

Jean Jacques Rousseau
Emile, or On Education
(1762)

Excerpts from the Original Electronic Text at the web site of the Institute for Learning Technologies.

On one level, *Emile* is a novel in which the narrator supervises Emile's education from infancy to adulthood, but the narration is really only the frame for long passages that describe ideals for education. The first four books concern Emile's infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The fifth book, which includes Emile's marriage and expectation of fatherhood, discusses women's education in the context of introducing Emile's wife-to-be, Sophie. -smv

PREFACE

[3:] We know nothing of childhood, and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child without considering what he is before he becomes a man. It is the latter study to which I have applied myself the most; so that if my method is unrealistic and unsound at least one can profit from my observations. I may be greatly mistaken as to what ought to be done, but I think I have clearly perceived the material that is to be worked upon. Begin thus by making a more careful study of your pupils, for it is clear that you know nothing about them. If you read this book with that end in view I think you will find that it is not entirely useless.

BOOK ONE

[10:] Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things, everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruits of another. He mixes and confuses the climates, the elements, the seasons. He mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave. He turns everything upside down, he disfigures everything, he loves deformities, monsters. He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man himself. For him man must be trained like a saddle-horse; he must be shaped according to the fashion, like trees in his garden. . . .

[12:] It is you whom I address, tender, foresighted mother -- you who know how to stay away from the busy highway and protect the growing seedling from the impact of human opinion! Cultivate and water the young plant before it dies; its fruit will one day be your delight. Early on, form an enclosure around your child's soul. Someone else can mark its circumference, but you alone must build the fence.

BOOK TWO

[258:] Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we try to pervert this order we shall produce a forced fruit that will have neither ripeness nor flavor and that will soon spoil. We will have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling that are proper to it. Nothing is less sensible than to try and substitute our ways. I would like no more to require a young child be five feet tall than that he have judgement at the age of ten. Indeed, what use would reason be to him at that age? It is the curb of strength, and the child does not need this curb.

[261:] Treat your pupil according to his age. Put him in his place from the first, and keep him there so well that he does not try to leave it. Then before he knows what wisdom is, he will be practising its most important lesson. Never command him to do anything, whatever in the world it may be. Do not let him even imagine that you claim to have any authority over him. He must know only that he is weak and you are strong, that his condition and yours put him at your mercy. Let him know this, let him learn it, let him feel it. At an early age let his haughty head feel the heavy yoke which nature imposes upon man, the heavy yoke of necessity under which every finite being must bow. Let him see this necessity in things, not in the whims of man. Let the curb that restrains him be force, not authority. If there is something he should not do, do not forbid him, but prevent him without explanation or reasoning. What you grant him, grant it at his first word without solicitations or pleading, above all without conditions. Grant with pleasure, refuse only with repugnance; but let your refusal be irrevocable so that no entreaties move you. Let your "No," once uttered, be a wall of bronze against which the child may have to exhaust his strength five or six times in order not to be tempted again to overthrow it.

[262:] It is thus that you will make him patient, equable, resigned, peaceful, even when he does not get all he wants. . . .

[264:] Every means has been tried except one. the one precisely that could succeed -- well-regulated freedom. One should not undertake to raise a child unless one knows how to guide him where one wants by the laws of the possible and the impossible alone. The limits of both being equally unknown, they can be extended or contracted around him at will. Without a murmur the child is restrained, urged on, held back, only by the bands of necessity. One can make him supple and docile solely by the force of things, without any chance for vice to spring up in him. For passions never become aroused so long as they have no effect.

[265:] Do not give your pupil any kind of verbal lessons; he should receive them only through experience. Do not inflict on him any kind of punishment, for he does not know what it is to do wrong. Never make him beg your pardon, for he does not know how to offend you. Deprived of all morality in his actions, he can do nothing that is morally wrong, and he deserves neither punishment nor reprimand....

[272:] The first education ought thus to be purely negative. It consists not at all in teaching virtue or truth, but in preserving the heart from vice and the mind from error. If you could do nothing and let

nothing be done, if you could bring your pupil healthy and robust to the age of twelve without knowing how to distinguish his right hand from his left, the eyes of his understanding would be open to reason as soon as you began to teach him. Without prejudice and without habits, there would be nothing in him to counteract the effects of your labours. In your hands he would soon become the wisest of men; by doing nothing to begin with, you would end with a prodigy of education.

[273:] . . . Since they want their child to be a doctor instead of a child, fathers and teachers think it never too soon to scold, correct, reprimand, flatter, threaten, promise, instruct, and reason. Do better than they; be reasonable and do not reason with your pupil. More especially do not try to make him approve of what he dislikes; for if reason is always connected with disagreeable matters, you make it distasteful to him. . . . Exercise his body, his limbs, his senses, his strength, but keep his mind idle as long as you can. . . . To prevent the birth of evil do not hasten to do good, for goodness is only possible when enlightened by reason. . . . Let childhood to ripen in children. . . .

BOOK FIVE

[1248:] Man should not be alone. Emile is now a man. We have promised him a companion; we must give her to him. That companion is Sophie.

[1250:] Sophie should be a woman as Emile is a man. That is to say, she should have everything that suits the constitution of her species and of her sex so as to take her place in the physical and moral order. Let us begin, therefore, by examining the similarities and differences between her sex and ours.

[1251:] In all that does not relate to sex, woman is man. She has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same manner, the parts are the same, the workings of the one are the same as the other, and the appearance of the two is similar. From whatever aspect one considers them, they differ only by degree.

[1254:] In the union of the sexes, each alike contributes to the common end but not in the same way. From this diversity springs the first difference which may be observed in the moral relations between the one and the other. The one should be active and strong, the other passive and weak. It is necessary that the one have the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance.

[1255:] Once this principle is established it follows that woman is specially made to please man. If man ought to please her in turn, the necessity is less urgent. His merit is in his power; he pleases because he is strong. This is not the law of love, I admit, but it is the law of nature, which is older than love itself. . .

[1256:] If woman is made to please and to be subjected, she ought to make herself pleasing to man instead of provoking him. Her strength is in her charms; by their means she should compel him to discover his strength and to use it. The surest way of arousing this strength is to make it necessary by resistance. Then *amour-propre* joins with desire, and the one triumphs from a victory that the other

made him win. This is the origin of attack and defense, of the boldness of one sex and the timidity of the other, and even of the shame and modesty with which nature has armed the weak for the conquest of the strong. . . .

[1265:] There is no parity between the two sexes when it comes to the consequence of sex. The male is only a male in certain instances; the female is female all her life or at least all her youth. Everything reminds her of her sex, and to fulfill well her functions she needs a constitution that relates to them. She needs care during pregnancy and rest when her child is born; she must have a quiet, sedentary life while she nurses her children; their education calls for patience and gentleness, for a zeal and affection which nothing can dismay. She serves as a liaison between them and their father; she alone can make him love them and give him the confidence to call them his own. What tenderness and care is required to maintain a whole family as a unit! And finally all this must not come from virtues but from feelings without which the human species would soon be extinct.

[1272:] Once it is demonstrated that men and women neither are nor ought to be constituted the same, either in character or in temperament, it follows that they ought not to have the same education. . . . After having tried to form the natural man, in order not to leave our work incomplete let us see how to also to form the woman who suits this man.

[1298:] Prevent young girls from getting bored with their tasks and infatuated with their amusements. . . . A little girl who is fond of her mother or her friend will work by her side all day without getting tired; the chatter alone will make up for any loss of liberty. But . . . children who take no delight in their mother's company are not likely to turn out well. . . . They are flatterers and deceitful and soon learn to conceal their thoughts. Neither should they be told that they ought to love their mother. Affection is not the result of duty, and in this respect constraint is out of place. Continual attachment, constant care, habit itself, all these will lead a child to love her mother as long as the mother does nothing to deserve the child's hate. The very control she exercises over the child, if well directed, will increase rather than diminish the affection, for women being made for dependence, girls feel themselves made to obey.

[1299:] For the same reason that they have, or ought to have, little freedom, they are apt to indulge themselves too fully with regard to such freedom as they do have. They carry everything to extremes, and they devote themselves to their games with an enthusiasm even greater than that of boys. . . . This enthusiasm must be kept in check, for it is the source of several vices commonly found among women -- caprice and that extravagant admiration which leads a woman to regard a thing with rapture to-day and to be quite indifferent to it to-morrow. . . . Do not leave them for a moment without restraint. Accustom them to interrupt their games and return to their other occupations without a murmur. Habit is all that is needed, since you have nature on your side.

[1300:] This habitual restraint produces a docility which woman requires all her life, for she will always be in subjection to a man, or to man's judgment, and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his. What is most wanted in a woman is gentleness. Formed to obey a creature so imperfect as man, a creature often vicious and always faulty, she should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint. She must be gentle for her own sake, not his. Bitterness and obstinacy only multiply the sufferings of the wife and the misdeeds of the husband; the

man feels that these are not the weapons to be used against him. Heaven did not make women attractive and persuasive that they might degenerate into bitterness, or meek that they should desire the mastery; their soft voice was not meant for hard words, nor their delicate features for the frowns of anger. When they lose their temper they forget themselves. Often enough they have just cause of complaint; but when they scold they always put themselves in the wrong. Each should adopt the tone that befits his or her sex. A too gentle husband may make his wife impertinant, but unless a man is a monster, the gentleness of a woman will bring him around and sooner or later will win him over. . . .

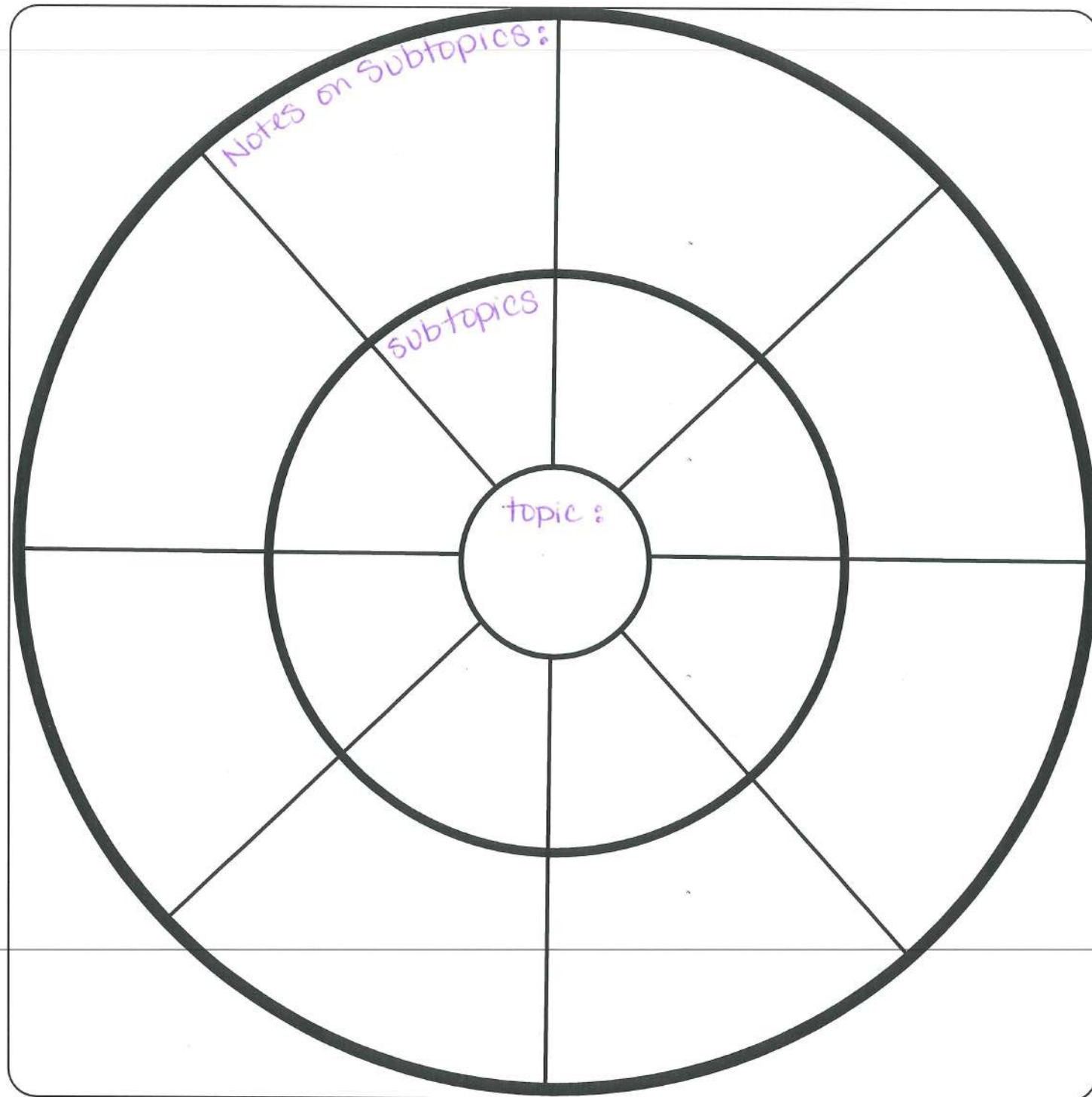
[1342:] The reason which teaches a man his duties is not very complex; the reason which teaches a woman hers is even simpler. The obedience and fidelity which she owes to her husband, the tenderness and care due to her children, are such natural and self-evident consequences of her condition that she cannot honestly refuse her consent to the inner voice which is her guide, nor disregard her duty in her natural inclination.

[1343:] I would not altogether blame those who would restrict a woman to the labours of her sex and would leave her in profound ignorance of everything else. But that would require either a very simple, very healthy public morality or a very isolated life style. In large cities, among immoral men, such a woman would be too easily seduced. Her virtue would too often be at the mercy of circumstances. In this philosophic century, virtue must be able to be put to the test. She must know in advance what people might say to her and what she should think of it.

[1357:] The search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in science, for all that tends to wide generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp; their studies should be thoroughly practical. It is their business to apply the principles discovered by men, it is their place to make the observations which lead men to discover those principles. A woman's thoughts, beyond the range of her immediate duties, should be directed to the study of men, or the acquirement of that agreeable learning whose sole end is the formation of taste. For the works of genius are beyond her reach, and she has neither the accuracy nor the attention for success in the exact sciences. As for the physical sciences, to decide the relations between living creatures and the laws of nature is the task of that sex which is more active and enterprising, which sees more things, that sex which is possessed of greater strength and is more accustomed to the exercise of that strength. Woman, weak as she is and limited in her range of observation, perceives and judges the forces at her disposal to supplement her weakness, and those forces are the passions of man. Her own mechanism is more powerful than ours; she has many levers which may set the human heart in motion. She must find a way to make us desire what she cannot achieve unaided and what she considers necessary or pleasing. Therefore she must have a thorough knowledge of man's mind -- not an abstract knowledge of the mind of man in general, but the mind of those men who are about her, the mind of those men who have authority over her, either by law or custom. She must learn to intuit their feelings from speech and action, look and gesture. By her own speech and action, look and gesture, she must be able to inspire them with the feelings she desires, without seeming to have any such purpose. The men will have a better philosophy of the human heart, but she will read more accurately in the heart of men. Woman should discover, so to speak, an experimental morality; man should reduce it to a system. Woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, man reasons. Together they provide the clearest light and the profoundest knowledge which is possible to the unaided human mind -- in a word, the surest knowledge of self and of others of which the human race is capable. In this way art may constantly tend to the perfection of the instrument which nature has given us.

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