquis des Arcis forces her to live a solitary life. Unable to face her shame and the ridicule she knows awaits her in her social circle, Mme de la Pommeraye is forced to withdraw from it. Idleness and wealth, superiority of birth with its subsequent pride, produce this utter disregard on the part of each party of the feelings or human worth of the other person. If the nobility will treat one another this way, what will they do to those who are lower born?

We have already spoken of the Marquis des Arcis in connection with Mme de la Pommeraye. We may note here in addition that he never did love her as he indicated to her he did. She is just one more conquest of his. When she sees the depth of his love for Mlle d'Aisnon, Mme de la Pommeraye is moved
to exclaim, "Ah! si j'avais été aimée comme cela, peut-être que . . . " (VI, 145) Not only has he ceased to love her, if she believes that he ever really did, but he never did love her as he loves Mlle d'Aisnon. She was not his first conquest. He is "un homme de plaisir . . . croyant peu à la vertu des femmes" (VI, 111)---from experience one could safely assume. There is, however, a redeeming side to the Marquis' character. After Mme de la Pommeraye has called him back on the morning after his wedding and has informed him of the real background of his bride, he returns home burning with anger. Something in the appearance of his wife and in her repeated swoons through the day moves him. After a two-week absence he returns and forgives her, one would gather as much out of love for her and respect for his wife in her, as out of a desire to spite Mme de la Pommeraye by making something good come out of "le mariage du marquis des Arcis et d'une catin." (VI, 152) His forgiveness and his further effort in making the marriage work are diametrically opposed to his treatment of Mme de la Pommeraye. Throughout the story until the marriage Mlle d'Aisnon has been a shadow, saying little and obeying her mother and Mme de la Pommeraye. We know very little about her except that she is beautiful and not of noble birth. Yet there is something in her sincere distress over the outcome of Mme de la Pommeraye's conniving that moves the Marquis. Insofar as her actions and sincerity move the Marquis to forgive her, she may be taken to be one cause of his
redemption from his former dissolute life. A lower class person here helps redeem a nobleman. We shall see another example of a successful and health-giving relationship across class lines in Chapter IV.

In view of our interest in relationships between people, it is interesting to note the progression found in the endings of this story and of the stories about the Jews in Le Neveu de Rameau. In the story of the Renégat d'Avignon, the Jew loses his fortune and his life; the Renégat gains that fortune. Evil has won. In the story of the Jew of Utrecht, both he and the servant who tricked him are reprimanded by society in the form of a court order by which the Jew must pay the promissory note and the servant does not receive the money, which is given to charity. Neither good nor evil wins. In the story of Hme de la Pommeraye, she is more miserable at the end of the story than at the beginning, for she has continued to love the Marquis after he spurns her. She is no more unhappy, on the other hand, than as if she had lost his love and done nothing about it. The Marquis has shown a side to his character unsuspected before; he has dealt with another human being in a conciliatory manner, based on recognition of the worth of the other. Evil is redeemed through forgiveness and reconciliation.2 In these three stories we see

2Another interesting comparison with this story is Don Juan. He may be contrasted with des Arcis, who while spending his life in seduction and unconcern for his victims, as did Don Juan, appears to have mended his ways.
progression in relationships from the triumph of the person of malicious intent, through a case of equal justice meted out to both parties, to an example of reconciliation.

Let us now consider another story about the nobility. It is very short, but quite significant because of the relationships it points up and the contrast it brings out with relationships among the common people. In the story of the enormous patch on Desglands' cheek (VI, 255-262), two noblemen duel six or seven times for the affection of a beautiful lady. Although another trivial incident might have caused their rivalry to erupt into dueling, the one in the story which is the initial cause is Desglands' inadvertent splashing of raw egg on his rival's face at dinner, and the latter's automatic lifting of his hand to slap Desglands. Desglands exclaims, "Monsieur, je le tiens pour reçu." (VI, 260) They duel, in spite of the fact that the lady has sworn never to see again whichever kills the other. Desglands next appears with an enormous healing plaster on one cheek. Each time he wins a duel with his rival, he reduces his patch by cutting off half an inch all around. The chagrin the lady feels over their rivalry eventually weakens her health until she dies. The rival eventually dies too, although not in a duel with Desglands, and Desglands removes the last of his patch. Anyone, except perhaps a nobleman, is struck by the ridiculousness of the initial incident in this chain of events and
and on the dueling intended to settle it. Other classes of people suffer similar insults and rivalries without resorting to such drastic measures, as we shall see in Chapter III. There is implied here a sharp criticism of relationships among the nobility.

Let us turn now to another tale. Jacques tells his master about a former master, a captain, and another captain who are at the same time the best of friends and the bitterest of enemies (VI, 64-67, 72-73). They have a mania for seeking one another out; once together for any length of time, they have a mania for dueling. At the height of the story, the rich captain settles a considerable sum of money on the poor captain in the event of the latter's killing the former—and they proceed to a field to duel fiercely. The story is brief and ends inconclusively. It is puzzling. It does tend, however, to indicate the ambivalent nature of human relationships. In any relationship, love and hate, sincere admiration and objective criticism may exist side by side. Diderot also uses this peculiar story to make an attack on dueling, and by extension on war.

However, it is in Jacques' master that Diderot especially embodies his conception of the nobility of his time. Smietanski has grasped this very clearly:

Dans ces années du siècle finissant, beaucoup de gens commencent à pressentir la décadence de la noblesse. Plus que jamais, les nobles restent attachés à leurs privilèges et à leur oisiveté. Aussi les richesses matérielle et spirituelle se sont-elles largement
C'est dans la bourgeoisie ascendante et dans le peuple que sont prises désormais les initiatives heureuses, que se trouvent les forces vives du pays. Or Diderot voit ce vide de la noblesse: "Vous ne connaissez pas encore cette espèce-là, dit-il du maître. Il a peu d'idées dans la tête; il lui arrive de dire quelque chose de sensé, c'est de réminiscence ou d'inspiration, il a des yeux comme vous et moi; mais on ne sait la plupart du temps s'il regarde. Il ne dort pas, il ne voit pas non plus; il se laisse exister; c'est sa fonction habituelle." (VI, 32)

Le maître, quel bel exemple de parasitisme! Au fond, que sait-il faire en dehors de priser et regarder l'heure? Il est esclave de Jacques, non parce que celui-ci a pris de l'ascendant sur lui, mais parce qu'il est incapable d'agir seul, parce que, livré à lui-même, il ne sait que trembler ou se faire voler. Il est un monde d'ennui et d'inutilité. Jamais, d'ailleurs, la vanité de ses activités n'est aussi patente que dans ces amours. Entre le chevalier de Saint-Ouin et Agathe la fausse innocente, son temps se passe en futilités, à dilapider la fortune paternelle: "La nécessité qui vous presse, lui dit Le Brun par derrière le chevalier de Saint-Ouin, est une plaisante nécessité, une bouillotte, une partie de la belle, quelque fille!" (VI, 228) Digne représentant de la haute société.3

Jacques' master's love story is one of gullible simplicity taken advantage of by calculating and clever knavery. Early in the telling of the story, Jacques indicates that he sees the trickery that is coming. The reader gets the impression that had Jacques been in his master's position, he would never have been duped as his master was. The outcome of this story is pertinent to our discussion. As the reader will recall, after being jailed on charges brought by Agathe's father, Jacques' master is forced to pay a considerable fine, and expenses for the birth, maintenance, and education of the child.
of Saint-Ouin and Agathe. The child has now grown old enough to be placed with someone to learn a trade. As Jacques and his master approach the house where the child has been staying in the country, Saint-Ouin is coming out of the house. The master and Saint-Ouin duel, and the latter is killed. The master escapes on horseback. When he is apprehended, he finds that he knows the police chief and is soon released. Jacques is imprisoned for much longer, and only escapes because some bandits release him from prison. The difference between the treatment of a nobleman who had killed a man, and his servant who was merely present at the scene of the event, but is a commoner, is obvious. Jacques' master has had the desire at various points in Jacques' telling of his story to use arms to defend Jacques. He now has defended his own honor by taking instant revenge upon the crook who swindled him. As we study some of the relationships among the common people, we shall note the difference between their reactions to situations of this sort and the instantaneous duel of Jacques' master and Saint-Ouin. Other aspects of the master's character are best brought out by his relationship with Jacques, which we shall examine in Chapter IV.

There remains the story of le Père Hudson (VI, 183-192). The clergy cannot really be placed in any class, as we mentioned in the Introduction. However, le Père Hudson feels free to call on a minister and turn affairs to his advantage.

4For example, when Jacques was attacked by robbers (VI, 85).
He is rewarded for his fight against the Jansenists by being given a rich abbey. At the end of his story we find him visiting in a château. Therefore, according to the rank to which he rose in the church and to the society he kept, we may safely discuss le Père Hudson in a chapter on the nobility, although Diderot tells us nothing of his birth. Le Père Hudson is another outstanding example of the extent of corruption to which a man may go. He is extremely clever and uses every means to achieve his ends. We have mixed feelings about him; he does an excellent job of reforming his order, and yet he himself engages in extensive debauchery. He manipulates everyone for his own ends. Smietanski speaks of him thus:

Pour sa part, le père Hudson, on s'en souvient, incarne la finesse, l'intelligence mises au service de la pire débauche... Il ne répugne ni au rapt, ni à la séquestration, Tous les moyens lui sont bons; hypocrisie, intrigue, séduction. Aucune valeur morale qu'il ne foule aux pieds; famille, religion, justice, humanité. Il exploite sans vergogne la crédulité et les sentiments les plus nobles de ceux à qui il a affaire. Bref, il est le type même du prêtre corrompu.

Crocker also comments on le Père Hudson:

He dominates and tyrannizes others in the convent.... Exactly as with Mme de la Pommeraye, hypocrisy becomes his major mode of action.... He considers himself the exception, by right of superiority—a "right" which extends to using other men and women as instruments or means to satisfy the ends of his ego.

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5 Smietanski, p. 96-97.
6 Crocker, "Jacques ..., an 'Expérience Morale'," p. 88.
The hypocrisy which Diderot attacked in *Le Neveu de Rameau* we see pointed up again here. Here too it is in connection with people who pay lip service to one set of standards but who act according to entirely other motivating forces.

The ending of this story too is interesting to our study. Richard, the spy sent from the general of the order to trap Hudson, tells of meeting him again at a later time, in the château of a mutual friend. L'Abbé Hudson arrives with a beautiful woman on his arm. His first words to Richard are: "Eh! c'est vous, mon cher Richard? vous avez voulu me perdre, je vous le pardonne; pardonnez-moi votre visite au petit Châtelet, et n'y pensons plus." Richard's response is: "Convenez, monsieur l'abbé, que vous étiez un grand vaurien." (VI, 191) From there Richard attempts to bring Hudson to confess that he is still operating in the same manner. For a time Hudson denies this. But at last he is forced to admit that he has not changed. As soon as Hudson makes an honest statement, we hear only that the four persons dine gaily together and promise to see each other again. When they have forgiven one another, and Hudson has dropped his mask with Richard, they can accept one another on honest terms and are able to get along together.

In conclusion, let us review briefly by stating that we have seen in this chapter that relationships among the nobility, at least as seen in the narrations found in *Jacques le Fataliste*, are based on extreme selfishness, manipulation of
others, hypocrisy, and trickery. By comparison, the bourgeois world of *Le Neveu de Rameau* seems less vile. The bourgeoisie is found to be mediocre at best in its virtue, but by the same token, it is mediocre in its vice. A bourgeois feels contempt for his fellow and deceives him. A nobleman thinks only of himself and manipulates and tricks his fellow. In the next chapter we shall peruse Diderot's comments about relationships among the common people.
CHAPTER IV

JACQUES ENCOUNTERS THE COMMON PEOPLE

As we stated in the Introduction, in this chapter we shall take up the third large social grouping in France of the eighteenth century, the common people. Loy speaks of Diderot as "the link between LeSage and Beaumarchais as historians of the third estate."\textsuperscript{1} Dutourd goes so far as to contend that Diderot himself was a commoner, and says further,

\begin{quote}
Il est bien curieux que, lorsqu'on parle de "littérature prolétarienne," on ne cite jamais Diderot. C'est lui, pourtant, qui a fait entrer le peuple dans les livres. \\
Diderot a inventé une certaine forme de dialogue, il a inventé le mauvais drame bourgeois, il a inventé la flânerie, etc. Personne ne dit qu'il a aussi inventé le peuple, alors que c'est peut-être là sa trouvaille la plus audacieuse, la semence la plus féconde qu'on ait jeté en quatre cents ans sur la littérature française.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

It is certainly true that Diderot relates events in the lives of common people with much realism and gusto, and that the common people play a vital role in Jacques le Fataliste. In this chapter we shall first see what Diderot says about the situation of the common people in general. We shall then discuss several characteristics of the relationships of the common people with one another and try to determine the bases

\textsuperscript{1}Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{2}Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, preface by Jean Dutourd (Paris, 1959), pp. 7, 9.
for their conduct. Lastly, we shall look at Jacques himself, and his special characteristics in dealing with others.

Diderot makes several comments about living conditions among the common people which will serve as a background for our examination of their conduct with one another. Early in Jacques le Fataliste, Diderot has the husband of the peasant woman reprimand his wife for her compassionate gesture when Jacques fainted on her doorstep:

L'année est mauvaise; à peine pouvons-nous suffire à nos besoins et aux besoins de nos enfants. Le grain est d'une cherté! Point de vin! Encore si l'on trouvait à travailler; mais les riches se retraitent; les pauvres gens ne font rien; pour une journée qu'on emploie, on en perd quatre. Personne ne paie ce qu'il doit; les créanciers sont d'une âpreté qui désespère; et voilà le moment que tu prends pour retirer ici un inconnu, un étranger qui y restera tant qu'il plaira à Dieu et au chirurgien qui ne se pressera pas de le guérir; car ces chirurgiens font durer les maladies le plus longtemps qu'ils peuvent; qui n'a pas le sou, et qui doublera, triplerà notre dépense. (VI, 26-27)

Smietanski points up the plight of the peasant and relates it to the above words:

1770 c'est l'année de la querelle sur le commerce des blés. On sait la part que Diderot y a prise, d'abord en publîcant les Dialogues sur le commerce des blés de l'abbé Galiani, et, ensuite, quand l'abbé Morellet y eut répondu, en écrivant la Vive Apologie de l'Abbé Galiani. Au long du texte on trouve des pages émues et indignées:

Qui est-ce qui forme la population des champs? Est-ce un petit nombre de fermiers aisés ou la multitude infinie de salariés misérables? Sur quelques fermiers aisés de la Flandre, du Languedoc, de la Picardie, de l'Ile-de-France, l'abbé Morellet voit toujours l'agriculture enrichir, tandis qu'elle ne met à l'aise que trois hommes pour en laisser trois cents dans la peine, les petits fermiers, les petits laboureurs et les
salariés de tous.

On conçoit à la lecture de ces témoignages, l'importance du problème paysan dans la pensée de Diderot. Cette misère, cette disette, c'est une réalité à laquelle Diderot, observateur honnête, ne pouvait rester insensible. On aurait donc tort de ne voir que couleur locale dans la plainte nocturne du paysan.3

At the Grand-Cerf Inn when a neighbor comes to borrow, the innkeeper replies:

Tu es dans la misère, tu ne sais où prendre de quoi ensemencer tes champs; ton propriétaire, las de te faire des avances, ne te veut plus rien donner. Tu viens à moi; cette femme intercède; cette maudite bavarde, qui est la cause de toutes les sottises de ma vie, me résout à te prêter; je te prête; tu promets de me rendre; tu me manques dix fois. (VI, 103)

Here we see described the poverty syndrome of unending debt, good intentions but little evidence of payment, and further debt. Smietanski remarks thus about this incident: "À la misère s'ajoute l'humiliation: l'hôte tutoie son débiteur qui le voussole, et peut se permettre de le maltraiter."4

The impecunious neighbor explains that the bailiff is at his home at that very moment, that his daughter will have to enter domestic service in Paris, and that his son will have to join the army. We shall see the outcome of this incident later on in this chapter. In yet another short incident Diderot describes the aftermath of the death of a café proprietor:

... un limonadier, décédé il y a quelque temps dans mon voisinage, laissa deux pauvres orphelins en bas âge. Le commissaire se transporte chez le défunt; on appose un scellé. On lève ce scellé, on fait un

3Smietanski, p. 83. 4Ibid., p. 84.
It is evident from these examples that Diderot was aware of the misery and poverty of the greater part of France's population in his time.5

Several of the characteristics of relationships among the common people are closely related to their constant economic need. First, let us note their self-interest. Each commoner feels he must protect his own and his family's interests. The doctor who agrees to take Jacques into his home bargains closely over the amount Jacques will pay for his bed, board, care, and medicines (VI, 80-82). When Jacques is about to leave the home of this doctor for Desglands' château, the doctor's wife urges him to recommend her husband at the château (VI, 101). Jeanne recognizes the probable neglect of Jacques that will come about after a time at the château: both the servants and the master will forget him, and he could starve there (VI, 168). In a society where poverty is a daily fact of life, the peasants look out for their own interests first.

Along with self-interest, the common people whom Diderot shows us are clever in their methods of promoting their own interests. In order to refresh the reader's memory,

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5Robert Ergang, Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo (Boston, 1939), pp. 628-632.
let us recall some of the details of these events. When Jacques returns to the magistrate's house to look for his purse, the servant girl, who had found it on the bed post and kept it, cleverly implicates Jacques himself. She tells her master that Jacques gave her the purse (VI, 36-37)! Her cleverness only means, however, that she loses her job for whoring instead of for stealing. In another incident, Jacques pockets the keys to the room of the sleeping brigands whom he has terrorized and stripped, and to the room where he has hidden their clothes. When his master questions him, Jacques declares that he has carried off the keys, because without them, those at the inn must break down two doors in order to release the brigands and to retrieve their clothing, all of which gains time for Jacques and his master. A closer questioning reveals that Jacques does not really know why he wants to gain time, however (VI, 19)! It was, nonetheless, a clever move on his part to protect his and his master's interests. In yet a third example, we see a small tradesman conniving with the law to save himself from a jail term. A nobleman's steward is attracted by a baker's wife. He manages to obtain an order for the baker's arrest. The police officer serving the warrant, however, is the baker's friend. They arrange for the baker to go into hiding while the policeman spies on the baker's wife and her lover. At last the steward is known to be inside the house with her. The police officer picks the lock, enters the house, and announces that
he has come to arrest the baker. The steward discloses that it is he, the steward; the baker is not there. The policeman replies, "Vous mentez, vous êtes le pâtissier, car le pâtissier est celui qui couche avec la pâtissière. Levez-vous, habillez-vous, et suivez-moi." (VI, 96-99) In each of these three cases, we have seen that the common people use their wits to protect themselves, often on the spur of the moment, but without maliciously intending to harm others. Protecting their own self-interests is their primary purpose.

Another characteristic of the common people's dealings with one another, as seen in Jacques, is that they often congenially arrange their affairs to their mutual advantage. The doctor who treats Jacques in the peasant's home arranges with the peasant and his wife for Jacques to pay them for their kindness and care. Jacques also pays the doctor for convalescent care in the doctor's home (VI, 42-43, 82).

The clergymen who live among the common people are not excluded from arrangements of mutual advantage; for example, Jacques' brother Jean is a priest who has worked things out rather well for himself: "Il est sûr que quand il (frère Jean) entrait dans une maison, la bénédiction du ciel y entrait avec lui; et que s'il y avait une fille, deux mois après sa visite elle était mariée." (VI, 48) At the moment of Jean's departure for Lisbon, he comes in the night to say good-bye to his family. Jacques relates what happened in these words:
... puis il me lâcha dans la main les cinq louis dont je vous ai parlé, avec cinq autres pour la dernière des filles du village, qu'il avait mariée et qui venait d'accoucher d'un gros garçon qui ressemblait à frère Jean comme deux gouttes d'eau. (VI, 51)

To cite another reference to priests, the landlady from the Grand-Cerf says about hers, "... c'est un bon homme qui, les dimanches et jours de fêtes, laisse danser les filles et les garçons, et qui permet aux hommes et aux femmes de venir chez moi, pourvu qu'ils n'en sortent pas ivres." (VI, 149)

Satisfied parishioners surely are more apt to care well for their priest. We see that the common people practice mutual aid.

A final characteristic of the conduct of the peasant class with one another might be called "accommodation." By this is meant a give and take in relationships and a lack of over-sensitiveness. One person may offend another by deed or spoken insult; while expressing his disgruntlement in words or gestures, the offended party accommodates himself to the offense. He neither takes excessive harmful revenge nor does he come to blows with his offender. Take, for example, the reaction of Bigre-the-son to Jacques' forcing of Bigre's girl Justine. Bigre-the-son had sent Jacques to Bigre-the-father in order to have Jacques distract the father long enough for Justine to escape from the loft where she had spent the night with Bigre-the-son. Jacques, who is piqued by Justine's attentions to Bigre-the-son instead of to him, pretends that he has been out all night and is afraid to go home. Bigre-the-father sends Jacques up to Bigre the main...
bed, where Justine is still hiding. Jacques does not waste the occasion. When Bigre-the-son returns home, he realizes that Jacques has tricked him. He grumbles and pouts and refuses to drink with his father and Jacques. Jacques needles him a little, especially when the father guesses that his son is pouting over Justine. Yet the adventure ends well:

LE MAITRE. — Et quelle fut la fin de l'aventure entre Bigre ton ami et Justine?

JACQUES. — Comme elle devait être. Il se fâcha, elle se fâcha plus fort que lui; elle pleura, il s'attendrit; elle lui jura que j'étais le meilleur ami qu'il eût; je lui jurai qu'elle était la plus honnête fille du village. Il nous crut, nous demanda pardon, nous en aimâ et nous en estima davantage tous deux. (VI, 200-209)

On another occasion at a wedding feast two farmers tease Jacques about the wedding night, about which he plays ignorant. Dame Marguerite and Dame Suzon, the wives of the farmers, each takes it upon herself to enlighten Jacques in his ignorance. Each finds out on that occasion that he is not so ignorant as he pretended. Neither takes offense when she learns of the other's part in Jacques' education. Jacques' master asks him about this very point:

LE MAITRE. — Et tu n'as pas revu ces femmes?

JACQUES. — Pardonnez-moi, plus d'une fois.

LE MAITRE. — Toutes deux?

JACQUES. — Toutes deux.

LE MAITRE. — Elles ne se sont pas brouillées?

JACQUES. — Utiles l'une à l'autre, elles s'en sont aimées davantage.

LE MAITRE. — Les nôtres en auraient bien fait autant, mais chacune avec son chacun . . . (VI, 217)
When we were discussing the story of Desglands in Chapter II, we saw that he and his rival dueled a number of times for the affection of a certain lady, and the offense that brought on the first duel was a trivial dinner table mishap, unfortunate but neither intentional nor disastrous. By contrast with the Desglands' story, we see the incidents above. Two young men share one girl, but one lets himself be persuaded by the other and the girl that he is mistaken in his suspicions. In the other case, two women share amicably the same lover. In neither case is there a question of violent hatred or trial by skill and force. The nobility in Diderot's stories is hypersensitive to affronts to its honor or person. The common people, on the other hand, seem to accept the fact that one will be insulted and will have to accept situations that are unpleasant, but that one should accommodate oneself to life among one's fellows on that basis.

We have seen some characteristics of relationships among the common people. We have looked at their self-interest and their cleverness in protecting it, at their arrangements to aid one another, at their acceptance of what comes from living among other people, and at their flexibility in adapting to it. Diderot has painted a straightforward picture. It is not a very pleasant one. Let us add then a few examples of some noble acts performed by the common people, unusual perhaps in their nobility, but nonetheless a part of the picture of the peasants that Diderot gives us. One such
example is Jacques' generosity in giving Jeanne almost all of his money when he is moved by her weeping over her broken oil jar (VI, 85). She expresses her gratitude to Jacques by her sensible arrangements for his continued care while at the château (VI, 168). Elsewhere, the peasant's wife shows compassion for Jacques, a wounded soldier brought by chance to her door (VI, 14). In still another incident, Marguerite is upset when her husband and his friend make fun of Jacques at the wedding feast, and takes steps to preclude its happening again (VI, 215). A final example of a disinterested act by a commoner is Jacques' response to the doctor's wife when she urges him to put in a good word for her husband at the château:

---Mais, madame la doctoresse, n'y a-t-il pas un chirurgien du château?
---Assurément!
---Et si cet autre était votre mari, seriez-vous bien aise qu'on le desservit et qu'il fût expulsé?
---Ce chirurgien est un homme à qui vous ne devez rien, et je crois que vous devez quelque chose à mon mari; si vous allez à deux pieds comme ci-devant, c'est son ouvrage.
---Et parce que votre mari m'a fait du bien, il faut que je fasse du mal à un autre? Encore si la place était vacante . . . (VI, 101)

Beside the many examples set down for us by the honest pen of Diderot of the self-seeking actions of peasants and small tradesmen, we have then the above examples of kindness and uprightness to balance the picture.

There is an excellent example of an act of kindness, of self-interest, and of mutual help in one incident which
epitomizes the common people's dealings with one another. The incident involves the landlord and his neighbor, called "godfather." As the reader will recall, at the time of this incident, the landlord has already helped his neighbor. His own self-interest is so apparent in his first remarks, that the godfather is offended and starts to leave without the loan for which he came. As he goes, he comments about what will become of his children. The landlord is moved to pity and insists that the neighbor accept a loan. The latter, still offended, refuses. It takes the combined persuasion of several present to convince him that he must take the money; he does, remarking at the same time upon the landlord's singularly inconsistent character.

There is another aspect to this story. These two men are related to one another in a special way: one is godfather to the other's child. To the bonds of being neighbors

6 The French word is "compère." This can mean simply a neighbor or comrade. It can mean a name given to another man whom one does not know how to address, but who is of one's own rank. On the other hand, the word's original meaning is "godfather," being the term used by the child's parents and the godmother in addressing the godfather. Diderot so uses it in the incident of the doctor and the peasants:

LE CHIRURGIEN. ---A ma filleule; comment se porte-t-elle?
L'HOTESSE. ---Fort bien,
LE CHIRURGIEN. ---Allons, compère, à votre femme et à la mienne; ce sont deux bonnes femmes. (VI, 42)

In the case of the landlord and the "compère," it is not clear whether the landlord is godfather to the neighbor's child, or the other way around. See Adolphe Hatzfeld and Arsène Darmesteter, Dictionnaire Général de la Langue Française (Paris, 1926), I, 400.

7 See the quotation on p. 56.
and friends is added this one of mutual obligation. A godfather assumes responsibilities toward his godchild, notably in promising to rear him in the event of the death of his parents, and in promising to assure his spiritual education. By extension, he is in a special relationship of mutual obligation with the parents of the godchild. The landlord is pressured by events and obligations into doing the humane thing that his first reactions indicate he would rather not do. In this story are mingled examples of several of the characteristics which we have seen in the peasants' conduct with one another; in addition, there is the element of obligation based on a spiritual bond.

We are now ready to state the bases for conduct among the common people. The reader will recall that among the bourgeoisie, mutual contempt, deceit, and a desire to appear to conform to the same pattern as the rest of one's social grouping were the motivating forces for their conduct with one another. Among the nobility, the bases for conduct were seen to be selfishness, manipulation of others, hypocrisy, and trickery. Among the common people, dealings with one another are based on self-interest, mutual obligations, and an accommodation to the exigencies of living closely with others. Because of mutual need, no one can afford to offend permanently or to be perpetually offended by his fellow.

As Diderot presents these classes, we see that he is not deluded about the motives for their conduct. He recognizes
deceit at all levels of society. Among the bourgeoisie, each wants to appear better than his fellows and to push himself forward financially. Among the nobility, the reasons for manipulating and deceiving people are as varied as the passions of the heart. Among the common people, it is often necessary to use cunning in order to stay alive. The difference between the groups in this matter of deceit would seem to lie in two areas. One is that the common people are not trying to get ahead socially, nor are they trying to fulfill some need of a bored ego. They are trying to get enough food and clothing merely to keep them and their dependents from perishing from year to year. Another difference between the groups is that Diderot presents the common people with more sympathy, more enthusiasm, more verve than he presents the other classes. Diderot catches the salty humor and peasant dialogue well. Between these two factors, then, the common people as a class appear less corrupt in their dealings with one another than do the other two classes. Jacques, as an outstanding example of a thoughtful commoner of good sense and adaptability, emphasizes the best aspects of his class.

In the chapter on the nobility, we took up Jacques' master's love story and saw something of his place in the novel as an embodiment of the decadent nobility. In this chapter we have seen several incidents involving Jacques himself. In general, his actions reveal him to be rather
more willing to accommodate himself to the situation in which he finds himself, and to placate others, rather than to demand every one of his rights. For instance, Jacques is very agreeable in his bargaining with the doctor over the daily price he is to pay for his care, although he does not submit completely to the doctor's wishes. Again, Jacques lets the magistrate override his attempts to object that he has not slept with the servant girl. Another time, Jacques plays the gullible innocent for the pleasure of the two jokers at the wedding feast, and several days later, for the pleasure of their wives. Without weakening himself as a person, he is able to assure good relationships between himself and those with whom he is dealing. We have seen that he is generous when he is moved by pity, as when he gives his own last money to Jeanne. In another incident, Jacques tries to calm the irate landlady who is shouting at two men who have kicked her little dog (VI, 91). Again, he is very grateful to the man who took him in when his horse bumped Jacques' head against the door lintel (VI, 75-76). He feels a real affection for and is loyal to his master throughout the novel.

For all his flexibility in assuring agreeable relations with others, Jacques does not value himself any the less. In fact, on the point of his own worth he is adamant; he intends to be taken for the person he is and not to be underrated. This unusual aspect of Jacques' character
comes out most clearly in his relationship with the landlady of the Grand-Cerf. We shall review this incident in some detail because of its importance and to refresh the reader's memory. When he arrives, she is upset about the mistreatment of her dog. Jacques speaks soothingly to her, and she answers him in a polite and friendly way, calling him "monsieur," and taking him for an ordinary valet (VI, 91-92). The next morning when the landlady has settled herself to tell them the story of Madame de la Pommeraye, she begins by saying, "Il faut se méfier des valets; les maîtres n'ont point de pires ennemis . . ." Jacques rises to the bait and answers, "Madame, vous ne savez pas ce que vous dites; il y en a de bons, il y en a de mauvais, et l'on compterait peut-être plus de bons valets que de bons maîtres." A quarrel does not erupt; the landlady says, rather, "Il faut convenir que s'il y a de bien méchants hommes, il y a de bien méchantes femmes." Jacques, still nettled by the landlady's initial remarks, replies, "Et qu'il ne faut pas aller loin pour les trouver."

L'HOTESSÉ. ---De quoi vous mêlez-vous? Je suis femme, il me convient de dire des femmes tout ce qu'il me plaîra; je n'ai que faire de votre approbation.
JACQUES. ---Mon approbation en vaut bien une autre.
L'HOTESSÉ. ---Vous avez là, monsieur, un valet qui fait l'entendu et qui vous manque. J'ai des valets aussi, mais je voudrais bien qu'ils s'avisassent! . . .

Encouraged by the master's words, the landlady gets up suddenly to make a teasing gesture toward Jacques, drops the
little dog she had on her lap, and becomes very distressed for its welfare. Jacques laughs uproariously. After seeing to the dog's comfort, the landlady again prepares to begin her narrative.

L'HOTESSE. —Ces deux hommes avec lesquels j'étais en querelle pour ma pauvre Nicole, lorsque vous êtes arrivé, monsieur ... 
JACQUES. —Dites messieurs.
L'HOTESSE. —Et pourquoi?
JACQUES. —C'est qu'on nous a traités jusqu'à présent avec cette politesse, et que j'y suis fait. Mon maître m'appelle Jacques, les autres, monsieur Jacques.
L'HOTESSE. —Je ne vous appelle ni Jacques, ni monsieur Jacques, je ne vous parle pas. . . .


The landlady has to interrupt her story to attend to the business of the inn. When she returns to their room, she brings two bottles of champagne. She says, "Allons, monsieur Jacques, faisons la paix . . ." Thereupon, we are told, "Jacques la prit par le milieu du corps, et l'embrassa fortement; sa rancune n'avait jamais tenu contre du bon vin et une belle femme . . ." She opens a bottle, spraying champagne all over Jacques' face. Then we read, "Jacques s'était prêté à cette cspièglerie, et l'hôtesse de rire, et Jacques et son maître de rire." (VI, 124-125) From then on their relationship is excellent.
Jacques wants to be accepted for the man that he is, and not relegated to a certain category and the subsequent traditional treatment of that category of person. The landlady has been calling Jacques "Monsieur Jacques" from shortly after his objection to being ignored in the conversation. Her champagne is only a symbol of her acceptance of him as he is. This is a key incident in *Jacques le Fataliste*, for it establishes that Jacques is out of the ordinary and is able to be accepted as such. It also points up again the value of adaptability, flexibility, and accommodation in human relationships. Neither the landlady nor Jacques holds rigidly to his position. The landlady begins addressing Jacques as he wishes, but cannot resist playing a joke on him. He laughs at her when she drops her dog, but he accepts champagne in his face as a good joke and laughs then too. He later compliments her on her beauty. Both Jacques' being out of the ordinary, and his flexibility in relationships will be significant in Chapter IV, where we shall discuss the relationship of Jacques and his master and its implications.
CHAPTER V

GOOD CONDUCT, OR A LIVING RELATIONSHIP

In discussing Le Neveu de Rameau we made note of the Neveu's comment about fools or clowns. He says,

Moi, je suis le fou de Bertin et de beaucoup d'autres, le vôtre peut-être dans ce moment, ou peut-être vous le mien; celui qui serait sage n'aurait point de fou; celui donc qui a un fou n'est pas sage; s'il n'est pas sage il est fou et peut être, fût-il le roi, le fou de son fou. (V, 443)

He suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship possible between people, particularly between masters and servants. It will be remembered that in Chapter I we related the fool or clown to the parasite, who was dependent upon a patron for his keep and who was expected to reciprocate with certain valet duties and by providing entertainment, particularly in the form of witticisms. The role was a subservient one that impecunious artists and/or mediocre ones accepted in order to pursue their art. The innovation in the Neveu's comment quoted above is his seeing the possibility for a reversal of role in the relationship of patron and parasite: the patron or master might speak impertinences wittily and thereby enlighten the fool or servant. Conceivably each could bring the other to a deeper understanding of the meaning of his life and of his relationship with others. We shall see how this is done in Jacques le Fataliste.
Two passages in Le Neveu relating to discrepancies in men’s economic situation serve as a good introduction to Diderot’s suggested improvements in social relationships.

LUI. —Mais, s’il est dans la nature d’avoir appétit, car c’est toujours à l’appétit que j’en reviens, à la sensation qui m’est toujours présente, je trouve qu’il n’est pas du bon ordre de n’avoir pas toujours de quoi manger. Que diable d’économie! des hommes qui regorgent de tout tandis que d’autres, qui ont un estomac importun comme eux, une faim renaissante comme eux, et pas de quoi mettre sous la dent. Le pis c’est la posture contrainte où nous tient le besoin. L’homme nécessiteux ne marche pas comme un autre, il saute, il rampe, il se tortille, il se traîne, il passe sa vie à prendre et à exécuter des positions. (V, 481-482)

The Neveu lashes out against a social economy where there is so much inequality, where many do not have even enough to eat. If those in need want to eat, they must humiliate themselves before the well-fed. Lui and Moi then go on to conclude that everyone, even the king, has to pose before someone from whom he wants a favor. In the case of the king, it is God and his mistress; in the case of others, their superiors in resources or power. As Moi puts it, "Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux est le grand branle de la terre; chacun a sa petite Hus et son Bertin." (V, 483) These comments about the universality of posing do not obviate its odious nature to anyone in the subservient position. It is with satisfaction that the Neveu makes the following remarks about how, in the end, all men are equal.

Au dernier moment, tous sont également riches, et Samuel Bernard, qui, à force de vols, de pillages, de banqueroutes, laisse vingt-sept millions en or, et Rameau qui ne laissera rien, Rameau à qui la charité
fournira la serpillière dont on l’enveloppera. Le mort n’entend pas sonner les cloches. C’est en vain que cent prêtres s’égossillent pour lui, qu’il est précédé et suivi d’une longue file de torches ardentes, son âme ne marche pas à côté du maître des cérémonies. Pourrir sous du marbre, pourrir sous de la terre, c’est toujours pourrir. (V, 408)

One implication of this bitter tirade is that equality is a good thing; it should be evident in life, not just in death.

From these three quotations from Le Neveu de Rameau we see Diderot’s profound dissatisfaction with the economic basis of society and with the social structure based upon it. He sees the flaws in an economy where many are hungry while others are overfed. He sees that the social organization based on such an economy causes the well-fed to be proud and selfish and forces the hungry to resort to flattery and abnegation of their inherent worth as persons.

Diderot does more than voice a protest. He suggests that a subtle interplay of personalities in a relationship across economic and social lines is possible; that a relationship may exhibit a reciprocity that almost amounts to a leveling of society to make everyone a member of the same class. If one is the fool of the other and vice versa, then where is the innate superiority of some, the essential inferiority of others? Diderot goes even further. He visualizes such a relationship; he fills in the outlines with flesh and mannerisms; he clothes in rich dialogue the very relationship that he has hinted at in Le Neveu de Rameau. That reciprocal relationship is that of Jacques and his master.
In this chapter we shall examine the conduct of Jacques and his master toward one another, building toward an unusual spoken agreement governing their conduct. We shall then look back over their relationship to find how they illustrate a number of implicit suggestions scattered through the Neveu's conversation in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. As we have done in the other chapters, we shall try to determine the bases for the conduct of Jacques and his master. Lastly we shall speculate about whether Diderot intended that this hypothetical couple be the forerunner of an improved society.

Let us look first at the way in which Jacques and his master deal with one another in order to find the nature of this new relationship. It is significant that their relationship is dynamic. It grows and changes before our eyes. Because of the diffuse nature of the plot lines in this novel, and in order to help the reader we shall summarize the events to which we refer.

As the novel opens, as Jacques and his master are conversing on horseback, Jacques makes the opening remarks that lead to his master's requesting him to relate his amorous adventures. The master addresses Jacques with "tu," but Jacques addresses his master with "vous"; except for that, however, the exchange is equal and amicable. They sometimes discuss theoretical questions, such as Jacques' fatalism. Sometimes they tell each other stories. The first hint of the relative merit of the two comes in an escapade in an
inn on the first night of their journey. They are given miserable food and drink because some brigands who arrived before them have eaten all the provisions. The thugs have the audacity to send the bones of a chicken they have just eaten to Jacques and his master. Jacques takes the master's pistols, goes to the brigands' room, terrorizes them, tells them to strip and get to bed, takes their clothing, returns to his own room, barricades the door, and goes to bed. His comment to his shocked and fearful master is, "Tous, dans cette maison, nous avons peur les uns des autres; ce qui prouve que nous sommes tous des sots . . ." (VI, 17) Jacques sleeps soundly; his master rests hardly at all. In the morning, the master insists to a relaxed and sleepy Jacques that they leave quickly: "Quel diable d'homme es-tu? Jacques, mon ami, je t'en prie." (VI, 18) Jacques has proven himself the superior person in this frightening situation.

Throughout the novel Jacques is aware that he is the valet of his master. He helps him to undress, saddles his horse, orders the meals, pays the innkeepers, returns for the forgotten belongings, bargains for a new horse. He addresses his master with "Monsieur." He bows to his master's superior social position. For instance, when Jacques is mounted on what we later learn is the hangman's horse, which has a penchant for racing toward every gallows it sees, Jacques says, "J'espère, monsieur, que vous ne me condamnerez pas à finir
notre voyage sur ce bizarre animal . . . " (VI, 67) The master teases Jacques that the horse's penchant is a sign that Jacques will shortly swing from a gallows. The reader has a hint, however, that all is not what one would normally expect between a master and his valet when Jacques makes the insolent remark that perhaps it is another's (that is, the master's) hanging at which he will be present, not his own. His master shows irritation at the impertinence, but Jacques calms him. In spite of brief flurries in their relationship, each recognizes that they are well-suited to and need one another:

LE MAITRE. ---Tu aimes mieux parler mal que te taire.
JACQUES. ---Il est vrai.
LE MAITRE. ---Et moi, j'aime mieux entendre mal parler que de ne rien entendre.
JACQUES. ---Cela nous met tous deux fort à notre aise. (VI, 161)

In fact, when Jacques has to leave his master by the side of the road and return to their lodging to find the watch and purse they have forgotten, his master is terribly bored. He has only one resource left, his tobacco pouch. He falls asleep and his horse is stolen as a result of his boredom.

The relationship of Jacques and his master goes beyond amiable tiffs, companionable conversation, and interdependence. When the hangman's horse bumps Jacques' head against a door lintel and he is knocked unconscious, Jacques' master has him transported to an inn where he watches over him through the night. When Jacques awakens and sees him at his bedside, he asks, "Que faites-vous là?" His master replies,
"Je te veille. Tu es mon serviteur, quand je suis malade ou bien portant; mais je suis le tien quand tu te portes mal."

(VI, 74) When Jacques has a sore throat at the Grand-Cerf Inn, his master is solicitous again: "La belle occasion pour reprendre et achever l'histoire de tes amours! mais on parle mal d'amour et d'autre chose quand on souffre. Vois, tête-toi, si tu peux continuer, continue; sinon, bois ta tisane et dors." (VI, 165) A strong affection has grown between Jacques and his master.

Being the resourceful person that he appears to be, Jacques cannot resist taking events into his own hands from time to time. At one point in his story, Jacques begins to go into an explanation of his stay in the doctor's house. His master begs him to skip that part of the story. Jacques pretends to rush on with the story, telling his master he was in love with a tall brunette—whose hands his master held more than once! His master, terribly curious, begs him to identify the girl. Jacques consents, on the condition that he tell his story in his own way. Naturally, the master accepts the condition (VI, 83). Furthermore, on the occasion when Jacques demonstrates the place of the will in his deterministic scheme of things, as we saw in the Introduction, his trick catches his master by surprise. Jacques is proven master of that situation; his master, though irritated, accepts the demonstration and forgets his anger (VI, 280-281).
Jacques also knows how to accommodate himself to another's wishes. He subsides at his master's command and lets the landlady tell her story, as we have seen. He takes her practical joke in good humor. The reader will recall, too, that after Jacques has thanked the hangman profusely for his thoughtfulness when he was knocked unconscious, not knowing who the man is, Jacques' master tells him the man's occupation. Jacques only makes one cross remark and lets the incident pass (VI, 77). We saw that Jacques' master adjusts himself to Jacques' occasional "power grabs"; but for the most part, Jacques accommodates himself to his master's wishes, playing the traditional role of servant, as we mentioned above. We shall see that he assumes this role voluntarily.

An important fact we must bear in mind in examining the relationship between Jacques and his master is that they are traveling. The exigencies of a trip have, no doubt, quite an influence on their relationship. The trip serves Diderot not only as a natural way for Jacques and his master to have time to tell one another their life stories and to meet other people; it also heightens tensions and penchants that are usually present in their relationship. In fact, the whole basis for their relationship might not have become evident had they not been traveling. For one thing, they find it more convenient to sleep in the same room and eat together while traveling. This communal life tends to
emphasize a certain leveling factor present in their relationship: the nobleman's lessening pride of rank and the commoner's sense of his human worth and dignity tend to meet. At the same time, in the course of the enforced stay at the inn because of bad weather, they rub on one another's nerves until an old quarrel rears its head once more. It is finally settled in the key passage of this novel. Let us examine it here in detail.

The issue that starts the quarrel has been raised before: a woman. Jacques got his own way about the manner in which he would tell his story by having piqued his master's curiosity about a tall brunette. Her identity is now revealed: she is Jeanne's daughter, Denise. The master admits that most of the visitors at Desglands' château have tried unsuccessfully to seduce her at one time or another (VI, 167).

After a time, the master exclaims,

LE MAITRE. —-La coquine! préférer un Jacques!
JACQUES. ---Un Jacques! un Jacques, monsieur, est un homme comme un autre.
LE MAITRE. ---Jacques, tu te trompes, un Jacques n'est point un homme comme un autre.
JACQUES. ---C'est quelquefois mieux qu'un autre.
LE MAITRE. ---Jacques, vous vous oubliez. Reprrenez l'histoire de vos amours, et souvenez-vous que vous n'êtes et que vous ne serez jamais qu'un Jacques.
JACQUES. ---Si, dans la chaumière où nous trouvâmes les coquins, Jacques n'avait pas valu un peu mieux que son maître . . .
JACQUES. ---Cela vous plaît à dire, monsieur; je me trouve bien ici, et je ne descendrai pas là-bas.
Notice that the master changes from "tu" to "vous" and back to "tu" in this passage; whether he does it to show degrees of respect for Jacques is a matter of speculation. In any case, they begin to shout at one another, until the landlady intervenes. They accept her as arbitrator. The reader may remember that she announces that Jacques will go downstairs as his master says, but that he will come back up immediately and resume his habitual place as his master's companion. No sooner has Jacques stepped out of the door to go down than his master throws himself on him and embraces him, saying, "Il est écrit là-haut que je ne me déferai jamais de cet original-là, et que tant que je vivrai il sera mon maître et que je serai son serviteur . . ."

(VI, 174)

Jacques takes advantage of the moment of reconciliation to devise a means of avoiding future disagreements. He sets forth what might be called a pacte explicite, to contrast with the "pacte tacite" existing between parasites and patrons according to the Neveu. The reader will recall that the "pacte tacite" stated that patrons would benefit their artists in every way, but that they would only be gossiped about and rendered ill for the good they had done. The pacte explicite states:
Stipulons: 1° qu'attendu qu'il est écrit là-haut que je vous suis essentiel, et que je sens, que je sais que vous ne pouvez pas vous passer de moi, j'abuserai de ces avantages toutes et quantes fois que l'occasion s'en présentera.

... Stipulons: 2° qu'attendu qu'il est aussi impossible à Jacques de ne pas connaître son ascendant et sa force sur son maître, qu'à son maître de méconnaître sa faiblesse et de se dépouiller de son indulgence, il faut que Jacques soit insolent, et que, pour la paix, son maître ne s'en aperçoive pas. Tout cela s'est arrangé à notre insu, tout cela fut scellé là-haut au moment où la nature fit Jacques et son maître. Il fut arrêté que vous auriez les titres, et que j'aurais la chose.

(VI, 175)

To his master's objection that it would be just as sensible, in that case, for Jacques to be called the master and for him to be Jacques' valet, Jacques replies that "Vous y perdriez le titre, et vous n'auriez pas la chose. Restons comme nous sommes, nous sommes fort bien tout deux..." (VI, 175).

We agree with the master who replies, "Nais, Jacques, on n'a jamais rien stipulé de pareil."

In this pact, the better man of the two assumes de facto leadership; but for all outward appearances, he continues to serve the other as valet and accepts all that such a role entails. As Jacques, his master, des Arcis, and Richard travel that afternoon, Jacques comments that everyone has his dog, and that he himself is cast in that role every time his master wants him to do something that he does not feel like doing. His concluding line in this speech is, "... les hommes faibles sont les chiens des hommes fermes."

(VI, 178) Jacques does not even hint at the recently concluded pact. He implies that the master is firm, and the
valet, weak. The Marquis des Arcis remarks to the master that he has an unusual servant. The master replies, "Un serviteur, vous avez bien de la bonté; c'est moi qui suis le sien; et peu s'en est fallu que ce matin, pas plus tard, il ne me l'ait prouvé en forme." (VI, 178) It is the master himself who admits to another nobleman the true relationship he has with Jacques.

Returning again to Jacques' comment that everyone has his dog, we are reminded of two comments in Le Neveu to which we have referred. One is Lui's speech about fools with which we opened this chapter. He suggests that each can be the fool of the other, and that even the king might be the fool of his fool on occasion; that is, everyone is someone's dog. Moi expresses the same idea, using the notion of poses and images which each assumes:

LUI. ---Vous avez raison. Il n'y a dans tout un royaume qu'un homme qui marche. C'est le souverain; tout le reste prend des positions.

MOI. ---Le souverain? Encore y a-t-il quelque chose à dire, et croyez-vous qu'il ne se trouve pas de temps en temps à côté de lui un petit pied, un petit chignon, un petit nez qui lui fasse faire un peu de la pantomime? Quiconque a besoin d'un autre est indigent et prend une position. Le roi prend une position devant sa maîtresse et devant Dieu; il fait son pas de pantomime. Le ministre fait le pas de courtisan, de flatteur, de valet ou de gueux devant son roi. La foule des ambitieux danse vos positions, en cont manières plus viles les unes des autres, devant le ministre. L'abbé de condition, en rabat et en manteau long, au moins une fois la semaine, devant le dépositaire de la feuille des bénéfices. Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux est le grand branle de la terre; chacun a sa petite Hus et son Bertin. (V, 483)
The difference between Ki, Lui, and Jacques and the rest of the world of posers is that they realize what they are doing, and therefore do not take themselves any more seriously than is appropriate. We have here another point at which these two novels meet.

The relationship of Jacques and his master is an unusual one, particularly for the time in which the novel was written, for it crosses wide social class barriers. What can be said to be the bases for their conduct with one another? First, they are frank and sincere with one another. Next, each seems to know his own strengths and weaknesses and those of the other. At the same time, each is sensitive to the other's feelings and has come to accept the other for what he is.

As we saw in Chapter I about Le Neveu de Rameau, Lui comments disparagingly about bourgeois society. As far as individuals in society go, he feels that in order to receive the respect of one's fellows, one ought to be worthy of it. He feels, furthermore, that one should express his feelings sincerely, while exercising, nonetheless, self-control. At least some of the hypocrites Lui describes have succeeded in fooling even themselves, and he implies that one should see himself as he really is. It is by fulfilling these requirements of the Neveu that Jacques and his master have been able to come to the healthy and stable relationship which they share. Each of them respects the other for the person
he is; each is loyal to the other. Both are sincere and frank in their speech with one another. To take one example from many, Jacques weeps openly before his master over the death of his captain. His master pronounces a fine speech intended to console and distract him. When Jacques takes him to task for making it sound like a speech for an expired lover, the master admits freely that his intention was to distract Jacques so that he would continue telling his love story (VI, 54-55).

As for self-control, Jacques exercises more of it than his master, probably because of his background as one of the people. Jacques lets it pass when the magistrate believes the servant girl's lie that Jacques gave her the purse. Jacques' master longs several times literally to fight injustice with his sword. When he comes upon Saint-Ouin unexpectedly, he falls upon him immediately and leaves him stretched out dead on the ground. This is probably characteristic of his background too, for the nobility was quick to defend its honor with the sword. Regarding knowing oneself, which Le Rèveur shows to be important in social relations, Jacques' master acknowledges that he depends on Jacques to amuse him with his stories; without Jacques, he finds he

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1There is just a touch of anachronism about the master, recalling Don Quijote. The master does not realize that in the world that is soon coming, individuals willlearn to solve their disputes as we have seen the common people do in Jacques. Instant dueling because of affronts and defending justice with the sword will be no longer the role of the individual.
is very bored as, for instance, when Jacques leaves him to return for their forgotten watch and purse. The master finds also that he misses Jacques terribly after his duel with Saint-Ouin and Jacques' subsequent imprisonment (VI, 286). Thus the master is found to know what is essential to his happiness. Jacques has a keen self-knowledge too. He is distressed that he cannot force himself always to act with aloof disdain of events as one who is totally convinced of his fatalistic philosophy ought to do. He comes to understand his true nature, as we see in this passage:

JACQUES. --- . . . je ne puis m'empêcher de pleurer ni de rire; et c'est ce qui me fait enrager. J'ai cent fois essayé . . . Je ne fermais pas l'œil la nuit . . .
LE MAÎTRE. ---Non, non, dis-moi ce que tu a essayé.
JACQUES. ---De me moquer de tout. Ah! si j'avais pu y réussir.
LE MAÎTRE. ---À quoi cela t'aurait-il servi?
JACQUES. ---À me délivrer de souci, à n'avoir plus besoin de rien, à me rendre parfaitement maître de moi, à me trouver aussi bien la tête contre une borne, au coin de la rue, que sur un bon oreiller. Tel je suis quelquefois; mais le diable est que cela ne dure pas, et que dur et ferme comme un rocher dans les grandes occasions, il arrive souvent qu'une petite contradiction, une bagatelle me déferre; c'est à se donner des soufflets. J'y ai renoncé; j'ai pris le parti d'être comme je suis; et j'ai vu, en y pensant un peu, que cela revenait presque au même, en ajoutant: Qu'importe comme on soit? C'est une autre révision plus facile et plus commode. (VI, 87)

Self-knowledge is another characteristic that the neveu implies is desirable and which both Jacques and his master exhibit. We have seen that when an individual is worthy of respect, sincere, and self-controlled, and when he has self-awareness, he is better fitted to deal with others in society.
The Neveu, in his scathing criticism of his milieu, indicates that sincerity and honesty are a better basis for social intercourse than hypocrisy and deceit. He implies that frank encounters between people would be better than one's having to play the role of fool or clown in order to speak truth to the powerful. Perhaps in his comment "celui qui serait sage n'aurait point de fou" (V, 443), Diderot is implying that best of all would be for each to recognize for himself and admit the sort of truths a fool usually speaks. The Neveu also remains undeceived about the true nature of bourgeois society. He criticizes it scathingly. He particularly objects to one's having to conform to society in order to be accepted as a part of it. In other words, he hints that tolerance is a necessary part of satisfactory social relationships. As we have seen, both Jacques and his master express their feelings openly to one another. Jacques is frank with his master to the point of being insolent; the master, from what he assumes to be a superior position because of his role as master, speaks plainly to Jacques at all times. They seem to tolerate one another and to enjoy others whom they meet in their travels together.

The Neveu de Rameau is upset because of the restraints put upon him by having to fit into a social arrangement he finds hypocritical, ridiculous, and artificial. He longs for freedom to express himself in his own way and yet to be
able to earn a living. He indicates that this sort of freedom should be possible in society. Jacques and his master have found that freedom. It has not come without a price. The master admits with good grace that he is not the man that Jacques is. For a nobleman, this would seem to be a big admission. Jacques accepts the responsibility involved in being the leader, and he chooses to continue in the traditional role society expects of him, that of servant. It demands continual flexibility on the part of both the master and Jacques for the one to have the outward appearance of master and yet to follow, and for the other to have the outward appearance of valet and yet to lead. They both agree to such a price for their freedom from the traditional patterns of society. Let us state this idea another way.

Diderot opposes unnatural constraint in *Le Neveu*:

=LUI. ---Et que puisque je puis faire mon bonheur par des vices qui me sont naturels . . . il serait bien singulier que j'allasse me tourmenter comme une âme damnée pour me bistourner et me faire autre que je ne suis, pour me donner un caractère étranger au mien. . . . Et puis cela me donnerait de l'humeur infailliblement; car pourquoi voyons-nous si fréquemment les dévots si durs, si fâcheux, si insociables? C'est qu'ils se sont imposés une tâche qui ne leur est pas naturelle; ils souffrent et quand on souffre, on fait souffrir les autres. (V, 427-428)

In *Jacques* the constraint is removed, for each of the two protagonists assumes the most natural role for himself. As the *Neveu* suggests, each is the fool of the other.

When we begin to talk about what Diderot might have intended to suggest by means of the hypothetical relationship
of Jacques and his master regarding an improved society, we must realize that we are in the realm of speculation.

Diderot did not publish *Le Neveu de Rameau* or *Jacques le Fataliste* during his lifetime; we do not even know why he did not. It seems plain, however, from our study of the close reciprocal relationship of a commoner and a nobleman that Diderot was trying to show that differences of birth and wealth need not prevent men from living amicably together. Such a society would demand a certain leveling out of differences. For instance, there could be no artifice; each man would have to take stock of himself and be willing to admit his real merit, apart from birth or wealth. The nobility would have to give up its notion of innate and exclusive superiority based on those two factors. Wealth would have to be more evenly distributed, for discontent cannot help arising where some are overfed and others starve, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter.

*Jacques le Fataliste* was finished on the eve of the French Revolution. In answer to the question of whether Diderot foreshadows the Revolution in making Jacques the master, Loy comments that he would not go so far as to say that. Rather,

Diderot foresaw a continual social evolvement of a middle class, exerting pressure above for constitutional limitations on the princely and powerful, and continually parrying off from below (sometimes even with limited success) the efforts of lower
classes to educate themselves and supplant their middle-class masters.  

From this statement Loy concludes that *Jacques* is "an eminently democratic document speaking of a classless democracy of merit rather than of a pseudo-classless pseudo-democracy of the proletariat." That would seem to be a fair statement of the wide social implications of these two novels. Smietanski points out a possible objective of Diderot in giving us such a clear picture of all of the society of his times:

Il y a, en effet, dans *Jacques le Fataliste*, un aspect satirique de grande importance. Si l'on mettait bout à bout toutes les pages satiriques de l'œuvre on serait presque tenté de croire que le sous-titre "satire" lui conviendrait tout autant, sinon davantage, qu'au *Neveu de Rameau*. Certes la satire est moins virulente dans *Jacques le Fataliste* que dans *La Religieuse*, ou même le *Neveu*. Il est aussi moins directe, moins explicite, comme si Diderot estimait que la peinture réelle de la société suffisait largement pour en montrer les vices et les insuffisances, pour condamner les abus trop insupportables. Mais en revanche, dans *Jacques le Fataliste* la satire vise un plus large éventail de maux: misère des campagnes, inégalité des sexes, institutions arbitraires ou contre nature, duels meurtriers, corruption usure, vénalité, injustices diverses. . . . Si l'on y regarde de près il n'est guère d'anecdotes finalement dans *Jacques le Fataliste* qui ne renferme quelque élément satirique. . . . Peindre le monde tel qu'il est, c'est déjà le transformer.

Diderot was one more link in the chain leading to the Revolution. Revolution presumably was not his goal. However,  

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3 Ibid.  
4 Smietanski, pp. 165-166.
by showing social conditions to be what they were, and by setting before us a working relationship across class and economic lines, Diderot implies that there is a better way for society to be organized. We may safely say, perhaps, that although to have known about the Revolution would have disturbed him profoundly, yet to have foreseen the more equal society that we trust has resulted in our day would have brought him great satisfaction.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The aspects of *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le Fataliste* that we have chosen to examine in this thesis deal with social relationships. There are negative and positive aspects. On the negative side, Diderot presents relationships among the bourgeoisie, as seen in the commentary, person, and mimicry of the Neveu de Rameau. Their social conduct is based on contempt, deception, and conformity. Diderot also gives us a picture of relationships among the nobility as seen through narrations in *Jacques le Fataliste*. Their dealings with one another are based on selfishness, manipulation of one another, hypocrisy, and trickery. Diderot then presents a picture of conduct among the common people. The difficult circumstances of their lives explain otherwise unpleasant aspects of their behavior, which can be seen to be motivated by self-interest protected by cunning, mutual aid, and accommodation or adaptation to one another.

The positive aspect of these works is seen in some hints about how society might be improved, found in the criticism of bourgeois society in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. On the plane of individual characteristics, the Neveu suggests plainly
that people ought to earn the respect they demand; that
they should be sincere in the expression of their emotions;
and that they should know themselves, and control themselves.
On the group plane, he opts for sincerity, tolerance, frank-
ness, and naturalness of behavior. These very suggestions
are taken up by Diderot and used to create the relationship
between Jacques and his master. Their relationship is very
unusual, for Jacques is the superior person, though of the
inferior social class. We recall the relationship between
the Neveu and the house of Bertin, in which his role was to
act as fool and parasite; between parasites and their pa-
trons exists a "pacte tacite," whereby the servant/parasite
would return ill for the good done him by his master/patron.
In the case of Jacques and his master, it is a pacte expli-
cite that exists, whereby each recognizes the superiority
of Jacques, and he is granted license to be insolent when
he chooses. At the same time, Jacques voluntarily remains
in the servant role and does not take advantage of his su-
periority to ridicule his weaker master in the eyes of
their acquaintances. In their relationship they demonstrate
the self-knowledge, self-control, frankness, sincerity,
naturalness, and flexibility that the Neveu suggests as
necessary for improved social relationships.

Although Diderot did not state that this relationship
might be taken as a model for society, its implications are
obvious. If it were the pattern for social relationships,
there would need to be a leveling out of differences between classes, a lack of artifice on the part of all, and more even distribution of wealth as minimum requirements. Diderot did not advocate radical social upheaval, but he would seem to encourage a continual evolution of a middle class and the resultant leveling of society. By showing his society exactly as it was, and by suggesting a model relationship, Diderot contributed much toward our understanding of human relations.

The conclusion we may draw from the relationship of Jacques and his master is that satisfactory social relationships are possible even across wide class barriers, provided that all parties exercise forbearance and readily adapt to the needs and demands of the others. The application of such a conclusion goes far beyond the period in which Diderot wrote. Human relations of any era must be based on honest give and take. Hornet, commenting along these lines, writes:

Diderot n'avait évidemment qu'à suivre les besoins de son coeur pour comprendre qu'il ne pouvait pas y avoir de bonheur, pas de vraie satisfaction de conscience si l'on ne songe pas au bonheur d'autrui autant et plus qu'au sien propre. Toute son œuvre ruissellera donc, à tout propos, de sensibilité bienfaisante... .
Jacques le Fataliste a beau être convaincu qu'il n'y a ni vice ni vertu et que tout est commandé par des nécessités inéluctables, il n'en donnera pas moins tout l'argent qui lui reste et dont il a un pressant besoin pour secourir une infortunée. Sans doute aussi tous les hommes ne sont pas bons; peu sont disposés à sacrifier spontanément leur intérêt immédiat à l'intérêt des autres. Mais justement la morale s'enseigne. Les hommes n'obéissent pas seulement aux instincts égoïstes. Ils obéissent aussi bien à des besoins qu'on peut, par une bonne éducation et une bonne police, installer en
Nornet has also brought in the other controls that Diderot considers necessary for society, and that he touches upon in _Le Neveu_ and _Jacques_. Education with the purpose of forming good citizens, good laws, and an adequate law-enforcement system. With these aids, the model relationship Diderot suggests in _Jacques_ need not remain remote and unworkable.

In closing, let us add that as one reads these novels of Diderot, it is impossible to forget the gathering storm clouds indicating the Revolution. In view of what actually took place during and after the Revolution, for instance during the Terror when thousands of Frenchmen were arrested and many died or were executed, Jacques and his master's amicable relationship seems very daring and forward looking. Loy has this to say:

> If there can be a final explanation for _Jacques_, it is that it represents Diderot's prejudgement of the Revolution which was already writ large, the testament he leaves to limit his responsibility in that tragic affair, and a forejudgment of those basic romantic heresies (here Rousseau again rears his head) which still badger the modern world—destructive totalitarianism and self-assertive individualism.²

Diderot has criticized the bourgeoisie for their deceit and lack of respect for one another. Yet his very criticism

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¹ Nornet, pp. 62-63.

² Loy, _Diderot's Determined Fatalist_, p. 195.
carries in it the seeds of a solution to the problem of relationships in society. He has condemned the nobility for its selfish manipulation of everyone for its own ends. He has presented the common people in all of their misery and earthiness, yet with appreciation for their tolerance of one another. In combining a member of the decadent noble class and a member of the resourceful lower class in a close relationship, Diderot has produced a delightful and workable pattern for all human relationships.
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