



## Title

## Author

### The Beginning of Childhood Proper (Ages 5-12)

What do you think about Rousseau's views concerning the way that a parent should respond to their child tears and hurts? Do you think that Rousseau is being unnecessarily harsh in his approach?

We have now reached the second phase of life; infancy, strictly so-called, is over; for the words *infans* and *puer* are not synonymous. The latter includes the former, which means literally “one who cannot speak;” thus Valerius speaks of *puerum infantem*. But I shall continue to use the word *child* (French *enfant*) according to the custom of our language fill an age for which these is another term.

When children begin to talk they cry low. This progress is quite natural; one language supplants another. As soon as they can say “It hurts me,” why should they cry, unless the pain is too sharp for words? If they still cry, those about them are to blame. When once Emile has said, “It hurts me,” it will take a very sharp pain to make him cry.

If the child is delicate and sensitive, if by nature he begins to cry for nothing, I let him cry in vain and soon check his tears at their source. So long as he cries I will not go near him; I come at once when he leaves off crying. He will soon be quiet when he wants to call me, or rather he will utter a single cry. Children learn the meaning of signs by their effects; they have no other meaning for them. However much a child hurts himself when he is alone, he rarely cries, unless he expects to be heard.

Should he fall or bump his head, or make his nose bleed, or out his fingers, I shall show no alarm, nor shall I make any fuss over him; I shall take no notice, at any rate at first. The harm is done; he must bear it; all my zeal could only frighten him more and make him more nervous. Indeed it is not the blow but the fear of it which distresses us when we are hurt. I shall spare him this suffering at least, for he will certainly regard the injury as he sow me regard it; if he finds that I hasten anxiously to him, ff I pity him or comfort him, he will think he is badly hurt. If he finds I take no notice he will soon recover himself, and will think the wound is healed when it ceases to hurt. This is the time for his first lesson in courage, and by bearing slight ills without fear we gradually learn to bear greater.

I shall not take pains to prevent Emile hurting himself; far from it, I should be vexed if he never hurt himself, ff he grow up unacquainted with pain. To bear pain is his first and most

useful lesson. It seems as if children were small and weak on purpose to teach them these valuable lessons without danger. The child has such a little way to fall he will not break his leg; if he knocks himself with a stick he will not break his arm; if he seizes a sharp knife he will not grasp it tight enough to make a deep wound. So far as I know, no child, left to himself, has ever been known to kill or maim itself, or even to do itself any serious harm, unless it has been foolishly left on a high place, or alone near the fire, or within reach of dangerous weapons....

### Happiness in Childhood

As their strength increases, children have also less need for tears. They can do more for themselves, they need the help of others less frequently. With strength comes the sense to use it. It is with this second phase that the real personal life has its beginning; it is then that the child becomes conscious of himself. During every moment of his life memory calls up the feeling of self; he becomes really one person, always the same, and therefore capable of joy or sorrow. Hence we must begin to consider him as a moral being.

Although we know approximately the limits of human life and our chances of attaining those limits, nothing is more uncertain than the length of the life of any one of us. Very few reach **old age**. The chief risks occur at the beginning of life; the shorter our past life, the lose we must hope to live. Of all the children who are born scarcely one half reach adolescence, and it is very likely your pupil will not live to be a man.

What is to be thought, therefore, of that cruel education which sacrifices the present to an uncertain future that burdens a child with all sorts of restrictions and begins by making him miserable, in order to prepare him for some far-off happiness which he may never enjoy? Even if I considered that education wise in its aims, how could I view without indignation those poor wretches subjected to an intolerable slavery and condemned like galley-slaves to endless toil, with no certainty that they will gain anything by it? The age of harmless mirth is spent in tears, punishments, threats, and slavery. You torment the poor thing for his good; you fail to see that you are calling death to snatch him from these gloomy surroundings. Who can say how many children fall victims to the excessive care of their fathers and mothers? They are happy to escape from this cruelty; this is all that they gain from the ills they are forced to endure: they die without regretting, having known nothing of life but its sorrows.

Men, be kind to your fellow-men; this is your first duty, kind to every age and station, kind to all that is not foreign to humanity. What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness? Love childhood; indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts. Who has not sometimes regretted that age when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart was ever at peace? Why rob these innocents of the joys which pass so quickly, of that precious gift which they cannot abuse? Why

Why does Rousseau believe that children should be allowed as much freedom to enjoy themselves as possible?

Note: old age: keep in mind that the mortality rate for children in Rousseau's own time was considerably higher than it is today.

fill with bitterness the fleeting days of early childhood, days which will no more return for them than for you? Fathers, can you tell when death will call your children to him? Do not lay up sorrow for yourselves by robbing them of the short span which nature has allotted to them. As soon as they are aware of the joy of life, let them rejoice in it, so that whenever God calls them they may not die without having tasted the joy of life.

How people will cry out against me! I hear from afar the shouts of that false wisdom which is ever dragging us onwards, counting the present as nothing, and pursuing without a pause a future which flies as we pursue, that false wisdom which removed us from our place and never brings us to any other.

Now is the time, you say, to correct his evil tendencies; we must increase suffering in childhood, when it is less keenly felt, to lesson it in manhood. But how do you know that you can carry out all these fine schemes; how do you know that all this fine teaching with which you overwhelm the feeble mind of the child will not do him more harm than good in the future? How do you know that you can spare him anything by the vexations you heap upon him now? Why inflict on him more ills than befit his present condition unless you are quite sure that these present ills will save him from future ill? And what proof can you give me that those evil tendencies you profess to cure are not the result of your foolish precautions rather than of nature? What a poor sort of foresight, to make a child wretched in the present with the more or less doubtful hope of day. If such blundering thinkers fail to distinguish between liberty and licence, between a merry child and a spoiled darling, let them learn to discriminate.

Let us not forget what benefits our present state in the pursuit of vain fancies. Mankind has its place in the sequence of things; childhood has its place in the sequence of human life; the man must be treated as a man and the child as a child. Give each his place, and keep him there. Control human passions according to man's nature; that is all we can do for his welfare. The rest depends on external forces, which are beyond our control.

### **Beginning of Morality**

Absolute good and evil are unknown to us. In this life they are blended together; we never enjoy any perfectly pure feeling, nor do we remain for more than a moment in the same state. The feelings of our minds, like the changes in our bodies, are in a continual flux. Good and ill are common to all, but in varying proportions. The happiest is he who suffers least; the most miserable is he who enjoys least. Ever more sorrow than joy — this is the lot of all of us. Man's happiness in this world is but a negative state; it must be reckoned by the fewness of his ills.

Every feeling of hardship is inseparable from the desire to escape from it; every idea of pleasure from the desire to enjoy it. All desire implies a want, and all wants are painful; hence our wretchedness consists in the disproportion between our desires and our powers. A conscious being whose powers were

Why does Rousseau believe that harmony with nature is the key to wisdom, morality and happiness?

equal to his desires would be perfectly happy.

What then is human wisdom? Where is the path of true happiness? The mere limitation of our desires is not enough, for if they were less than our powers, part of our faculties would be idle, and we should not enjoy our whole being; neither is the more extension of our powers enough, for if our desires were also increased we should only be the more miserable. True happiness consists in decreasing the difference between our desires and our powers, in establishing a perfect equilibrium between the power and the will. Then only, when all its forces are employed, will the soul be at rest and man will find himself in his true position.

In this condition, nature, who does everything for the best, has placed him from the first. To begin with, she gives him only such desires as are necessary for self-preservation and such powers as are sufficient for their satisfaction. All the rest she has stored in his mind as a sort of reserve, to be drawn upon at need. It is only in this primitive condition that we find the equilibrium between desire and power, and then alone man is not unhappy. As soon as his potential powers of mind begin to function, imagination, more powerful than all the rest, awakes, and precedes all the rest. It is imagination which enlarges the bounds of possibility for us, whether for good or for ill, and therefore stimulates and feeds desires by the hope of satisfying them. But the object which seemed within our grasp flies quicker than we can follow; when we think we have grasped it, it transforms itself and is again far ahead of us. We no longer perceive the country we have traversed, and we think nothing of it; that which lies before us becomes vaster and stretches still before us. Thus we exhaust our strength, yet never reach our goal, and the nearer we are to pleasure, the further we are from happiness.

On the other hand, the more nearly a man's condition approximates to this state of nature the less difference is there between his desires and his powers, and happiness is therefore less remote. Lacking everything, he is never less miserable; for misery consists, not in the lack of things, but in the needs which they inspire....

### **Real and Artificial Needs**

Nature provides for the child's growth in her own fashion, and this should never be thwarted. Do not make him sit still when he wants to run about, nor run when he wants to be quiet. If we did not spoil our children's wills by our blunders, their desires would be free from caprice. Let them run, jump, and shout to their heart's content. All their own activities are instincts of the body for its growth in strength; but you should regard with suspicion those wishes which they cannot carry out for themselves, those which others must carry out for them. Then you must distinguish carefully between natural and artificial needs, between the needs of budding caprice and the needs which spring from the overflowing life just described.

I have already told you what you ought to do when a child cries for this thing or that. I will only add that as soon as he has words to ask for what he wants and accompanies his demands with tears, either to get his own way quicker or to over-ride a refusal, he should never have his way. If his words were prompted by a real need you should recognize it and satisfy it at once; but to yield to his tears is to encourage him to cry, to teach him to doubt your kindness, and to think that you are influenced more by his importunity than your own good-will. If he does not think you kind he will soon think you unkind; if he thinks you weak he will soon become obstinate; -hat you mean to give must be given at once. Be chary of refusing, but having refused, do not change your mind.

Above all, beware of teaching the child empty phrases of politeness, which serve as spells to subdue those around him to his will, and to get him what he wants at once. The artificial education of the rich never fails to make them politely imperious, by teaching them the words to use so that no one will dare to resist them. Their children have neither the tone nor the manner of suppliants; they are as haughty or even more haughty in their entreaties than in their commands, as though they were more certain to be obeyed. You see at once that "If you please" means "It pleases me," and "I beg" means "I command" What a fine sort of politeness which only succeeds in changing the meaning of words so that every word is a command! For my own part, I would rather Emile were rude than haughty, that he should say "Do this" as a request, rather than "Please" as a command. What concerns me is his meaning, not his words....

### **Reasoning With Children**

I return to practical matters. I have already said your child must not get what he asks, but what he needs; I he must never act from obedience, but from necessity.

Why does Rousseau believe that it is foolish to try to reason with a young child?

The very words obey and command will be excluded from his vocabulary, still more those of duty and obligation; but the words strength, necessity, weakness, and constraint must have a large place in it. Before the age of reason it is impossible to form any idea of moral beings or social relations; so avoid, as far as may be, the use of words which express these ideas, lest the child at an early age should attach wrong ideas to them, ideas which you cannot or will not destroy when he is older. The first mistaken idea he gets into his head is the germ of error and vice; it is the first stop that needs watching. Act in such a way that while he only notices external objects his ideas are confined to sensations; let him only see the physical world around him. If not, you may be sure that either he will pay no heed to you at all, or he will form fantastic ideas of the moral world of which you prate, ideas which you will never efface as long as he lives.

"Reason with children" was Locke's chief maxim; it is in the height of fashion at present, and I hardly think it is justified by its results; those children who have been constantly reasoned

with strike me as exceedingly silly. Of all man's faculties, reason, which is, so to speak, compounded of all the rest, is the last and choicest growth, and it is this you would use for the child's early training. To make a man reasonable is the coping atone of a good education, and yet you profess to train a child through his reason! You begin at the wrong end, you make the end the means. If children understood reason they would not need education, but by talking to them from their earliest age in a language they do not understand you accustom them to be satisfied with words, to question all that is said to them, to think themselves as wise as their teachers; you train them to be argumentative and rebellious; and whatever you think you gain from motives of reason, you really gain from greediness, fear, or vanity with which you axe obliged to reinforce your reasoning.

Most of the moral lessons which are and can be given to children may be reduced to this formula:

Master. You must not do that.

Child. Why not?

Master. Because it is wrong.

Child. Wrong! What is wrong?

Master. What is forbidden you.

Child. Why is it wrong to do what is forbidden?

Master. You will be punished for disobedience.

Child. I will do it when no one is looking.

Master. We shall watch you.

Child. I will hide.

Master. We shall ask you what you were doing.

Child. I shall tell a lie.

Master. You must not tell lies.

Child. Why must not I tell lies?

Master. Because it is wrong, etc.

That is the inevitable circle. Go beyond it, and the child will not understand you. What sort of use is there in such teaching? I should greatly like to know what you would substitute for this dialogue. It would have puzzled Locke himself. It is no part of a child's business to know right and wrong, to perceive the reason for a man's duties.

Nature would have them children before they are men, If we try to invert this order we shall produce a forced fruit immature and flavorless, fruit which will be rotten before it is ripe; we shall have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling; nothing is more foolish than to try and substitute our ways; and I should no more expect judgment in a ten-year-old child than I should expect him to be five feet high. Indeed, what use would reason be to him at that age? It is the curb of strength, and the child does not need the curb.

When you try to persuade your scholars of the duty of obedience you add to this so-called persuasion compulsion and threats, or still worse, flattery and bribes. Attracted by selfishness or constrained by force, they pretend to be convinced by reason. They see as soon as you do that obedience is to their

advantage and disobedience to their advantage. But as you only demand disagreeable things of them, and as it is always disagreeable to do another's will, they hide themselves so that they may do as they please, persuaded that they are doing no wrong so long as they are not found out, but ready, if found out, to own themselves in the wrong for fear of worse evils. The reason for duty is beyond their age, and there is not a man in the world who could make them really aware of it; but the fear of punishment, the hope of forgiveness, importunity, the difficulty of answering, wrings from them as many confessions as you want; and you think you have convinced them when you have only wearied or frightened them.

What does it all come to? In the first place, by imposing on them a duty which they fail to recognize, you make them disinclined to submit to your tyranny, and you turn away their love; you teach them deceit, falsehood, and lying as a way to gain rewards or escape punishment; then by accustoming them to conceal a secret motive under the cloak of an apparent one, you yourself put into their hands the means of deceiving you, of depriving you of a knowledge of their real character, of answering you and others with empty words whenever they have the chance. Laws, you say, though binding on conscience, exercise the same constraint over grown-up men. That is so, but what are these men but children spoiled by education? This is just what you should avoid. Use force with children and reasoning with men; this is the natural order; the wise man needs no laws.

Treat your scholar according to his age. Put him in his place from the first, and keep him in it, so that he no longer tries to leave it. Then before he knows what goodness is, he will be practicing its chief lesson. Give him no orders at all, absolutely none. Do not even let him think that you claim any authority over him. Let him only know that he is weak and you are strong, that his condition and yours puts him at your mercy; let this be perceived, learned, and felt. Let him early find upon his proud neck, the heavy yoke which nature has imposed upon us, the heavy yoke of necessity, under which every finite being must bow. Let him find this necessity in things, not in the caprices of man; let the curb 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 give him, give it at his first word without prayers or entreaties, above all without conditions. Give willingly, refuse unwillingly, but let your refusal be irrevocable; let no entreaties move you; let your "No," once uttered, be a wall of brass, against which the child may exhaust his strength some five or six times, but in the end he will try no more to overthrow it.

Thus, you will make him patient, equable, calm, and resigned, even when he does not get all he wants; for it is in man's nature to bear patiently with the nature of things, but not with the ill-will of another. A child never rebels against, "There is none left," unless he thinks the reply is false. Moreover, there is no middle course; you must either make no demands on him

at all, or else you must fashion him to perfect obedience. The worst education of all is to leave him hesitating between his own will and yours, constantly disputing whether you or he is master; I would rather a hundred times that he were master.

It is very strange that ever since people began to think about education they should have hit upon no other way of guiding children than emulation, jealousy, envy, vanity, greediness, base cowardice, all the most dangerous passions, passions ever ready to ferment, ever prepared to corrupt the soul even before the body is full-grown. With every piece of precocious instruction which you try to force into their minds you plant a vice in the depths of their hearts; foolish teachers think they are doing wonders when they are making their scholars wicked in order to teach them what goodness is, and then they tell us seriously, "Such is man." Yes, such is man, as you have made him. Every means has been tried except one, the very one which might succeed--well-regulated liberty. Do not undertake to bring up a child if you cannot guide him merely by the laws of what can or cannot be. The limits of the possible and the impossible are alike unknown to him, so they can be extended or contracted around him at your will. Without a murmur he is restrained, urged on, held back, by the hands of necessity alone; he is made adaptable and teachable by the more force of things, without any chance for vice to spring up in him; for passions do not arise so long as they have accomplished nothing.

Give your scholar no verbal lessons; he should be taught by experience alone; never punish him, for he does not know what it is to do wrong; never make him say, "Forgive me," for he does not know how to do you wrong. Wholly unmoral in his actions, he can do nothing morally wrong, and he deserves neither punishment nor reproof.

Already I see the frightened reader comparing this child with those of our time; he is mistaken. The perpetual restraint imposed upon your scholars stimulates their activity; the more subdued they are in your presence, the more boisterous they are as soon as they are out of your sight. They must make amends to themselves in some way or other for the harsh constraint to which you subject them. Two schoolboys from the town will do more damage in the country than all the children of the village. Shut up a young gentleman and a young peasant in a room; the former will have upset and smashed everything before the latter has stirred from his place. Why is that, unless that the one hastens to misuse a moment's licence, while the other, always sure of freedom, does not use it rashly. And yet the village children, often flattered or constrained, are still very far from the state in which I would have them kept.

### **Moral Education**

Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart, the how and why of the entrance of every vice can be traced. The only natural passion is self-love or



What does Rousseau mean when he says that a child might do damage (to himself or others) but that he can never do wrong?

selfishness taken in a wider sense. This selfishness is good in itself and in relation to ourselves; and as the child has no necessary relations to other people he is naturally indifferent to them; his self-love only becomes good or bad by the use made of it and the relations established by its means. Until the time is ripe for the appearance of reason, that guide of selfishness, the main thing is that the child shall do nothing because you are watching him or listening to him; in a word, nothing because of other people, but only what nature asks of him; then he "I never do wrong.

I do not mean to say that he will never do any mischief, never hurt himself, never break a costly ornament if you leave it within his reach. He might do much damage without doing wrong, since wrong-doing depends on the harmful intention which will never be his. If once he meant to do harm, his whole education would be ruined; he would be almost hopelessly bad.

Greed considers some things wrong which are not wrong in the eyes of reason. When you leave free scope to a child's heedlessness, you must put anything he could spoil out of his way, and leave nothing fragile or costly within his reach. Let the room be furnished with plain and solid furniture; no mirrors, china, or useless ornaments. My pupil Emile, who is brought up in the country, shall have a room just like a peasant's. Why take such pains to adorn it when he will be so little in it? I am mistaken, however; he will ornament it for himself, and we shall soon see how.

But if, in spite of your precautions, the child contrives to do some damage, if he breaks some useful article, do not punish him for your carelessness, do not even scold him; let him hear no word of criticism, do not even let him see that he has vexed you; behave just as if the thing had come to pieces of itself; you may consider you have done great things if you have managed to hold your tongue.

May I venture at this point to state the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of education? It is: Do not save time, but lose it. I hope that every-day readers will excuse my paradoxes; you cannot avoid paradox if you think for yourself, and whatever you may say I would rather fall into paradox than into prejudice. The most dangerous period in human life lies between birth and the age of twelve. It is the time when errors and vices spring up, while as yet there is no means to destroy them; when the means of destruction are ready, the roots have gone too deep to be pulled up. If the infant sprang at one bound from its mother's breast to the age of reason, the present type of education would be quite suitable, but its natural growth calls for quite a different training. The mind should be left undisturbed till its faculties have developed; for while it is blind it cannot see the torch you offer it, nor can it follow through the vast expanse of ideas a path so faintly traced by reason that the best eyes can scarcely follow it.

Therefore the education of the earliest years should be merely negative. It consists, not in teaching virtue or truth, but

in preserving the heart from vice and from the spirit of error. If only you could let well alone, and get others to follow your example; if you could bring your scholar to the age of twelve strong and healthy, but unable to tell his right hand from his left, the eyes of his understanding would be open to reason as soon as you began to teach him. Free from prejudices and free from habits, there would be nothing in him to counteract the effects of your labors. 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.

Reverse the usual practice and you will almost always do right. Fathers and teachers who want to make the child, not a child but a man of learning, think it never too soon to scold, correct, reprove, threaten, bribe, teach, and reason. Do better than they; be reasonable, and do not reason with your pupil, more especially do not try to make him approve what he dislikes; for if reason is always connected with disagreeable matters, you make it distasteful to him, you discredit it at an early age in a mind not yet ready to understand it. Exercise his body, his limbs, his senses, his strength, but keep his mind idle as long as you can. Distrust all opinions which appear before the judgment to discriminate between them. Restrain and ward off strange impressions; and to prevent the birth of evil do not hasten to do well, for goodness is only possible when enlightened by reason. Regard all delays as so much time gained; you have achieved much, you approach the boundary without loss. Leave childhood to ripen in your children. In a word, beware of giving anything they need today if it can be deferred without danger to to-morrow.

### **The Child's Educational Program in General**

Why does Rousseau maintain that the child actually has no real memory?

The apparent ease with which children learn is their ruin. You fail to see that this very facility proves that they are not learning. Their shining, polished brain reflects, as in a mirror, the things you show them, but nothing sinks in. The child remembers the words and the ideas are reflected back; his hearers understand them, but to him they are meaningless.

Although memory and reason are wholly different faculties, the one does not really develop apart from the other. Before the age of reason the child receives images, not ideas; and there is this difference between them: images are merely the pictures of external objects, while ideas are notions about those objects determined by their relations. An image when it is recalled may exist by itself in the mind, but every idea implies other ideas. When we image we merely perceive, when we reason we compare. Our sensations are merely passive, our notions or ideas spring from an active principle which judges. The proof of this will be given later.

I maintain, therefore, that as children are incapable of judging, they have no true memory. They retain sounds, form, sensation, but rarely ideas, and still more rarely relations. You tell me they acquire some rudiments of geometry, and you think

you prove your case; not so, it is mine you prove; you show that far from being able to reason themselves, children are unable to retain the reasoning of others; for if you follow the method of these little geometricians you will see they only retain the exact impression of the figure and the terms of the demonstration. They cannot meet the slightest new objection; if the figure is reversed they can do nothing. All their knowledge is on the sensation-level, nothing has penetrated to their understanding. Their memory is little better than their other powers, for they always have to learn over again, when they are grown up, what they learnt as children.

I am far from thinking, however, that children have no sort of reason. On the contrary, I think they reason very well with regard to things that affect their actual and sensible well-being. But people are mistaken as to the extent of their information, and they attribute to them knowledge they do not possess, and make them reason about things they cannot understand. Another mistake is to try to turn their attention to matters which do not concern them in the least, such as their future interest, their happiness when they are grown up, the opinion people will have of them when they are men — which are absolutely meaningless when addressed to creatures who are entirely without foresight. But all the forced studies of these poor little wretches are directed towards matters utterly remote from their minds. You may judge how much attention they can give to them.

The pedagogues, who make a great display of the teaching they give their pupils, are paid to say just the opposite; yet their actions show that they think just as I do. For what do they teach? Words! words! words! Among the various sciences they boast of teaching their scholars, they take good care never to choose those which might be really useful to them, for then they would be compelled to deal with things and would fail utterly; the sciences they choose are those we seem to know when we know their technical terms — heraldry, geography, chronology, languages, etc., studies so remote from man, and even more remote from the child, that it is a wonder if he can ever make any use of any part of them

What are Rousseau's arguments for avoiding the study of language, geometry, history and literature (fables) during the child's early years.

### *Languages*

You will be surprised to find that I reckon the study of languages among the useless lumber of education; but you must remember that I am speaking of the studies of the earliest years, and whatever you may say, I do not believe any child under twelve or fifteen ever really acquired two languages.

If the study of languages were merely the study of words, that is, of the symbols by which language expresses itself, then this might be a suitable study for children; but languages, as they change the symbols, also modify the ideas which the symbols express. Minds are formed by language, thoughts take their color from its ideas. Reason alone is common to all. Every language has its own form, a difference which may be partly

cause and partly effect of differences in national character; this conjecture appears to be confirmed by the fact that in every nation under the sun speech follows the changes of manners, and is preserved or altered along with them.

By use the child acquires one of these different forms and it is the only language he retains till the age of reason. To acquire two languages he must be able to compare their ideas, and how can he compare ideas he can barely understand? Everything may have a thousand meanings to him, but each idea can only have one form, so he can only learn one language. You assure me he learns several languages; I deny it. I have seen those little prodigies who are supposed to speak half a dozen languages. I have heard them speak first in German, then in Latin, French, or Italian; true, they used half a dozen different vocabularies, but they always spoke German. In a word, you may give children as many synonyms as you like; it is not their language but their words that you change; they will never have but one language.

To conceal their deficiencies teachers choose the dead languages, in which we have no longer any judges whose authority is beyond dispute. The familiar use of these tongues disappeared long ago, so they are content to imitate what they find in books, and they call that talking. If the master's Greek and Latin is such poor stuff, what about the children? They have scarcely learnt their primer by heart, without understanding a word of it, when they are set to translate a French speech into Latin words; then when they are more advanced they piece together a few phrases of Cicero for prose or a few lines of Vergil for verse. Then they think they can speak Latin, and who will contradict them?

### *Geography*

In any study whatsoever the symbols are of no value without the idea of the things symbolized. Yet the education of the child is confined to those symbols, while no one ever succeeds in making him understand the thing signified. You think you are teaching him what the world is like; he is only learning the map; he is taught the names of towns, countries, rivers, which have no existence for him except on the paper before him. I remember seeing a geography somewhere which began with: "What is the world?" — "A sphere of cardboard." That is the child's geography. I maintain that after two years' work with the globe and cosmographic, there is not a single ten-year-old child who could find his way from Paris to Saint Denis by the help of the rules he has learnt. I maintain that not one of these children could find his way by the map about the paths on his father's estate without getting lost. These are the young doctors who can tell us the position of Pekin, Ispahan, Mexico, and every country in the world....

### *History*

It is a still more ridiculous error to set them to study history,

which is considered within their grasp because it is merely a collection of facts. But what is meant by this word “fact”? Do you think the relations which determine the facts of history are so easy to grasp that the corresponding ideas are easily developed in the child’s mind? Do you think that a real knowledge of events can exist apart from the knowledge of their causes and effects, and that history has so little relation to words that the one can be learnt without the other? If you perceive nothing in a man’s actions beyond merely physical and external movements, what do you learn from history? Absolutely nothing; while this study, robbed of all that makes it interesting, gives you neither pleasure nor information. If you want to judge actions by their moral bearings, try to make these moral bearings intelligible to your scholars. You will soon find out if they are old enough to learn history....

Such words as king, emperor, war, conquest, law, and revolution are easily put into their mouths; but when it is a question of attaching clear ideas to these words the explanations are very different from our talk with Robert the gardener.

Without the study of books, such a memory as the child may possess is not left idle; everything he sees and hears makes an impression on him, he keeps a record of men’s sayings and doings, and his whole environment is the book from which he unconsciously enriches his memory, till his judgment is able to profit by it.

To select these objects, to take care to present him constantly with those he may know, to conceal from him those he ought not to know, this is the real way of training his early memory; and in this way you must try to provide him with a storehouse of knowledge which will serve for his education in youth and his conduct throughout life. True, this method does not produce infant prodigies, nor will it reflect glory upon their tutors and governesses, but it produces men, strong, right-thinking men, vigorous both in mind and body, men who do not win admiration as children, but honor as men.

### *Fables*

Emile will not learn anything by heart, not even fables, not even the fables of La Fontaine, simple and delightful as they are, for the words are no more the fable than the words of history are history. How can people be so blind as to call fables the child’s system of morals, without considering that the child is not only amused by the apologue but misled by it? He is attracted by what is false and he misses the truth, and the means adopted to make the teaching pleasant prevent him profiting by it. Men may be taught by fables; children require the naked truth.

All children learn La Fontaine’s fables, but not one of them understands them. It is just as well that they do not understand, for the morality of the fables is so mixed and so unsuitable for their age that it would be more likely to incline them to vice than to virtue. “More paradoxes!” you exclaim. Paradoxes they may be; but let us see if there is not some truth in them.

I maintain that the child does not understand the fables he is taught, for however you try to explain them, the teaching you wish to extract from them demands ideas which he cannot grasp, while the poetical form which makes it easier to remember makes it harder to understand, so that clearness is sacrificed to facility. Without quoting the host of wholly unintelligible and useless fables which are taught to children because they happen to be in the same book as the others, let us keep to those which the author seems to have written specially for children....

### *Reading*

Why does Rousseau believe that reading is the "curse of childhood"?

When I thus get rid of children's lessons, I got rid of the chief cause of their sorrows, namely their books. Reading is the curse of childhood, yet it is almost the only occupation you can find for children. Emile, at twelve years old, will hardly know what a book is. "But," you say, "he must at least, know how to read." When reading is of use to him, I admit he must learn to read, but till then he will only find it a nuisance.

If children are not to be required to do anything as a matter of obedience, it follows that they will only learn what they perceive to be of real and present value, either for use or enjoyment; what other motive could they have for learning? The art of speaking to our absent friends, of hearing their words; the art of letting them know at first hand our feelings, our desires, and our longings, is an art whose usefulness can be made plain at any age. How is it that this art, so useful and pleasant in itself, has become a terror to children? Because the child is compelled to acquire it against his will, and to use it for purposes beyond his comprehension. A child has no great wish to perfect himself in the use of an instrument of torture, but make it a means to his pleasure, and soon you win not be able to keep him from it.

People make a great fuss about discovering the best way to teach children to read. They invent "bureaux" and cards, they turn the nursery into a printer's shop. Locke would have them taught to read by means of dice. What a fine idea! And the pity of it! There is a better way than any of those, and one which is generally overlooked — it consists in the desire to learn. Arouse this desire in your scholar and have done with your "bureaux" and your dice — any method will serve.

Present interest, that is the motive power, the only motive power that takes us far and safely. Sometimes Emile receives notes of invitation from his father or mother, his relations or friends; he is invited to a dinner, a walk, a boating expedition, to see some public entertainment. These notes are short, clear, plain, and well written. Some one must read them to him, and he cannot always find anybody when wanted; no more consideration is shown to him than he himself showed to you yesterday. Time passes, the chance is lost. The note is read to him at last, but it is too late. Oh! if only he had known how to read! He receives other notes, so short, so interesting, he would like to try to read them. Sometimes he gets help, sometimes

none. He does his best, and at last he makes out half the note; it is something about going tomorrow to drink cream-- Where? With whom? He cannot tell--how hard he tries to make out the rest! I do not think Emile will need a "bureau." Shall I proceed to the teaching of writing? No, I am ashamed to toy with these trifles in a treatise on education.

I will just add a few words which contain a principle of great importance. It is this: what we are in no hurry to get is usually obtained with speed and certainty. I am pretty sure Emile will learn to read and write before he is ten, just because I care very little whether he can do so before he is fifteen; but I would rather he never learnt to read at all, than that this art should be acquired at the price of all that makes reading useful. What is the use of reading to him if he always hates it?

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Jean Jacques Rousseau. *Emile*. Trans. Barbara Foxley (1911).

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