

The Role of Education in Rousseau's Political Thought: The Relationship between Humanity and Citizenship

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Received: 19/08/2024 Accepted: 07/01/2026

DOI: 10.22096/hr.2026.2039048.1680

Abstract

This paper deliberates on education and political thought in Rousseau's magnum opus. This venture demonstrates the harmonic line of argument in Rousseau's texts in spite of the variety of subjects he addresses and traces the relationship between the two noted concepts. This paper tries to introduce the logic of how Rousseau linked education to the polity –in other words, how he linked humanity to the citizenship responsibilities of humans throughout his intellectual career. Examining this question helps clarify the link connecting all of Rousseau's works and also offers a more proper understanding of his thoughts. Whether Rousseau succeeded in this effort is a controversial issue.

Before Rousseau, other thinkers had also examined this relationship, foremost among them was Plato. It appears that Rousseau had intended for all people to enjoy an education before entering the society. He believed that human beings need to transition from the state of nature to society through the cultivation of values. Following in Plato's steps, Rousseau sought to construe a new political society for the new century and replace it with the corrupted former political society. In seeking to link education and the polity and using the concept of body politic by recourse to his private intuitions, Rousseau faced problems that Plato had thoughtfully evaded.

Keywords: Jean Jacques Rousseau, Education, Polity, Humanity, Citizenship.

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1. Introduction

“Two human inventions can be considered the most difficult,” as Immanuel Kant correctly stated, “namely, the art of government and the art of education.”¹ Before Kant, Rousseau had seriously reflected on these two areas, namely education and political thought. But how did Rousseau depict the relationship between these two concepts in his writings? In other words, with the emphasis placed on the definition of individual or human in the modern era, how has he established the relationship between humanity and citizenship? This question is important for two reasons. First, it would be a miss to examine Rousseau’s political thought without understanding the status of education in his ideas, because the transition from the state of nature to civil society was impossible without developing the human mind, and only in the discussion of private education and public education in his works can we understand the link he constructed in transitioning from the state of nature to civil society. Second, Rousseau was greatly fond of ancient Greece and Rome and tried to construct a sort of sameness between the good human and the good citizen in the new era. What he endeavored to reach had already been introduced in Plato’s writings and even Aristotle’s, but Rousseau addressed the subject from another stance that appeared to be troublesome, while the way Plato had addressed the subject had not been problematic at all.

For Plato, human should be learning all that is needed for living as a citizen of the society. While treasuring Socrates’ fate at heart, Rousseau wanted to save people from the corrupt modern society but also prevent Socrates’ fate. In ancient Greek time, man was not perceived as out of the society but as part of it and his fate was designed for him. Rousseau rephrased the problem by asking how the good human could be the same as the good citizen. In the absence of a sane society, humans need to be taught to be good humans and shall only then enter the society and this way they can both (human and the society) be saved. This article tries to demonstrate how this human invention would not solve the problem because it holds human bodies and the social architecture one and the same. That body politic perception on the society and finding a supreme legislator for his society as the head in the body made critical contradictions in his schema that discussing in the later here.

2. The Life Story of Rousseau

Let us ask why Rousseau kept reflecting on his book *Emile, or On Education*, for twenty years?² The answer may be found in his rather blemished personal life.³ Rousseau’s birth on 28 June 1712 was synonymous with the death of

¹ Immanuel Kant, *On Education*, trans. Annette Churton (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, INC, 2003) 12.

² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions and Correspondence Including the Letters to Malesherbes*, trans. Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College, 1995), 182.

³ Jacob Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 282.

her mother: "I cost my mother her life, and my birth was the first of my misfortunes."⁴ That horrible accident deprived him of motherly love. His father left his care to a nurse and his aunt and uncle and he never enjoyed a loving family. In the next phase of his life, a priest entrusted him to Baroness de Warens to be taken care of and the lack of motherly love created a fierce attachment between him and the Baroness and led him to become a Catholic. In 1728, he was accepted into Turin Church's soup kitchen, which he later described in his *Confessions* as the most despicable period of his entire life.⁵

In 1745, Rousseau married a seamstress who was ten years his junior, named Therese Levasseur. The marriage gave him a more stable life. Until this date, Rousseau was involved in different occupations and worked as woodcutter, servant, church scholastic, musician, surveyor, civil servant, farmer, tutor, cashier, music copyist, author and personal secretary of an ambassador,⁶ which all indicate his confused soul. After the stability his marriage brought him, Rousseau drew his attention toward social issues and began theorizing. As if he was Emile and his marriage to Sophie had pushed him into the social arena.

Rousseau's difficult life led him to dwell on what a good education should be. As for education, he most generalized his personal experiences to elaborate his doctrine on education. For example, although it was abysmal, he never views the early period of his life as fruitless; instead, he believed that students should be left to their own devices in keeping with nature until they reach an intellectual understanding of the world and that there is no need to instill devout religious beliefs in them and limit their intellectual ability; he vehemently believed that Robinson Crusoe was the only book a child ever needed.⁷

Once, Rousseau strived to use his own experiences in practice and teach poor Madame Mably's children, but he made no success out of this experiment, since "with them I knew how to use only three instruments that are always useless and often pernicious with children, feeling, reasoning, anger."⁸

By embarking on 'another destiny', Rousseau was trying to compensate for his neglect as the father of five as stated in his *Confessions*: "I am deprived of the pleasure of seeing them and have never savored the sweetness of paternal embraces, alas; I have already told you that I do not see anything in this but something to feel sorry about and I am delivering them from poverty at my expense; in his republic Plato wanted all the children to be brought up

⁴ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 10.

⁵ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 39.

⁶ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 9-32.

⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. and Notes by Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books, 1979), 7.

⁸ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 224.

in such a way that each would remain unknown to his father and all would be children of the state. But this education appears low and base, there is the great crime, it impresses you as it does other people and you do not see that by always following the prejudices of high society you take for the dishonor of vice what is only the dishonor of poverty".⁹

The truth is that Plato intended to lend the education of children to the society in his ideal society where people felt compelled; but in the corrupted society of Rousseau's life time, as he often described, education did not appear to be conducted well.

3. A Historic Trajectory of Education and Polity to Find Out the Rousseau's Novelty

Rousseau's interest in education does not solely correspond to his personal experiences. The pervasive developments of the modern era greatly drew his attention. The status of the individual in the society and cosmos had undergone dramatic changes that had to be traced back to the past in order to yield a better understanding.

In ancient Greece, human was perceived as a citizen rather than an individual. That is to say, individuals' life made sense in the context of public life. The 'city state' was prioritized to the individual, who was foremost regarded as a citizen who had to perform his duties in order to gain any virtue. Any human who was removed from the city state was conceived to 'be either a beast or a god'.¹⁰ The happiness of humans depended on the city state, which had to be well-organized. Human was not trained to gain virtue; rather, any education he received in rhetoric, music and military service served a political purpose. At that time, humans served as what Aristotle called 'the social animal' instead of 'moral human-beings'. Consequently, education had a public facet and the individual was conspicuously reduced to a whole.

Human being's standing in the society and the cosmos was rather more blurred in the Christianized Middle Ages. In comparison to ancient Greece, Christianity ratifies the individuality of human-being by making him accountable toward God for the sake of his own happiness in the afterlife. As a matter of fact, in Christianity, humans come down into the world to atone for the original sin, and this world to them is only a chance for repenting that sin.¹¹ Strictly speaking, the descent of humans from Heaven into Earth was to make them pure by removing Evil from their Spirit. According to Christianity, the rationale of instructing human-beings is that they can ultimately reach eternal happiness and not that they can serve as citizens in the society. In Christianity, this world has been presented by the Divine Spirit for humans to

⁹ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 552.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Aeterna Press, 2014), 3.

¹¹ Joseph Peter Stern, *Nietzsche* (London: Fontana, 1985), 57.

testify that they can comply with the duties ordered to them by God and win His grace and be saved.

Christianity did in a sense provide the grounds for the dramatic transformation that occurred with the Renaissance by clarifying the individuality of human-being. The greatest transformation proposed in the Renaissance was that a pessimistic perception of human as a repenting existence is no longer valid and human-being is now regarded at the center of the universe and has come down here to re-organize his relationship with the society, the nature and God. In the Renaissance, the profusely apologetic human disappeared and the individual was introduced as the inventor in its stead. The post-Renaissance human-being is a Creator himself, because the humankind is blessed. This transformation led to the removal of barriers such as the metaphysical chains that held humans back from understanding the nature. In the place of a past that had created humiliated human-beings, this movement portrayed them more realistically as the Godliest creatures in this world.¹²

The modern mankind felt obligated to rearrange all of his civic duties, such as education and political philosophy, from the outset. This obligation gradually eradicated the pervasive, cardinal, clerical rules. The church authorities strived to revise and update the educational instructions and make them attractive. In the period from when Mansion College was established in 1548 to the year 1762 when Clermont College was established, the church tried to revise the quality of education, but without success, and so, they conceded the task to the modern intelligentsia. In the first 60-70 years of the 16th century, many colleges were opened in France, such as Angouleme, Lyon, Dijon, Bordeaux, Tournon, Auch, Albi and Alencon colleges.¹³ In spite of the many people who received an education in those colleges, they generally failed in attracting the public with their Aristotelian and scholastic educational content.¹⁴

The background of that perception of humankind may be found in the modern European intellectual tradition as well. By the return to ancient Rome, Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) sought to instruct princes on how to perform rightly in issues of statecraft.¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) gave a mechanical definition of human instincts to introduce security as the main end of the society.¹⁶ In *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, John Locke (1632-1704) put forth a bourgeois philosophy of education, especially where it

¹² Ernest Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 39.

¹³ Jean Chateau, *Les Grand Pedagogues*, trans. Gholamhossain Shokoohi (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1976), Ch. 3.

¹⁴ Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1998), 1-2.

¹⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. N. H. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, INC, 1992), Ch. 6-11.

¹⁶ Find this notion in: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

stated that the unprivileged and the worker class should also be sent to school in a compulsory manner from the age of three years.¹⁷ None of these thinkers, except for Rousseau, attempted to draw a connection between education and political and social philosophy; nevertheless, these thinkers all had a forceful effect on him concerning the subject of education.

The main question with which human was faced in the modern era was how to organize the society in a way that no one would be subordinate to others. Human-being does not have to be subjugated to anything, including other humans, who are his equals. What this notion implies is that every individual should have his own territory to rule in order to evade being under the influence of others, but this way of living is only possible in the state of nature, and not in the state of civil society. The core question underlying Rousseau's political philosophy was how to live in the civil society without being under the influence of another human-being and without having one's destiny determined by another human. In other words, how can we retain our humanity while abiding by our citizenship duties in the civil society in a way that no contradictions are formed? That is to say, how can we be a citizen rather than a slave in the civil state?

Research on Rousseau's works has occasionally been overtly engaged with his personal life, which has been revealed in *the Confessions*, as a pretext for wide blame.¹⁸ Others have examined his works with no note of its private aspects. As one of Rousseau's experts, Vaughan believed that his thesis on the Social Contract should be studied as an apolitical text separated from fields of education, music, theater and love.¹⁹ A third view is that the study of Rousseau should take account of all the aspects of his life and work in order to reach a rich understanding of his philosophy. Rousseau himself was more interested in this third approach and discussed it in one of his works: "Society must be studied by means of men, and men by means of society. Those who want to treat politics and morals separately will never understand anything of either of the two."²⁰

It is only by following his own advice that a link can be made between *Emile* and the *Social Contract* and the controversies on how to study Rousseau can be resolved. This approach to Rousseau not only gives a better chance at fully examining 'progress in human spirit' in the society, but also implies that pedagogical thoughts are not isolated from philosophical, political, religious and ethical thoughts.²¹

4. Why Rousseau Found Wounding in the State of Affairs of His Time?

¹⁷ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 92.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Intellectuals*, Ch. 1.

¹⁹ Peter Gay, *Introduction to Basic Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (U.S.A: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 34.

²⁰ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 235.

²¹ Chateau, *Les Grand Pedagogues*, 179.

Rousseau was not approving of his time, because he believed that the man of his time was entangled in the restrictions of civilization, and so, he preferred a return to the state of nature. Nevertheless, the state of nature does not create a situation ripe for living either, although it yields better circumstances than the civilized society. In the past, man felt comfortable and happy in the state of nature, which offered motherly care for all human needs.²² Man lived freely and felt happy in this state, but as the population increased, difficulties grew.²³ Communications developed with various tools and languages, and men developed closer relations by their good faith.²⁴ In the same manner, family was established as the first collective association and then, “this was the first yoke he inadvertently imposed on himself and the first source of the evils he prepared for his descendants.”²⁵ What later followed was the possession of the property of others by force instead of cooperation.²⁶ The consequence was that property made a pretext for conflict and bloody war among people, and as put forward by Rousseau, “the first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying ‘This is mine’, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society.”²⁷

In the transition from the state of nature, man worked hard to develop agriculture and pursued metalwork for his survival. In this phase, he tried to seize more soil and instruments to his own benefit, and the state of nature gave way to “the war of all against all (*Bellum omnium contra omnes*)”, as suggested by Hobbes.²⁸ Note that Rousseau agreed with Hobbes concerning what happened in this phase of history, but he did not believe that this transition came from mankind’s innate essence. In this state, man strives to find allies for himself so as to be able to better protect himself against others. This ‘war’ initiated new forms of associations to facilitate possessing more property and wealth and “converted clever usurpation into unalterable right.”²⁹ This process resulted in the emergence of some political bodies that threatened each other’s territory and gave way to bloody wars as a legitimate tool for their purposes.³⁰ The primitive man, however, only engaged in such conflicts when it was absolutely vital to his survival, and as soon as his needs were met, would find no more pretext for enmity.³¹ In other words, in the state of nature, man would set up war against another man for the sake of his own

²² Jean Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *Basic Political Writings of J.J. Rousseau*, ed. Peter Gray (U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 20.

²³ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 25.

²⁴ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 42.

²⁵ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 44.

²⁶ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 45.

²⁷ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 40.

²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 64.

²⁹ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 34.

³⁰ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 53.

³¹ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 21.

survival, but in the modern society, one's comfort came at the cost of the other's death.³²

Sciences and industries served precisely to further exploit the earth and gather greater welfare for man. The end of this process was that, instead of helping flourish virtues in the society, morally frail men were trained. Sciences and industries only further justified the power of owners and rulers.³³ Sciences and industries became so dominant in the society that it was no longer possible to criticize them. All men wanted to seem polite and reasonable in their appearance, followed particular behaviors and utterances and no longer sought to express their inner talents.³⁴ The result was the flourishing of sameness (uniformity) and illiteracy accompanied with extravagant luxuriousness, ill will and corruption that penetrated the society. The man who was trying to control his destination and change his surroundings in the modern era was now sunk into corruption by sciences and industries. His increased awareness and information created vanity instead of becoming empowering and pushed him into the darkness. Although sciences can create a special refinement, they cannot make men brave. When he said, "I know that I know nothing", Socrates prevented vanity and believed that ignorance caused leisure.³⁵ This vanity created degeneration: "Could knowledge and virtue be incompatible?"³⁶ The status of arts declined with the emergence of sciences and industries. Artists could not address their opinions in the society because they were in search of fame, and fame is the basis of vanity and degeneration.

Rousseau did not clearly discuss whether this dire situation resulted from the essence of sciences and industries or whether humans were not well suited for utilizing them ethically and for the sake of greater virtuousness. Perhaps he intended to say that mankind should reshape his surroundings and social arrangements such that they would bring about virtuous behaviors. Only under these circumstances would sciences and industries not only be dull, but help promote the human spirit.

Virtue and piety were the two main concepts quoted by Rousseau and derived from classic literature: "Ceaselessly occupied with Rome and Athens"³⁷ that he used for criticizing the modern era. For Rousseau, liberty entails the politically and the ethically virtuous: "There can be no patriotism without liberty, no liberty without virtue, no virtue without citizens."³⁸ In his

³² Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," 32.

³³ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. and with Introducing by Susan Dunn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 48.

³⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 49.

³⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 53.

³⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 54.

³⁷ Rousseau, *Confessions*, 56.

³⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on Political Economics," in *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Charles Edward Vaughan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 11.

view, liberty was prioritized over self-preservation and virtues were a means of achieving liberty.³⁹ Liberty is possible only when virtues survive. Virtues constitute primitive people's knowledge and enable a life in peace and security. The modern man's impatience is the result of disappearing virtues. Large educational institutions gathered young people together "and instructed in everything but their duty."⁴⁰ The youth learn poems without understanding their inner meanings. They have no clear perception of words such as nobility, magnanimity, humanity, courage and audacity. The fatherland is unknown to them. No one asks them whether they would like to be honorable. Instead, they are asked about their skills, the books they have written, and whether the books have proved useful: "Rewards are lavished on wit and ingenuity, while virtue is left unhonoured."⁴¹ Such a society is deemed corrupted because its attempts are not in accordance with virtues and only seek to improve young men's knowledge, and all the expenditures in education for the young generation ultimately prove useless. A society that lacks an education system based on virtues is not a liberated society and is also apt to tyranny.

How can society be established based on virtues for the higher goal of freedom? Freedom was a precious stone for Rousseau. He sought this freedom either in the state of nature without any obligations raised or in the civil society, where it had to be established. Does this mean that, according to Rousseau, since it is not possible for men to achieve intellectual development in the state of nature, the current unpleasant society is also inevitable? In other words, is it better to stay in the state of nature for the sake of protecting freedom? But if man could be locked in the state of nature and at the same time his needs be met and his freedom reserved, then there would be no need to talk about a civil society. Since there is no enduring mechanism for preserving the state of nature or no authorities have been delegated the task of resolving conflicts, insecurity becomes a high priority in this state. Meanwhile, freedom is the essence; that is, man proceeded to escape the state of nature and enter the civil society in pursuit of freedom. This is why Rousseau did not agree with Hobbes' human, who, by consent, accepted to live under a secure association at the expense of his freedom. What Hobbes intended to establish, however, led to unbecoming societies that are criticized by Rousseau, since man feels secure in them but has lost his freedom and feels in a cage everywhere and has lost his dignity. Rousseau did not solve the dilemma and could not accept either the insecure state of nature or the secure but unpleasant civil society. In his primary writings, such as what he published as a criticism of the Encyclopédistes in *Discourse on the Origin*

³⁹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 290.

⁴⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts," in *Basic Political Writings of J.J. Rousseau*, ed. Peter Gay (U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 147.

⁴¹ Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts," 149.

and Foundations of Inequality among Mankind, in which he was enthused with the idea of ‘the Noble Savage’⁴² instead of the social contract.

In *the Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that, by entering the society, ethics, fairness and purity come to exist as a matter of fact.⁴³ In the state of nature, what man took for granted was that he had a natural freedom and could reach all goals, even though, in reality, this was impossible.⁴⁴ In the civil society, he gained civil freedom and property rights, fairness replaced instincts, moral rules replaced physical attraction and fulfilling duties replaced passion.⁴⁵ In the civil society, mental faculties would be of more use, and he gathers more diversified and in-depth thoughts and noble feelings, leaves his animal nature, short-sightedness and idiocy and generates intelligent and humanistic humans.⁴⁶ Here, Rousseau took a contrary position to his primary papers and stated that the civil society “transformed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man.”⁴⁷ He concludes that the civil society would be preferred over the state of nature at any given time, but his civil society is very different from the one discussed by Hobbes. In the state of nature, if man is free, he is free by nature, and his freedom is not man-made, and it is therefore taken for granted, unless it comes to be threatened by a new social contract. In the state of nature, man did not clearly distinguish himself from animals, but since mankind is perfectionist by nature, even in this state, he seeks to excel his human side and realize his freedom, which is the condition of his humanity. The civil state should therefore expand social relations and facilitate self-realization and pave the way for a good and law-abiding citizen who does not violate others’ realms and who is not forced to return to the state of nature as a result of the prevailing scarcity that necessitates conflicts. If humans are raised as virtuous, no scarcity will be a pretext for them to violate others’ rights. A proper upbringing would encourage humans to resolve their defects, and as a result, learning sciences and industries and arts would no longer serve as a means of collecting immoral inner supplications; rather, they would serve to excel the human side of humanity.

Hence, all people should transfer their rights to the whole society for enabling equality of all and nobody gets more profit than others. If one person has even a little bit more profit than others, the society is considered to be based on discrimination and others may be provoked to do the same, and in the absence of a good judge, this situation will give rise to another state of nature. It is therefore mandatory for all to delegate their rights to a supreme

⁴² Rousseau, “Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts,” 67.

⁴³ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 166.

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 166.

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 166.

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 167.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 167.

association and “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole”⁴⁸ and a body politic is thereby established with the size of all the members voting in the general assembly. By including the will of all in the assembly, a general will is created that is different from each individual’s will and is rather at the service of the whole society and makes thoughtful decisions by reference to the law.

“But when the whole people decree concerning the whole people, they consider themselves alone; and if a relation is then constituted; it is between the whole object under one point of view and the whole object under another point of view, without any division at all. Then the matter respecting which they decree is general like the will that decrees. It is this act that I call a law.”⁴⁹

By participating in establishing the assembly, humans are considered law-abiding but not slaves, since they are obeying the law they have themselves put in place, and though they have a head, they do not have a master. Regardless of what form of government rules this society, the end result is a republic and a legitimate one too. But how do men agree to enter the civil state and grant consent to transfer their rights to the general assembly, when, in the state of nature, their rights have not been equal? And if they could manage equal property ownership, they would not need to establish a government at all. Let us rephrase the question. Him who lives in the state of nature has the potential to seek perfection, but, in reality, is little different from animals and his intellects have not yet been fully developed. It seems that Rousseau has reached a dead-end here. But how does he solve this issue? In *the Social Contract*, he answers this critical question:

In order that a newly formed nation might approve sound maxims of politics and observe the fundamental rules of state-policy; it would be necessary that the effect should become the cause; that the social spirit, which should be the product of the institution, should preside over the institution itself, and that men should be, prior to the laws, what they ought to become by means of them. Since, then, the legislator cannot employ either force or reasoning, he must have recourse to an authority of a different order, which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing.⁵⁰

Does this scenario seem like a feasible solution? How can the social spirit be formed prior to establishing a social institution? Rousseau answers this question in *Emile*.

5. Which One for Rousseau Would Be at Prior, Education or Polity?

⁴⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 167.

⁴⁹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 179.

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 182.

As there are no social institutions for socialization in the state of nature, Emile is him whom Rousseau wants to teach according to natural pedagogy. This education is not meant to prepare Emile for life in the state of nature, which requires no education at all; rather, it is preparing him for entrance into the civil society. Education for Emile involves 20 years of his life from birth, as it is within this timeframe that his mentality flourishes and he comes to understand social relationships. Rousseau postulated that if man gets an education in his primary years of life in accordance with nature and be given natural freedom, he will be better prepared for entering the society, because it is not possible to simultaneously be educated for humanity and also for citizenship,⁵¹ and it is only by the realization of his humanity that he may also become a good citizen.

As corruption was rife in his time, Rousseau disapproved of the style of education provided by social institutions: “In the present state of things, a man abandoned to himself in the midst of other men from birth would be the most disfigured of all. Prejudices, authority, necessity, example, all the social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged would stifle nature in him and put nothing in its place.”⁵² Another passage in *Emile* also deals with this issue: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.”⁵³ Rousseau does not find the state of affairs fit for the proper education of humans and does not find any institution healthy for this raising socialized men. The only solution is for Emile to be educated in accordance with the conditions in the state of nature to prepare him for accepting his social roles. For this purpose, he draws a plan and believes that any plan has to first be absolutely good and then enable an easy enough implementation.⁵⁴ The ideal plan is one that is acceptable in essence; for example, “that the proposed education be suitable for man and well adapted to the human heart.”⁵⁵ It should be noted that the educational requirements of particular countries or particular classes of the society might differ from this plan and these differences should be considered in devising this plan. In *Emile*, Rousseau seeks to address a general means of education with no regard for these peculiarities. This educational plan shall be executable for all the society, as is the case with the law.⁵⁶ Rousseau believed that education was possible through three sources: the education of our nature, of men, and of things.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 37.

⁵² Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 38.

⁵³ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 38.

⁵⁴ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 44.

⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 33.

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 41-42.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 38.

These three sources of education should be consistent in order to accomplish the goal. Among them, the natural source of education is out of our domain, and knowledge of things comes within our domain only in some cases. The education of nature, however, is completely out of human hands, and so, the other two would have to be given in harmony with the education of nature in order to reach the precious goal, “but to reach it requires luck.”⁵⁸ Success is nevertheless not ensured in spite of all this complex process. In addition, as man’s domination over the things around him increases, it is expected for him to get an education that takes advantage of better facilities.

For Rousseau, these processes come in sequence; that is, at the early stages of life until age 12 years, mankind should be educated according to the state of nature. He forbids swaddling children, which resembles the coffin man is put into when he leaves the world, both of which represent the absence of freedom. Rousseau found that a baby’s cry is an expression of freedom. Even though refraining from swaddling might cause some harm to the baby, it is better to not take away his freedom by this strategy. Some parents are so afraid of their children getting hurt that they end up being control freaks in their children’s eyes.⁵⁹

The second stage of life, which is considered a more real one, is the one in which the child gains consciousness and where his physical body grows and he comes to the realization that everything he has done in the past or may do in the present or in the future come from the same source, and it is at this time that the child’s true personality comes out and becomes stable.⁶⁰ At this stage, the child should learn how to stand on his own feet and determine his relationship to his surroundings and rely on his own will. This latter case is what they call the education of things. The child learns of the limits of his abilities and understands that his desires should not surpass his abilities.⁶¹ Achieving a balance between these two make a happy person out of him. This does not imply that the child’s natural inclinations should be suppressed; rather, that they should be harmonized. It is of no use to bring an argument to children at this stage, since their senses still overpower their intellect, and he shall only learn the logic of nature through practical examples and by the power of his senses. If he breaks a window, he should learn that he will be exposed to wind as a result of his action, it is only in this manner that he learns to correct his mistakes. The logic of sense aids him in this period of life. “Devoid of all morality in his actions, he can do nothing which is morally bad.”⁶² This is therefore a critical time of his life, because he does not have an inner power to correct his mistakes and faults can take root and become

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 39.

⁵⁹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 19.

⁶⁰ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 78-79.

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 79.

⁶² Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 92.

hard to later remove.⁶³ Rousseau calls this stage the stage of negative education.⁶⁴ It is needless to present the truth to a child; instead, he should be left free to discover it by himself, while, at the same time, we prevent him from falling into traps. In this stage, self-actualization is possible under the supervision of an adult, but with the child left free to arrange his surroundings. In the stage called 'reason's sleep',⁶⁵ the child should not be learning history, because he makes nothing of terrible events,⁶⁶ but he should not learn fiction and fables either, as they keep his mind from the truth.⁶⁷ In sum, children need neither the truth nor falsehood. They just need a path to discovering the truth or coming to close it. Revealing the truth to a child may give him an illusion of the truth rather than the truth itself, because they are still not capable of making sense of events and things. This stage does not require belief and faith, but practice. The more we are staying in nature, the more adapted we become to living a happy life. It is for these reasons that one should only give *Robinson Crusoe* to children and no other books.⁶⁸ Education is a time-consuming process that should be taken seriously; no saving is acceptable in this process.⁶⁹ The best way of educating children is to educate them in accordance with their age and conditions, so that they become qualitatively prepared to understand what society means.

The first rule of nature is the instinct of self-preservation.⁷⁰ Loving one's family and friends comes in second. This is why the child needs to be under close parental care. When the baby has a leg to stand on, he will continue to be kind and caring, because these attributes are in his nature. Self-interest is essential for self-preservation, but egoism is only cause for the comparison of oneself with others. The second is therefore inconvenient in the society.

Rousseau believed that we are born twice; once for coming into being and a second time for living; once for becoming an existence and once in the form of genesis.⁷¹ When man examines his behavior towards others, he prepares to enter the society. This stage goes beyond the education of things and is a time in which he learns of his relationship with other people. From the age of 15 years, man tries to learn of moral concepts and he should therefore be taught about the private lives of great men,⁷² and by learning about different individuals and human-beings, he learns of the society as a whole too. This

⁶³ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 292.

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 93.

⁶⁵ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 107.

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 110.

⁶⁷ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 111.

⁶⁸ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 148.

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 149.

⁷⁰ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 68.

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 72.

⁷² Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 244.

period is a time to teach him about religion and set the context for its acceptance rather than coercing him into it, because:

“You must believe in God to be saved. This dogma badly understood is the principle of sanguinary intolerance and the cause of all those vain instructions that strike a fatal blow to human reason in accustoming it to satisfy itself with words. Doubtless there is not a moment to lose in order to merit eternal salvation. But if in order to obtain it, it is enough to repeat certain words, I do not see what prevents us from peopling heaven with starling and magpies just as well as with children.”⁷³

This enables Emile to not attribute false perceptions to God. In truth, he does not talk about anything that he cannot understand. He learns that his conscience is the best judge. Anyone who is trying to cheat himself uses reasoning to do so. Conscience is the voice of the spirit while passion is the voice of the body. Conscience is not possible without reason, but the former is more reliable than the latter.⁷⁴

At this stage, Emile is prepared to enter the society. He is in an urgent need to be married to Sophie. The marriage removes the last barrier to the culmination of Emile’s intellectual improvement, as sexual instincts are not something that can be resolve with reasoning. Marriage is also the first stage of accepting social responsibility. The ideal marriage is one that is indirectly arranged with someone of equal worth, such as was Sophie for Emile. Emile marries at the age of 18 years and then has to leave Sophie to go on a trip to find out about the ills of society and foster self-reliance and be prepared for playing a social role. This is a Spartan education, in which social duties are always prioritized to family duties. At the age of 20, Emile has become a well-travelled man who can understand the social contract by his own reasoning and clearly identify the social rules. The best way of setting forth the social contract is by educating the likes of Emile, who have fostered a social spirit before entering the society.

6. Which one gets First Priority, Humanity or Citizenship?

If men were carefully educated from the outset of entering the civil state, then one could hope that they would all delegate their properties to the body politic, as the educated man is adequately rational to make sacrifices for the higher good of the society. The quantity and quality of this man’s properties in comparison to others’ do not matter; rather, it is performing a social responsibility that matters. Locke’s human would not do the same, because for him, the amount of properties determines the amount of freedom.⁷⁵

But can Emile remain good and intact in a corrupted society? In a society that consists of men like Emile, he definitely can stay intact, but how about

⁷³ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 257.

⁷⁴ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 289.

⁷⁵ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: A Critical Examination of Some Important Social and Political Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*, vol. 1 (USA: Longman Inc., 1963), 241.

in a society where not all people are educated the same way as Emile? In *Julie, or the New Heloise* (2010), Rousseau addresses this subject. In this book, Emile and Sophie are faced with the problems of coming into contact with the corrupted civil society, but they manage to eventually return to their comfortable former life after going through a lot of hardships.⁷⁶ What matters in studying Emile is that his education requires maximum effort, but in the end, the outcome of even a good education is determined by luck, which is out of the human's power. In other words, one cannot ensure a good life for Emile despite his education of nature.

Let us pose another question too. If learned men like Emile need to exist for the social contract to be established in the civil state, who then is to educate Emile's tutor? And also, if we assume that people like Emile find their way into the society, his private education has only prepared him for being a good man –not a good citizen.

Rousseau divided instruction into two parts: The public/common education and the individual/domestic/private education. As for public education, he turned toward the ancient era for guidance.⁷⁷ The aim of public education is to instruct men as citizens with an ad-hoc position fitted to their nature.⁷⁸ Plato appears to have addressed a sermon on education. In *A Discourse on Political Economy*, Rousseau emphasizes that public education can be initiated with private education since birth.⁷⁹

If public education comes under the rule of a legitimate authority and the state, then all children grow up under conditions of equality and accept the state law as a common principle and learn to obey the general will. In *the Government of Poland*, he emphasized public education once again:

“It is education that must give souls a national formation, and direct their opinions and tastes in such a way that they will be patriotic by inclination, by passion, by necessity. When first he opens his eyes, an infant ought to see the fatherland, and up to the day of his death he ought never to see anything else.”⁸⁰

Rousseau's sporadic descriptions of public education in his different treatises do not add much to Plato's discussions on this subject and merely re-iterate them. But there is one more interesting point in *the Social Contract* that demonstrates a serious contradiction in Rousseau's thoughts on public education, while there is no such contradiction in Plato's philosophical

⁷⁶ Chateau, *Les Grand Pedagogues*, 187.

⁷⁷ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 40.

⁷⁸ Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, 41.

⁷⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Political Economy,” in *Basic Political Writings of J.J. Rousseau*, ed. Peter Gay (U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 11.

⁸⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Government of Poland* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985), 45.

thought. In this part of *the Social Contract*, he states that the plan a nation establishes for itself is called the law, but elsewhere, he states that:

In order to discover the rules of association that are most suitable to nations, a superior intelligence would be necessary who could see all the passions of men without experiencing any of them, who would have no affinity with our nature and yet know it thoroughly; whose happiness would not depend on us and who would nevertheless be quite willing to interest himself in ours; and, lastly, one who, storing up for himself with the progress of time a far-off glory in the future, could labor in one age and enjoy in another. Gods would be necessary to give laws to men.⁸¹

Similarly, he states in another part of *the Social Contract*: “It is a special and superior office, having nothing in common with human jurisdiction; for, if he who rules men ought not to control legislation; he who controls legislation ought not to rule men; otherwise his laws, being ministers of his passions, would often serve only to perpetuate his acts of injustice; he would never be able to prevent private interests from corrupting the sacredness of his work.”⁸²

Rousseau does not clarify what a legislator’s attributes should be and how to find a human-being fit for that position. It is hard to find a certain answer for this contradiction in Rousseau’s works. Perhaps Jean Chateau was right when he said: “If we do not engage the Divine wisdom, it would not be perfectly possible to comprehend Rousseau’s postulate.”⁸³

This issue was not problematic for Plato, as he put the philosopher king in political office from the outset. The philosopher king is one who has already moved from the darkness and understood the sun of truth and has taken the top political position by virtue of these achievements. Boasting qualities such as brilliance, he can lead other people toward happiness and delegate social roles to them that are in conformity with their nature. He himself is the law and has accepted to rule the nation for their own happiness.⁸⁴

Another point that was not problematic for Plato but which Rousseau rather neglected is that the individual was not very important in ancient Greece; rather, the city state was what mattered. Public duties are prioritized over other duties for Rousseau too, but the issue is that the individual would receive his education prior to entering the civil state in Rousseau’s world. In other words, is Emile receiving instructions on how to be a good human when entering the civil society or is he learning to be a good citizen? If the latter is the case, then what is the status of humanity in Rousseau’s works? If he is trying to emphasize men’s liberty in the state of nature, then, by this representation, he transmutes one into the other. As a matter of fact, similar

⁸¹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 180.

⁸² Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 181.

⁸³ Chateau, *Les Grand Pedagogues*, 194.

⁸⁴ Werner, Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

to Plato, Rousseau also finds that sacrificing humanity/liberty for the higher good of the nation and for the sake of citizenship is good. To rephrase the question, is Rousseau's man in concordance with Plato's man, who has freedom but only insofar as he moves in line with the goal that has been determined for him in the society?

7. Conclusion

In the meticulous words of Leo Strauss: "The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society, have all of them felt the necessity to go back to the state of nature, but not one of them has arrived there."⁸⁵ Rousseau also did not succeed to arrive there and be separated from the state of nature until the very end of his life. He made great efforts to establish a society that revived the nature, but he was not successful in founding a good mechanism for it.

A major critique of Rousseau's political work is that he did not differentiate between organic and established/mechanical societies, as stated in *A Discourse on Political Economy*: "The body politic, therefore, is also a moral being possessed of a will."⁸⁶ He strived to create an organic unity between all the parts of the society, on the one hand, and establish social institutions by a social contract, on the other. But he did not hold that every part of the society has a defined end to which it should lead up; rather, he believed that a mechanism should be devised for public education that prepared men for finding their suitable social roles. He discussed this issue in *the Social Contract*: "There is for nations, as for men, a period of youth, or, shall we say, maturity."⁸⁷ In another passage, he wrote: "The life-principle of the body politic lies in the sovereign authority. The legislative power is the heart of the state; the executive power is its brain, which causes the movement of all of parts."⁸⁸ In essence, examining his two main works demonstrates that he perceived the society anthropocentrically. *Emile* shows human-being going through the pre-social phases of his life and preparing to enter the society; in *the Social Contract*, human-being is passing his childhood in the state of nature and his entrance into the society is synonymous with his puberty. Rousseau attributes the same human phases of childhood, puberty, collapse and death to the society.

Plamenatz may have been right when he said: "What Rousseau wanted was a world fit for himself to live in, a heaven fit for himself to go to, and a God worthy of his love."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 267.

⁸⁶ Rousseau, "Discourse on the Political Economy," 3.

⁸⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 39.

⁸⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 40.

⁸⁹ Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, 364.

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