

UC Davis

UC Davis Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Doctrine of Natural Goodness: Rousseau's Critique of the Will to Dominate in Emile

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8c21h0bm>

Author

Musacchia, Miranda

Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

The Doctrine of Natural Goodness: Rousseau's Critique of the Will to Dominate in *Emile*

By

MIRANDA MUSACCHIA
THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Political Science

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

John Scott, Chair

Shalini Satkunanandan

Robert Taylor

Committee in Charge

2024

Abstract

Although Rousseau is well-known for his doctrine of the natural goodness of man, his new doctrine has not attracted much attention on how it responds to a tradition of philosophical and theological thought that centers on the related claims concerning original sin, the will to dominate, and pride. I argue that Rousseau's account of natural goodness is helpfully understood as a critique of the tradition that identifies a will to dominate in human nature – a tradition beginning with Augustine's account of original sin and continued in the thinking of Hobbes and Locke. Understanding Rousseau's treatment of the will to dominate as arising from societal corruption of human nature illuminates the educational program in *Emile* as an attempt to curb the desire to dominate.

Introduction

Rousseau is well-known for his doctrine of the natural goodness of man. He directs his new doctrine against a tradition of philosophical and theological thought that centers on the related claims concerning original sin, the will to dominate, and pride represented most importantly for Rousseau by Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke. To clarify the basis of Rousseau's concerns, the will to dominate can be defined as the conscious or intentional choice one makes to exert power over another in order to satisfy one's own end. Pride is a significant driver of domination because the power one exerts over someone else stems from one's desire to be pleased at another's expense (Pettit 1999; see also Fraistat 2016, 890). Many philosophers within the history of political thought attribute the impulse to dominate to be a natural feature of mankind because of the pride we are born with to act primarily with one's own self-interest in mind. The root of human pridefulness originates from original sin – the Christian doctrine which teaches that humans are tainted from the moment of birth due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve choosing to listen to the serpent over the command of God. Augustine argues in the *City of God (CG)* that while dominion is a natural feature of man, God intended dominion to be exercised over irrational creatures, not human beings (19.15). As a consequence of the Fall, men act with their “individual wills” to disobey God and express dominion over their fellow rational beings.

Continuing the tradition that man is naturally prideful are Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. While both Hobbes and Locke do not necessarily agree with the theological element of original sin, they both provide theories of human nature related to Augustine's account of the love of dominion grounded in the relative sentiment of pride. In *Leviathan (L)*, Hobbes refers to the human passions as a “general inclination of all mankind” which is “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death” (*L* 11.2). Humans desire power because of their

vainglorious nature that makes them want to be esteemed by others. Similarly, Locke sees pride as a central feature of mankind to the extent that he centers his educational treatise on how to suppress children's natural "desire for dominion" (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education (ST)* §76). Locke defines children's "natural love of dominion" as "the first origin of the most vicious habits that are ordinary and natural" (§103). Failing to curb this development will cause children to desire having others be subservient to them.

Despite agreements that the will to dominate is a natural disposition of man, Rousseau believed it was his mission to overturn the established doctrine that man is naturally evil. What Rousseau has in mind when confronting the evil tendencies of man are the passions, primarily pride, that arise when man enters civil society and develops a relationship that makes him dependent upon others (*Second Discourse (SD)* 23, 127). His central critique that nature made man good, and it is only in society that man is corrupted and becomes evil, is boldly stated in his *Letter to Beaumont (LB)*: "The fundamental principle of all morality about which I have reasoned in all my Writings... is that man is a naturally good being... that there is no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right" (28).

Given Rousseau's staunch position that man is naturally good, I propose a new way to read Rousseau's doctrine of natural goodness through his critique of the will to dominate. Since domination derives from pride, a feature Rousseau clarifies as having two different forms, men cannot naturally desire domination because they are amoral beings who become corrupted only when introduced to civil society. Men in the "pure state of nature" lack passions, such as pride, that allow for harm to be inflicted upon others when they value their own lives as more important than others (*SD* 147). Rousseau's novel argument of human nature as naturally good has long been recognized as a counter teaching to the doctrine of original sin. Melzer (1990; 1996) categorizes

Rousseau's doctrine of natural goodness to be aimed at Christian theologians, specifically Augustine's interpretation of original sin as a feature embedded in human nature. Original sin denies the idea of having a free will, weakens the natural passion of self-love, and turns us against each other by inspiring hatred (349). Considering how similar these factors are to domination, I bring attention to the lack of treatment of Rousseau's overall refusal that the will to dominate is natural to man.

My innovation here is to demonstrate how Rousseau's account of natural goodness is a critique of the more general idea of the will to dominate found in Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke who understand the will to dominate as a consequence of the mark of man's fallen nature. Domination is often an overlooked concept in Rousseau's thought, especially in terms of how he responds to the tradition before him. Fraistat (2016) has already shown how the caring education in Rousseau's *Emile* can provide a new solution to neo-republican theories of freedom as non-domination. But my argument demonstrates why Rousseau critiques the tradition of viewing the will to dominate as an inaccurate portrayal of human nature based on the unnatural passion of pride. Additionally, some scholars have addressed how Rousseau's targets incorporate dominion into their respective frameworks. For example, Marks (2012) and Tennyson and Schwarze (2023) analyze Rousseau's critique of Locke's education centered on curbing the "desire to dominate". Others such as Slomp (1998) and Strong (2017) discuss how Hobbes views dominion to be a product of glory in his theory of human nature.

My argument is that Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke share the same perspective that pride allows domination to serve as an outlet to fulfill one's own desires, which Rousseau views as a false representation of human psychology. Because Rousseau rejects domination as a natural feature of mankind, he gives himself the task of demonstrating how to ensure a child does not

develop the corrupting tendency to impose his own will upon another. To advance my argument as to how and why Rousseau rejects the notion of the will to dominate, I turn to two of Rousseau's "three principal writings": *Emile* and the *Second Discourse*.¹ Rousseau believed these works sought to capture the "Illumination at Vincennes" which gave birth to his systematic thought that man is naturally good (*LM* 575). Additionally, Rousseau describes in his *Dialogues* how *Emile* demonstrates the way the "harmful passions" entered the human heart, and the way one could prevent "the passages through which they enter" from opening (23). While Rousseau's other works help us to understand his unifying theme of the doctrine of the natural goodness of man, I focus on *Emile* and the *Second Discourse* because these two works contain Rousseau's most explicit treatment of his concern of domination and pride. Both works explain the origins of the will to dominate, and *Emile* goes further to provide a solution to curb the will to dominate from developing through a negative education based in nature that allows Emile to maintain as much of his naturalness as possible.

In the first section of the paper, I examine Rousseau's doctrine of the natural goodness of man to show how it stands in contrast to the passion of pride that influences Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke's theories of human nature. I then turn to Rousseau's critique of the will to dominate, and analyze how Rousseau targets each of his opponents. I begin with Augustine's interpretation of original sin, and illustrate how it is the starting point to a tradition that argues pride is a natural feature of mankind. Next, I take up Hobbes' concept of glory to demonstrate how it is a desire for power, which leads human beings to seek esteem through gaining more power over others. Third, I turn to Locke's education program, which aims to curb children's natural love of dominion, and demonstrate how Rousseau critiques such a feature to be a natural condition of human beings.

¹ Rousseau identifies the *First Discourse* as the third of his "three principal writings."

After analyzing each of Rousseau's targets, I present what Rousseau considers to be a solution to prevent the will from developing the capacity to desire domination. That solution involves the implementation of negative education, one which allows for the preservation of the child's natural goodness.

Rousseau's Doctrine of the Natural Goodness of Man

What does Rousseau mean when he says man is naturally good? The first mention of the principle of natural goodness can be found in the *Discourse on Inequality (SD)*, but it appears in one of his notes to the work. He writes, "Men are wicked; sad and continual experience spares the need for proof. Yet man is naturally good – I do believe I have demonstrated it" (127). This "demonstration" is unclear considering Rousseau does not present the term "natural goodness" within the actual text. To gain a better idea of what Rousseau means by "goodness," it is helpful to turn to the distinction Rousseau makes between "savage [or natural] man" and "civilized man". Rousseau identifies "savage man" as one who is found in the state of nature, which is the basis for his critique of previous philosophers who he believes have not reached far back enough: "In short, all of them... have carried into the state of nature ideas they have taken from society: they spoke of savage man and they were depicting civil man" (*SD* 62). The identifying feature that helps to distinguish between the two types of men has to do with their respective psychological abilities. "Savage man" is one who is free of the corrupting influences Rousseau associates with "civilized man"; one who has yet to be introduced to civil society, and has limited desires. He lives an isolated life in the state of nature, and only knows of his immediate, simple needs to keep himself alive.

To further pinpoint what Rousseau means by goodness, Melzer (1990) categorizes natural man's goodness to mean both "good *for himself* and also good *for others*" (16). Man is naturally good "for himself" because he is "self-sufficient" (*SD* 88). He has simple needs and does not

depend on others to have his needs met. His self-sufficiency further means that his needs do not conflict with others' needs. As Rousseau writes, "Savage man, once he has eaten, is at peace with all of nature and the friend of all his fellow humans" (SD 128). More importantly, man in the state of nature lacks the passions that makes civil man desire for more than his needs require. Natural man's desires reflect his primary concern with self-preservation, which implies his desires stem from his *amour de soi* (self-love), a term I will further define shortly. This can be summed up by Rousseau's definition in *Emile*: "Natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind" (39). His limited desires accompany his needs, which makes the attainment of happiness easy to achieve.

The second aspect of Rousseau's concept of goodness – that man is naturally good for others – gets more at the heart of Rousseau's description of the psychological differences between natural and civil man. Natural man does not possess the capacity to reason and lacks a sense of morality. Likewise, he does not consider others' needs before his own. He is only concerned with his own needs because he possesses the natural faculty of *amour de soi* (self-love). Rousseau's distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* (pride) is also found in one of his notes to the *Second Discourse*. In Note XV, he provides an important explanation between these two forms of self-love that serves as the basis of his critique of the will's natural desire to dominate:

Pride and self-love – two passions very different in their nature and their effects – must not be confused. Self-love is a natural feeling that inclines every animal to look after its own self-preservation and that, directed in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Pride is only a relative feeling, fabricated and born in society, that inclines every individual to attach more importance to himself than to anyone else, that inspires in men all the harm they do to one another, and that is the true source of honor (SD 147).

To unpack this distinction between the two forms of self-love, Rousseau views *amour de soi* as a positive feature of human nature because it allows man to focus on his self-preservation without

caring for how his fellow neighbors carry out their own lives or judge his own life to be. Although natural man only cares for his own needs, he does possess the faculty of pity, “a natural feeling which, by moderating the activity of love of oneself in each individual, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species. It is it that carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering” (*SD* 85). Natural man hates the sight of other sensible beings suffering, which makes him not want to harm others. His feeling of pity modifies his *amour de soi* because of his sole desire for self-preservation. Yet, pity is not an act of reflection because natural man lacks the ability to reason.

The capacity to reason is what enables man to develop the unnatural feature of *amour-propre*: a corrupted form of self-love that appears in society when man begins to feel a sense of pride through the approval of others. Again, placed in Note XV, Rousseau details how “Pride is only a relative feeling, fabricated and born in society, that inclines every individual to attach more importance to himself than to anyone else, that inspires in men all the harm they do to one another, and that is the true source of honor” (*SD* 147). Though there are many passions that make man develop more complex desires, and in turn, feel restless from the inability to satisfy his growing wants, pride is the primary driver that causes man to lose his naturalness. This is because pride connects man to other human beings through the comparisons he makes with them. Consequently, man no longer considers himself to be “the sole judge of his own merit,” instead relying upon others to determine his self-worth and build his self-esteem (*SD* 147). With the birth of pride, man loses his naturalness and becomes forever transformed into a “civilized man.”

Rousseau identifies the transition from the state of nature to civil society to be the point in which “savage man” loses his natural goodness and becomes a corrupted “civilized man.” The term “civilized man” is used in a negative sense because he no longer possesses simple desires to

satisfy his needs for “mere existence” (Melzer 1990, 16). His desires develop beyond what are truly necessary. He now has excess desires rather than needs for sole survival, which become more expansive as his desires continue to progress: “First it is a question of providing for what is necessary, and then for what is superfluous; next comes delicacies, and then immense wealth, and then subjects, and then slaves” (*SD* 129). The passions that now overburden civil man drives him to a dangerous state because they “alter” his “primary goal” of self-preservation, and awaken his ability to establish preferences of how he wants his desires to be satisfied (*E* 213). These passions, especially pride, cause man to view himself as better than others, and compete for esteem from other persons. The moment one begins to seek self-esteem through others is when man loses his natural feature of self-sufficiency and becomes forever dependent on others to feel satisfaction in life.

In Book II of *Emile*, Rousseau distinguishes between two types of dependency: the first in which men are dependent on things, and the second in which men are dependent on other men (85). To provide a clearer distinction between the two Rousseau explains, “Dependence on things, since it has no morality, is in no way detrimental to freedom and engenders no vices. Dependence on men, since it is without order, engenders all the vices, and by it, master and slave are mutually corrupted” (85). Rousseau is concerned about developing a dependency on men because it weakens a child’s ability to be self-sufficient. When a child is self-sufficient, they are able to satisfy all of their needs independently, which means they act upon the freedom they were naturally born with. Rousseau writes, “The only one who does his own will is he who, in order to do it, has no need to put another’s arms at the end of his own; from which it follows that the first of all goods is not authority but freedom. The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases” (*E* 84). The moment one needs another person to have their needs met leads not only to a

loss of freedom, but also to the development of more unnatural desires that are unrelated to mere survival.

However, Rousseau clarifies that it is necessary for a child to feel weakness because it helps him to learn how to avoid the actions of commanding and obeying (*E* 85). When a child enters into a relationship based on commanding and obeying, he then subjects himself to the will of others. Rousseau warns, “Grant nothing to his desires because he asks for it but because he needs it. Let him not know what obedience is when he acts nor what dominion is when one acts for him. Let him sense his liberty equally in his actions and yours” (*E* 85). Rousseau is not calling for the prevention of children from noticing their own wills, but rather wants to ensure that children do not discover wills as something that can be commanded or obeyed. The will must be free to act independently in order to meet the “needs of the constitution seeking to strengthen itself” (*E* 86). When the will begins to develop desires that the child is unable to satisfy independently, this is the first sign that the child is learning how to command orders. He begins by crying out to have his needs met. If he does not receive a response, he sheds tears as a sign of doubting another’s will. When his desires are finally met, he recognizes one’s weakness, and learns of his ability to express signs of power over another (*E* 86). This innocent stage of dependency in childhood soon transforms into one’s recognition of the will to dominate.

Rousseau warns against the act of allowing children to get everything they ask for. The essential needs children have early in life to survive are an unproblematic form of dependency. However, when children recognize their ability to have more than just their needs satisfied by others, they begin to recognize the control they can easily assert over another to have their desires met. This is why Rousseau issues caution over accustoming children to having all of their desires satisfied. Refusing to give in to a child’s desires will lead the child to develop unnatural passions

that turn into a desire for dominion. “Multiply not only our desires but the means of satisfying them, and each will make himself the master of everything. Hence, the child who has only to want in order to get believes himself to be the owner of the universe; he regards all men as his slaves.” Furthermore, “When one is finally forced to refuse him something, he, believing that at his command everything is possible, takes this refusal for an act of rebellion” (*E* 87). This description of the transition from dependency to domination illuminates Rousseau’s reason for critiquing the will to dominate in that the desire to dominate is unnatural, and only arises in society. Having laid the groundwork as to why Rousseau promotes the doctrine of natural goodness as a critique to the tradition that identifies the will to dominate as a natural feature, I now turn to Rousseau’s targets, beginning with Augustine and his portrayal of the natural lust for dominion.

Rousseau’s Critique of Augustine’s Concept of *Libido Dominandi*

Rousseau’s critique of the will to dominate begins with Augustine’s account of the *libido dominandi* (lust for domination) as articulated in the *City of God*. Augustine provides the biblical account of the doctrine of original sin in which God created Adam and Eve as good, but their decision to disobey the word of God and eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge caused the Fall of Man. As Augustine teaches in the *City of God* (*CG*), “For God ordained that infants should begin the world as the young of beasts begin it, since their parents had fallen to the level of the beasts in the fashion of their life and of their death” (543-4). Disobeying the command of God permanently changed the course of human nature in which all humans would be born into original sin, resulting in a natural condition of prioritizing one’s self and desiring dominion over others.

Augustine indicates in the preface how the Fall has caused the lust for domination to become the main driver of human action. In reference to Rome’s early history, Augustine writes: “we must not pass over in silence the earthly city also: that city which, when it seeks mastery, is

itself mastered by the lust for mastery even though all the nations serve it” (*CG* Preface, 3). Pride motivates the restless desire for glory because it makes humans want to be judged as better and more worthy of others. Yet with the “lust for mastery” it “disturbs and consumes the human race with great ills” (*CG* III.14, 111). Man is disturbed “with great ills” because he has separated his life from God due to a belief that God created the world to contain evil. His failure to recognize how his “ills” are a result of alienating himself from God causes him to develop even more pride and desire to attain ultimate power to feel content with his own life. While these are the consequences that emerge from the *libido dominandi*, Augustine intends to demonstrate God’s goodness that he created before the Fall (*CG* XI.22, 476-77). The purpose here is not to focus on God’s intention, but rather to illustrate how Augustine conceives of domination to now be a natural part of human nature, an issue Rousseau goes to great lengths to prove wrong.

Rousseau offers a scathing attack against the doctrine of original sin in his *Letter to Beaumont* as directed at Augustine. Responding to the Archbishop of Paris who attacks Rousseau’s objections in *Emile*, Rousseau denounces the Church’s teaching that God would allow human beings to be born into “guilty bodies” because of their ancestors’ actions. The Church teaches that the only way to be absolved of original sin is through baptism, which Rousseau tries to make sense of because this would seem to mean that Christians are the only ones who have ever been “citizens or men”:

Whereupon you say that my plan of education, *far from agreeing with Christianity, is not even suited to making Citizens or men*. And your sole proof is to oppose me with original sin. Your Grace, there is no other way to be absolved of original sin and its effects than by baptism. From which it would follow, according to you, that only Christians have ever been Citizens or men (*LB* 29).

Rousseau argues that original sin is not a creation from God because “it is not at all certain, in my view, that this doctrine of original sin, subject as it is to such terrible difficulties, is contained in

the Scriptures either as clearly or as harshly as it has pleased the Rhetorician Augustine and our Theologians to construct it” (*LB* 29). The teaching of original sin is supposed to make men conform their behavior to be more virtuous, but it has the opposite effect. It makes men feel less free because they experience the burden of failure when their actions are deemed to have broken with the principles of Christianity. Even more important is it makes men believe they are not capable of avoiding evil. The apparent fact that everyone is born to sin convinces men that they have to depend on God to wipe away their sins and make them free again (Melzer 1990, 19). It is this sense of dependence that allows Rousseau to categorize humans as weak.

In revealing the weakness of the Church’s teachings of original sin, Rousseau counters with his doctrine of natural goodness. He argues, “If man is good by his nature, as I believe I have demonstrated, it follows that he remains so as long as nothing foreign to himself spoils him. And if men are wicked, as they have gone to the trouble of teaching me, it follows that their wickedness comes from elsewhere” (*LB* 35). Original sin is not a natural disposition of man, but rather a product of humans: “God is just, I am convinced of it; it is a consequence of his goodness. The injustice of men is their work and not His” (*LB* 46). Augustine would agree with Rousseau’s position that injustice is a man-made product, but he would disagree with Rousseau that original sin is not natural. The actions of our ancestors have tainted human nature, and as a result, mankind no longer has the ability to avoid sin. Before the Fall, Adam possessed the ability to choose between good and evil, but now humans lack the freedom to choose not to sin. Rousseau takes issue with such a teaching because he believes that it is the cause of the many evils it is supposed to cure. The guilt that it puts on men makes us hate them more than we should love them. We fear the dominion that others have the ability to impose on us, while we possess the same ability to impose dominion over others. But Rousseau is more concerned with the characterization of the

will because he believes that human beings are born with no capabilities, especially the ability to dominate. He argues that “We are born capable of learning but able to do nothing, knowing nothing. The soul, enchained in imperfect and half-formed organs, does not even have the sentiment of its own existence. The movements and the cries of the child who has just been born are purely mechanical effects, devoid of knowledge and of will” (*E* 61). Children develop the desire to dominate through the habits they form from the care they receive. Pride is not passed down from our ancestors because it is not a natural feature of mankind.

To further demonstrate how the *libido dominandi*, like *amour-propre*, is a man-made passion, Rousseau demonstrates the wickedness of humans by accusing those who teach God’s words of spreading false ideas. God created humans in his own image and likeness, which corresponds to the goodness Rousseau recognizes. He did not destine humans to suffer. If God wants all humans to suffer as a consequence of the Fall, then that goes against God’s goodness. As Rousseau summarizes, “I followed this contradiction to its consequences, and saw that by itself it explained all the vices of men and all the ills of society. From which I concluded it was not necessary to assume that man is wicked by his nature, when it is possible to indicate the origin and progression of his wickedness” (*LB* 52). Although Augustine maintains God’s goodness in the creation of Adam and Eve, there is still the question of how temptation arose given God created the world in a “perfect” way (*CG* XI.15, 469). Augustine suggests that pride is a natural feature of mankind, prior to sin, which explains why Adam and Eve selfishly chose to follow their own decision rather than the command of God (*CG* XI.15, 469). Pride allows humans to be self-centered, but it comes in two different forms.

In Book V, Chapter 19, Augustine distinguishes between the “desire for glory” and “the

lust for mastery” in explaining why God helped the Romans to achieve their great empire. He defines those who seek glory “even of human praise” to “nonetheless take care not to displease men of good judgment” because they possess “many good aspects of character” to be “competent judges” (223-4). By contrast, Augustine identifies “the lust for mastery” in a more negative sense because “one who desires to rule and command but who lacks that love of glory which will deter him from displeasing men of good judgment will very often seek to obtain what he loves even by the most blatant acts of wickedness” (224). These two definitions of pride serve as a main reason why Rousseau rejects original sin and the natural desire to dominate. In his writing to the Archbishop of Paris, Rousseau distinguishes his project from the tradition that believes in a naturally corrupt form of human psychology: “The only thing you can see is man in the hands of the Devil, while I see how he fell into them. The cause of evil, according to you, is corrupted nature, and this corruption itself is an evil whose cause had to be sought. Man was created good. We both agree on that, I believe. But you say he is wicked because he was wicked. And I show how he was wicked” (*LB* 31). To summarize, Rousseau believes he provides a better justification for the natural goodness of man compared to the teaching of original sin that does not provide a clear answer as to how wickedness emerged in man. Although both agree that God created man as naturally good, the Christian tradition seems to not distinguish between the two forms of self-love Rousseau identifies as *amour de soi* and *amour propre*. Rousseau accepts a natural form of selfishness, but it presents itself as an isolated form of self-love, meaning it does not influence the way one wants to be viewed by others. In contrast, the Christian understanding of selfishness does refer to the way one wishes to be perceived by others. This analysis serves to demonstrate how Rousseau critiques the tradition of the will to dominate as a product of societal corruption rather

than as a part of human nature. The discussion of glory as an outcome of pride leads to Rousseau's next critique of Hobbes's presentation of the human passions.

Hobbes's "Robust Child" vs. Rousseau's Emile

Rousseau's critique of Hobbes is widely known among scholars, especially through his description of the pure state of nature in the *Second Discourse* as a refutation of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. However, scholars have not focused solely on Hobbes and Rousseau's disagreement on the characterization of the will. Hobbes shares Rousseau's objections that man is naturally sinful, but it is the psychological disposition that Rousseau takes issue with. Hobbes has an account of human nature that relies on the premise that humans naturally possess passions beyond *amour de soi* and pity. In the *Elements of Law (EL)*, Hobbes identifies glory as the greatest passion "which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us" (IX, 50). He further divides the concept of glory to explain how "vain glory" arises as "merely vain and unprofitable; as when man imagineth himself to do the actions whereof he readeth in some romant, or to be like unto some other man whose acts he admireth" (IX, 50-1)". Glory serves as an important part of Rousseau's critique of Hobbes's presentation of human nature because of the pleasure one takes in acquiring more power than others. Slomp (1998) views the concept of glory in both the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* to be "the *genus* of all human motivation" because it represents "man's dominant passion and ultimate end" to hold "superior power with respect to others" (553-54). However, in *Leviathan (L)*, Hobbes identifies glory as the third principal cause of quarrel in which men fight for reputation (13.1-7). Hobbes contends that man has a natural desire for power because of the natural condition of mankind as selfish and equally vulnerable. Natural man compares himself with others in order to determine his self-worth, which oftentimes leads to conflict.

Rousseau maintains that Hobbes's portrayal of human nature as engaging in conflict due to their battle for power makes man naturally evil, but Hobbes explicitly denies the fact that humans are evil (*SD* 67; *L* 13.10). Hobbes claims that the passions that incline men to engage in such behavior are not sins, but Rousseau views the restless desire for power to represent the corrupt nature of civil man. The reason for Rousseau's persistence of Hobbes's categorization of men as evil relates to a distinction made earlier between natural man being good for himself and good for others (see Melzer 1990). In the distinction between this double meaning of goodness, Hobbes's presentation of natural man would make him evil because he is neither good for himself nor good for others. Hobbes's natural man is not good for himself because is not self-sufficient. He relies on others to accumulate more power and feels the need to constantly compare himself with others to ensure he is not viewed as weaker and easier to take advantage of. Similarly, natural man is not good for others because he views himself in constant competition to ensure his self-preservation.

The main factor that leads Rousseau to categorize Hobbes's account of human nature as evil is his view towards pride. Rousseau critiques Hobbes's understanding of the psychological disposition of man by stating, "let us not conclude with Hobbes that since man has no idea of goodness he is naturally evil, that he is vicious because he does not know virtue, that he always refuses his fellow humans services he does not believe he owes them, or that, by virtue of the right he reasonably claims to the things he needs, he foolishly imagines himself to be the sole owner of the entire universe" (*SD* 81). This idea that humans view themselves to be the only one in control of the entire universe is rooted in Hobbes's argument that man has a natural "right to everything, even to one another's body" (*L* 14.4). Having a right to anything one pleases speaks the language of domination, which Rousseau critiques as being a corrupted view of human nature. Natural man

does not desire to have more than his needs. When Rousseau's natural man does encounter a possibility of conflict, he immediately retreats and finds another resource to satisfy his needs.

Furthermore, Rousseau believes that Hobbes comes to the opposite conclusion of how man is to live in the state of nature. Both Hobbes and Rousseau view natural man as prioritizing his self-preservation, but they have different accounts of how natural man is to enjoy self-preservation. Rousseau believes in the simplicity of natural man who has limited desires and is incapable of possessing passions other than his self-love (*amour de soi*). Yet, Rousseau accuses Hobbes of depicting civil man rather than natural man: "[Hobbes] says precisely the opposite since he has improperly included in savage man's care for his self-preservation the need to satisfy a large number of passions which are the product of society and which have made laws necessary" (*SD* 81-2). Following this statement, Rousseau mocks Hobbes's portrayal of natural man as a "robust child" (*SD* 82; see also *E* 67). Hobbes believes that an evil man is "like a sturdy boy," in that he exhibits strength through the vast amount of power and pride he holds (see footnote in *SD* 82). Rousseau sarcastically considers Hobbes's description of the evil man as "robust" because he believes the evil man is actually the opposite. We can turn to Rousseau's discussion in *Emile* to better understand why Rousseau does not take Hobbes's account of natural man seriously:

But when Hobbes called the wicked man a robust child, he said something absolutely contradictory. All wickedness comes from weakness. The child is wicked only because he is weak. Make him strong; he will be good. He who could do everything would never do harm. Of all the attributes of the all-powerful divinity, goodness is the one without which one can least conceive it (*E* 67).

This statement illuminates Rousseau's distinction between the natural goodness of man and the will to dominate. A child is naturally good when he is able to be self-sufficient. He does not depend on others to have his needs met, and does not resort to violence when fulfilling his desires. In contrast, the man who exhibits evil also reveals his desire to dominate because he demands others

to satisfy his needs, and is incapable of surviving by the strength of his own power. He has no strength because he has relied too heavily on gaining power at another's expense. Rousseau supports his doctrine of natural goodness when he writes, "Man is weak when he is dependent and he is emancipated before he is robust" (*SD* 82). Dependency is not the only factor that makes men weak. It is the accumulation of the passions that makes man develop vices.

The most burdensome feature of civil man, according to Rousseau, is the accumulation of the passions. Natural man lacks the ability to conceive of desires other than those most pressing for his survival. However, when man transitions into civil society, he develops the ability to reason, leading one to distinguish between good and bad (*E* 67). The passions can sometimes lead to conflicting desires, causing man to feel overwhelmed, and blame anyone other than himself for the suffering he encounters. His suffering leads him to only trust himself, which is why he desires to accumulate unlimited power and express dominion over others. Through the depiction of Hobbes's understanding of human psychology, we can see how Rousseau uses his doctrine of the natural goodness of man as a critique of the inaccurate portrayal of the human passions. The last target Rousseau has in mind with his counter to the natural desire for dominion is John Locke's presentation of children's "desire for domination" as expressed in his educational treatise.

The Problem with Locke on Children's "Desire for Domination"

Locke views the "love of dominion" as the "first origin of most vicious habits that are ordinary and natural" to children (*ST* §76). Locke believes dominion presents itself in two ways. First, children desire for others to serve their will. Second, children "desire to have things be theirs" (*ST* §77). Rousseau takes issue with Locke's advancement of the principle that children possess a natural tendency to dominate and are born already corrupted because it stands in stark contrast with his doctrine of natural goodness. Rousseau immediately reveals in the preface to *Emile* his

intention of his educational project to be a critique of Locke's educational treatise. He writes, "After Locke's book, my subject was still entirely fresh" (E 33). Rousseau believes Locke has an inaccurate portrayal of childhood that leads his theory to not properly curb children's "love of dominion". To distinguish between the two educational works, Rousseau introduces his doctrine of the natural goodness of man as a counterpoint to what Locke considers to be children's natural possession of the will to dominate: "Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way" (E 33). Similar to his critique of Hobbes, Rousseau believes Locke provides an account of civilized man rather than a natural child. Children do not naturally possess the desire to dominate because they are born without the corrupting feature of *amour-propre*. Rousseau explains how the will to dominate emerges in civil society: "The first tears of children are prayers. If one is not careful, they soon become orders. Children begin by getting themselves assisted; they end by getting themselves served. Thus, from their own weakness, which is in the first place the source of the feeling of their dependence, is subsequently born the idea of empire and domination" (E 66). Recognizing how one can be served allows the love of dominion to develop.²

Rousseau provides a second similar account of how the will to dominate develops through children learning how to give orders to their caretakers. He writes, "The more he screams, the less you should listen to him. It is important to accustom him early not to give orders either to men, for he is not their master, or to things, for they do not hear him" (E 66). By giving in to the child's display of anger, parents accustom children to engage in such behavior to satisfy their desires. Children learn that they can command others to act for them, leading to the corrupting development

² See also Tennyson and Schwarze (2023) on their discussion of Locke's view that children naturally love dominion.

of the will to dominate. They have their will transformed from solely being content with *amour de soi* to awakening their *amour propre* because they see how prideful behavior can allow for their desires to be met by others. This also results from the improper reasoning children receive before they can understand how to reason. Rousseau explains how “Reason alone teaches us to know good and bad. Conscience, which makes us love the former and hate the latter, although independent of reason, cannot therefore be developed without it” (E 67). When children are taught the difference between good and bad before understanding what these terms mean, they develop an improper use of their ability to reason. They view the lessons in reasoning as being forced to obey (E 89). Having to obey makes a child become subject to other individual wills rather than their own.

Rousseau uses his critique of Locke’s lesson in reasoning as another way to reinforce his doctrine of the natural goodness of man. He presents an account of human nature that reverses the “in vogue” depiction of reasoning with children (E 89). Receiving a lesson in reasoning too early allows the will to dominate to slowly develop. Rousseau clarifies his concern through the following: “Before the age of reason one cannot have any idea of moral beings or of social relations. Hence so far as possible words which express them must be avoided, for fear that the child in the beginning attach to these words false ideas which you will not know about or will no longer be able to destroy” (E 89). Since children are not at the point of being able to correctly distinguish between good and bad, the moral words they are taught run the risk of being misinterpreted and applied incorrectly, which Rousseau sees as allowing pride to develop: “to believe themselves as wise as their masters, to become disputatious and rebellious” (E 89). By delaying the use of reasoning with children, they can maintain their natural goodness and not

become dependent on the wills of others. The act of depending on other wills leads children to develop the desire to dominate.

The purpose of analyzing Rousseau's critique of Locke's promotion of reason is to show how human nature becomes corrupted with improper education. By teaching a child to maintain his natural goodness through lessons suitable for his age, he prevents the development of pride from ruining a child's self-love. The discussion of Locke and Rousseau's disagreements on how to educate children leads to the final section of how Rousseau envisions his educational project to emerge from the doctrine of the natural goodness of man.

Rousseau's Solution: Freedom Through Negative Education

The purpose of *Emile* is to demonstrate how Emile's education is presented as an alternative account of original sin modeled on the doctrine of natural goodness. From the outset of *Emile*, Rousseau lays out the need for a revised form of education, one which he considers to be a negative form of education. He argues that it is not natural for the will to desire domination because it is not possible for someone to desire such a developed faculty given his position that we are born as a blank slate: "We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education" (*E* 38). To become a fully developed being, one must be taught how to use the faculties that are formed from nature: "This education comes to us from nature or from men or from things. The internal development of our faculties and our organs is the education of nature. The use that we are taught to make of this development is the education of men" (*E* 38). Since we are taught to use our faculties through the "education of men," Rousseau has to devise a new form of education based on his premise that "everything degenerates

in the hands of man” (*E* 37). The new form of education Rousseau proposes is based on his doctrine of natural goodness, which teaches Emile to never become dependent on another person’s will.

Education from the moment of birth is necessary because of the vulnerable condition infants are born into. Namely, infants are vulnerable because they do not choose the type of care they receive. To put Rousseau’s argument into perspective, he uses the vivid example of the child who is struck by his nurse. When a child continues to cry despite the various care techniques one may use to soothe the child, the corrupt nature of humans allows frustration to determine one’s actions. This frustration results in one’s emotions being let out on the innocent child: “If he persists, one gets impatient, one threatens him; brutal nurses sometimes strike him” (*E* 65). The moment a nurse strikes the child out of impatience, the child becomes corrupt and allows pride to become awakened. Hence is the reason why “As long as children find resistance only in things and never in wills, they will become neither rebellious nor irascible and will preserve their health better” (*E* 66).

The critique of the habituation of the child’s dependence also relates to Rousseau’s problem with Augustine’s advancement of the doctrine of original sin. Rousseau shows how original sin is introduced to a child who gets punished as a result of not having his needs met:

“When the child cries, he is uncomfortable; he has some need which he does not know how to satisfy. One examines, one seeks this need, one finds it, one provides for it. When one does not find it or when one cannot provide for it, the tears continue. One is bothered by them; one caresses the child to make him keep quiet, one rocks him, one sings to him to make him go to sleep. If he persists, one gets impatient, one threatens him; brutal nurses sometimes strike him. These are strange lessons for his entrance in life” (*E* 65).

The “strange lessons” a child is introduced to as an infant are a result of corruption because nurses awaken the unnatural tendencies of anger and resentment when they strike the child out of frustration for not being able to satisfy his needs. These actions of the nurse are an example of the typical educational practices Rousseau wants to overturn because of the introduction of vice that

they breed into children's behavior. The example of the child becoming indignant demonstrates how the nurse's action teaches the child to display wickedness and desire domination rather than retain his natural goodness through figuring out his own way to have his needs met.

What is significant about the example Rousseau portrays of the infant and the nurse is that Emile is not the infant. Rousseau wants to demonstrate that Emile would never behave in such a way because he maintains his natural goodness. Infants who are not raised the same way as Emile let agitation become their strongest passion because they lose the ability to control their passions. Rousseau suggests "the more [the infant] screams, the less you should listen to him" because "[it] is important to accustom him early not to give orders either to men, for he is not their master, or things, for they do not hear him" (*E* 66). Rousseau wants to raise Emile as an independent boy; one who does not depend on others to have his desires satisfied. The moment when a child is served, he begins to view himself as master over someone. He expects that his servant will continue to fulfill his needs and obey his demands. Thus is why Rousseau suggests that "when a child desires something that he sees and one wants to give it to him, it is better to carry the child to the object than to bring the object to the child" (*E* 66). By carrying the child to the object, the child is able to reach the object on his own. Actions such as this one begin to cultivate the mindset that the child is capable of satisfying his own desires. Bringing the object to the child contributes to the weakness of children because they are not learning how to become independent. If one cannot become independent, then one cannot develop a sense of freedom.

Rousseau is concerned with freedom because it helps a child to retain his natural goodness as a self-sufficient being. Rousseau calls freedom his "fundamental maxim" (*E* 84) because his main goal is to prevent children from subjecting other wills to him. The child should follow his own desires, and any desires that cannot be achieved independently should serve as a warning that

his will is tending towards the desire to dominate. This is clarified in a statement Rousseau makes about the corruption of society: “Society has made man weaker not only in taking from him the right he had over his own strength but, above all, in making his strength insufficient for him. That is why his desires are multiplied along with his weakness” (*E* 84). Furthermore, Rousseau sees freedom as a way for education to preserve the natural goodness of man. He explains after his maxim that “The spirit of these rules is to accord children more true freedom and less dominion, to let them do more by themselves and to exact less from others. Thus, accustomed early to limiting their desires to their strength, they will feel little the privation of what is not going to be in their power” (*E* 68). This is why Rousseau emphasizes the need for an education based on the freedom one experiences in the state of nature.

Conclusion

Recognizing how Rousseau’s doctrine of the natural goodness of man responds to a tradition centered on domination as a natural feature of mankind helps to illuminate the task of Rousseau’s education project as an attempt to curb the desire to dominate. The goal in this paper has been to make the connection between the will to dominate, original sin, and pride, all three features Rousseau rejects to be a natural part of human nature. Rousseau believes that Augustine, Hobbes, and Locke all share the same theory of human nature as inclined toward evil due to the mark of the fall. The focus is on the psychological development of humans in which the only passion felt in the state of nature is self-love. It is not until the introduction to society that man develops more complex passions that leads to his misery and dependence on others. Portraying Rousseau’s doctrine of natural goodness through the lens of the will to dominate can help to gain a better understanding of how Rousseau’s system of thought is consistent across his works.

Works Cited

- Augustine. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Edited and Translated by R.W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Fraistat, Shawn. "Domination and Care in Rousseau's *Emile*." *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 4 (2016): 889-900.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*. Edited by J.C.A Gaskin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994.
- Locke, John. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. Edited by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996.
- Marks, Jonathan. "Rousseau's Critique of Locke's Education for Liberty." *Journal of Politics* 74, no. 3 (2012): 694-706.
- Melzer, Arthur. *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Melzer, Arthur. "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity." *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 344-360.
- Pettit, Philip. *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile or On Education*. Translated by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written From the Mountain, and Related Writings*. Translated by Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush. Edited by Christopher Kelly and Eve Grace. Hanover: University Press of New England. 2001.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Rousseau: Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*. Edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly. Translated by Judith R. Bush, Christopher Kelly, and Roger D. Masters. Hanover: University Press of New England. 1990.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*. Translated by Christopher Kelly. Edited by Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman. Hanover: University Press of New England. 1995.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses” and the “Social Contract.”* Translated by John T. Scott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Slomp, Gabriella. “From *Genus* to *Species*: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory.” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (1998): 552-569.

Strong, Tracy B. “Glory and the Law in Hobbes.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (2017): 61-76.

Tennyson, Timothy T., and Michelle Schwarze. “An Honest Man? Rousseau’s Critique of Locke’s Character Education.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 2023, p. 1-22.