

From Martha Lee Osborne, ed.,
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8 Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712, the youngest son of Isaac Rousseau, a watchmaker, and his wife, Suzanne Bernard, who died a week or so later of puerperal fever. Until he was ten the boy was brought up by "the best of fathers," as he styled him in the *Confessions*, with whom he would sit up all night reading novels, and by an aunt who sought to bring some semblance of order into the home. In 1722 Isaac Rousseau left Geneva to avoid a sentence passed against him as a result of a scuffle over an alleged act of trespass, and Jean-Jacques was placed under the tutorship of a country minister at Boissy. Two years later he was apprenticed, first to a notary and later to an engraver who treated him so badly that he ran away. When Rousseau was sixteen years old his wanderings took him to the home of Mme. de Warens, a twenty-nine-year-old divorcée of fairly substantial means, who became his patron and in time, it seems, his mistress.

In 1741 Rousseau parted company with Mme. de Warens, his *maman* (mamma), as he called her, and proceeded to Paris armed with letters of introduction that eventually led to his acquaintance with a number of Parisiennes of considerable influence. But it was with a woman of lowly birth that he formed a *liaison*: Thérèse le Vasseur, a seamstress at the boardinghouse where he roomed, lived with him, cared for him, and nursed him until his death, thirty-five years later. He claims that five children were born to this union and that each was sent to the foundling hospital upon its birth.

Although he led a simple life with a semiliterate concubine, Rousseau lived on the fringes of the *haut monde*. He frequented the most fashionable salons and was lionized by the ladies because of the sentimentality of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, because of his interest in the education of their children, and because in the character of Sophia in his novel *Emile* he tried to portray them not from their husbands' point of view but from their own.

The ideal woman depicted by Rousseau in *Emile* provides quite a contrast to the real French women with whom he actually consorted—especially to the *salonnières*, who upon his arrival in Paris had been amused at his *gaucherie*, and who later, although they had bestowed their friendship and their patronage upon him, had denied him the love for which he had always yearned. It is significant that *Emile* encounters Sophia not in Paris but in the provinces. Eschewing the high heels, high hairdos, low necklines, and corsets popular among Parisian ladies, the ideal woman will choose to dress simply and modestly. Innocent of all philosophy, she will not aspire to the salon, but will devote herself entirely to the comfort and pleasure of her spouse. Her nature, her education, and her role in society are totally different from those of the ideal man. It is interesting to note that in *Emile et Sophie*, the sequel to *Emile*, the destruction of the ideal marriage occurs in Paris, where the bridegroom, distracted by urban pleasures, neglects his bride.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed his views on woman not in conjunction with

his social and political theories but in *Emile*, a treatise on education. Although he addressed himself specifically to "those who regard woman as an imperfect man," Rousseau's own view is distinguished from the one he is repudiating by little more than a verbal quibble. Before puberty, he claimed, boys and girls are virtually indistinguishable. In face, in form, in complexion, in voice, there is little if any observable difference between them. Even after puberty, which Rousseau referred to as a "second birth," men and women are alike in all respects except those pertaining to sex, and in sex-linked characteristics, he contended, they exhibit similarities as well as differences. One soon realizes, however, that in his eyes all traits are sex-linked, and one searches in vain for the similarities to complement the differences, for Rousseau claimed that men and women are basically unlike in physique, in temperament, in behavior, in understanding, and in intellect. Moreover, he found that many of these differences antedate puberty. And furthermore, while carefully avoiding such words as "equality" and "superiority," while insisting that men and women are alike in their common characteristics and simply incomparable in all others, and while chiding those who call female traits defects, he was quick to add that those traits which are characteristic of women are traits that would be considered defects in a man.

Physically, women are weaker than men. Perhaps it is this weakness that leads to those temperamental and behavioral differences that precede puberty, girls preferring—almost from infancy, Rousseau thought—quiet play with dolls, mirrors, jewelry, and clothes, leaving to their brothers noisy, active games with drums and tops and hobbyhorses. Women's reason, he believed, is also inferior; consequently it may be used only indirectly to induce men to employ their reason to right ends, rather than directly to affect situations by its own power.

These basic differences between men and women Rousseau seemed to ascribe to the different functions for which the two sexes were designed, woman being intended merely to serve as man's helpmate. But rather than leaving her the ignorant bedmate and housekeeper of Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, Rousseau suggested educating her carefully so that she might delight and complement man in every respect, and in the fifth chapter of *Emile* he carefully outlined such a program.

Although the rational capacity of woman is limited, it is adequate to her needs. It apprises her of her duty: the fidelity and obedience that she owes to her husband and the care and tenderness that she should lavish on her children. It also serves as a means of obtaining the approval, esteem, respect, and love of that husband upon whom she depends. Although these duties are easily seen, they are, according to Rousseau, less easily fulfilled. Since women are made to please men and be useful to them, the entire education of the female should be directed toward that end. Since the body is "born, in a manner, before the soul," it should be trained first. Woman needs little physical strength: only enough to enable her to bear strong children and to rear and educate them (especially the boys among them, one might presume). It is grace that her physical training should seek to cultivate—grace in demeanor, in attitude, in bearing, in gesture, in step, and in tone. To this end she should be given lessons in singing and dancing, especially dancing. Any elocution lessons given to a girl might also be considered physical rather

than mental training and would probably be intended to enhance her grace as well, for Rousseau found the speech of men to differ from that of women in substance, in requisite, and in aim, that of men being based on knowledge and intended for use, and that of women grounded in whim and calculated to please.

Perhaps more important than the training of a girl's body, however, is the molding of her temperament. The restrictions to be imposed on her when she is grown make it mandatory, in Rousseau's estimation, to condition her to them early. The very restricted amount of liberty that is permitted a girl is likely to make her prize the little that she does have all the more dearly and to lead her ultimately to abuse it. To counteract this tendency in young girls, Rousseau recommends stern measures: interrupt them in the middle of their play, he says, and make them return to their work; if, on the other hand, they are absorbed in their work, make them stop. Such practices, he thinks, will cultivate docility and good temper in women, for they soon must accustom themselves to putting up with whatever their husbands choose to inflict upon them.

A woman's understanding matures earlier than a man's; therefore while it is important to show a boy the utility of what he learns, it is even more essential to do so in the case of a girl. Rousseau noted that girls dislike reading and suggested no remedy for this disaffection, for reading has little to do with household management, but he urged an emphasis on arithmetic because of its utilitarian value.

Woman's physical and mental weakness Rousseau believed to be compensated for by a sort of "experimental morality," which is her province and hers alone. This quality involves the manipulation of men and results in women's controlling, in the last analysis, the manners, passions, tastes, pleasure, even happiness of the world. They rear men in their boyhood, advise them in their maturity, and comfort them in their old age. They are, in Rousseau's words, "that sex which governs and doth honour to ours."

From *Emilius; or, A New System of Education*

SOPHIA

Body
In every thing, which does not regard the sex, woman is the same as man; she has the same organs, the same necessities, the same faculties: the corporeal machine is constructed in the same manner, its component parts are alike, their operation the same, and the figure similar in both. In whatever light we regard them, they differ from each other only in degree.

On the other hand, in every thing immediately respecting sex, the woman differs entirely from the man; the difficulty of comparing them together, lying in our inability to determine what are those particulars in the constitution of each that immediately relate to the sex. From their [comparative anatomy] and even from simple inspection, we perceive some general distinctions between

them, that do not appear to relate to sex; and yet there can be no doubt that they do, although we are not capable of tracing their modes of relation. Indeed we know not how far the difference of sex may extend. All that we know, of a certainty, is, that whatever is common to both is only characteristic of their species; and that every thing in which they differ, is distinctive of their sex. Under this twofold consideration we find so much resemblance and dissimilitude, that it appears even miraculous, that nature should form two beings so much alike, and, at the same time, so very different.

This difference and similitude must necessarily have an influence over their moral character; such an influence is, indeed, obvious, and perfectly agreeable to experience; clearly demonstrating the vanity of the disputes that have been held concerning the superiority or equality of the sexes; as if, in answering the different ends for which nature designed them, both were not more perfect than they would be in more nearly resembling each other. In those particulars which are common to both, they are equal; and as to those wherein they differ, no comparison is to be made between them. A perfect man and a complete woman should no more resemble each other in mind than in feature, nor is their perfection reducible to any common standard.

In the union of the sexes, both pursue one common object, but not in the same manner. From their diversity, in this particular, arises the first determinate difference between the moral relations of each. The one should be active and strong, the other passive and weak: it is necessary the one should have both the power and the will, and that the other should make little resistance.

This principle being established, it follows, that woman is expressly formed to please the man. If the obligation be reciprocal also, and the man ought to please in his turn, it is not so immediately necessary: his great merit lies in his power, and he pleases merely because he is strong. This, I must confess, is not one of the refined maxims of love; it is, however, one of the laws of nature, prior to love itself.

If woman be formed to please and to be subjected to man, it is her place, doubtless, to render herself agreeable to him, instead of challenging his passion. The violence of his desires depends on her charms: it is by means of these she should urge him to the exertion of those powers which nature hath given him. The most successful method of exciting them, is to render such exertion necessary by her resistance; as, in that case, self-love is added to desire, and the one triumphs in the victory which the other obliged him to acquire. Hence arise the various modes of attack and defence between the sexes, the boldness of one sex, and the timidity of the other, and, in a word, that bashfulness and modesty with which nature hath armed the weak, in order to subdue the strong.

Hence we deduce a third consequence from the different constitutions of the sexes; which is, that the strongest should be master in appearance, and be dependent in fact on the weakest; and that not from any frivolous practice of gallantry or vanity of protectorship, but from an invariable law of nature, which, furnishing woman with greater facility to excite desires than she has given man to satisfy them, makes the latter dependent on the good pleasure of

the former, and compels him to endeavour to please in his turn, in order to obtain her consent that he should be strongest. On these occasions, the most delightful circumstance a man finds in his victory is, to doubt whether it was the woman's weakness that yielded to his superior strength, or whether her inclinations spoke in his favour: the females are also generally artful enough to leave this matter in doubt. The understanding of women answers, in this respect, perfectly to their constitution: so far from being ashamed of their weakness, they glory in it: their tender muscles make no resistance; they affect to be incapable of lifting the smallest burdens, and would blush to be thought robust and strong. To what purpose is all this? Not merely for the sake of appearing delicate, but through an artful precaution: it is thus they provide an excuse beforehand, and a right to be feeble when they think it expedient.

There is no parity between man and woman as to the consequences of their sex. The male is such only at certain momentary intervals: the female feels the consequences of her sex all her life, at least during youth, and, in order to answer the purposes of it, requires first a suitable constitution. She requires next careful management in her pregnancy, repose in child-bed, ease and a sedentary life during the time of suckling her children, and, to bring them up, such patience, good-humour, and affection, as nothing can disgust. She serves as the means of their connection with their father: it is she who makes him love them, and gives him the confidence to call them his own. What tenderness and solicitude ought she not to be possessed of, in order to maintain the peace and unity of a whole family! Add to this, that her good qualities should not be the effects of virtue, but of taste and inclination, without which the human species would soon be extinct.

The relative duties of the two sexes do not require an equally rigorous observance in both. When women complain, however, of this partiality as unjust, they are in the wrong: this inequality is not of human institution; at least, it is not the effect of prejudice, but of reason. It certainly belongs to that party which nature hath more immediately intrusted with the care of children, to be answerable for that charge to the other. Neither of them, indeed, is permitted to violate their mutual engagements. Every faithless husband, who deprives his wife of the only compensation for the severer duties of her sex, being guilty of cruelty and injustice. A faithless woman, however, does still more: she dissolves the union of her family, and breaks through all the ties of nature; in giving to a man children which are not of his begetting, she betrays both, and adds perfidy to infidelity. Such an action is naturally productive of the worst of crimes and disorders. If there be a situation in life truly horrid, it is that of an unhappy father, who, placing no confidence in his wife, cannot indulge himself in the most delightful sentiments of the heart; who doubts, while he is embracing his child, whether it be not the offspring of another, the pledge of his dishonour, and the usurper of the rights of his real children. What a scene doth a family in such a case present to us! Nothing but a community of secret enemies, whom a guilty woman arms one against the other, by compelling them to pretences of reciprocal affection.

It is not only of consequence, therefore, that a woman should be faithful to her husband, but also that he should think her so. It is requisite for her to be modest, circumspect, and reserved, and that she should bear, in the sight of others, as well as in her own conscience, the testimony of her virtue. If it be necessary for a father to love his children, it is first necessary for him to esteem their mother. Such are the reasons which place even the preservation of appearances among the number of female duties, and render their honour and reputation no less indispensable than chastity. From these principles is derived a new motive of obligation and convenience, which prescribes peculiarly to women the most scrupulous circumspection in their manners, conduct, and behaviour. To maintain indiscriminately that the two sexes are equal, and that their reciprocal duties and obligations are the same, is to indulge ourselves in idle declamations unworthy of a serious answer.

It being once demonstrated that man and woman are not, nor ought to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows of course that they should not be educated in the same manner. In pursuing the directions of nature, they ought indeed to act in concert, but they should not be engaged in the same employments: the end of their pursuits should be the same; but the means they should take to accomplish them, and of consequence, their tastes and inclinations, should be different. Having endeavoured to lay down the principles of a natural education for a man, let us trace, in the same manner, the methods to form a woman answerable to him.

Are you desirous of being always directed aright? Observe constantly the indications of nature. Whatever is characteristic of the sex, should be regarded as a circumstance peculiarly established. You are always complaining that women have certain defects and failings; your vanity deceives you: such, indeed, would be defects and failings in you, but they are essential qualities in them, and women would be much worse without them. You may prevent these pretended defects from growing worse; but you ought to take great care not entirely to remove them.

The women, again, on their part, are constantly crying out, that we educate them to be vain and coquettish; that we constantly entertain them with puerilities, in order to maintain our authority over them; and attribute to us the failings for which we reproach them. What a ridiculous accusation! How long is it that the men have troubled themselves about the education of the women? What hinders mothers from bringing up their daughters just as they please? There are, to be sure, no colleges and academies for girls: a sad misfortune truly! Would to God there were none also for boys; they would be more sensibly and virtuously educated than they are. Who, ye mothers, compels your daughters to throw away their time in trifles? to spend half their lives, after your example, at the toilette? Who hinders you from instructing, or causing them to be instructed in the manner you choose? Is it our fault that they charm us when they are pretty, that we are seduced by their affected airs, that the arts they learn of you attract and flatter us, that we love to see them becomingly dressed, and that we permit them to prepare at leisure those arms

with which they subdue us to their pleasure? Educate them, if you think proper, like the men; we shall readily consent to it. The more they resemble our sex, the less power will they have over us; and when they once become like ourselves, we shall then be truly their masters.

To cultivate in women, therefore, the qualifications of the men, and neglect those which are peculiar to the sex, would be acting to their prejudice: they see this very well, and are too artful to become the dupes of such conduct: they endeavour, indeed, to usurp our advantages, but they take care not to give up their own. By these means, however, it happens that, not being capable of both, because they are incompatible, they fail of attaining the perfection of their own sex, as well as of ours, and lose half their merit. Let not the sensible mother, then, think of educating her daughter as a man, in contradiction to nature; but as a virtuous woman; and she may be assured it will be much better both for her child and herself.

It does not hence follow, however, that she ought to be educated in perfect ignorance, and confined merely to domestic concerns. Would a man make a servant of his companion, and deprive himself of the greatest pleasure of society? To make her the more submissive, would he prevent her from acquiring the least judgment or knowledge? would he reduce her to a mere automaton? Surely not! Nature hath dictated otherwise, in giving the sex such refined and agreeable talents: on the contrary, she hath formed them for thought, for judgment, for love, and knowledge. They should bestow as much care on their understandings, therefore, as on their persons, and add the charms of the one to the other, in order to supply their own want of strength, and to direct ours. They should doubtless learn many things, but only those which it is proper for them to know.

Whether I consider the peculiar destination of the sex, observe their inclinations, or remark their duties, all things equally concur to point out the peculiar method of education best adapted to them. Woman and man were made for each other; but their mutual dependance is not the same. The men depend on the women, only on account of their desires; the women on the men, both on account of their desires and their necessities: we could subsist better without them than they without us. Their very subsistence and rank in life depend on us, and the estimation in which we hold them, their charms and their merit. By the law of nature itself, both women and children lie at the mercy of the men: it is not enough they should be really estimable, it is requisite they should be actually esteemed; it is not enough they should be beautiful, it is requisite their charms should please; it is not enough they should be sensible and prudent, it is necessary they should be acknowledged as such: their glory lies not only in their conduct, but in their reputation; and it is impossible for any, who consents to be accounted infamous, to be ever virtuous. A man, secure in his own good conduct, depends only on himself, and may brave the public opinion: but a woman, in behaving well, performs but half her duty; as what is thought of her, is as important to her, as what she really is. It follows hence, that the system of a woman's education should, in this respect,

be directly contrary to that of ours. Opinion is the grave of virtue among the men; but its throne among the women.

On the good constitution of mothers depends originally that of their children; on the care of the women depends our earliest education; on the women also depend our manners, our passions, our tastes, our pleasures, and even our happiness itself. For this reason, the education of the women should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable; these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy. So long as we fail to recur to this principle, we run wide of the mark, and all the precepts which are given them contribute neither to their happiness nor our own.

Girls are, from their earliest infancy, fond of dress. Not content with being pretty, they are desirous of being thought so; we see, by all their little airs, that this thought engages their attention: and they are hardly capable of understanding what is said to them, before they are to be governed by talking to them of what people will think of their behaviour. The same motive, however indiscreetly made use of with boys, has not the same effect: provided they are left to pursue their amusements at pleasure, they care very little what people think of them. Time and pains are necessary to subject boys to this motive.

Whencesoever girls derive this first lesson, it is a very good one. As the body is born, in a manner, before the soul, our first concern should be to cultivate the former; this order is common to both sexes, but the object of that cultivation is different. In the one sex, it is the development of corporeal powers; in the other, that of personal charms: not that either the quality of strength or beauty ought to be confined exclusively to one sex; but only that the order of the cultivation of both is in that respect reversed. Women certainly require as much strength as to enable them to move and act gracefully, and men as much address as to qualify them to act with ease.

Children of both sexes have a great many amusements in common; and so they ought; have they not also many such when they are grown up? Each sex hath also its peculiar taste to distinguish in this particular. Boys love sports of noise and activity; to beat the drum, to whip the top, and to drag about their little carts: girls, on the other hand, are fonder of things of show and ornament; such as mirrors, trinkets, and dolls: the doll is the peculiar amusement of the females; from whence we see their taste plainly adapted to their destination. The physical part of the art of pleasing lies in dress; and this is all which children are capacitated to cultivate of that art.

You shall see a little girl spend whole days about her waxen baby; be perpetually changing its clothes, dress and undress it an hundred times, and be for ever studying new combinations of ornament; well or ill-sorted, it is no matter: her fingers want dexterity, and her taste is not yet formed; but her inclinations are sufficiently evident. While thus occupied, her time slips insensibly away; she forgets even her meals, and has more appetite to dress than

to food. You will say, perhaps, that she dresses up her baby, and not herself. Doubtless, it is her baby she sees, and not herself: she can do nothing as yet about her own person, all her concerns center in her doll, and in the management of this it is that she displays all her coquetry. This, however, will not be always the case; the time approaches when she will take the same pleasure in ornamenting herself.

Whatever may be sometimes said in raillery, good sense is equally the property of both sexes. Girls in general are more docile than boys, and, indeed, we ought to use more authority over them, as I observe hereafter; but it does not thence follow, that we should require them to do any thing, of which they do not see the utility: it is the art of a mother to show them the usefulness of whatever they are set to do; and this is by so much the more easy, as the understanding ripens much sooner in girls than boys. This rule frees their sex, as well as ours, not only from those indolent and useless studies, which answer no good purpose, nor even render those who cultivate them the more agreeable to others; but also all those whose utility is not adapted to their present age, nor perceptible in a future one. If I am against compelling boys to learn to read, it is with still greater reason that I oppose using any such compulsion with girls, at least till they are well instructed in the utility of reading: the manner, however, in which this utility is usually inculcated, is much better adapted to our own notions of things than to theirs. And, after all, where is the necessity for a girl's learning to read and write so early? does she so soon take on herself the management of a family? I am afraid there are but few who do not make rather a bad use than a good one of this fatal science; and I am certain they have all so much curiosity as to learn it without compulsion, whenever they have leisure and opportunity. Perhaps they ought to learn arithmetic in preference to every thing else; for nothing can appear more useful at any time of life, nor requires longer practice, than the keeping of accounts. If a little girl should have no means of obtaining cherries or sugar-plums, but by resolving a question in arithmetic, I will answer for it she would soon learn to calculate for them.

Let there be propriety in all the injunctions you lay upon young girls, but take care always to impose on them something to learn or to do. Indolence and indocility are two of the most dangerous ill qualities they are subject to, and what they are the most seldom cured of, when they have once contracted them. Girls ought to be active and diligent; nor is that all; they should also be early subjected to restraint. This misfortune, if it really be one, is inseparable from their sex; nor do they ever throw it off but to suffer more cruel evils. They must be subject, all their lives, to the most constant and severe restraint, which is that of decorum: it is, therefore, necessary to accustom them early to such confinement, that it may not afterwards cost them too dear; and to the suppression of their caprices, that they may the more readily submit to the will of others. If, indeed, they are fond of being always at work, they should be sometimes compelled to lay it aside. Dissipation, levity and inconstancy are faults that readily spring up from their first propensities, when corrupted or

perverted by too much indulgence. To prevent this abuse, we should learn them, above all things, to lay a due restraint on themselves. The life of a modest woman is reduced, by our absurd institutions, to a perpetual conflict with herself: not but it is just that this sex should partake of the sufferings which arise from those evils it hath caused us.

For the same reason that they have, or ought to have, but little liberty, they are apt to indulge themselves excessively in what is allowed them. Addicted in every thing to extremes, they are even more transported at their diversions than boys: this is the second inconvenience of which I spoke before. These transports ought to be moderated; being the cause of many vices peculiar to the women; such, among others, are the caprice and infatuation by which a woman is in raptures today with an object she may regard with coldness and indifference tomorrow. The inconstancy of their inclinations is as fatal to them as their excess; both one and the other also are derived from the same source. Deny them not the indulgence of their innocent mirth, their sports and pastimes; but ever prevent their sating themselves with one to run to another; permit them not for a moment to perceive themselves entirely freed from restraint. Use them to be interrupted in the midst of their play, and sent to work, without murmuring. Habit alone is sufficient to inure them to this, because it is only confirming the operations of nature.

There results from this habitual restraint a tractableness which the women have occasion for during their whole lives, as they constantly remain either under subjection to the men, or to the opinions of mankind; and are never permitted to set themselves above those opinions. The first and most important qualification in a woman is good-nature or sweetness of temper: formed to obey a being so imperfect as man, often full of vices, and always full of faults, she ought to learn betimes even to suffer injustice, and to bear the insults of a husband without complaint: it is not for his sake, but her own, that she should be of a mild disposition. The perverseness and ill-nature of the women only serve to aggravate their own misfortunes, and the misconduct of their husbands; they might plainly perceive that such are not the arms by which they gain the superiority. Heaven did not bestow on them the powers of insinuation and persuasion to make them perverse and morose; it did not constitute them feeble to make them imperious; it did not give them so soft and agreeable a voice to vent abuse, nor features so delicate and lovely to be disfigured with anger. When they give way to rage, therefore, they forget themselves: for, though they may often have reason to complain, they are always in the wrong to scold. Each sex should preserve its peculiar tone and manner; a meek husband may make a wife impertinent; but mildness of disposition on the woman's side will always bring a man back to reason, at least if he be not absolutely a brute, and will sooner or later triumph over him.

Whatever is, is right; nor can any general rule in nature be wrong. The superiority of address peculiar to the female sex, is a very equitable indemnification for their inferiority in point of strength: without this, woman would

not be the companion of man, but his slave: it is by her superior art and ingenuity that she preserves her equality, and governs him while she affects to obey. . . .

Dress may make a woman fine, but personal charms only make her please. Our clothes are not ourselves: they often disfigure and are unbecoming, because they are too remarkable: and those which most distinguish the wearer, are often such as are least remarkable in themselves. The usual method of educating girls is, in this respect, quite absurd: they are promised fine clothes, etc., by way of rewards, and are taught to admire affected modes of dress. Again, they are themselves admired when finely dressed; whereas they ought to be given to understand, that so much care to deck them out is bestowed on them only to hide their defects, and that the real triumph of beauty lies in the display of its native charms. A fondness for fashions is thus a proof of bad taste, as the person and features do not change with the mode; what is becoming or unbecoming at one time, must therefore be always so.

The first thing which young persons observe, as they grow up, is, that all these foreign aids of dress are still insufficient, if they have no charms in their own persons. Beauty cannot be acquired by dress, and coquetry is an art not so early and speedily attained. While girls are yet young, however, they are in a capacity to study agreeable gesture, a pleasing modulation of voice, an easy carriage and behaviour; as well as to take the advantage of gracefully adapting their looks and attitudes to time, place, and occasion. Their application, therefore, should not be solely confined to the arts of industry and the needle, when they come to display other talents, whose utility is already apparent.

I know some persons are so severe, that they would not have girls taught singing, dancing, nor any of the agreeable arts. This seems to me, however, very absurd and ridiculous. Pray, on whom would they have these talents bestowed? On the boys? Do these accomplishments best become the men or the women? They will answer, perhaps, that they become neither: that profane songs are criminal: that dancing is the invention of the devil: and that girls ought to have no other amusements than their sampler and their prayers. Strange amusements, truly, for a girl of ten years of age! For my part, I am somewhat afraid that these little saints, in consequence of being thus compelled to spend their childhood in praying to God, will be tempted to spend their youth in very different employment; and that they will endeavour to make up, when they are married, for the time they will conceive they lost before-hand. It is, in my opinion, necessary to pay a regard to their age as well as their sex: a little miss ought not, surely, to lead the life of her grandmother, but, on the contrary, to be indulged in her vivacity and childish amusements; she should be permitted to sing, to dance, to play about as much as she pleases, and to enjoy all the innocent pleasures of her age: the time will come but too soon, when she must be more reserved, and put on a more constrained behaviour.

Industry and talents form the taste; by means of taste also it is that the mind insensibly acquires ideas of the truly beautiful, and, in time, of moral

relations, which depend thereon. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why the sentiments of modesty and decency take rise earlier in girls than boys: for to imagine that notions so premature are the effect of the lessons of the governess, argues but little acquaintance with the nature of those lessons, and the progress of the human mind. The talent of speaking holds the first rank in the art of pleasing: it is that alone which can give new attractions to those charms which have lost their power over the senses by habit. It is the mind which not only animates the body, but in some sense gives it a new form: it is by the succession of its sentiments and ideas, that it enlivens and diversifies the countenance: it is by the discourse it inspires, that attention is kept on the stretch, and preserves, for any long time, the same regard for the same object. I conceive it is for all these reasons that girls so early acquire an agreeable mode of prattle; that they are emphatic in their discourse, even before they well know what they say; and that men amuse themselves by listening to their talk, even before they can understand them.

The tongues of women are very voluble: they speak earlier, more readily and more agreeably than the men: they are accused also of speaking much more; but so it ought to be: and I should be very ready to convert this reproach into a compliment: their lips and eyes have the same activity, and for the same reason. A man speaks of what he knows, a woman of what pleases her: the one requires knowledge, the other taste. The principal object of a man's discourse should be what is useful, that of a woman's what is agreeable. There ought to be nothing in common between their different conversation but truth.

We ought not, therefore, to restrain the prattle of girls, in the same manner as we should that of boys, with that severe question, *To what purpose are you talking?* but by another, which is not less difficult to answer, *How will your discourse be received?* In infancy, while they are as yet incapable to discern good from evil, they ought to observe, as a law, never to say any thing disagreeable to those whom they are speaking to. What will render the practice of this rule also the more difficult, is, that it must ever be subordinate to the former, of never speaking falsely or telling an untruth.

If boys ought not to be indulged in asking indiscreet questions, much less should girls; whose curiosity, either satisfied or imprudently evaded, is of much greater consequence, on account of their penetration to foresee the mysteries which are concealed from them, and their address in discovering them. But, without permitting them to ask questions, I would have them be continually interrogated themselves; and excited to prattle, in order to accustom them to a fluency of speech, to make them quick at reply, and to refine their wit and their tongue as much as possible, without danger. Such conversations being always accompanied with gaiety, but managed with art and discretion, would be an amusement adapted to their years, and might be made the means of inculcating, in the innocent minds of such young persons, the first, and perhaps the most useful lessons of morality they may ever receive; teaching them, under the appearance of pleasure and vanity, what are the qualities for which men truly hold

them in esteem, and in what consist the glory and happiness of a modest woman.

It is easy to be conceived, that if male children are not in a capacity to form any true notions of religion, those ideas must be greatly above the conception of the females: it is for this very reason, I would begin to speak to them the earlier on this subject; for if we were to wait till they were in a capacity to discuss methodically such profound questions, we should run a risk of never speaking to them on this subject as long as they lived. Reason in women is a practical reason, capacitating them artfully to discover the means of attaining a known end, but which would never enable them to discover that end itself. The social relations of the sexes are indeed truly admirable: from their union there results a moral person, of which women may be termed the eyes and man the hand, with this dependance on each other, that it is from the man that the woman is to learn what she is to see, and it is of the woman that man is to learn what he ought to do. If woman could recur to the first principles of things as well as man, and man was capacitated to enter into their *minutiae* as well as woman, always independent of each other, they would live in perpetual discord, and their union could not subsist. But in the present harmony which naturally subsists between them, their different faculties tend to one common end; it is difficult to say which of them conduces the most to it: each follows the impulse of the other; each is obedient, and both are masters.

As the conduct of a woman is subservient to the public opinion, her faith in matters of religion should for that very reason be subject to authority. Every daughter ought to be of the same religion as her mother, and every wife to be of the religion of her husband: for, though such religion should be false, that docility which induces the mother and daughter to submit to the order of nature, takes away, in the sight of God, the criminality of their error. As they are not in a capacity to judge for themselves, they ought to abide by the decision of the fathers and husbands as confidently as by that of the church.

As for the rest, it is proper to observe, that till girls arrive at the age, when their enlightened reason or growing sentiment gives use to the dictates of conscience, they should be governed in their notions of good and evil entirely by the decisions of those who are about them. Whatever they are commanded to do, should be thought right, and what they are forbidden to do, wrong: they ought at present to know nothing farther than this: hence we see of how much greater importance it is, that we should be careful in the choice of persons to educate girls than we are of those who take the charge of boys. At length, however, the time will come when even girls will begin to judge for themselves, and when it will be necessary to diversify our plan of education.

I have, indeed, hitherto, perhaps, said too much. How low should we reduce the women, if we gave them no other laws than those of public opinion? Let us not so far disparage that sex, which governs and doth honour to ours, when we do not debase it. There exists, for the whole species, a rule prior to opinion. It is to the fixed and certain direction of that rule we should subject all others; it is the judge of prejudice itself, and it is not that the esteem in which

men hold it agrees therewith, so much as that such esteem ought to give it authority with them.

This rule is that of innate sentiment. I shall not repeat what I have already said on that subject: it is sufficient to observe here, that if these two rules do not concur in the education of women, it will be always defective. Sentiment, without regard to opinion, will not give them that delicacy of mind, which adds to virtue the approbation of the world; and a regard to opinion, without sentiment, will only make them false and deceitful, placing the appearances of virtue in the room of virtue itself.

It is of consequence to them, therefore, to cultivate a faculty which serves as an umpire between the two guides, preventing the mistakes of conscience, and correcting the errors of prejudice. This faculty is reason; but how many queries offer themselves at that word? Are women capable of solid reasoning? Is it of any use for them to cultivate their reason? Can they do it with any success? Is that cultivation expedient to the functions imposed on them? Is it compatible with that simplicity of manners which becomes the sex?

The motive which leads a man to the knowledge of his various duties is not very complicated; that which directs a woman to the knowledge of her duties is still more simple. That obedience and fidelity which she owes to her husband, that care and tenderness which is due to her children, are such natural and affecting consequences of her situation, that unless she is abandoned to an habitual depravity, she cannot revolt from those internal principles which influence her conduct; nor mistake her duty, while she retains that propensity which nature has implanted in her bosom.

I would not indiscriminately condemn the practice of confining a woman solely to the occupations of her sex, and leaving her in profound ignorance with respect to all other concerns: But in such case it is necessary that the public morals should be very pure and simple, or that her manner of living should be extremely retired. In large cities, and in the midst of licentious men, such a woman would be easily seduced; her virtue would, on many occasions, be merely accidental; but this philosophic age requires a virtue which is at all times a proof against temptation. A woman ought to be sensible, before-hand, what may be said to her, and in what light it becomes her to consider it.

Besides, being subject to the opinion of men, she should study to merit their esteem: and she ought to be particularly anxious to acquire that of her husband; she should not only endeavour to make him love her person, but engage him to approve her conduct; she ought, in the eyes of the world, to justify the choice he has made, and derive honour to her husband, in consequence of the respect which is paid to his wife. But how should she accomplish these ends, if she is a stranger to our institutions, if she is ignorant of our customs and rules of decorum, if she is not acquainted with the sources of human judgment, nor with the passions by which it is determined? When she becomes sensible that she must depend both on the dictates of her own conscience, and on the opinion of others, it is necessary that she should learn to compare these

two rules of action, to reconcile them, and never to prefer the former but when they stand in opposition to each other. From hence she becomes a judge over her judges; she determines within herself when she ought to submit to them, and when she ought to reject their authority. Before she adopts or rejects their prejudices, she considers their weight; she learns to recur to their first source, to obviate them, and render them favourable to her principles: she is cautious never to incur censure, when her duty will allow her to avoid it. These purposes cannot be effected, without enlarging her mind, and cultivating her reason.

From these considerations, I believe, we may in general be able to determine what kind of culture is most suitable to female minds, and upon what objects we ought to turn their reflections during their infancy.

I have already observed, that the duties of their sex are more easily known than practised. The first thing they should learn, is to be in love with their duty from a principle of interest; which is the only means to render it easy. Every station and every age has its peculiar duties. We are easily acquainted with them, provided we do but love them. Respect your condition as a woman, and whatever station Providence thinks proper to allot you, you will always be a woman of virtue. The essential point is to be what nature formed us; we are always too propense to be what the world would wish us.

Researches into abstract and speculative truths, the principles and axioms of sciences, in short, every thing which tends to generalize our ideas, is not the proper province of women; their studies should be relative to points of practice; it belongs to them to apply those principles which men have discovered; and it is their part to make observations, which direct men to the establishment of general principles. All the ideas of women, which have not an immediate tendency to points of duty, should be directed to the study of men, and to the attainment of those agreeable accomplishments which have taste for their objects; for as to works of genius, they are beyond their capacity; neither have they sufficient precision or power of attention to succeed in sciences which require accuracy: and as to physical knowledge, it belongs to those only who are most active, most inquisitive; who comprehend the greatest variety of objects; in short, it belongs to those who have the strongest powers, and who exercise them most, to judge of the relations between sensible beings and the laws of nature. A woman who is naturally weak, and does not carry her ideas to any great extent, knows how to judge and make a proper estimate of those movements which she sets to work, in order to aid her weakness; and these movements are the passions of men. The mechanism she employs is much more powerful than ours; for all her levers move the human heart. She must have the skill to incline us to do every thing which her sex will not enable her to do of herself, and which is necessary or agreeable to her; therefore she ought to study the mind of man thoroughly, not the mind of man in general, abstractedly, but the disposition of the men about her, the disposition of those men to whom she is subject, either by the laws of her country, or by the force of opinion. She should learn to penetrate into their real sentiments from their conversations,

their actions, their looks and gestures. She should also have the art, by her own conversation, actions, looks and gestures, to communicate those sentiments which are agreeable to them, without seeming to intend it. Men will argue more philosophically about the human heart; but women will read the heart of man better than they. It belongs to women, if I may be allowed the expression, to form an experimental morality, and to reduce the study of man to a system. Women have most wit, men have most genius; women observe, men reason; from the concurrence of both we derive the clearest light and the most perfect knowledge, which the human mind is, of itself, capable of attaining: in one word, from hence we acquire the most intimate acquaintance, both with ourselves and others, of which our nature is capable; and it is thus that art has a constant tendency to perfect those endowments which nature has bestowed.

The world is the book of women; if they do not read well it is their own fault, or some passion blinds them. Nevertheless, a true mistress of a family, is not less a recluse in her own house, than a nun in her convent. Therefore, before a young virgin is married, we ought to act with regard to her, as they do, or at least ought to do, towards those who are to be confined in nunneries; that is, we should show them the pleasures they are to quit, before we suffer them to renounce them, lest the false idea of pleasures to which they are strangers, should mislead their minds, and interrupt the felicity of their retirement. In France, young ladies live in nunneries, and wives go abroad in the world. Among the ancients it was just the reverse; the maidens, as I have observed, were indulged with entertainments and public festivals; but wives lived retired. This custom was more rational, and had a better tendency to preserve morals. A kind of coquetry is allowed to young girls who are unmarried; their grand concern is to amuse themselves. Wives have other employment at home, and they are no longer in pursuit of husbands; but such a reformation would not be for their interest, and unhappily they lead the fashion. Mothers, however, make companions of your daughters! cultivate in them a just understanding and an honest heart, and then hide nothing from them which a chaste eye may view without offence. Balls, entertainments, public sights, even theatres; every thing which, seen improperly, delights indiscreet youth, may without danger be presented to the eye of prudence. The more they are conversant with these tumultuous pleasures, the sooner they will be disgusted with them.

Parents impose an outward restraint on their daughters, in hopes to meet with dupes who will marry them from their appearance. But examine these young girls attentively for a moment. Under an affected air of constraint, they do but ill disguise the eager desires which prey upon them; and you may already read in their eyes their violent inclination to imitate their mothers. But they do not covet a husband; they only long for the licence of matrimony. What occasion can they have for a husband, when they may have so many lovers? But they stand in need of a husband as a cover to their intrigues. Modesty is in their looks, but licentiousness in their hearts. That affected modesty is a symptom of it. They affect it only to get rid of it the sooner. . . .

Would you inspire young girls with a love of morality? Instead of telling them continually, "Be discreet," show them that it is their interest to be so; make them acquainted with the value of discretion, and you will make them in love with it. It is not sufficient, however, to present this interest to their view at a distance; convince them of their present advantage, with regard to the circumstances of their age, and with respect to the characters of their lovers. Describe to them the man of worth, the man of merit; teach them to know him, to love him, and to love him for their own sakes; persuade them that such a man alone is capable of making them happy, either as friends, wives or mistresses. Introduce virtue under the guidance of reason; make them sensible that the dominion of their sex, and all their prerogatives, do not depend entirely on their own good conduct, their own morals, but likewise on those of the men; that they can have no sure dependance on mean and groveling souls, and that a man is only qualified to oblige his mistress, in proportion as he is subservient to virtue. Take care likewise that in describing the manners of the present age, you at the same time inspire your daughter with a sincere aversion to them: by giving her a true description of our modish people, you will teach her to despise them; you will render her averse to their maxims, give her a dislike to their sentiments, and a contempt for their idle gallantries; you will excite in her a more noble ambition, that of reigning over strong and vigorous minds, that which inspired the women of Sparta, who boasted that they ruled over men. A forward, audacious and intriguing woman, who knows no other method of alluring lovers, but by coquetry, nor of preserving them but by repeated favours, makes them obey her like lacqueys on trifling and servile occasions; but in serious and weighty matters, she has no authority over them. But a woman who is virtuous, amiable and discreet, who obliges her lover to respect her, one who has reserve and modesty, in a word, one who supports love by esteem, will, by a single motion, send them to the farthest part of the world, to battle, to glory, to death; in short, wherever she pleases: such an empire, in my opinion, is glorious, and is well worth the pains of purchasing.

man's muse

Elizabeth Rapaport

Elizabeth Rapaport is an associate professor of philosophy at Boston University, where she specializes in ethics and political philosophy. In the following excerpt, taken from an article in *The Philosophical Forum*, Professor Rapaport points out that despite Rousseau's dedication to the belief in the essential difference between woman's nature and man's, he finds the effects of love to be equally disastrous to the two sexes. This pessimistic view she deems a product of Rousseau's conviction that the love relation is essentially a dependent one and his notion that autonomy is a requisite for happiness. If the fear of dependence could be mitigated, Rapaport suggests, love might be "rehabilitated."