

Sex, Freedom & Equality in Rousseau's "Emile"

Author(s): Penny A. Weiss

Source: *Polity*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 603-625

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3234821>

Accessed: 09-09-2017 22:19 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/3234821?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Polity*

Sex, Freedom & Equality in Rousseau's *Emile**

Penny A. Weiss
Purdue University

This article challenges interpretations of Rousseau's Emile that see its program of female education as inconsistent with that of males and with Rousseau's general principles. Using Rousseau's definition of freedom, the author explores how the educations of both sexes aim at creating interdependencies rather than self-sufficiency or slavery and concludes that Emile is not as free, nor Sophie as enslaved, as some have argued. The differences in their educations are seen as appealing to identical understandings of the human condition and development, freedom and dependence, happiness and suffering, and the tasks of politics.

Penny A. Weiss is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Purdue University. She has published articles on Rousseau in Political Theory, Review of Politics, and other journals.

Although the book bearing his name was written in 1750, Rousseau's *Emile* could pass for a "nineteen-eighties-kind-of-guy" according to portraits of him in the secondary literature. He is strong, yet sensitive. He is bright and resourceful, without being pedantic. He is a reliable worker, but not overly fond of money. He stays in shape and gives to the needy. Why, he is even acquainted with sexual responsibility and imposes no sexual double standard on women, whose respect he seeks.

Rousseau's Sophie, on the other hand, seems completely out of place in the late twentieth century. An eighteenth century "total woman," she is the eternal caregiver. Modest and motherly, unschooled and unskilled, she strikes many as more a plaything than a partner to Emile. Sophie gets her way indirectly through feminine wiles, and cares too much about appearance and reputation to make it as an appealing role model.

* The author wishes to thank Edward Goerner, Lynne Arnault, and Robert Strikwerda for their help in the preparation of this essay.

Practically since the ink dried on the pages of Rousseau's *Emile*, commentators have been disturbed by the substance of Sophie's education and perplexed by its apparent inconsistency with the more appreciated program of male education. Wollstonecraft may have been among the first to detect some problem,¹ but even today comments abound alluding to the defects of Rousseau's scheme of female education and the ways in which it contradicts his own principles. The following comments are representative:

Emile was to be a critical, self-reliant citizen, entitled to an elaborate education and full equality with his peers. Sophie, on the other hand, was to be trained only as a wife to Emile and as a mother to his children.²

Sophy's [sic] education could not be more different than Emile's. His education is aimed at freedom and independence, while her education is directed toward making her able to please man and be subjected to him.³

Rousseau is a paradigm case of this differential application of the axiomatic principles on which most political philosophy has been built since the seventeenth century. His primary "human" values—equality and freedom—are swept aside entirely when he discusses the proper place and role of the female sex.⁴

While the accusation of inconsistency is oft repeated, its significance is frequently downplayed on the grounds that Rousseau's scheme of female education is nothing more than an uncritical reflection of the sexist times in which he lived,⁵ or of his personal misogyny.⁶ Such explanations often

1. See Wollstonecraft's comments in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Charles Hagelman, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967; originally written in 1791), Chapter V. Others who responded negatively include Formey, author of *Anti-Emile* (Berlin, 1763), and Voltaire.

2. Victor Wexler, "'Made for Man's Delight': Rousseau as Antifeminist," *American Historical Review*, 81 (April 1976): 266.

3. Ron Christenson, "The Political Theory of Male Chauvinism: J. J. Rousseau's Paradigm," *Midwest Quarterly*, 13 (April 1972): 294.

4. Susan Moller Okin, "Rousseau's Natural Woman," *Journal of Politics*, 41 (May 1979): 395. One might question Okin's limitation of this phenomenon to post-seventeenth century thought.

5. William Boyd, *The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau: Selections* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1966), p. 177; J. H. Broome, *Rousseau: A Study of His Thought* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 98.

6. Victor Wexler, in "'Made for Man's Delight,'" and Zillah Eisenstein, in *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981), discuss Rousseau's fear of women's power. Ron Christenson, in "The Political Theory of Male Chauvinism," talks of Rousseau's belief in women's inferiority.

suggest that Rousseau's words on female education are unreflective of and unimportant to his philosophy and that his views are better understood looking exclusively at male education.

This dismissal of Rousseau's writings on women is unwarranted. At least as much can be learned about Rousseau from studying his comments on female education as on male education. I argue below that the principles behind Rousseau's education for *both* sexes have largely been misrepresented.⁷ The two educations can, in fact, be reconciled, and a more coherent interpretation of Rousseau's favored text established. A careful study of female education provides a new perspective from which to see Rousseau, and focusing on the theoretical similarities in male and female education offers insight into the fundamental principles and assumptions undergirding his philosophy of education, his conception of the human condition, and his politics.

I have argued elsewhere that Rousseau's differential treatment of the sexes is not based on biological determinism; that is, Rousseau does not educate the sexes differently simple because he believes there are natural sex differences that leave him no choice.⁸ Instead, the creation of sex roles is recommended for the social and political ends they are capable of serving. What follows here is compatible with that argument. The sexes *are* educated to become different, but the training of both generally appeals to an identical understanding of the human condition and of what problems political arrangements must address. I am not claiming that the educational programs are substantive twins—they obviously cannot be if they are intended to create differences—but I am arguing that they are not contradictory either. Rousseau's values are not "swept aside" in discussions of the female sex. In presenting evidence for this interpretation, I compare it to the view that Sophie's education and Emile's are totally dissimilar. I conclude with some thoughts about the causes of misinterpretation and about what the similarities in women's and men's educations teach us about Rousseau.

I. Education and Freedom

Rousseau establishes one principle that goes a great distance in explaining his practical programs of education.

7. Jane Roland Martin argues that lack of attention to women's education is actually a cause of such errors. "Sophie and Emile: A Case Study of Sex Bias in the History of Educational Thought," *Harvard Educational Review*, 51 (August 1981): 357–372.

8. Penny Weiss, "Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Woman's Nature," *Political Theory*, 15 (February 1987): 81–98.

The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases. That is my fundamental maxim. It need only be applied to childhood for all the rules of education to flow from it.⁹

Rousseau's assertion that "all the rules of education" flow from his conception of freedom indicates the very political nature of his educational scheme and provides the standard by which to assess the education of each sex. While not every particular of education must be aimed solely at freedom, each must be compatible with it.

In Rousseau's state of nature people live freely, being without the authority of a master and without need for the services or esteem of others. The needs of natural savages are limited, and their powers are sufficient to satisfy them independently. This vision of all determining and satisfying their minimal needs without particular or sustained dependencies is the purest and most powerful portrayal of freedom in Rousseau's thought. "Only in this original state are power and desire in equilibrium and man is not unhappy" (*Emile*, p. 80). While the regular interdependence that defines civil society decisively alters the human condition, so that freedom can no longer be associated with independence and self-sufficiency, the ideal of equilibrium is maintained in the *Emile*. As Roger Masters notes,

The natural man is not here primitive man, nor even merely the abstraction of what is common to all socialized men, but the man who is not in contradiction with himself and whose faculties are in "equilibrium."¹⁰

Freedom in society is still the development of one's powers and restriction of one's desires to the realm of that which can be obtained without becoming a master or a slave. Happiness is the result, or concomitant, of this balance. These formal definitions only require an equilibrium between two factors, not necessarily a certain amount or kind of either one. Thus, although people may lead quite different lives, freedom and happiness are within the grasp of all who can maintain the powers-desires equilibrium. But do the two sexes have comparable chances of establishing this balance, based on their different Rousseauian educations? To answer this, both facets of freedom and happiness need to be investigated—the one relating to powers and the other to desires.

9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 84. All references are to this translation and are in the text.

10. Roger Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 15.

II. Powers

Rousseau's notion of what "empowers" people is a broad one. Based on Emile's education, which most commentators see as fostering strength and self-sufficiency, the powers component of the freedom ratio includes at least physical fitness, economic independence, and freedom from public opinion. This list need not and indeed should not be considered exhaustive. It is sufficient that the items on it are representative and significant. In discussing each, I will first lay out the obvious contrasts between Emile's and Sophie's training, and the standard way of interpreting these contrasts as leading to freedom only for Emile, and then offer some textually based corrections and challenges to both.

Physical Fitness

Without question Emile's education places heavy emphasis on strengthening his body and accustoming him to physical hardships. No activities are forbidden Emile—nothing is too taxing, too dangerous, or too adventurous. He is constantly in motion, and the tutor is advised not to oppose such "restlessness" (*Emile*, p. 369). For Sophie's "fair sex," only "agreeable, moderate, and salutary exercises" (*Emile*, p. 366) are urged, and she plays no games which bruise or harden her skin.

These differences can be interpreted as contributing to Emile's self-sufficiency and Sophie's dependency: the weak need assistance and protection, the strong do not and thus can be free. While Emile was frequently injured during his physical trials, Rousseau held that "the well-being of freedom makes up for many wounds" (*Emile*, p. 78). Sophie, it seems, has neither wounds nor freedom. Such an interpretation, however, omits mention of the similarities in the programs that do exist, pays insufficient attention to the ends of physical education, and fails to place it in the broader context of Rousseau's politics.

There are, it should be noted, three similarities in the two programs that show a consistent philosophy of education. First, Rousseau does assert that for both sexes "since the body is born, so to speak, before the soul, the body ought to be cultivated first" (*Emile*, p. 365). For girls as for boys, Rousseau treats the developmental stages through which they pass (emotional and intellectual as well as physical) as a constraint upon the educator, and exercises their bodies before their minds.

Second, Rousseau criticizes

the paternal household, where a girl—delicately fed, always pampered or scolded, always seated within range of her mother's eyes, shut up in a room—does not dare stand up, walk, speak, or breathe, and does not have a moment of freedom to play, jump,

run, shout, or indulge in the petulance natural to her age. (*Emile*, p. 366)

This condemnation coincides with notions found in *Emile's* education. Rousseau views childhood as a distinct and valid state of existence. He rejects a conception of children as "miniature adults," and its practical consequences of subjecting youngsters to strict discipline and early formal intellectual education. He also casts aside a conception of children as "imperfect adults," a view which leads to either neglect or overprotection. With childhood as but a prelude to adulthood, worthless in itself, youngsters are either indulged and molly-coddled, carefully shielded from the world to preserve them for healthy adulthood, or merely tolerated until they become useful adults. Rousseau allows for the energy and pleasures properly characteristic of youth, male and female, and does not devalue any stage, immature as the child may be, much as the similarly limited life of the natural savage is not depreciated.

Lastly, it is rightly said that Rousseau rejects education which is guided only by the needs of the future adult and which ignores present happiness and interests, and this holds true for both sexes. But for neither does he embrace education which cares *only* for present happiness. Rousseau's program for *both* sexes can be understood in this query: "Why do you give him more ills than his condition entails without being sure that these present ills are for the relief of the future?" (*Emile*, p. 80). That is, if there is reasonable certainty that one is preparing a child for events or situations she or he will encounter as an adult and that less suffering is involved in preparations beforehand than upon adulthood, then (and only then) such focus on the future is justifiable to Rousseau. Lessons which pass such a test are given to Sophie *and* *Emile*. Because the adult lives of men and women differ, so do their educations. But each is prepared for their "Rousseauian destiny," and neither is given training which is of no particular use to them.

To understand the other important similarities in *Emile's* and Sophie's educations, it is necessary to see that in *Emile's* physical training, strength is not sought as an end in itself. Rousseau mentions at least four important consequences of constant exercise and exposure for *Emile*.

First, he applauds the fact that physical activity, rather than forced intellectual education, develops the mind. Children learn best through moving, experimenting, and confronting the consequences of actions.

Since he is constantly in motion, he is forced to observe many things, to know many effects . . . the more he makes himself strong and robust, the more he becomes sensible and judicious. (*Emile*, p. 119).

Second, Rousseau notes that the physical health born from exercise allows one to be a useful person. This is opposed to Rousseau's hard image of the sickly person as "useless to himself and others, involved uniquely with preserving himself" (*Emile*, p. 53), and dependent upon that detested art of medicine. Third, Rousseau sees a healthy body as a necessary condition of freedom (*Emile*, p. 54, p. 118, and p. 125). The weak require assistance, while those like Emile, "able to do more by themselves, . . . need to have recourse to others less frequently" (*Emile*, p. 78).

Lastly, physical fitness relates to a recurring theme of the *Emile*: preparedness in the face of the changing or the unknown. The physical element of preparedness is represented by the book's frontispiece of Thetis submerging her child in the water of the Styx.¹¹ Rousseau's goal is to "harden their bodies against the intemperance of season, climates, elements; against hunger, thirst, fatigue" (*Emile*, p. 47). Given the flux Rousseau portrays as characteristic of his time, he prepares Emile to survive in any environment and to be capable of conquering or ignoring physical discomfort. Even the many accidents young, active Emile is sure to have are an asset, for they decrease sensitivity to greater injuries to be borne as an adult. One's environment is a given, belonging to the unchangeable "world of things" outside one's control. Rousseau's intent is that Emile be able to accept and bear this given.

Thus seen, Emile is exposed to activity and hardship in order to create a person who understands cause and effect relationships, who is able to remain healthy and active in various environments and situations, and who can both go beyond an existence of concern with the self and be free from certain debilitating dependencies. Rousseau's programs of education would thus be inconsistent if none of these goals were sought in Sophie's education, either through physical training or another aspect of it (assuming there is more than one possible means to the ends.) But Sophie's education does not do this: she is not rendered stupid, frail, inflexible, self-absorbed, or helpless. Emile's education aims at taking him outside of himself while avoiding slavish dependence on others; the goal is something between slavery and mastery, and between self-absorption and total dependence. Here the two programs are identical.

Emile seems to be created to be the ultimate boy scout—prepared for anything and dependent on no one—but Rousseau's program is misrepresented if it is thought to include preparation for every possible fate that

11. It is interesting to note that in Plato's *Republic*, to which Rousseau implicitly compares the *Emile*, tales of the Styx as "hateful rivers," fear of which makes one "malleable and soft," are cast out of the city (387b-c).

might befall a person. Rather, people are prepared for events which are reasonably most likely to occur, and which need preparation far in advance. As a citizen of a republic, Emile will be in the army, and should there be a war must possess the strength and endurance to partake in battle. Hence, because of the different lives they will lead, Emile must undergo different physical training than does Sophie, but the lessons of both are determined by their future utility.

It is crucial to note a final similarity in the two programs of physical training. Both sexes are being prepared for certain *social* roles, roles which involve responsibilities to others, and which show that Emile is not to be a free and independent savage. Emile's training, for example, enables him to be a citizen-soldier, a social role involving obligations and loyalties to political and familial communities. He will be strong for others, not simply for himself. Similarly, in writing that "Women ought not to be robust *like* men, but they should be robust *for* men, so that the men born from them will be robust too" (*Emile*, p. 366), Rousseau shows that Sophie's strength matches a certain role she must fulfill for others, not simply for herself. For neither sex is the need for strength considered in isolation from social needs. Each education is guided by political purposes, for the fulfillment of necessary social tasks.

Sophie's relative physical weakness does indeed render her vulnerable in a way unknown to men, and to women in the state of nature. But one cannot conclude too quickly that Rousseau thus makes only women dependent. Physical weakness *is* a form of weakness that can leave one in need of others. But, as will become clearer, Rousseau is trying to encourage interdependence. He believes that two people with like strengths and weaknesses will not have predictable need for each other.¹² Further, the fact that men are rendered physically strong in no way can be taken to mean that they have no need for others. The strengths and weaknesses of the sexes will differ, and must differ in Rousseau's scheme, because only then will each reliably be drawn to the other, and overcome their natural isolation. For example, in another context Rousseau writes:

If woman could ascend to general principles as well as man can, and if man had as good a mind for details as woman does, they would always be independent of one another, they would live in eternal discord, and their partnership could not exist. (*Emile*, p. 377)

The freedom that Rousseau asserts guides educational practices requires balance between desires and powers. What Rousseau establishes in

12. I thank Michael Weinstein for helping me clarify this point.

physical education is a related match between abilities and tasks, between what one has to do socially and what one is capable of doing. Other elements of the *Emile* are directed at shaping people who will want to engage in these social tasks. Thus seen, the different physical programs have several principles in common and do relate, for both sexes, to being socially free. These themes receive further elaboration below.

Economic Independence

A second aspect of self-sufficiency is economic independence; Emile is made able to support himself. The possession of marketable skills has an obvious relationship to freedom. Money earned is purchasing power, allowing the option of satisfying certain needs and desires. Earning power also frees one from dependencies which involve having to prostitute oneself to those whose money one needs. Emile learns many trades, following the self-sufficient and ingenious hero of the sole book presented to the young boy—*Robinson Crusoe*.

Rousseau returns to the theme of fate, of fortune's impartial and imperial unconcern with individual destinies.

Do you not see that in working to form him exclusively for one station you are making him useless for any other. . . . You trust in the present order of society without thinking that this order is subject to inevitable revolutions. . . . Are the blows of fate so rare that you can count on being exempted from them? (*Emile*, p. 194)

Rousseau is attacking both class-specific and apprentice education. The former leaves one unprepared to meet the challenges presented by social and political changes. The anti-aristocratic Rousseau finds this especially true among the wealthy. A narrow apprentice education is rejected for neglecting the person *qua* person in its quest for education of the person *qua* artisan.

Emile is prepared to support himself under a variety of conditions; his happiness is independent of the availability of any specific vocation, and, his hands being his tools, he is most independent of others. For these reasons, Rousseau can claim that Emile's occupation "brings him closest to the state of nature" (*Emile*, p. 195).

Similar training for Sophie receives no mention at all. All of the skills she is taught involve household management and include cooking, sewing, cleaning, and keeping accounts. If Emile's trades further his independence and flexibility, Sophie's lack of the same seems to render her dependent and unprepared in the face of change. What if her husband, on whom she appears economically dependent, dies, is temporarily or permanently disabled, or cannot sell his labor or products at all or at a

price sufficient to support his family? Perhaps Rousseau does not consider it necessary to teach Sophie a flexible trade, since her fortune and position will always depend directly on that of a man, and only indirectly on political conditions. But, this only presents a larger problem. For Rousseau has said that

dependence on things, since it has no morality, is in no way detrimental to freedom and engenders no vices . . . [but] dependence on men, since it is without order, engenders all the vices, and by it, master and slave are mutually corrupted. (*Emile*, p. 85)

It looks as though in *Emile's* education, as in politics, Rousseau goes to great lengths to banish dependence on particular individuals. But Sophie, that unfortunate representative of everywoman, appears left in a state of personal dependence, with no independent source of income and no skills with which to secure one if required by accidental circumstances.

This account of the relative freedom, flexibility, and self-sufficiency of the two sexes regarding a trade can be challenged from several perspectives. First, while there is a sense in which *Emile's* trade makes him freer, in Rousseau's view the very need for a trade, and the division of labor upon which it rests, involves a sacrifice of freedom. Even one involved in the stablest of crafts must be sensitive to the market, scientific advances, and customers' desires. Rousseau writes elsewhere, "An author who would brave the general taste would soon write for himself alone."¹³ One with unnecessary or outmoded products, or unsatisfied customers, fails to make a living. *Emile* is caught in the "chains" of society by his dependence on science, the market, and other individuals. While given relatively stable means of supporting himself, and crafts not subject to much division of labor, *Emile* is quite a distance from the perfectly self-sufficient natural savage.

The opposite argument can be made regarding Sophie. That is, the fact that *Emile's* trade thrusts him more deeply into the social world and thus makes him more dependent on others raises the interesting and perhaps surprising issue of whether Sophie might not actually be freer than *Emile*. In her distance from the public world and its division of labor, Sophie is closer to the happy state of nature than is *Emile*. Actually, what occurs here is an attempt by Rousseau to distribute fairly what he sees as the benefits and burdens of social life between the sexes. Each has less freedom in certain areas, more in others, just as each is rendered dependent on the other in different ways.

13. Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert*, in *Politics and the Arts*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 19.

The perception of Emile as totally free and Sophie as totally enslaved can be challenged in a second way. It can be argued that Sophie's training in household management is comparable to Emile's training as a craftsperson. With her skills, Sophie is prepared to perform her duties, managing a household, under any conditions, just as Emile is prepared to perform his duties. Further, there seems to be no basis for saying that as "housewives" women are not self-sufficient while men as "bread-winners" are. It is an unjustifiable assumption, and one not made by Rousseau, that women contribute less to their own survival, the maintenance of the household, the welfare of offspring, or the stability of society, than do men. Simply consider the life of Rousseau's woman. She grows, preserves, and prepares food, weaves material and turns it into clothing, nurses, manages, keeps accounts, and educates. It is not obvious that she is really more dependent on a man than he on her, or, with these skills, less prepared than he to adapt to a changing world.

Lastly, while Rousseau discusses trades he would like Emile to learn, he rejects some that do not "suit his sex." While the topic arises only indirectly and is not given much emphasis, there are some means of earning an income, such as "sewing and the needle trades" (*Emile*, p. 199) which are suitable for women. Rousseau does not encourage women to engage in them, but they do exist. Moreover, Sophie needs no additional training for such work, for as a wife and mother she is equipped with skills marketable in the paid labor force.

Both sexes are thus prepared for the roles they will adopt in Rousseau's legitimate state. Neither sex is, can, or ought to be made totally self-sufficient. Rather, each is given a set of equally useful, and thus equally valuable skills necessary for the survival and well-being of all. For both, possession of these skills is in some ways liberating, in other ways enchainning. For both, preparation for their "vocational duties" involves denaturing, direction and limitation, as well as perfection of hitherto dormant capacities and the possibilities of community.

Freedom from Public Opinion and Authority

No theme in the *Emile* seems more pervasive and central, or more passionately advocated, than that of Emile's independence from public opinion. Opinion and authority are apparently associated with corruption and conformity, and scorn is thus duly heaped upon their influence—in education as in everyday life.¹⁴

14. Condemnation of education employing appeals to authority may recall the ancient and medieval warnings against arguments from authority. The latter, however, were concerned with unquestioning acceptance of opinions as a barrier to the discovery of truth.

Immunity to opinion relates to independence and power in several ways. First, if people are regularly simply told things, as opposed to finding out for themselves, they “believe much and never . . . know anything” (*Emile*, p. 125). One need not reason or experiment if another is willing to reveal the answer, or if one can resort to following directions. The consequences of this, Rousseau thinks, are startling. Emile would fail to learn to take responsibility for himself, “habit and obedience [would] take the place of reason” (*Emile*, p. 118), and he would be unable to distinguish between good and bad advice, leaving him an easy prey. He would, finally, be not only in need of others but at their mercy.

Operating by habit and obedience rather than reason also leaves one less able to respond to new situations. Yet we have seen that Rousseau stresses preparedness in the face of the changing and unknown. So important is this that he sees the harm of learning from opinion and authority as greater than ignorance: “I prefer a hundred times over his being ignorant . . . to your having to tell . . . him” (*Emile*, p. 148).

The goal of “authenticity” also seems to have a part in Rousseau’s condemnation of opinion, authority, and prejudice. Concerned with avoiding education that produces people “appearing to relate everything to others and never relating anything except to themselves alone” (*Emile*, p. 41), he writes that “to be oneself and always one, a man must act as he speaks” (*Emile*, p. 40). A connection seems to exist between authenticity and harmony on one hand, and refusal to be a slave of fashion on the other. This link between honesty and independence is evident in Rousseau’s educational practices: “It is quite clear that the more I make his [Emile’s] well-being independent of either the will or the judgments of others, the more I reduce any interest in him to lie” (*Emile*, p. 103).

On the practical level, Emile learns by trial and error, and by experimentation rather than memorization or reading and listening to authorities. Habituated to think for himself, Emile knows that it is in fact possible to solve problems for and by himself and sees such a procedure as the norm in daily life. This training encourages independence, autonomy, and authenticity.

While a cornerstone of Emile’s preparation for freedom, Rousseau practically boasts that this lesson of indifference to opinion, prejudice, and authority is meant for males only:

Rousseau, on the other hand, focuses on the slavishness and conformity resulting from subjection to opinion. That is, he looks more at the loss of personal freedom than the neglect of or harm done to truth.

When a man acts well, he depends only on himself and can brave public judgment; but when a woman acts well, she has accomplished only half of her task, and what is thought of her is no less important to her than what she actually is. . . . Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women. (*Emile*, pp. 365–65)

Unlike *Emile*, Sophie, in deciding upon a course of action, must not only consult her reason and conscience, but must consider what others will think as well. She lacks that radical freedom which arises from exercising the power to decide for oneself how to think and act and is described as having “been taught from her childhood nothing so much as to adjust herself to the people with whom she had to live” (*Emile*, p. 404).

In *Emile*’s training Rousseau rejects education using appeals to authority and giving answers before the student first tries to secure them independently. But Sophie’s education seems to exclude practices bolstering independent thought and self-reliance. In religious education, for example,

Due to the very fact that in her conduct woman is enslaved by public opinion, in her belief she is enslaved by authority. Every girl ought to have her mother’s religion, and every woman her husband’s. . . . Since authority ought to rule the religion of women, the issue is not so much one of explaining to them the reasons there are for believing as of explaining distinctly what we believe. . . . (*Emile*, pp. 377–78)

That is, despite the Savoyard Vicar’s argument that objective reasons for belief do not exist, *Emile* has the opportunity to wonder and decide for himself about such issues, while Sophie is merely told to follow the religion of her parents and husband.

Sophie’s sensitivity to others implies that the lesson of submitting to the necessity of things but never to the wills of others is again meant for males only. In an apparently radical departure from his earlier position, Rousseau states that women must submit to the wills of others; “they have—or ought to have—little freedom” (*Emile*, pp. 369–70). *Emile* is taught that the “world of things” is beyond his control, but that otherwise he is captain of his ship. Sophie is taught to believe she has no freedom against the world of things or against other people’s wills. Rousseau writes of women that

they never cease to be subjected either to a man or to the judgments of men and they are never permitted to put themselves above these

judgments . . . she ought to learn early to endure even injustice and to bear a husband's wrongs without complaining. (*Emile*, p. 370)

Unfortunately for Sophie, what is "immovable" in her life is not only the world of things, but also the wills of men.

While *Emile's* education is to produce a resourceful person of independent thought and action, as immune to the views of others as possible, the focus in Sophie's is on producing a person sensitive and submissive to others' general opinions and particular views of herself—a person possessing as little independence of thought and action as possible. Yet the contrast here really is in fact only superficial.

First of all, the bald statement that *Emile* is trained to be free from all opinion flies in the face of the fact that he is to be a citizen. Leo Strauss writes that opinion

is the basis of society . . . According to Rousseau, civil society is essentially a particular, or more precisely a closed, society. . . . Civil society requires conformance . . . compared with man's [sic] natural independence, all society is therefore a form of bondage.¹⁵

Rousseau writes in the *Social Contract* "Man was/is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."¹⁶ His goal is not to break all social chains but to legitimate them. As a citizen of a closed society, *Emile* must be subjected to opinions that attach people to their community. "Adam was sovereign of the world, like Crusoe of his island, as long as he was its only inhabitant" (*Social Contract*, p. 48).

It is erroneous to suppose that Rousseau simply denigrates opinion across the board. While without doubt he wants to limit or destroy some of its more pernicious manifestations and effects, Rousseau knows that opinion, especially *les moeurs*, is essential to society. In discussing laws he mentions one type which is

the most important of all; which is not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of the citizens; which . . . preserves a people in the spirit of its institution, and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority. I am speaking of mores, customs, and especially of opinion—a part of the laws unknown to our political theorists, but on which the success of all the others depends. (*Social Contract*, p. 77)

15. Leo Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," in *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. M. Cranston and R. S. Peters (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 274–75. Also see *Emile*, p. 39.

16. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Judith Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 46. Further references to this translation are in the text.

Furthermore, even as a child Emile is subjected to others' wills. Rousseau states that "children, even in the state of nature, enjoy only an imperfect freedom, similar to that enjoyed by men in the civil state" (*Emile*, p. 85). Emile is subjected to no less manipulation in education than is Sophie. All Rousseau does is take pains to conceal this fact.

There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the *appearance of freedom* . . . Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to want only what you want him to do. He ought not to make a step without your having foreseen it; he ought not to open his mouth without your knowing what he is going to say. (*Emile*, p. 120, emphasis added)

As Allan Bloom remarks, "the tutor and his helpers must disappear, as it were, and everything that happens to the child must *seem* to be an inevitable effect of nature."¹⁷ The tutor systematically tricks Emile into thinking, for instance, that nature rather than the tutor has disciplined him, or that refusals are always based entirely on the impossibility of satisfying the request rather than on any changeable human will.

Not only is Emile subject to opinions much more than we thought, but Sophie is not so totally subjected as has frequently been held. Rousseau says that "*up to the age* when reason is enlightened, and when nascent sentiment makes the conscience speak, what is good or bad for young girls is what the people around them have decided it to be" (*Emile*, p. 381, emphasis added). Sophie has early exposure to the mores of her culture, but this does not mean that she is left with no means by which to question opinion or convention. "Finally the moment comes when [girls] begin to judge things by themselves, and then it is time to *change the plan* of their education" (*Emile*, pp. 381–82; emphasis added).

Rousseau clearly states that for *both* sexes inner sentiment judges convention and that, if the two conflict, inner sentiment is authoritative (*Emile*, pp. 382–83). His position on Sophie's subjection to opinion seems more moderate and similar to his views on Emile, when he says

As soon as she depends on both her own conscience and the opinions of others, she has to learn to compare these two rules, to reconcile them, and to prefer the former only when the two are in contradiction. She becomes the judge of her judges. (*Emile*, p. 383)

17. Bloom, Introduction to *Emile*, p. 11, emphasis added. Also see R. S. Peters, *Essays on Educators*, where he discusses how Emile is coerced and manipulated by the "concealed authority of the tutor," pp. 17–20.

Saying one is to prefer the dictates of conscience to those of opinion *only* when the two disagree is identical to saying one is to prefer conscience *whenever* the two conflict. Thus, one may conclude that Sophie, like Emile, is never to follow opinion when she judges it in error, yet both are to listen to and consider it respectfully. If for no other reason than that the trends of a given time may corrupt them, Rousseau absolutely rejects an educational program for women that gives them no law but convention or prejudice.¹⁸ Both sexes are left dependent on others and the community, but with means of challenging them that are compatible with morality and integrity.

III. Desires

Thus far I have examined the *powers* half of the happiness ratio; the other part, *desires*, remains. Rousseau warns, “do not fancy that in extending your faculties you extend your strength. On the contrary, you diminish your strength if your pride is extended farther than it” (*Emile*, p. 81). To be free and happy it is necessary not only to develop one's powers, which are finite, but also to limit one's potentially unlimited desires in due proportion. Rousseau assumes that desires are malleable and trainable, and sees their training as a political task. It may well be that in discussions of Rousseau's sexual politics this subject is especially important and revealing.

Controlling desires is achieved in part by teaching Emile to submit to or accept the inevitable and immovable. Emile must

at an early date feel the harsh yoke which nature imposes on man, the heavy yoke of necessity under which every finite being must bond. Let him see this necessity in things, never in the caprice of men. (*Emile*, p. 91)

As we now know, while Emile is only to “see” this necessity in “things,” in fact it comes from the wills of others as well. If seen as such, however, Emile is likely to resist. He learns to resign himself to what is presented and *perceived* as necessity. His training goes beyond lessons, for example, about accepting disease and death to understandings about property and sex—social constructs. Whatever the lessons of necessity, in teaching them as such to Emile, Rousseau says:

you will make him patient, steady, resigned, calm, even when he has not got what he wanted, for it is in the nature of man to endure

18. See *Emile*, p. 46, where Rousseau applauds those women who “brave the empire of fashion” and become “worthy mothers.”

patiently the necessity of things but not the ill will of others.
(*Emile*, p. 91)

Rousseau also discusses curbing *Emile's* potentially boundless imagination for the sake of happiness. Imagination can make us miserable in numerous ways. We can be frustrated by imagining things as other than they must be. Imagination can exaggerate risks and damages, leaving us immobile and overly fearful. And as an escape, imagination can steer us away from hardships which we in fact can and ought to challenge. While not discouraging curiosity and inventiveness, Rousseau directs *Emile's* imaginings in a way compatible with maintaining the equilibrium between what he wants and what is in his power to obtain.

Disparaging luxury and wealth is yet another means toward reducing and controlling desires. Rousseau's rejection of modes of living which revolve around the procurement of wealth is in part a rejection of insecure social status and uncertain power. The potentially fleeting nature of riches and, therefore, of social status derived from their possession, leads Rousseau to advocate a maximin strategy. None should feel immune to crises and revolution in the social order, and everyone should be prepared to ground their status in the more certain and secure power of personal qualities such as strength, goodness, and ingenuity. Rousseau thus advocates a secular version of "there but for the grace of God go I" in extending natural pity to the political and economic world. This, like the lesson of "accept that which you cannot change," limits the range and number of *Emile's* desires.

Lastly, to keep the number of *Emile's* desires at a minimum, Rousseau attempts to foster only true needs in the child. This includes needs which have as their object the necessities of life, those which can be satisfied without the assistance of others, and those whose object is something useful. What Rousseau excludes are needs arising only from pride, from a desire to be esteemed and to be superior to others in honor, wealth, or reputation. The satisfaction of such needs is rarely under one's own control, and to have them is to be dependent on others in debilitating and degrading ways.

Practically speaking, the educator must show *Emile* the limits of his strength and of the possible. *Emile* must not be habituated to always getting what he wants, for such a practice is wont to make him believe no desires are unrealizable. Even his immunity to the lures of public opinion and convention, discussed earlier, plays a part in controlling his desires, for it leaves his desires more under his control and relatively stable, since they are not influenced by the flux of popular opinion.

The project of restraining desires, one of the two parts of the balance necessary for freedom and happiness, proceeds with much similarity for

the two sexes. Statements pulled from the *Emile* such as “[girls] must be exercised in constraint, so that it never costs them anything (*Emile*, p. 369),” frequently appear in commentaries about Rousseau’s views on women as quick and easy proof of his harsh brand of antifeminism.¹⁹ These citations are problematic, for they fail to address the fact that Rousseau consistently makes similar statements with respect to males, political statements that reflect his understanding of the human condition.

This fact ought to receive more attention, because it helps reveal the way in which both sexes are being directed, limited, and generally prepared for social life by education. While it often seems on the surface that *Emile* is to be left as free as nature presented him, and *Sophie* alone is to be channeled and restrained, it is to *Emile* that the tutor offers the following words of wisdom:

Restrain your heart within the limits of your condition. Study and know these limits. However narrow they may be, a man is not unhappy as long as he closes himself up within them. (*Emile*, p. 445)

Rousseau’s assumptions seem to be that the desires of both sexes can and must be manipulated and that such manipulation and limitation is compatible with happiness. Both sexes are taught to see such channeling as natural, and thus are more apt to accept it and proceed from there. The channeling, again, is often different: men, for instance, are steered away from pursuit of wealth, women from the assembly. It is, however, sometimes the same: both are directed to learn to care for and be responsible to others. In either case, the condition of *both* sexes, Rousseau shows above, is limited. Restraint reveals the condition of social life. All we can and must do is make the necessary chains more legitimate and less painfully noticeable.

Conclusion

I have presented the case of those who believe the educations of *Sophie* and *Emile* are totally dissimilar in philosophy as well as practice. While I do not claim that the themes discussed add up to a comprehensive treatment of Rousseau’s educational schemes, I do believe they are representative, significant, and popular in secondary literature. They reveal the fundamental flaws in the following view:

19. See, for example, Rosemary Agonito, *History of Ideas on Woman* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977).

Between Emile's education and that which Sophie receives, there is more than a contrast, there is an abyss. Rousseau emancipated Emile; he enslaves Sophie. To the same degree that he showed himself bold in his views on the "foundation" of men, is he timid, backward and conservative in his ideas on woman's education.²⁰

It has been my intent to establish some important similarities and connections between the educations of women and men that allow for a more coherent interpretation of Rousseau's work. Both sexes are acknowledged to go through various developmental stages that must be respected in education. For both, the limits and wonder of childhood are respected, and both are taught that which will be useful in their different adult lives. Each is given both sensitivity to opinion and some means of resisting it. Both are resourceful; neither is self-sufficient.

It is undoubtedly true that despite its subtitle *or, On Education*, Rousseau's *Emile*, as he himself hinted, concerns more than pedagogy in the narrow sense. It addresses issues, for example, of human nature and the character of social existence, and was considered by Rousseau his "greatest and best work."²¹ Recent attention to the political nature of the *Emile*²² is surely justified and long overdue. By emphasizing the common threads in education for the sexes, it is easier to place the *Emile* in its proper political context, rather than focusing exclusively on the technical aspects of its educational schemes.

What, then, do Rousseau's views on the education of the sexes tell us about his politics, and especially about his conception of freedom? In arguing that Emile is not as free, nor Sophie as enslaved as is frequently held, the question arises of whether anyone is really free in Rousseau's scheme. That is, if we are now to understand Emile as being as manipulated, controlled, and directed as Sophie, do we rescue Rousseau, egalitarian, at the expense of Rousseau, advocate of freedom?²³

Perhaps a good place to start is with an understanding of what Rousseau's freedom is *not*, according to the educations of Sophie and Emile. First, it is not the independence of the natural savage. For Rousseau, the possibility of self-sufficient survival has been irretrievably

20. Gabriel Compayre, *Rousseau and Education from Nature* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1921), pp. 83–84.

21. Rousseau, *Rousseau Juge de Jean Jacques*, Pleiade, I, p. 687.

22. See Allan Bloom's Introduction to his translation of the *Emile*; his "Rousseau on the Equality of the Sexes," in *Justice and Equality Here and Now*, ed. Frank S. Lucash (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 68–88; and Joel Schwartz's *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

23. I would like to thank one of *Polity's* anonymous readers for helping me put this question so succinctly.

lost. Thus, the social freedom of Emile and Sophie, who are taught to be dependent upon and accountable to others, does not consist in such things as the independent determination and satisfaction of one's desires, or in the absence of sustained ties or moral obligations to others.

Second, Rousseau's freedom is not found in the natural unfolding of individual potential. Despite his persistent association with "negative education," viewing Rousseau as a whole-hearted adherent of a "follow nature" philosophy is flawed, as we have seen. A negative education is endorsed, but only for certain ages and lessons. Rousseau assumes that it is both possible (perfectability) and necessary (asociality, indolence) to mold human nature in order to adapt it to the unnatural though legitimate demands of social life. While nature is not exactly silent, it does not equip us exclusively or sufficiently with skills and inclinations that teach us how to live well together. Thus, the social freedom of Emile and Sophie, who are carefully socialized, is not equated with freedom from restraint or the absence of external direction.

Third, interpretations of Rousseau as a liberal notwithstanding, his freedom is not the autonomy of bourgeois individuals. It is not how to survive independently that people need so much to be taught, but how to cooperate, sacrifice, and go beyond the self to a community with a common good. The pursuit of self-interest, Rousseau argues adamantly, fails to provide a solid basis for community, and inevitably leads to everything from fragmented families and false friendships to exploitative politics and dishonest business dealings. Such costs, Rousseau would argue, are ones we can least afford and, according to his logic, would actually render us unfree.

What is left of freedom as it existed in the state of nature is twofold. First, slavery, which was impossible and useless in the state of nature, is also to be avoided in society as morally unjustifiable, and this applies whether the enslavement is based on racial, sexual, class, or religious lines. Freedom thus requires that the social structure not leave some at the mercy of self-interested others, or dependent on a particular will. None can be impoverished, or systematically exploited. Sophie is not a helpless slave, and Emile is not a tyrant, beneficent or otherwise. Both are to see themselves as parts of larger wholes, to which they contribute and from which they receive necessary and desirable benefits.

Second, freedom as a balance between needs and desires is central to both the state of nature and the civil state, as has been explored above. It is still possible, for both sexes, to talk of a freedom won by simultaneous self-restraint and self-development, possible to work for that equilibrium that came effortlessly to natural savages. The failure to recognize this may arise from a tendency to apply the understanding and values of our

time too quickly to Rousseau. The fact that certain of Sophie's faculties remain undeveloped, for example, does not allow us to conclude automatically that Sophie is stunted and unhappy, and Emile free and satisfied. By Rousseau's standards, one's closeness to the state of nature, manifested in part by undeveloped faculties, may be an asset: "the closer to his natural condition man has stayed, the smaller is the difference between his faculties and his desires, and consequently the less removed he is from being happy" (*Emile*, p. 81). Also, the author of the first *Discourse* by no means thinks so highly of intellectual development as we often do today, and does not believe that fulfillment can only be found in the so-called public world. He does not exclusively or always value what is considered traditional male work, priorities, or skills.

If freedom is defined as a balance between powers and desires, then the extent of one's powers is irrelevant, as long as they are proportionate to one's desires, which, as we have seen, are themselves the objects of socialization. To the extent that freedom is associated with this equilibrium, and not with any substantive state (other than that which is not slavery), it seems that what is important is *feeling* free. Feeling free consists at least in not wanting that which is outside one's power to get and "in never doing what [one] does not want to do."²⁴ Education must not only restrain our desires, but teach us to want to do what we must do, so that we may feel free.

Outside of this subjective feeling, whatever exists of freedom in Rousseau must be compatible with community. This limits freedom at the outset, as Rousseau tells us by insisting that his enterprise is to legitimize the chains of society, not to "lose" them. This circumscribing of freedom is, of course, painful for Rousseau, and must be understood as a significant loss. William Bluhm argues that because of this, "the artificial state of society is incompatible with any version of the concept of freedom" for Rousseau.²⁵

Despite his pessimism, Rousseau may have believed that there was more than myth to social freedom, *contra* Bluhm. Looking at the educations of Emile and Sophie, with some light from other works, freedom in community involves interdependence, participation, and limited sovereignty.

Interdependence is a sticky issue. Because independence is so strongly associated with freedom and happiness in the state of nature, interdependence looks, by contrast, simply like unfreedom and unhappiness.

24. Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, pp. 83–84.

25. William T. Bluhm, "Freedom in *The Social Contract*: Rousseau's 'Legitimate Chains,'" *Polity*, 16 (Spring 1984): 363–64.

But Rousseau also views it as a gain, a "power," not unlike those considered earlier.

In discussing the cause of departure from the state of nature, Rousseau speaks of how individual resources become inadequate to guarantee survival, while the union of individual resources makes survival possible. Our interdependence is a source of strength. It not only gives us access to the ideas and products of others, but opens up all the possibilities of social life, including moral relations, bonds of affection, and development of our potential. Obviously this does not come without inevitable costs and possible dangers. Rousseau's plan is to structure social life so as to render the good consequences more probable and the bad less so, and to have the good and bad balance out such that overall interdependence is a benefit. While no person of either sex can any longer think only of, rely only upon, or work only for him- or herself, none is to be selfless or subjugated, either. Freedom in Rousseau is moderated and compensated for by the demands and rewards of community and equality.

Participation is another part of Rousseau's social freedom. His view seems to be that subjection to the community differs formally and substantively from subjection to a self-interested master, which he rejects. Subjection to the common good, in the family or the assembly, is freedom limited by fairness and concern for others, but is perhaps not so small or mythical in groups where all are trained and constrained to abide by its demands. And having some say in the determination of the general will is reminiscent of classic understandings of freedom, where participation and the possibility of affecting politics is essential to being free. Women, of course, do not participate in Rousseau's sovereign assembly, but nonetheless are seen by him as centrally affecting politics via their influence on mores and education.

Lastly, Rousseau does not create a sovereign that rules on every matter, though where it speaks it is authoritative. He never attempts what he sees as the impossible task of obliterating private will. It is also worth remembering that Rousseau advocated, against the customs of his day, that such decisions as those regarding vocations and marriage be less under the control of class systems and parental authority and more under the control of the individual.

From studying the similarities in the training of Sophie and Emile, however, a certain pessimism about the possibilities and insecurity of social life for all people surfaces. Rousseau emphasizes the need for both sexes to be accustomed to suffering, whether of physical discomfort or of injustice, and he repeatedly mentions the flux and uncertainty of modern life that both sexes will encounter. Of course, if one is prepared to face the given reality of "the world of social things," one may, as Rousseau

urges, be more resigned, have more attainable desires and thus may be, as he would say, at least less unhappy.

The author of the *Emile* knew his work to be full of puzzles, but did not think it internally inconsistent. This essay has attempted to discover its consistency by focusing on its oft neglected program of women's education. It has been shown that while women's and men's educations are often substantively different, they are consistent in their appeal to identical understandings of the human condition and development, freedom and dependence, and happiness and suffering.²⁶ Interpretations of both Emile's and Sophie's educations must be corrected in terms of this political and philosophical framework.

There is a good reason to be suspicious of the creation and enforcement of systematic differences. "Difference" is often nothing more than a good cover and more palatable name for inequality. Justified skepticism, however, is not the same thing as proof that all avoidable differences are damnable. Some differences, such as of culture, can be enriching, even when one is born into rather than choosing them. Assimilation and uniformity are clearly not always to be preferred. We need to give more attention to the thorny question of when difference is to be celebrated and when it is to be condemned.

Rousseau saw sexual difference as a means to other ends, not as an end in itself. Even as a means the pains he took to try to make it fair—to prevent difference from degenerating into relationships of master and slave—were not negligible. The questions that remain are still numerous, and include exploring whether he correctly assessed the created differences as practically compatible with equality, community, and social freedom, whether the social problem he was attempting to solve with difference was correctly perceived then and whether it still remains, and, if it is still with us, whether there are less problematic solutions to it that are consistent with sociality and justice. The reading of the *Emile* offered here helps to clarify those concerns and assumptions of Rousseau that must be addressed in answering these broader questions.

26. It is possible to discuss other similarities between the two educational programs. For example, in her dissertation, Anne Harper explores how both sexes are educated to be virtuous, not erudite. *The Family and the State in Rousseau's Emile, or On Education* (University of Michigan, 1986).