

Rousseau on Democratic Education

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1. Introduction

In 1794, amid much fanfare, officials in France had Jean-Jacques Rousseau's remains moved to Paris and placed among others deemed worthy of the highest regard in the recently completed Panthéon. Rousseau was honored in 1794 for the same reasons that his work remains on the syllabi of political theory courses today: he articulated a vision of political community in which legitimate rule was to be based on the collective interests of all citizens. A deep egalitarianism runs through Rousseau's political thought—citizens are equally part of the sovereign body and the demands of that body's general will are imposed on all citizens equally. The leaders of the French Revolution celebrated Rousseau's influence and generations of political theorists continue to reckon with his ideas.

Rousseau's rank in the canon of Western educational philosophy is perhaps even more elevated. Rousseau is a staple of introductory courses in educational theory. Of thinkers outside of the last half century, the same could only be said of Plato and John Dewey. Rousseau today is best known as perhaps the most influential proponent of child- or student-centered education—and more narrowly, experiential or discovery learning—in which children learn through encounters with problems in their environment (rather than by reading about them or hearing a teacher discuss them). Rousseau presented these ideas in *Emile: Or on education*, published in 1762.¹

Rousseau also discussed education in other works, particularly in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. But Rousseau's ideas of education in those works highlight not the student-centred principles of *Emile* but rather a collectivist education in patriotism. Rather than allowing the children to discover principles and ideas on their own schedule, Rousseau calls for public schooling that explicitly cultivates patriots. In *Considerations of the Government of Poland* and in some other works, Rousseau writes about the need to cultivate a strong attachment to both one's country and one's fellow citizens.

To modern ears, Rousseau's treatment of education in *Considerations* seems poorly suited to modern liberal democracies. Extreme nationalism seems to invite xenophobia and jingoism. Can the patriotic, nationalistic aim of education in *Considerations* be reconciled with the child-centered, individual education of *Emile*? Were either of these ideals (or both) theories of *democratic* education? In this paper, I first discuss the individual ideal presented in *Emile* and I explain why educators and philosophers committed to democratic education embraced Rousseau's work. I then discuss the

¹ Note on Rousseau's works: The translations of Rousseau's works cited in this chapter are *Emile* (E), by page number; *The Social Contract* (SC) by book, chapter, and paragraph number; *The First Discourse* (FD) by part and paragraph number; *The Political Economy* (PE) by paragraph, *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (GP) by chapter and paragraph number; and *Plan for a Constitution of Corsica* (CC) by page number.

national aim of education that Rousseau articulated most prominently in *Considerations*. Finally, I discuss some of the scholarly attempts to interpret whether the ideals are contradictory. I argue that there has been an overlooked, unifying theme in his educational works grounded in his discussions of *amour propre*. Rousseau believed that education—whether national or individual—must generate social cohesion, concord, and fellow-feeling; that is, education ought to provide a foundation for citizens to recognize each other’s dignity and live harmoniously with one another.

2. Domestic Education, Education for Citizenship, and Democratic Education in *Emile*

Rousseau’s *Emile* is an unconventional book on education in many ways. It is not merely a treatise on education; much of it is presented as a novel where the relationship of a boy, Emile, and his tutor, Jean-Jacques (and later his wife, Sophie), is a thought experiment designed to elucidate philosophical, psychological, and educational principles. But Rousseau also includes anecdotes from his own experiences, in addition to those he imagines Emile encountering. A discussion of natural religion, “The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” reads as though it is a completely separate essay (over fifty pages in Bloom’s translation) that was inserted into *Emile*.² (Rousseau wrote that he included it “as an example of the way one can reason with one’s pupil in order not to diverge from the method I have tried to establish” [E 313]).

To modern readers, *Emile*’s scope seems remarkably wide. Today’s books on education are typically divided into those for parents and those for educators. Among parenting books, there are some about infants, others about toddlers, and those that address further stages of development. Education books for teachers might focus on classroom management, pedagogy, curriculum, or communication strategies. *Emile* is comprehensive; it discusses child rearing and education with a tutor (though not in a classroom). It’s five books are based on different stages of development. This first covers infancy (and Rousseau doles out advice on topics like nursing, swaddling and bathing); the second covers toddlerhood through age twelve; the third ages twelve to fifteen (the age of “adolescence without yet being that of puberty” [E 165]); the fourth, fifteen to eighteen, and the fifth early adulthood (including marriage and a discussion of girls’ education).

That Rousseau divided childhood into stages is noteworthy. Rousseau insisted that children are not mini-adults and, therefore, the education suitable to them at different stages must be carefully thought out. Rousseau writes, for example, that, in education, the “wisest men concentrate on what it is important for men to know without considering what children are in the condition to learn” (E 34) and “childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it” (E 90).

But, since this chapter is not a general survey of Rousseau’s educational thought but rather a discussion of the connection of his educational thought to democratic theory, I must focus on what Rousseau says about education for democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, it is not clear that the education outlined in *Emile* is directed at citizenship, let alone democratic citizenship. Rousseau posits that educating the man and the citizen are two wholly opposed projects. “Civil man,” Rousseau writes, “is only a fraction unity dependent on the denominator; his value is determined by his relation to the whole.” On the other hand, “natural man” is “a numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind” (E 39). Rousseau then gives examples of Romans and Spartans as exemplary citizens, men and women who were great patriots and took delight in their fellow citizens’ accomplishments without jealousy. Rousseau argues that man and citizen are “necessarily opposed objects” which require “two contrary forms of instruction—the one, public and common; the other, individual and domestic” (E 40). Rousseau then dismisses the idea of public education because there is no longer a fatherland (or, he implies, there is no country worthy of a citizen’s patriotic commitment).

² Jurgen Oelkers (2008) argues that the section on religion is key to interpreting the entire book.

Despite claiming that the individual and the citizen are distinct, Rousseau recognized that even the product of a domestic education will become a citizen, and he discusses what kind of citizen Emile will become. As readers discover at the end of Book V when Emile has travelled Europe to examine the variety of political regimes, Emile will take up residence in a country where he can live simply and peacefully. Thus, though Emile may, by necessity, become a citizen of some country, his education can hardly be understood as an education for robust participation in a democratic society.

A further challenge of discussing Rousseau's work in relation to democracy is that Rousseau would have been unlikely to view himself as a democratic theorist. The word democracy appears only at the end of *Emile*³ and even there Rousseau merely notes that “we shall conclude that generally democratic government is suitable for small states, aristocratic government for medium-sized states, and monarchy government for large states” (E 466). In *The Social Contract*—published in the same year as *Emile* and reflecting ideas similar to the political analysis in *Emile* (E 459-467)⁴—Rousseau makes the same claim. But he goes on to say there that a pure democracy is an unattainable ideal, even in a small state: “If there were a people of Gods, they would govern themselves democratically. So perfect a Government is not suited to men” (SC III.4.8). Nevertheless, one should not overlook the fact that democracy is the ideal. And Rousseau hardly endorses the large societies for which he says monarchy and aristocracy are suited.⁵ Capital cities, in particular, are a frequent target for Rousseau; he deems them breeding grounds for vice. Indeed, one could read Rousseau as saying that life in large countries is so corrupt and debasing, they might as well be governed by a monarchy or aristocracy. Rousseau viewed tyranny as one of the greatest plagues of humanity (E 466) and envisioned societies in which people cared for each other, treated each other as equals.⁶ He was a fierce advocate of popular sovereignty—calling for a radical increase in citizens' radically increased participation in public life. Indeed, Rousseau is credited as an early advocate of what is now called participatory democracy, a form of governance in which citizens deliberate about the state's laws and some other important matters. (Advocates of representative democracy, on the other hand, call for the election of officials who deliberate about public policy while representing groups of citizens.) So, there is good reason to treat Rousseau as an advocate for democracy even if he might have seen himself as, more generally, a republican.

In addition to Rousseau's influence on democratic theory, there is another reason that it is valuable to consider Rousseau in the context of democratic education. Rousseau was highly influential among progressive educational philosophers and theorists who understood themselves to be developing an educational theory appropriate for democracy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these progressives often invoked Rousseau. Indeed, when John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn surveyed progressive educational experiments in *Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), Rousseau's name arose often. The Deweys wrote there were a range of practices at the schools, but “most of these

³ On p. 465 of the 480 pages in Bloom's translation.

⁴ Allan Bloom notes that *Emile's* analysis of politics has some notable omissions in comparison with *The Social Contract*. There is no discussion in *Emile* about the legislator and civil religion (E, p. 494, n61).

⁵ In *Considerations*, Rousseau (somewhat surprisingly to many readers), notes the danger of political revolution and outlines reforms while preserving the monarchy.

⁶ When Emile is about to begin his life as a young adult in Book V, Jean-Jacques takes him away from Paris and says: “Adieu, then, Paris, celebrated city, city of noise, smoke, and mud, where the women no longer believe in honor and the men no longer believe in virtue. Adieu, Paris. We are seeking love, happiness, innocence. We shall never be far enough away from you” (E 355). In the *Plan for a Constitution for Corsica*, Rousseau wrote “if cities are harmful, capitals are even more so. A capital is a pit into which almost the entire nation goes to lose its morals, its laws, its courage, and its freedom... From the capital is exhaled a continuous plague which undermines and finally destroys the nation” (CC 132).

points of similarity are found in the views advocated by Rousseau” (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 290).⁷ These progressive educators thought that traditional schooling was appropriate for authoritarian regimes. Democracies, on the other hand, required citizens to take initiative—rather than passively waiting for others’ commands but democracy also required cooperation—citizens must be able to work with all citizens regardless of ethnic, class, religious, or other differences.⁸ Rousseau, they believed, identified a way to cultivate the kind of initiative and independence suited for democratic citizens.

3. *Emile* and the Autonomous and Independent Citizen

Perhaps most striking to *Emile’s* readers—both past and present—is *Emile’s* freedom up to fifteen. *Emile* has no classroom, no classmates, no traditional teacher, no set curriculum, no books, and hears no lectures. “*Emile* will never learn anything by heart” (*E* 112). He will not be forced to read—“reading is the plague of childhood and almost the only occupation we know how to give it. At twelve *Emile* will hardly know what a book is” (*E* 116). Until the age of at least twelve or fifteen, he won’t learn languages—“I number the study of languages among the useless parts of education” (*E* 109). Likewise, until that age it is “ridiculous” to study history. Rousseau notes that when a child studies geography, he may learn to list the names of cities and rivers but has no understanding of the subject: “there is not a single child of ten who can find his way from Paris to Saint-Denis,” a nearby town (*E* 110).

Rousseau rejected these facets of schooling (which are as common in our own era as they were in his) because he made a set of assumptions about physiological development. He believed that children were not capable of grasping abstract ideas. When learning history, a child may be able to repeat facts but cannot grasp the complex context of those facts—a historical understanding of causes and effects (*E* 110). When studying foreign languages, a child is simply mapping synonyms onto his native tongue, Rousseau believed.

Rousseau was guided by an ideal about the value of children’s freedom and independence. Books—“the instruments of their greatest misery” (*E* 116)—are not only filled with ideas young children cannot adequately grasp. They also do something more pernicious: they “teach us to use the reason of others... to believe much and never to know anything” (*E* 125). Rousseau insists that submitting to the authority of others must be assiduously avoided (a topic I discuss in the next section).

⁷ Progressive educational theorists were explicitly reckoning with the role of education in democracy. It was no accident that Dewey titled his most important work on educational philosophy *Democracy and Education* (1916). In chapter nine, Dewey explicitly wrote that nature as aim is “of recent influence” and that, “since no one has stated in the doctrine both its truth and falsity better than Rousseau, we shall turn to him” (1916, p. 112). I have argued elsewhere (Mintz, 2016) that Dewey uses Rousseau as a stand in for his contemporary child-centered progressives whom he declined to identify explicitly. I discuss Rousseau’s educational legacy among progressives more generally in Mintz (2012).

⁸ The Deweys wrote, “education that associates learning with doing will replace the passive education of imparting the learning of others. However well the latter is adapted to feudal societies, in which most individuals are expected to submit constantly and docilely to the authority of superiors, an education which proceeds on this basis is inconsistent with a democratic society where initiative and independence are the rule and where every citizen is supposed to take part in the conduct of affairs of common interest” (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 163). They also wrote “The conventional type of education which trains children to docility and obedience, to the careful performance of imposed tasks because they are imposed, regardless of where they lead, is suited to an autocratic society... Children in school must be allowed freedom so that they will know what its use means when they become the controlling body, and they must be allowed to develop active qualities of initiative, independence, and resourcefulness, before the abuses and failures of democracy will disappear” (pp. 303-304).

Rousseau sometimes called these educational principles the “inactive method” of education. He writes, “usually one gets very surely and quickly what one is not in a hurry to get” (*E* 117). Elsewhere he writes: “Dare I expose the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of all education? It is not to gain time but to lose it” (*E* 93). He also calls this education up until the age of twelve a “purely negative education”; “It consists not at all in teaching virtue or truth but in securing the heart from vice and the mind from error” (*E* 93). From the earliest pages of *Emile* Rousseau emphasizes this message: “What must be done is to prevent anything from being done” (*E* 41). Rousseau calls for governing without explicit instruction, which he argues is really “doing everything by doing nothing” (*E* 119).⁹

What the progressive educational philosophers, so deeply committed to devising a new democratic education, would have liked about these ideas is clear. Children are presented with ample opportunities to explore with the freedom and independence appropriate for someone who will be an adult citizen empowered to govern her own life and, with others, society in general. But Rousseau also articulated something else that proved appealing to those educators. Rather than force children to study something that was ill-suited to their development or their interests, one should wait for the child to desire to study it. That is, Rousseau understood the child’s intrinsic motivation to be essential to learning. Forward-thinking educators of Rousseau’s day proposed various ways to engage students in learning. They had dice and card games (just as we do now) to generate students’ interest. Rousseau writes, “What a pity! A means surer than all these, and the one always forgotten, is the desire to learn. Give the child this desire; then let your desks and your dice go. Any method will be good for him” (*E* 117). Though Jean-Jacques does not teach *Emile* to read, Rousseau writes, “I am almost certain that *Emile* will know how to read and write perfectly before the age of ten, precisely because it makes very little difference to me that he knows how before fifteen” (*E* 117).

Learning takes place when children enjoy an activity or pursue something for the sake of some other goal (*E* 116).¹⁰ When the child reaches fifteen or so, the period of losing time ends. But Rousseau does not believe that one should then proceed to teach in a traditional way (*E* 172). In Book III, Rousseau outlines a pedagogical strategy to engage *Emile* in lessons that are now appropriate to his age.

Rather than lecturing the child (or assigning a book on the topic), educators must create an educational experience. Rousseau describes how Jean-Jacques would teach *Emile* geography and astronomy through a situation where understanding emerges from activity. Jean-Jacques takes *Emile* to the forest and pretends that they are lost. *Emile* is tired, hungry, and begins to cry. Jean-Jacques laments the predicament along with him but then notes the position of the sun in the sky. *Emile*, prompted by a few questions, deduces which direction is north from the shadows, then reasons that he needs to go south to emerge from the forest. *Emile* concludes, “Astronomy is good for something” (*E* 181).

Because Rousseau calls for learning in immersive experiences where students discover facts on their own, he has been credited as the father of “experiential education” and “discovery learning.”¹¹

⁹ Lines such as this one appears frequently. For example: “the education of children is a vocation in which one must know how to lose time in order to gain it” (*E* 141); “nature’s instruction is late and slow; men’s is almost always premature. In the former case the senses wake the imagination; in the latter the imagination wakes the senses; it gives them a precocious activity which cannot fail to enervate and weaken individuals first and in the long run the species itself” (*E* 215); “I shall repeat it endlessly: put off, if possible, a good lesson for fear of giving a bad one” (*E* 96); and “keep yourself from giving it today if you can without danger put it off until tomorrow” (*E* 94). See also Rousseau’s critique of parents who are overly eager to have their children learn to speak (*E* 93).

¹⁰ Children must feel “the real and present advantage in either pleasure or utility” (*E* 116).

¹¹ Concerning the importance of the use of the senses in children’s learning, Rousseau was particularly influenced by Condillac. See Roosevelt (2021, pp. 101-107).

Rousseau writes, “let him know something not because you told it to him but because he has understood it himself. Let him not learn science *but discover it*” (E 168; emphasis added).¹² The educator should not only avoid teaching a lesson directly, he should not even suggest what the child ought to learn (E 179). Rousseau wrote something of this process that would seem familiar to anyone acquainted with contemporary educational theory. Emile should learn to learn rather than acquire knowledge, and he should come to love learning. In studying geography, for example, “the goal is not that he know exactly the topography of the region, but that he grasp the means of learning about it” (E 171). Rousseau elaborates: “The issue is not to teach him the sciences but to give him the taste for loving them and the methods for learning them” (E 172).

Educators are keen to impart lessons to their charges but, Rousseau warns, “our didactic and pedantic craze is always to teach children what they would learn much better by themselves” (E 78). Rousseau recognized an important implication of this approach to pedagogy. Educators must not create an educational experience but then jump in as soon as the youth struggles or errs. One must wait until the youth recognizes them himself: if Emile “never made mistakes, he would not learn so well. (E 171).

Some of Rousseau’s critics from the pedagogical right thought he called for a completely *laissez-faire* approach to education. Such an interpretation, however, neglects Rousseau’s repeated calls for the tutor to create the conditions under which Emile will be prompted to investigate, just as getting lost in the forest is the occasion for the study of geography and astronomy. When Rousseau writes, for example, that the educator should not even suggest what Emile ought to learn because “it is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it” he advises next that “it is up to you to put it within his reach, skillfully to give birth to this desire and to furnish him with the means of satisfying it” (E 179).

Some of Rousseau’s critics from the pedagogical left who consider the teacher’s authority to be a threat to the student noticed that Rousseau was anything but *laissez-faire* and warned that Jean-Jacques’s hidden agenda introduced a pernicious manipulation that undermined Rousseau’s aim of educating an independent, free person.¹³ Rousseau, however, saw no inconsistency in maintaining that Emile’s tutor ought to be in complete control while Emile believed himself to be completely free. He confronted the matter head on:

Let [your pupil] always believe his is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive.... Are not his labors, his games, his pleasures, his pains, all in your hands without his knowing it? 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. (p. 120; see also p. 121, p. 124, p. 175)

The degree to which authority is valuable or detrimental in cultivating democratic citizens is a question of no small importance.¹⁴ Must students exercise their autonomy in order to develop it? Rousseau, in *Emile*, answers with a qualified yes. Children and adolescents need to be free to discover and pursue their interests, but this discovery falls within a carefully delineated sphere for which the educator is fully responsible. Coercion and manipulation are threats only if they are detected. Emile “instructs himself so much the better because he sees nowhere the intention to instruct” (E 119). Rousseau

¹² Rousseau also writes, the governor “ought to give no precepts at all; he ought to make them be discovered” (E 52).

¹³ A.S. Neill noted with disapproval Rousseau’s authoritarianism (see Walter, 1996). Rosenow (1980) and Darling (1982, pp. 179-182) discuss the tutor’s manipulation. For nuanced treatments of authority in Rousseau’s *Emile*, see Iheoma (1997) and Michaud (2012).

¹⁴ See chapters 11, 22 and 39 in this volume.

warns that if one makes a child submit to commands “that is to want him to be credulous and a dupe when he is grown up” (E 178). Because the manipulation is hidden, Emile is “not accustomed to turning constantly to others... he judges, he foresees, he reasons in everything immediately related to him. He does not chatter, he acts” (E 119). Jean-Jacques even tells Emile as he transitions into adulthood that he was only apparently free, but now he is really free and must “learn to become [his] own master” (E 445).

Much like in Rousseau’s political theory, where Rousseau believed he identified a way for citizens to be free under the constraints of the general will—famously writing that sometimes citizens may need to be “forced to be free” (SC I.7.8)—Rousseau’s educational theory sought to reconcile the value of a child’s freedom with the adult’s knowledge and experience about how to best develop children’s autonomy. Whether Rousseau’s solution is persuasive (or even plausible) is a matter of debate. But autonomy and independence are not the only aim of Emile’s education; indeed, they are only instrumentally valuable for Rousseau’s broader educational project in *Emile*, and that broader project has important implications for democratic citizenship.

4. *Amour-Propre* and Citizenship

Rousseau argues that Emile should not only (believe himself to) be free from submitting to adults but that he should never become accustomed to commanding others. Children have needs that they cannot meet. According to Rousseau, how one attends to those needs makes all the difference. When a baby cries out for an object, Rousseau advises that one should take the baby to the object so he can grasp it himself, rather than fetch the object for him; “The first tears of children are prayers. If one is not careful, they soon become orders. Children begin by getting themselves assisted; they end by getting themselves served” (E 66). Rousseau’s emphasis on “wasting time” is rooted in a concern that one should avoid introducing notions of “domination and servitude,” “empire and dominion” (E 48 & 66). It is primarily in service of this idea that Rousseau constructs an educational philosophy where authority is hidden, where the child discovers ideas on his own, where the child pursues only what interests him.

Ideas of dominion are so dangerous because they “awaken and flatter” *amour-propre*, which could be translated as vanity, pride, or self-esteem. *Amour-propre* involves comparing oneself to others, in contrast to *amour de soi*, self-love:

Self-love [*L’amour de soi*], which concerns only ourselves, is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour-propre*, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible. This is how the gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love, and how the hateful and irascible passions are born of *amour-propre*. Thus what makes man essentially good is to have few needs and to compare himself little to others; what makes him essentially wicked is to have many needs and to depend very much on opinion (E 213-4; see also 243).

Emile’s education has limited the way that he compares himself to others in that Jean-Jacques has painstakingly avoided putting Emile in situations where he obeys others (and thus feels inferior to them) or makes others obey him (which would arouse feelings of superiority).

Rousseau says that Emile’s education is based on the need to delay comparisons to others as long as possible, and this need not begin until a child becomes a moral being around the age of fifteen (and the subject of *Emile’s* fourth book).¹⁵ Rousseau’s aforementioned comments about comparisons

¹⁵ Rousseau notes that Emile is eighteen at the beginning of Book IV (E 243), but closes Book III by noting that Emile is in his fifteenth year and “*amour-propre*, the first and most natural of all the passions, is still hardly aroused in him” (E 208).

to others might lead to a reading of *Emile* that holds that *amour de soi*—self-love—is a virtue while *amour propre*—vanity—is a vice. But the issue is actually more complex. *Amour-propre* is the root of prejudice and opinion (*E* 68), yet it is “useful” despite the fact that it is a “dangerous instrument” (*E* 244). Rousseau says, “we shall transform it [*amour-propre*] into a virtue” since “there is no man’s heart in which this virtue does not have its root” (*E* 252).

Emile should thus be read not only as an educational philosophy of discovery learning or experiential education but, rather, an educational philosophy about turning *amour-propre* into a virtue. Such a reading would relegate the ideas which proved so influential to child-centered educational philosophers as but a means to that end. Comparison to others is inevitable, especially during adolescence. Furthermore, and importantly for the purposes of considering Rousseau’s contributions to democratic educational thought, comparison to others is essential for citizenship. Recall Rousseau’s question at the outset of *Emile*: “what will a man raised uniquely for himself become for others?” (*E* 41). *Emile* has spent the first fifteen years of life raised “for himself.” Now that he can meaningfully engage in moral relations, *amour-propre* must come into play. But rather than looking at others and wanting to be ranked ahead of them, *Emile* will look at them as fellow humans who ought to be afforded the same respect as he would hope they afford him. Because *Emile* has not been raised to yearn for the admiration of others, and he has not spent his time jealous of others, the foundation has been laid, perhaps, for *Emile* to be that rare citizen who does not look down upon those of lower rank nor defer to members of the upper class. *Emile* would view other citizens as his equals, recognizing no distinctions of class.¹⁶

In this discussion of education in *Emile*, I have argued that Rousseau’s educational philosophy might be viewed as democratic in two senses. First, because of his emphasis on autonomy and independence in the child’s self-motivated learning through experience, Rousseau’s ideas suggest one way to cultivate democratic citizens, a vision that proved influential about child-centered progressive educators. Second, Rousseau also articulates a more complex vision of democratic education. Discovery learning and related educational ideas are means to a more important end: the cultivation of a citizen who recognizes the inherent dignity of all fellow human beings, one whose *amour-propre* is a virtue rather than a vice. Such a citizen will not tolerate anti-democratic class hierarchies.

My analysis here is not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, Rousseau’s argument in *Emile* is particularly interesting because of the robust role allotted to the emotions in *Emile*’s education; compassion, for example, is particularly important in the development of *Emile*’s *amour-propre* and thus compassion becomes a key political emotion.¹⁷ Love is also important. The fifth book describes Sophie, her education, and her relationship with *Emile*. Sophie’s education is, in many important ways, opposed to *Emile*’s. For example, whereas others’ opinions should not matter to *Emile* and he should not care about his appearance, appearances matter for Sophie (*E* 361 & 364-5). Rousseau writes, “opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women” (365).¹⁸ Yet perhaps Rousseau’s description of Sophie’s education is evidence that *Emile* is not fully fit to participate in

¹⁶ Rousseau’s egalitarianism runs through his comments about how *Emile*’s education will be designed. He writes, “Men are not naturally kings, or lords, or courtiers, or rich men” (*E* 222) and “man is the same in all stations...to the man who thinks, all the civil distinctions disappear” (*E* 225). Rousseau suggests that political equality is necessary for people to care for fellow citizens (*E* 224). Thus, *Emile* would see all men as equal up to the age of twelve (*E* 160) and *Emile*’s education about others (when he becomes a “moral being”) begins with examining what he has in common with others (*E* 235). *Emile*’s education will be arranged so that he “puts himself in no class but finds his bearings in all” (*E* 226).

¹⁷ For a list of sources on the role of compassion in Rousseau’s political and educational theory, see Mintz (2012, p. 264 n37).

¹⁸ For an insightful critique that focuses on the precise nature of Rousseau’s views on women and girls’ education, see Weiss (1993). See Jonas (2016) on some of the ways that Rousseau’s educational philosophy and philosophy of the family intersect.

society. Sophie—with her knowledge of the ways of opinion and appearance—represents a bridge between Emile and society. His relationship with Sophie might therefore suggest that both of them have an incomplete education and, without one another, meaningful political participation is impossible. (At least via Emile, since Rousseau does not envision granting women with the same rights and responsibilities as men.) Nevertheless, I must set that controversy aside to turn to the most important problem with interpreting Rousseau’s educational theory. How can one reconcile Emile’s education with Rousseau’s views on public education?

5. Considerations on the Government of Poland and Patriotic Citizenship

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau wrote that he would consider “men as they are, and the laws as they can be” (*SC* I.0.1). Perhaps fittingly, therefore, Rousseau said relatively little about education in that work, though he does discuss how civil religion can form citizens, making them “love [their] duties,” more sociable, and tolerant (*SC* IV.8.31-34). Could one reconcile education through civil religion with the education of *Emile*? Perhaps Emile will reach such a conclusion about the value of civil religion on his own, becoming a patriot in whatever country he moves to after his marriage. Or perhaps civil religion is necessary for forming citizens who have not benefitted from the type of education Emile experienced. More challenging to reconcile with *Emile*, however, is Rousseau’s *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (*GP*).

Rousseau was asked to offer recommendations for Poland’s constitution when the country was in the midst of political upheaval and was deteriorating in anarchy (*GP* 3.1). He completed his essay for Poland in 1772. He devoted a chapter to education, which he says is “the important subject” (*GP* 4.1) and calls not only for public schooling—the sort of institution into which Emile never sets foot—but a thoroughgoing attempt to foster a love of country. The schools are to be common to all, rich and poor alike, and free, or at least affordable for the poor as well (*GP* 4.3). (The common education that Rousseau proposes is limited to boys, we may presume.)

When Emile eventually learned to read, he was given *Robinson Crusoe*, a book that celebrates independence. In Poland, however, Rousseau advised that a child, “upon learning to read, he read about his country.” Rousseau provided some details for his patriotic curriculum: “at ten he know all of its products, at twelve all of its provinces, roads, towns, that at fifteen he know its entire history, at sixteen all of its laws, that in all of Poland there not be a single great deed or illustrious person of which his memory and heart are not full, of which he could not then and there give an account” (*GP* 4.2).

Emile’s curriculum contains no love of fatherland. While history and law is something Emile begins to learn at the age of fifteen, by twelve Emile would have no knowledge of the country’s products or its provinces, roads, and towns. Indeed, as I mentioned above, Rousseau specifically criticized the teaching of geography in this way (*E* 110). Patriotism is the aim of national education in *Considerations*—“It is education that must give souls the national form, and so direct their tastes and opinions that they will be patriotic by inclination, passion, necessity” (*GP* 4.1).¹⁹ Rousseau writes that a true republican loves his fatherland; “when he is alone, he is nothing” (*GP* 4.1). In contrast, Emile has spent much time alone and maintains a critical distance from his own country, travelling for two years to identify the best country to settle in.

Emile spent time doing whatever interested him. But in Poland children “should not be allowed to play by themselves as they please, but all together and in public” (*GP* 4.5). Emile viewed other as equals because, unlike Sophie, he was not raised to seek the approval of others. In contrast, Rousseau proposes that the children of Poland become accustomed, much like Sophie, “to living under the eyes of their fellow-citizens and to seeking public approbation.” Children would play

¹⁹ On patriotism as one of Rousseau’s educational ideals, see Wain (2011, pp. 1-20).

together in public in a way that “excites competition and emulation.” Emile was shielded in his early life from ideas of subordination and dominance, but the children of Poland will be accustomed “early on to rule, to equality, to fraternity, to competitions” (GP 4.5). Rousseau proposes a mechanism for developing students’ skills of shared governance in Poland—a “moot State.” This student government, much like the official regime, would have a budget and meet to conduct business. Rousseau says that it is “the nursery of the Statesmen who will one day direct public affairs in the same capacity which they first exercise only in play” (GP 4.6). Emile’s introduction to politics comes from study and travel alone, rather than practice.

There are some educational principles shared in *Emile* and *Considerations*—Rousseau says in *Considerations* that “I cannot repeat often enough that good education has to be negative” (GP 4.4). In *Considerations*, like in other political works, Rousseau treats *amour-propre* as a dangerous but potentially valuable passion.²⁰ Perhaps he envisions Polish schools adapting some of the educational principles of *Emile* in much the way that child-centered progressives later would in schools. However, the emphasis on manufacturing patriotism in Poland has no equivalent in *Emile* and seems to undermine the autonomous judgement that Emile would develop.

Is there any way that these two works can be reconciled or are they an example of contradictions and paradoxes about which Rousseau often warns readers?

6. Autonomy, Patriotism, and *Homonoia*

Are these two ideals opposed? Perhaps, if they are, one might be inclined to argue that Rousseau simply changed his mind between the publication of *Emile* in 1762 and *Considerations* in 1772? This is not a promising explanation, however, because Rousseau had been consistently extolling patriotism prior to *Emile*. In his *First Discourse*, written in 1749 and published in 1750, Rousseau lamented the lack of patriots in society. Rousseau lamented the intellectuals around him who “smile disdainfully at such old-fashioned words as Fatherland and Religion” (FD 2.40), and the politicians who care about money rather than virtue. In his *Discourse on Political Economy*, published in 1755, Rousseau articulated ideals for state education that are consistent with those of *Considerations*, though in Poland the abstract is made concrete.²¹ Finally, even while Rousseau was writing *Emile*, he wrote in *the Social Contract* that “when each Citizen is nothing and can do nothing except with all the others, and the force acquired by the whole is equal or superior to the sum of the natural forces of all the individuals, the legislation may be said to be at the highest pitch of perfection it can reach” (SC II.7.3).

If Rousseau’s thinking did not change over time, perhaps Rousseau simply could not decide whether national or individual education ought to be the primary purpose of education. As Amos Hofman recently put it, “even after about a decade since the publication of *Emile*, Rousseau was still vacillating within the man/citizen dichotomy that characterized his philosophy of education all along” (Hofman, 2021, p. 89).

Hofman may be correct, but there are some other options that ought to be considered as well. Perhaps we might consider whether the differences between the two ideals as stark as scholars typically

²⁰ In his *Political Economy*, Rousseau writes of dangerous passions like greed and vanity but that, when citizens “feel themselves members of the fatherland,” they “transform into a sublime virtue the dangerous disposition that gives rise to all of our vices” (PE ¶36). In *The Plan for the Constitution of Corsica*, Rousseau identifies vanity as an impediment to social cohesion (CC p. 154).

²¹ Rousseau wrote that education “is surely the most important business of the state” (PE ¶38) and thus should not “be abandoned to fathers’ lights and prejudices” (PE ¶37). Rousseau essentially defined the good citizen as a patriot, and called for education to form the good citizen: “the fatherland cannot endure with freedom, nor freedom without virtue, nor virtue without citizens; you will have everything if you form citizens... Now to form citizens is not the business of a single day; and to have them be citizens when they are grown, they have to be taught when they are children” (PE ¶20; see also ¶29).

assume. Denise Schaeffer (2013) has argued that Rousseau remains committed to developing judgement in both contexts.

Grace Roosevelt (1990, especially chs. 5 & 6) has, to my mind, offered the most compelling analysis of Rousseau's opposing educational ideals. Rousseau believed that different forms of government were appropriate to states of different sizes (and democracy was appropriate only for the smallest). Roosevelt argues that the education outlined in *Considerations* is appropriate for small, tightly knit states. Patriotism is necessary in a small country like Poland on the brink of anarchy because it will help unify its citizens as a free and independent state. In contrast, *Emile* proposes an education appropriate to a decadent, expansionist state—notably, *Emile* is set in France. The citizen, like Emile, in a large, aggressive monarchy ought to be raised to be a cosmopolitan humanitarian, “comfortable in the world at large and generally critical of his own government, but who nevertheless fulfills civic duties and social responsibilities with compassion and commitment” (1990, p. 172).²²

Returning to the language I used to describe the two ideals above, Rousseau highlighted the importance of patriotism for some regimes and the value of autonomy and independence in *Emile*. However, he believed that social cohesion is essential in any society. The patriot not only loves his Fatherland, he loves his fellow citizens. Rousseau's conception of patriotism is perhaps even more focused on citizens' relationships with one another than citizens' relationship with the state. In both *Considerations* and *Emile*, Rousseau is concerned with how citizens view one another. Rousseau was a serious reader of the ancients and the concept that best describes the unifying educational aim across his works is *homonoia*. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle understood *homonoia* to be central to any thriving community.²³ Translated literally, *homonoia* means like-mindedness, but might be better described as solidarity, concord, or harmony. It involves a sharing of both hearts and minds, a love for one's fellow's citizens as well as shared commitments. Basically, it is that which creates social cohesion in a political community. An education in patriotism, as Rousseau outlines in *Considerations* and calls for elsewhere, is one way of forming bonds between citizens. Humanitarian cosmopolitanism—the term Roosevelt uses to describe Emile's citizenship—is another. As I described above, Emile grows to see others as his equals who are worthy of respect and whose dignity is recognized regardless of their social status. In either case, education must turn *amour propre* into a virtue. *Amour propre* is thus the key to generating *homonoia* or a threat to it.

If Rousseau might seem foolhardy to modern readers for proposing two opposed ideals, one might reply that he was not the only one in his time grappling with the competing demands of citizenship and developing autonomy.²⁴ It was an era, after all, where Benjamin Rush (one of the signatories of America's Declaration of Independence) declared that, having freed America from tyranny, schools must help citizens prepare for their independence by converting “men into republican machines” (1786, p. 17). When Rousseau is read in the context of other Enlightenment thinkers like Rush, it becomes clear that it was no simple matter to identify the balance between cultivating commitments to shared governance and cultivating the capacity for autonomy required to participate meaningfully in collective rule

²² Victor Gourevitch seems to endorse Roosevelt's analysis in his brief comments about man and citizen in his introduction to *Rousseau: The social contract and other later political writings* (Rousseau 1997, pp. xxix-xxx). Gourevitch argues that national education is “concerned with happiness accessible to the greater number,” while individual education is the best option available in some political contexts. (Gourevitch does not cite her work in the discussion, but Roosevelt [1990] is listed in his “A brief guide to further reading” [p.xl].)

²³ On Plato and Aristotle's praise of *homonoia* in Sparta, for example, see Mintz (2018).

²⁴ By the second half of the eighteenth century, intellectuals became intensely interested in citizenship education. Condorcet would write about education in France and Diderot about education in Russia, for example. See Gilead (2021, especially pp. 21-24).

The tension is no less present in modern democracies. Should schools encourage patriotism? Or is patriotism suited to authoritarian regimes? One of the most contested issues in public schooling in democracies is the history curriculum. Should students encounter a version of history that celebrates a country's heroes and ideals? Or should they encounter the many ways that a country has failed in its treatment of populations within and outside of its borders? Since democratic patriotism is the subject of chapter 26 in this volume, I will not explore it further here. But Rousseau's educational philosophy, both in *Emile* and elsewhere, points clearly to the pressing need for *homonoia* and social cohesion. In *Emile* and *Considerations* (and elsewhere) he discusses how *amour-propre* might be transformed into a virtue, proposing an education that is up to the task of helping citizens recognize each other's dignity and live harmoniously. Rousseau may be fairly criticized for the inadequacy of some of his political and educational principles, but underlying his philosophy is a sincere hope that citizens can relate to each other better, wherever they may find themselves.

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