

# Educating Emile: Rousseau and Cosmopolitanism



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## Abstract

Rousseau's *Emile*, the book on the education of a boy can even be read as a book about the formation of a true cosmopolitan. Here Rousseau was in search of true, authentic cosmopolitanism. Three elements of Rousseau's philosophy form the ground for the cosmopolitan education of the pupil: Rousseau's criticism of Eurocentrism, his moral universalism and his pacifism. He claims that humans all over the world have an innate sense of justice and the aim of good education is to awaken and cultivate this disposition. God's moral commandments are written in the secret heart of everybody. Rousseau does not ignore cultural differences across the globe, but strongly asserts that among the variety of manners and customs, we will everywhere find the same ideas of right and justice; everywhere the same rules of morality, the same concepts of good and evil. *Emile* is made ready for this state of moral development, moral cosmopolitanism, which combines sentimental and cognitive elements.

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism, Universalism, Pacifism, Cognitive, Justice, Affiliation, Sentimental, Customs

## Introduction

In *Emile* the teacher puts the finishing touches to Emile's cosmopolitan education during their Grand Tour. All Emile has to do now is to overcome patriotic prejudices. Emile finally practises what is called cognitive cosmopolitanism, a cognitive orientation with the key feature of impartiality, a disposition that entails openness towards others and an acceptance of diversity. Human history would be a learning process, and the crucial lesson is parallel to *Émile's*, who, as a first step, has to extend his moral sensibility to those he knows and has relations with. Abstract moral reasoning has to be practised, learned and perfected in order to achieve a true cosmopolitan attitude. According to this interpretation, Rousseau is a peculiar kind of cosmopolitan, who believes in the human capacity to learn, form syntheses, and develop one's moral potential. As Rousseau's educational theory aims at creating rooted cosmopolitans, by definition they cannot be aloof spectators. Passages in *Émile* would suggest that the required faculty is indeed pity or compassion, the capacity to identify with others and to feel for their suffering. As a result, a union of mutual regard and esteem is established, sparked by these interconnections of feeling and concern. This moral union is gradually extended beyond state borders.

## Aim of the Study

Cosmopolitanism is defined as the belief or the theory that all humans, regardless of race, gender, religion or political affiliation, belong or should belong to one single community. Cosmopolitanism's basic tenets are: its reach is global in scope and all human beings belong to it. Second, it includes an element of moral universalism: all humans enjoy an equal moral status and share certain essential features. The focus is especially on individuals, not on nations or peoples. Finally, participation in a community governed by just laws and the general will helps people to form ideas of justice with a more extensive application. The aim of the paper is to make an attempt to study Rousseau's *Emile* as a treatise on cosmopolitanism.

## Review of Literature

P. D. Jimack's "Introduction" on *Emile* is an exhaustive study on its greatness and importance. He has commented how Rousseau is a many-faceted writer, who achieved eminence in various fields- philosopher, moralist and political theorist. *Emile* holds a very important place in Rousseau's life and thought. Although Rousseau usually referred to *Emile*

as his treatise on education, he always played down the educational aspect of the book. He saw it primarily as a book of moral philosophy.

Anthony Kwame Appiah's work, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers* focuses strongly on the ethical aspects of cosmopolitanism. Appiah stresses on cross-cultural analysis to come to a conclusion that there are some basic mental traits that are universal. He continues, in culture as in biology, our common lifestyle presents similar problems. This argument of Appiah forms the fundamental concept of any study of cosmopolitanism.

Donald Brown's *Human Universals* interestingly describes many of the characteristics we humans share. With our common biology and the shared problems, we end up having many deep factors in common. It is our shared human nature that helps us to make meaning or sense of one another. Cosmopolitanism starts with what is human in humanism.

Rousseau's *Emile* is central to all these ideas.

Rousseau saw his work primarily as a work of moral philosophy, based on his belief that man is naturally good. The aim of the paper is to relate Rousseau's ideas on education and morality towards the understanding of cosmopolitanism.

#### **Discussion**

Rousseau is a structured and systematic thinker, linking cosmopolitanism with his generic moral and political philosophy, and the educational dimensions. Rousseau claims, cosmopolitanism is acceptable if it is equally rooted in and progressing from adherence to one's particular community. He went on to claim that republican patriotism, properly understood might lead to thin moral cosmopolitanism. Civic patriotism is a step further in the evolution of a genuine love of humanity. Civic patriotism and cosmopolitanism do not exclude each other, but can form a beautiful synthesis with the help of education. A global general will might be created by a regular republican practice. A just and legal participation in a community can form the basis of any larger application. In this connection Kwame Anthony Appiah says, "Cross-cultural analysis reveals that there really are some basic mental traits that are universal-in the sense that they are normal everywhere.... Part of the reason for this is that, in culture as in biology, our human environment presents similar problems; societies, like natural selection, often settle on the same solution because it is the best available" (96). One can make reference here to Donald Brown's book *Human Universals*. There is an interesting chapter "The Universal People", which describes many of the traits we humans share. According to the discussion there, starting with our common biology and the shared problems of the human situation, human societies have ended up having many deep things in common. Among them are practices like music, poetry, dance, marriage, funerals; values resembling courtesy, hospitality, sexual modesty, generosity, reciprocity, the resolution of social conflict; concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, parent and child, past,

present and future. It is a shared human nature that allows us to make sense of one another (Appiah 96-97). Appiah rightly points out, "Cosmopolitanism, as we have been conceiving it, starts with what is human in humanity" (134).

Rousseau advises the tutor to sow the first seeds of humanity in the pupil's heart. This is done by making the pupil realise the fact of the common sufferings of mankind (the cognitive aspect) and by a careful cultivation of the feeling of pity (the emotional aspect). Our common sufferings draw our heart to our fellow creatures. Our duties towards mankind are based on human frailty and weakness, on various forms of suffering not on our needs, on mutual dependence, or on what others think of us. The teacher stimulates and nourishes pity by fostering the cognitive and emotional capacities. Emile's moral character is tested, when he has already found his love and future wife Sophie. He passed the test with flying colours. His cognitive, moral and emotional capacities have developed in a way that is able to respect the rights of humanity. Emile has dates with Sophie. One day Emile and his teacher did not show up. Sophie meets Emile with scornful irony. Emile, in fact, has shown his humanism by helping an unlucky peasant the day before, who accidentally fell off his horse and broke his leg. Emile addresses Sophie with great firmness, "You may condemn me to die of grief; but do not hope to make me forget the rights of humanity; they are even more sacred in my eyes than your own rights; I will never renounce them for you" (Rousseau 484). Here pity and justice have formed a perfect synthesis. Emile is ready for the last stage of moral development. As Rousseau puts it, "Extend self-love to others and it is transformed into virtue, a virtue which has its root in the heart of every one of us. The less the object of our care is directly dependent on ourselves, the less we have to fear from the illusion of self-interest; the more general this interest becomes, the juster it is; and the love of the human race is nothing but the love of justice within us" (Rousseau 257).

Emile finally practices cognitive cosmopolitanism, an orientation with the key feature of impartiality, a disposition which includes openness towards others and an appreciation of diversity. When Emile and his tutor return from the Grand Tour, the former is ready to marry his beloved Sophie. Searching for the perfect place to live in Europe was one of the motives of the tour in the first place. The two main characters provide two slightly different answers. Emile has arrived at what we call "global thinking". He declares, "What matters my place in the world? What matters it where I am? Wherever there are men, I am among my brethren; wherever there are none, I am in my home" (Rousseau 523). The tutor dismisses Emile's opinion. "Do not say therefore, what matters where I am? It does matter that you should be where you can best do your duty; and one of these duties is to love your native land. Your fellow-countrymen protected you in childhood; you should love them in your manhood" (Rousseau 525). This sense of belongingness will help him to develop a just and virtuous personality. Rousseau says, "Oh, Emile,

where is the man who owes nothing to the land in which he lives? Whatever the land may be, he owes to it the most precious thing possessed by man, the morality of his actions and the love of virtue....He learns to fight against himself and to prevail, to sacrifice his own interest to the common weal" (524-525). This is embedded moral cosmopolitanism. Emile should not become one of the caricatures of cosmopolitans who neglect the duties that lie nearest.

Although Rousseau usually referred to *Emile* as his treatise on education, he tended always to play down the educational aspect of the book, which he saw primarily as a work of moral philosophy, based on his belief that man was naturally good. He wrote to a correspondent in 1764, "But I cannot believe that you take the book which bears this name for a true treatise on education. It is a rather philosophical work on the principle ... that man is naturally good" (xxi). Rousseau always maintained that *Emile* formed part of a philosophical system. Rousseau's famous principle of the goodness of natural man was not in fact enunciated in the first *Discourse*, in which he set out to show that modern man, for all his knowledge and culture, was inferior to the unsophisticated citizens of ancient Rome or Sparta. It was only in the second *Discourse* that natural man came on the scene for the first time as Rousseau's ideal. But if man was to be reformed, a choice of model had surely to be made between natural man and social man, and it is thus appropriate that the discussion of this choice should form the matter of the opening pages of *Emile*: "The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like. The citizen is but the numerator of a fraction, whose value depends upon the whole, that is, on the community" (Rousseau 08). Now it is precisely because he is torn between these conflicting demands that modern man is unhappy; Rousseau's aim is thus to pave the way for his happiness by uniting the two ideals: "If the two-fold aims could be resolved into one by removing the man's self-contradictions, one great obstacle to his happiness would be gone" (Rousseau xxii). Emile will be a natural man, not in the historical sense of the second *Discourse*, but a man whose natural goodness has been protected and allowed to develop unbiased by

the corrupting influence of the society. Yet at the same time he will be a member of a society, able to play in it whatever role his duty as a citizen should require. Rousseau speaks of this total and balanced development of Emile: "Life is the trade I would teach him. When he leaves me, I grant you, he will be neither a magistrate, a soldier, nor a priest; he will be a man" (Rousseau 10).

#### **Conclusion**

Philosophically, cosmopolitanism rests on the assumption that it should embody order, and the assumption that being human is not an abstract feature but a quality that needs to be validated and recognised. It is clear from this that cosmopolitanism is not value-free, it is loaded with ideas of order, and with notions of human dignity and human virtues. Rousseau educates Emile as: "Extend self-love to others and it is transformed into virtue, a virtue which has its root in the heart of every one of us. The less the object of our care is directly dependent on ourselves, the less we have to fear from the illusion of self-interest; the more general this interest becomes, the juster it is; and the love of the human race is nothing but the love of justice within us" (Rousseau 257). At the end of his moral education, Emile seems to have reached the intellectual and moral heights of a great cosmopolitan. Rousseau continues to justify his attempts to educate Emile by saying, "If therefore we desire Emile to be a lover of truth, if we desire that he should indeed perceive it, let us keep him far from self-interest in all his business" (257-258). The more care Emile bestows upon the happiness of others the wiser and better he is. He should be educated in the two basic aspects of cosmopolitanism, namely in its cognitive and ethical dimensions.

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