

Rousseau's indictment of the social order in emile



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) consists of a series of stories, and its teaching comes to light only when one has grasped each of these stories in its complex artistic details and in its entirety. The interpretation of this hybrid text, the first 'bildungsroman' requires a union of l' spirit de geometrie and l' spirit de finesse, a union in which it both typifies and teaches. In the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1753) Rousseau says that "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains." Man is born equal, self-sufficient, unprejudiced, but we find at the end of history that he is in fetters. With the progress of civilization man has socially degenerated. He is constantly plagued by the social inequality, superstitions and the division between his inclinations and his duties. Nature has made man a brute. History has made man civilized, but unhappy and immoral. History is not a theodicy but a tale of misery and corruption. For Rousseau, *Emile* is the history of his species rather than a novel. Kant says that it is a work which attempts to reconcile nature and with history, man's selfish nature with the demands of the civil society, in other way, inclination with duty. Rousseau tries to restore the harmony of man with the world by re-ordering man's acquisitiveness and ambition. *Emile* is the canvas on which Rousseau tries to paint all of the soul's acquired passions and learning in such a way as to cohere with man's natural wholeness. Rousseau says that the causes of evil are embedded in the social order itself. Society is the outcome of irreversible historical process. Man is a bundle of contradictions because of the paradoxes, spurious social and spiritual order. He says that human sins are contained in religious doctrines. He attributes the decay of society to Christianity that is responsible for the loss of our heavenly abode. Man is not naturally a political being; he has no inclination towards justice. By nature he

cares only for his own preservation. All of these, Rousseau takes to be true. He differs only in that he does not believe that the duty to obey the laws of civil society can be derived from self-interest. Rousseau is at the source of the tradition which replaces virtue and vice as the causes of man's being too good or bad, happy or miserable and a whole lot of contradictions. All these have their source in Rousseau's analysis of amour de soi (self-interest) and amour propre (selfish-interest), a division within man's soul resulting from man's bodily and spiritual dependence on other men which tears apart his original unity or wholeness. 'Self-interest' lies in primitive men; 'selfish-interest' lies in modern corrupt society. Self-interest retrace back to the state of God, the state of perpetual bliss. When self-interest is subject to debasement, it gets metamorphosed into selfish-interest. Virtue and knowledge are incompatible. To avoid this, we need the taming and controlling of body's desires under the guidance of the soul's reason. In Emile, we find that all of Emile's early rearing is an elaborate attempt to avoid the emergence of the imagination which according to the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality is the faculty that turns man's intellectual progress into the source of his misery. In the first place, the boy does not imagine beings or places which does not exist. He imagines himself in situations and subject to necessities which are part of his experience. The right kind of education, one independent of society, can put a child into direct contact with nature without the intermixture of opinions. His desire for the pleasant and the avoidance of the painful are given by nature. The tutor's responsibility is, in the first place, to let the senses develop in relation to their proper objects; and secondly, to encourage the learning of the sciences as the almost natural outcome of the use of his senses. Education comes to

us from nature or from men or from things. Of these three, education coming from nature is in no way in our control. The conjunction of these three educations is necessary to their perfection. Every particular society, when it is narrow and unified, is estranged from the all-encompassing society. The essential thing is to be good to the people with whom one lives. He, who in the civil order wants to preserve the primacy of the sentiments of nature, does not know what he wants. Always in contradiction with himself, always swaying between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either man or citizen. He will be good neither for himself nor for others. He will be nothing. Natural education ought to make a man fit for all human conditions. Rousseau was the first to isolate and coin the low, debased human species—the bourgeois. The bourgeois is contrasted by Rousseau, on the one side with the natural man (*homme naturel*) and on the other, with civil man (*homme civil*). The natural man is whole and simply concerned with himself and the civil man's very being consists in his relation to his city, who understands his god to be identical with the common god. The division between these two causes man's unhappiness. The bourgeois distinguishes his own good from the common good. His good requires society, and he exploits others while depending on them. When Rousseau says that man is by nature good, he means that man, concerned only with his well-being, does not naturally have to compete with other men, nor does he care for his opinions. Man's goodness is identical to his natural freedom and equality. From the standpoint of imaginary perfection man's passions are bad; from that of the natural desire for self-preservation they are good. We see in *Emile* that *Emile* is gradually moving towards social integration that his point of departure is his acute individualism. Rousseau condemns the false values of

<https://assignbuster.com/rousseau-indictment-of-the-social-order-in-emile/>

an inauthentic society. He is against any kind of indoctrination. Social Contract (1762) along with Emile constitute an exploration of the consequences for modern man of the tensions between and civilization, freedom and society, and hence happiness and progress which Rousseau propounds in the Discourse on the Arts and Sciences (1750) and the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (1754). Social Contract deals with the civil society and the citizen. Family is the first natural association. In the ancient times men lived in the lap of nature. There were no feuds or scuffle between them; their life was simple and happy. But with the increase of population and public property, there arose various problems. Property was the origin of many evils. It was to be safeguarded from others. It led to rivalry. Individual rivalry led to group rivalry. This was a 'state of war'. In Social Contract, Rousseau says, some type of contract between the ruler (i. e. powerful) and the ruled (i. e. weak) was formed to get rid of this anarchy. But Rousseau says, this contract is spurious and bogus. What we find in this kind of contract is despotism; so in a sense, we can say that it is a movement from the frying pan of anarchy to the fire of despotism. Despotism is a kind of monster that lives on the ruins of the public. Surrendering one's free will to despotism is contrary to natural law. Rousseau says, to set right the situation, the people formed a 'social contract' among themselves. Rousseau gives much interest to this contract. According to this contract, as Rousseau says, the power was given to the society. Rousseau calls it the "General Will". It is not merely the summation of everybody's will. Every man has two wishes in himself—real will and unreal will. "General Will" is the summation of everyman's real will. As a man's 'real will' cannot be false, so the general cannot be untrue. The laws

that will emanate from 'General Will' will be infallible. In a sense, he is upholding the notion of mass-sovereignty. To Emile whose only desire is to know and live according to the necessity, the new science of laws of nature is a perfect complement. Rousseau agrees with Locke that man has no natural inclination to civil society and the fulfillment of obligation, he must find some other selfish natural passion that can somehow be used as the basis for a genuine (as opposed to spurious, competitive) concern for others. Such a passion is necessary in order to provide the link between the individual and disinterested respect for or the rights of others, which is what meant by real morality. Emile's first principle of action is pleasure and pain; his second, after the birth of reason and his learning the science is utility; now compassion is added to the other two, and concern for others for others become part of his sense of his own interest. At the end of Emile, Emile's inclinations are thwarted by another will. He becomes subject to a law and has an inner experience of the tension between inclination and duty. But Rousseau has many loopholes and contradictions in his views. Critics say, by endowing all the power to the "General Will", Rousseau is supporting the dictatorship of the common mass. There is another lacuna in his argument that there was a social contract without laws. Though we cannot deny Rousseau's contribution to the dialectics of the 'origin of the state'. Society has always demanded an abandonment of natural freedom and the unnatural bending to the needs of community. Emile is the outline of a possible bridge between the particular will and the general will. If children are properly educated like Emile in natural way, the collective society will be better. Rousseau's comment "The voice of the people is the voice of the God" is to be treasured up.