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Rousseau
Emile

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Emile

10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) Emile

Sophie should be as truly a woman as Emile is a man, that is, she must possess all those characteristics of her species and her sex required to allow her to play her part in the physical and moral order. Thus let us begin by examining the similarities and differences between her sex and our own.

Except for her sex woman is like a man: she has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed the same way, the pieces are the same, they work the same way, the face is similar. In whatever way one looks at them, the difference is only one of degree.

Yet where sex is concerned woman and man are both complementary and different. The difficulty in comparing them lies in our inability to decide in either case what is due to sexual difference and what is not. From

the standpoint of comparative anatomy and even upon cursory inspection one can see general differences between them which do not seem connected to sex. However, they are related, but by connections that elude our observations. How far such differences may extend we cannot tell; all we know for certain is that everything they have in common is from the species and that all their differences are due to sexual difference. Considered from these two standpoints, we find so many similarities and differences that it is perhaps one of the marvels of nature that two beings could be so alike and yet so different.

These similarities and differences must have an influence on morals; this effect is apparent and conforms with experience and shows the futility of the disputes over the superiority or the equality of the sexes—as if each sex, arriving at nature's ends by its own particular route, were not on that account more perfect than if it bore greater resemblance to the other. In their common qualities they are equal; in their differences they cannot be compared. A perfect woman and a perfect man should resemble one another neither in mind nor in face, and perfection admits of neither less nor more.

In the union of the sexes, each alike contributes to the common end, though in different ways. From this diversity springs the first difference that may be observed between man and woman in their moral relations. One should be strong and active, the other weak and passive; one must necessarily have both the power and the will—it is sufficient for the other to offer little resistance.

This principle being established, it follows that woman was specifically made to please man. If man ought to please her in turn, the necessity is less direct. His merit lies in his power; he pleases simply because he is strong. I grant you this is not the law of love; but it is the law of nature, which is older than love itself.

If woman is made to please and to be subjugated to man, she ought to make herself pleasing to him rather than to provoke him; her particular strength lies in her charms; by their means she should compel him to discover his own strength and put it to use. The surest art of arousing this strength is to render it necessary by resistance. Thus pride reinforces desire and each triumphs in the other's victory. From this originates attack and defense, the boldness of one sex and the timidity of the other and finally the modesty and shame with which nature has armed the weak for the conquest of the strong.

Who can possibly suppose that nature has indifferently prescribed the same advances to the one sex as to the other and that the first to feel desire should also be the first to display it. What a strange lack of judgment! Since the consequences of the sexual act are so different for the two sexes, is it natural that they should engage in it with equal boldness? How can one fail to see that when the share of each is so unequal, if reserve did not impose on one sex the moderation that nature imposes on the other, the result would be the destruction of both and the human race would perish through the very means ordained for its continuance. Women so

easily stir men's senses and awaken in the bottom of their hearts the remains of an almost extinct desire that if there were some unhappy climate on this earth where philosophy had introduced this custom, especially in warm countries where more women than men are born, the men tyrannized over by the women would at last become their victims and would be dragged to their deaths without ever being able to defend themselves.

If female animals do not have the same sense of shame, what do we make of that? Are their desires as boundless as those of women, which are curbed by shame? The desires of animals are the result of need; and when the need is satisfied the desire ceases; they no longer pretend to repulse the male, they do so in earnest. . . . They take on no more passengers after the ship is loaded. Even when they are free their seasons of receptivity are short and soon over; instinct pushes them on and instinct stops them. What would supplement this negative instinct in women when you have taken away their modesty? When the time comes that women are no longer concerned with men's well-being, men will no longer be good for anything at all.

The Supreme Being has deigned to do honor to the human race: in giving man unlimited desires, at the same time he provided the law that regulates them so he could be free and self-controlled; and while delivering him to these immoderate passions he added reason in order to govern them. In endowing woman with unlimited desires he added modesty in order to restrain them; moreover he has also given a reward for the correct use of their faculties, to wit, the taste one acquires for right conduct when one makes it the law of one's behavior. To my mind this is certainly as good as the instinct of the beasts.

Whether the woman shares the man's desires or not, whether or not she is willing to satisfy them, she always repulses him and defends herself, though not always with the same vigor and not, therefore, always with the same success. For the attacker to be victorious, the besieged must permit or direct the attack. How adroitly she can force the aggressor to use his strength. The freest and most delightful of all the acts does not admit any real violence; both nature and reason oppose it; nature, in that she has given the weaker party strength enough to resist if she chooses; reason, in that real violence is not only the most brutal of all acts but defeats its own ends, not only because man thus declares war against his companion and gives her the right to defend her person and her liberty even at the expense of the aggressor's life, but also because the woman alone is the judge of the situation and a child would have no father if any man might usurp a father's rights.

Thus the different constitution of the sexes leads us to a third conclusion, namely, that the strongest seems to be the master, but depends in fact on the weakest; this is not based upon a foolish custom of gallantry, nor upon the magnanimity of the protector but upon an inexorable law of nature. For nature, having endowed woman with more power to stimulate man's desire than he is able to satisfy, thus makes him dependent on woman's good will and compels him in turn to please her so that she may

consent to yield to his superior strength. Is it weakness that yields to force or is it voluntary self-surrender? This uncertainty constitutes the chief delight of the man's victory, and the woman is usually cunning enough to leave him in doubt. In this respect women's minds exactly resemble their bodies; far from being ashamed of their weakness they revel in it. Their soft muscles offer no resistance; they pretend that they cannot lift the lightest loads; they would be ashamed to be strong. And why? This is not merely to appear delicate, they are too clever for that; they are providing themselves beforehand with excuses and with the right to be weak if need be. . . .

There is no parity between man and woman as to the importance of sex. The male is only a male at certain moments; the female all her life, or at least throughout her youth, is incessantly reminded of her sex and in order to carry out its functions she needs a corresponding constitution. She needs to be careful during pregnancy; she needs rest after childbirth; she needs a quiet and sedentary life while she nurses her children; she needs patience and gentleness in order to raise them; a zeal and affection that nothing can discourage. She serves as liaison between the children and their father. She alone wins the father's love for the children and gives him the confidence to call them his own. How much tenderness and care is required to maintain the entire family in unity! Finally all this should not be a matter of virtue but of inclination, without which the human species would soon be extinct.

The relative duties of the two sexes are not and cannot be equally rigid. When woman complains about the unjust inequalities placed on her by man she is wrong; this inequality is by no means a human institution or at least it is not the work of prejudice but of reason. She to whom nature has entrusted the care of the children must hold herself accountable for them. No doubt every breach of faith is wrong and every unfaithful husband who deprives his wife of the sole reward for the austere duties of her sex is an unjust and barbarous man. But the unfaithful wife is worse. She dissolves the family and breaks all the bonds of nature; by giving her husband children who are not his own she betrays both him and them and adds perfidy to faithlessness. . . .

Thus it is not enough that a wife should be faithful, but that she should be so judged by her husband, by her neighbors and by the world. She must be modest, devoted, reserved and she should exhibit to the world to her own conscience testimony to her virtue. Finally, for a father to love his children he must esteem their mother. For these reasons the appearance of correct behavior must be among women's duties; it repays them with honor and reputation that are no less indispensable than chastity itself. From these principles derives, along with the moral difference between the sexes, a new motive for duty and propriety that prescribes to women in particular the most scrupulous attention to their conduct, manner and behavior. To advance vague arguments about the equality of the sexes and the similarity of their duties is to lose oneself in vain declamation and does not respond to my argument.

Is it not illogical to cite exceptions in response to general laws so firmly established? Women, you say, are not always bearing children. Agreed, yet it remains their particular mission. What! Just because there are a hundred large towns in the world where women live licentiously and have few children, would you maintain that it is their business to have few children? And what would become of your towns if the remote countryside, where women live more simply and more chastely, did not offset the sterility of the ladies. There are plenty of provincial areas where women with only four or five children are reckoned unfruitful. In conclusion, if a woman here or there has few children, what difference does it make? Is it any the less a woman's business to be a mother? Does it not accord with general laws that nature and morals both contribute to this state of things?

Even if we admit the possibility of such long intervals between pregnancies, can a woman change her manner of life so abruptly and without peril and without risk? Can she be a nursing mother today and a soldier tomorrow? Can she change her temperament and her tastes as a chameleon changes colors? Can she step suddenly from the shadow of the cloister and her domestic cares to the dangers of the elements, to the labors, fatigues, and perils of war? Can she be sometimes timid and sometimes brave, sometimes delicate and sometimes robust? If the young men raised in Paris can scarcely stand the soldier's profession, how can women who have never faced the sun directly and who scarcely know how to walk bear this after fifty years of idleness? Can they take up this arduous vocation at the age when men are leaving it? . . .

I am quite aware that Plato, in his *Republic*, assigns to women the same exercises as to men. Having excluded individual families from his government, and not knowing what to do with women, he finds himself forced to make them into men. This great genius has thought of everything: he even responded to an objection that perhaps no one would ever have made, but he has resolved the real objection poorly. I am not speaking of that alleged community of wives about which the oft-repeated reproach proves that those who make it have never read him. I am speaking of that civic promiscuity that mixes the two sexes in the same tasks, in the same work, and cannot help but engender the most intolerable abuse. I am speaking of that subversion of the sweetest sentiments of nature, sacrificed to an artificial sentiment that can only subsist because of them—as though it did not require a natural hold to form the bonds of convention! as though the love one has for one's dear ones were not the principle for that love one owes to the state! as if it were not by the small fatherland, the family, that the heart becomes attached to the larger fatherland, as if it were not the good son, the good husband, the good father who makes the good citizen!

Once it is demonstrated that man and woman are not, and should not be constituted the same, either in character or in temperament, it follows that they should not have the same education. In following the directions of nature they must act together but they should not do the same things;

their duties have a common end, but the duties themselves are different and consequently also the tastes that direct them. After having tried to form the natural man, let us also see, in order not to leave our work incomplete, how the woman is to be formed who suits this man.

If you would always be well guided, follow the indications of nature. All that characterizes sexual difference ought to be respected or established by nature. You are always saying that women have faults that we men do not have. Your pride deceives you; they would be faults in you but they are virtues in them; things would go less well if they did not have them. Prevent these so-called faults from degenerating, but beware of destroying them.

Women, for their part, are always complaining that we raise them only to be vain and coquettish, that we keep them amused with trifles so that we may more easily remain their masters; they blame us for the faults we attribute to them. What stupidity! And since when is it men who concern themselves with the education of girls? Who is preventing the mothers from raising them as they please? There are no schools for girls—what a tragedy! Would God, there were none for boys! They would be raised more sensibly and more straightforwardly. Is anyone forcing your daughters to waste their time on foolish trifles? Are they forced against their will to spend half their lives on their appearance, following your example? Are you prevented from instructing them, or having them instructed according to your wishes? Is it our fault if they please us when they are beautiful, if their airs and graces seduce us, if the art they learn from you attracts and flatters us, if we like to see them tastefully attired, if we let them display at leisure the weapons with which they subjugate us? Well then, decide to raise them like men; the men will gladly agree; the more women want to resemble them, the less women will govern them, and then men will truly be the masters.

All the faculties common to the two sexes are not equally divided; but taken as a whole, they offset one another. Woman is worth more as a woman and less as a man; wherever she makes her rights valued, she has the advantage; wherever she wishes to usurp ours, she remains inferior to us. One can only respond to this general truth by citing exceptions in the usual manner of the gallant partisans of the fair sex.

To cultivate in women the qualities of the men and to neglect those that are their own is, then, obviously to work to their detriment. Shrewd women see this too clearly to be duped by it. In trying to usurp our advantages they do not abandon their own, but from this it comes to pass that, not being able to manage both properly on account of their incompatibility, they fall short of their own possibilities without attaining to ours, and thus lose half their value. Believe me, judicious mother, do not make a good man of your daughter as though to give the lie to nature, but make of her a good woman, and be assured that she will be worth more to herself and to us.

Does it follow that she ought to be raised in complete ignorance and

restricted solely to the duties of the household? Shall man make a servant of his companion? Shall he deprive himself of the greatest charm of society? The better to reduce her to servitude, shall he prevent her from feeling anything or knowing anything? Shall he make of her a real automaton? Certainly not! Nature, who has endowed women with such an agreeable and acute mind, has not so ordered. On the contrary, she would have them think, and judge, and love, and know, and cultivate their minds as they do their faces: these are the weapons she gives them to supplement the strength they lack and to direct our own. They ought to learn many things, but only those which it becomes them to know.

Whether I consider the particular destination of the female sex or observe woman's inclinations, or take account of her duties, everything concurs equally to convince me of the form her education should take. Woman and man are made for each other, but their mutual dependence is not equal: men are dependent on women because of their desires; women are dependent on men because of both their desires and their needs. We men could subsist more easily without women than they could without us. In order for women to have what they need to fulfill their purpose in life, we must give it to them, we must want to give it to them, we must believe them worthy; they are dependent on our feelings, on the price we place on their merit, and on the opinion we have of their charms and of their virtues. By the very law of nature, women are at the mercy of men's judgments as much for themselves as for their children. It is not sufficient that they be thought estimable; they must also be esteemed. It is not sufficient that they be beautiful; they must please. It is not sufficient they be well behaved; they must be recognized as such. Their honor lies not only in their conduct but in their reputation. It is impossible for a woman who permits herself to be morally compromised ever to be considered virtuous. A man has no one but himself to consider, and so long as he does right he may defy public opinion; but when a woman does right, her task is only half finished, and what people think of her matters as much as what she really is. Hence it follows that the system of woman's education should in this respect be the opposite of ours: among men, opinion is the tomb of virtue; among women it is the throne.

On the good constitution of mothers depends primarily that of the children; on the care of women depends the early education of men; and on women, again, depend their morals, their passions, their tastes, their pleasures, and even their happiness. Thus the whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and should be taught them from their infancy. Unless we are guided by this principle we shall miss our aim, and all the precepts we give them will accomplish nothing either for their happiness or for our own.