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Rousseau's *Emile* (1762): The Patriarchal Family and the Education of the Republican Citizen

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It also makes a great difference for the good order of the marriage whether the man makes an alliance above or below himself. The former case is entirely contrary to reason; the latter is more conformable to it. Since the family is connected with society only by its head, the position of the head determines that of the entire family. When he makes an alliance in a lower rank, he does not descend, he raises up his wife. On the other hand, by taking a woman above him, he lowers her without raising himself. Thus, in the first case there is good without bad, and in the second bad without good. Moreover, it is part of the order of nature that the woman obey the man. Therefore, when he takes her from a lower rank, the natural and the civil order agree, and everything goes well. The contrary is the case when the man allies himself with a woman above him and thereby faces the alternative of curbing either his rights or his gratitude and of being either ungrateful or despised. Then, the woman, pretending to authority, acts as a tyrant toward the head of the house, and the master becomes a slave and finds himself the most ridiculous and most miserable of creatures. Such are those unfortunate favorites whom the Asian kings honor and torment by marrying them to their daughters, and who are said to dare to approach only from the foot of the bed in order to sleep with their wives. I expect many readers, remembering that I ascribe to woman a natural talent for governing man, will accuse me of a contradiction here. They will, however, be mistaken. There is quite a difference between arrogating to oneself the right to command and governing him who commands.¹

In book V of *Emile* or *On Education*, the eighteenth-century French *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) presents his patriarchal conception of the family. While the first four books focus on the early years of Emile and his

progressive transformation into a man under the guidance of his governor, the last book of Rousseau's treatise on education introduces a new character, Sophie, 'or the Woman', who is destined to be Emile's wife. The book narrates how they meet, fall in love and are then separated, while Emile, following his governor's advice, travels around the world to get better knowledge of foreign political cultures, before they are eventually reunited and married. The final book of *Emile* appears therefore both as a romantic novel, in which the progression of Emile and Sophie's love story is described with much detail, and a political treatise. Indeed, Emile is now ready to enter society and become a citizen. The issue of the best political system is also at stake in this book, which includes a summary of the *Social Contract* (published the same year as *Emile*, in 1762), a treatise conceived as an 'appendix' to *Emile*, according to Rousseau himself. Finally, book V should be read as a political treatise because Rousseau uses the relationship between Emile and Sophie to illustrate his conception of the family.

The extract above reveals two important aspects regarding Rousseau's patriarchalism. First, it explicitly states that the man is the sole head of the family, and that, therefore, a woman ought to obey her husband; the man is presented as the master, the one who commands. The social inferiority of the woman to her husband agrees with her natural submission. Secondly, in the extract, Rousseau mentions the link between family and society, or the role of men in the civil and the natural orders: as citizens and fathers, they are the connection between the state and the family, women being submitted to them in the natural order and merely absent from the civil order. The subordination of women is presented in book V of *Emile* as a natural principle: it is 'part of the order of nature', or, as the governor tells Sophie: 'It is for you to obey, just as nature wanted it' (478). The patriarchal dimension of family life is also praised by the governor, who advises Emile, on their coming back from their travels throughout Europe, to adopt 'the patriarchal and rustic life, man's first life' because it is the most natural 'and the sweetest life for anyone who does not have a corrupt heart' (474). In his *Discourse on Political Economy*, which was first published as an article on '(Moral and political) Economy' in the *Encyclopedia* (volume V, 1755), Rousseau explains why a woman should obey her husband: first, he says that there must be only one final authority in the family so that decisions can be made when opinions are divided, and, given that women are sometimes incapacitated by their reproductive functions, this authority must be given to the man; secondly, Rousseau repeatedly emphasizes the necessity for a man to know for sure that the children are his own, and, for paternity to be ascertained, absolute control of the husband over his wife is required.²

Book V of *Emile* opens with an anthropology of the sexes and a description of Sophie's education, which serve as a basis and justification for the establishment of patriarchal principles in the family. Rousseau first insists on the similarities between the sexes: 'In everything not connected with sex, woman is man. She has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same way; its parts are the same' (357). One would therefore expect Sophie's education to be the same as Emile's, but, on the contrary, education is strongly 'gendered' in Rousseau's treatise, as it reflects men's and women's distinct roles in family and society. Man and woman are identical in so far as they belong to the same species, but '[i]n everything connected with sex, woman and man are in every respect related and in every respect different' (357). Rousseau brushes aside all discourses on the superiority of one sex over the other because, he says, '[i]n what [man and woman] have in common, they are equal. Where they differ, they are not comparable' (358). Therefore, both sexes contribute to the same aim, but in different ways. On this assertion is premised the first and main difference between man and woman: the latter is 'passive and weak', while the former is 'active and strong'. This is the law of nature, which entails two very different educations for boys and girls. Contrary to Emile, an isolated child whose only parent and social contact is his governor, Sophie grows up in a family, she is taught to get used to authority, she must pay attention to the opinion of others and she is encouraged to care about appearances: 'in her conduct woman is enslaved by public opinion, in her belief she is enslaved by authority' (377). It seems that Rousseau first assumes what women's role should be in society, from which he deduces the capacities that are required from them to fit their proper function.³ The education they are given is therefore based on what is expected from them. In other words, woman's natural weakness is not the cause of her subordination to the man in the family, but rather the consequence of it. The education of girls that Rousseau advocated was in keeping with the general, traditional conception of the time; as such, it was a step backward from more progressive conceptions, such as Fénelon's in *De l'éducation des filles* (1687).

Many feminist critics have denounced Rousseau's definition of woman's place in the family and his arguments in favour of a sex-roled society. Soon after the publication of *Emile*, at the end of the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft expressed her strong disagreement with the philosopher's patriarchal principles and insisted on the necessity of giving the same education to boys and girls: 'women, considered not only as moral but rational

creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being – one of Rousseau's wild chimeras'.⁴ More recently, feminist critics have underlined the surprising contradiction between Rousseau's emphasis on equality and freedom on the one hand, and his defence of the subordination of women on the other; indeed, his patriarchal principles – and the submission of women they entail – seem to contradict his egalitarian political theory, as it is presented in the *Social Contract* and the *Second Discourse* (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755) in particular. Moreover, no satisfactory explanation for the emergence of the patriarchal family can be found in Rousseau's theory of the state of nature. Indeed, in the 'original state of nature', all individuals are free and equal; women are perfectly capable of rearing their children on their own, which is necessary anyway since sexual relations are random and therefore the identity of the father of a child is usually unknown. However, with the division of labour and the emergence of private property, universal equality is suddenly – and without justification – replaced with 'the golden age' of the patriarchal family and the subordination of women. When it comes to the roles of the sexes and the relations of man and woman, it seems that Rousseau makes inconsistent use of the concept of nature: whereas the 'natural man' is man in the original state of nature, the 'natural' woman is defined in reference to the age of patriarchal families.

Other interpreters have endeavoured to reconcile the family and the state in Rousseau's political theory, either by arguing that the family should be seen as a retreat from corrupted modern governments, or by insisting on the pivotal role that the family plays in the formation of good citizens, showing the link between pedagogical and political ideas in Rousseau's thought.⁵ Moreover, in an attempt to play down the impact of Rousseau's patriarchal principles, it has often been argued that the power of the husband over his wife and that of the father over his children are far from absolute in Rousseau's conception of the family. There are actually two limits to the power of the father: first, a man should not use tyrannical force against his wife and children, and secondly, the power of the father over his children is limited in time – once they become independent adults, children are no longer expected to obey their fathers, but only to respect them and be grateful to them. In book V of *Emile*, Rousseau suggests that there might be another limit to the power of the husband in the patriarchal family: if women are cunning enough, a balance of power might be established between husband and wife because 'woman [has] a natural talent for governing man', as the extract above states. Indeed, even

though the man is the one who commands, the woman, as ‘the arbiter of his pleasures’ (478), might eventually govern him if she learns how to manipulate his sexual needs. In book V, the governor says that the woman should learn how to use ‘the modesty and the shame with which nature armed the weak in order to enslave the strong’ (358). However, Rousseau fears that the woman might become a ‘tyrant’ and turn the master into a slave (see extract above), which is probably one of the reasons why he insists so much on the importance of patriarchal principles in *Emile*.

If the French *philosophe* adopts a patriarchal conception of the family, which is clearly expressed in *Emile*, he strongly and explicitly refutes ‘the odious system which Sir Filmer tried to establish in a work entitled *Patriarcha*’, adding that John Locke and Algernon Sidney should not have dignified Robert Filmer with a response.⁶ Yet Rousseau’s own refutation of Filmer’s doctrine is even more radical than that of the English philosophers as he refuses to make any concessions to political patriarchalism. In his *Discourse on Political Economy*, Rousseau states that the power of the father over his family is in no way identical with that of the magistrate over his subjects, contrary to Filmer’s contention in *Patriarcha* (published in 1680). Emphasizing the distinction between political and domestic economy,⁷ Rousseau shows that the state and the family cannot be administered in the same way, the main reason being that the state is much larger than a family – Rousseau explains that the father can watch all that happens at home but the magistrate will only ever see part of what happens in the state. Rousseau adds another fundamental distinction, which he borrows from Locke: the power of the father in the family is natural, whereas political authority is based on conventions, which is why the father will act according to his heart, while the magistrate should have no rule but the law. Moreover, in the family, the children do not own anything but what they eventually inherit from their fathers; conversely, the general administration of the state is established to protect private property, which precedes it. In a further attempt to refute Filmer’s doctrine of Adamic patriarchy, Rousseau states in the *Social Contract* that Adam governed the world merely because he was the first and sole inhabitant of the earth, like Robinson Crusoe on his island, not because he had been given divine power, as Filmer had argued. Rousseau adds with much irony:

I have said nothing about King Adam, or about emperor Noah, father of three great monarchs who among themselves divided the universe, as did the children of Saturn, whom some believed they recognized in them ... since I am a direct

descendant from one of these Princes, and perhaps from the elder branch, for all I know, I might, upon verification of titles, find I am the legitimate King of humankind.⁸

The only similarity between state and family, according to Rousseau, is that they should both aim at happiness.

In mid-eighteenth-century France, when Rousseau was writing *Emile*, patriarchalism was being questioned, and the consensus on the legitimacy of the paternal image of monarchy was challenged.⁹ The reflection on the role and power of the father and on the reform of education was fuelled by ideas inherited from seventeenth-century English authors, whose works were translated into French, commented upon and published in the first half of the eighteenth century. Rousseau was strongly influenced by Locke's ideas on education as they are presented in his treatise entitled *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (translated into French by Coste in 1695, only two years after its publication in England) and he had read the summary of Locke's *First Treatise of Government* by Jean Le Clerc (1690). Rousseau had also read Algernon Sidney, whose *Discourses concerning Government* (1698) were translated into French in 1702. Although no translation of Filmer's *Patriarcha* was available in France before the twentieth century (and Rousseau could not read English), the author of *Emile* could have knowledge of Filmerian patriarchalism thanks to its detractors, such as Jean Barbeyrac in his translation of Pufendorf's *Droit de la nature et des gens* (1706). It appears that Rousseau had second-hand knowledge of Filmer's doctrine. The refutation of Filmerian patriarchalism by English authors was appropriated and developed by French philosophers of the mid-eighteenth century, before being widely spread in the pre-revolutionary context. In the years before 1789, it was fairly common for political thinkers to insist on the absurdity of 'a father who has twenty million children'.¹⁰

The influence of Rousseau's ideas on the actors of the Revolution cannot be doubted. *Emile* was regularly reprinted in the second half of the century, and it was mentioned in political and pedagogical debates in the context of the Revolution. The relevance of *Emile* to the revolutionaries could also be found in the prospective dimension of Rousseau's treatise on education as it explicitly heralded the end of monarchy in Europe. Indeed, in a note to book III, Rousseau writes: 'I hold it to be impossible that the great monarchies of Europe still have long to last' (194). Moreover, the definition of the good father, the good husband and the good citizen was a major focus of political thinkers in pre-revolutionary France, underlining the relation between political ideas and pedagogical principles, between the state and the family. Rousseau

explains in the *Discourse on Political Economy* and in the 'Considerations on the Government of Poland' (1772) that public education should be preferred to private education because education first aims at making citizens. Yet, Emile is educated at home by a governor – the reason for the choice of private education in this case is that the state in mid-eighteenth-century France had become too large, according to Rousseau, and therefore no effective system of public education could be implemented in this context. Rousseau's idea that love of the family is what brings love of the state was also of interest to the actors of the Revolution; in particular, a passage from *Emile* may have inspired the authors of Article 4 of the Declaration of Rights and Duties of Man and Citizen, Constitution of the Year III (1795): 'as though it were not by means of the small fatherland which is the family that the heart attaches itself to the large one; as though it were not the good son, the good husband, and the good father who make the good citizen!' (363). In other words, the family is the place where public virtues are learnt: if mothers do nurse their children, a reformed public and private morality can be expected, maternal love being the first step towards patriotic citizenship. This passage also shows that, despite the criticism of patriarchalism, the family remained a model for political authority, or rather it was the place from which a new public and private order could emerge, with members loving one another as 'brothers'. Indeed, the paternal image of the king was progressively replaced with ideas of 'fraternity' (which triumphed in the Revolution) and representations of the republic as a mother figure.

To conclude, the publication and reception of Rousseau's *Emile* in pre-revolutionary France can be seen as a 'patriarchal moment' for two apparently contradictory reasons: first, *Emile* strongly reaffirmed traditional conceptions of the subordination of women in the family, but secondly, by giving women an essential role in the formation of citizens and by contesting political patriarchalism, it contributed to the transformation of the paternal representation of political power and the emergence of the image of the nation as a mother.