

## LOCKE AND ROUSSEAU: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Both John Locke (1632-1734) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) write as early modern social contract theorists, and both promote reason and freedom as essential components of political societies. Yet these thinkers take many distinct, and at times opposing, stances on education. This paper will explore John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on early childhood education, first by considering each philosopher separately, then comparing and contrasting their views. Locke and Rousseau principally disagree on naturalism and the use of habits and social conventions for the education of young children. Fundamentally, their theories of education rest on how they construe the relationship between nurture and nature and what the role of the educated man is in society.

### **John Locke**

*“The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone lay it seriously to heart and [...] set his helping hand to promote everywhere that way of training up youth [...] which is the easiest, shortest, and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings.”*

John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, defends the fundamental belief that humans are born without innate ideas,<sup>1</sup> and thus must derive their knowledge entirely from “*external, sensible Objects...perceived and reflected on by our selves*” (EU: II.I, § 1, emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup> This belief in *tabula rasa* leads Locke to argue that “[c]hildren commonly get not those general *Ideas* [of the rational Faculty], nor learn the Names that stand for them, till having for a good while exercised their Reason about familiar and more particular *Ideas*” (EU: I.II, § 14). Yet, for Locke, a lack of innate knowledge is not equivalent to a lack of natural faculties, abilities, or tendencies. He distinguishes knowledge from tendency by explaining:

I deny not, that there are natural tendencies imprinted on the Minds of Men; and that, from the very first instances of Sense and Perception, there are some things, that are grateful, and others that welcome to them; some things that they incline to, and others that they fly: But this makes nothing for

innate Characters on the Mind, which are to be the Principles of Knowledge, regulating our Practice.  
[EU: I.III, § 3]

Children are born with minds as blank as slates, but they have natural inclinations which include personalities, likes and dislikes.

For Locke, educating children, then, entails instructing their minds and molding their natural tendencies. Education develops the understanding, which men “universally pay a ready submission” to, whether it is “well or ill informed” (CU: § 1). Because children are born without a natural knowledge of virtue, early education greatly shapes their development, where even “little and almost insensible impressions on [their] tender infancies have very important and lasting consequences” (TCE: § 1). Thus, Locke’s method of education is meant to be observed by parents even from the time their child is in the cradle, long before the teaching that comes from books.

Locke warns at the end of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* that he can only provide general views on the proper education of a gentleman; the “various tempers, different inclinations, and particular defaults that are to be found in children” are so diverse that “it would require a volume” to prescribe correct remedies for all (TCE: § 216).<sup>3</sup> Locke encourages parents to watch their children, for through observation, parents can understand their child’s distinctive inclinations. Specifically, they should pay particular attention to their child “in those seasons of perfect freedom” and “mark how [the child] spends his time” (TCE: § 125).<sup>4</sup> Once armed with such information, parents can better know how to motivate their children towards the right and can craft their methods of education accordingly.<sup>5</sup> As Nathan Tarcov notes, “One studies a child’s nature not merely to adjust to it but to see ‘how it may be improved.’”<sup>6</sup>

Locke discusses individual tempers to warn parents that some children may be more prone to falling from the path of reason than others. A child not properly guided could become an irrational, cruel being because “the minds of children [are] as easily turned this or that way as water itself” (TCE: § 2). Indeed, so many various tempers can be found that “there are possibly scarce two children who can be conducted by exactly the same method” (TCE: § 216). Yet, this mention of specific tempers and characteristics in individual children does not ignore that children share several natural tendencies as well. Locke presents us with fundamental qualities that all children, and rational beings, share: curiosity, pride, desire for liberty, and want of dominion. Parents, treating their children as rational beings, can guide toward good action rather than injustice. Locke holds that of all men, “nine parts out of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education” (TCE: § 1), for proper education brings natural

qualities to fruition by “laying the first foundations of virtue” (TCE: § 139). Only a handful of men may not need a great deal of assistance, for they come from the cradle with a natural strength or genius. Yet, whether individuals are born with a weaker or stronger constitution, Locke stresses that both the manners and abilities of gentlemen owe “more to their *education* than to anything else” (TCE: § 32).

Of the natural qualities which children possess, curiosity and liberty seem to guide the young pupil most. Locke describes curiosity as motivating children toward knowledge, for nature grants it as a great instrument to remove ignorance, and through it, all children are led to questioning about most anything (TCE: § 118). Hence, parents should cherish curiosity in their children as a positive appetite. Locke warns parents to answer questions patiently and gently and never to embarrass a child for seeking what may even seem like trivial knowledge. “Children,” he reminds us, “are strangers to all we are acquainted with, and all the things they meet with are at first unknown to them, as they were to us” (TCE: § 120.3). Happy is the child who has help in discovering this new world.

The desire for liberty is especially important in Locke’s idea of education. Liberty here does not mean a complete absence of restraint, but it does entail a sense of independence in action. Children want to show that their actions come from themselves and that they are free (TCE: § 73). In this sense, pride has a close connection to liberty, for men act out of liberty in the belief that they have the capacity for freedom and a natural claim to it as rational beings.<sup>7</sup> Liberty also gives children satisfaction in their industry. Whereas some may argue that children love play-games because they excite their imagination or desire for amusement, Locke argues that it is “*liberty* alone which gives the true relish and delight to their ordinary play-games” (TCE: § 76, my emphasis). If children were forced to play, they would grow weary of it in the same way that they tire of study when forced to learn. Hence, it is not any particular action that can become irksome to a child, but the denial of liberty and the use of force. Locke explains that play loses its relish as soon as it becomes duty:

Let a child be but ordered to whip his top at a certain time every day, whether he has or has not a mind to it; let this be required of him as a duty...and see whether he will not soon be weary of any play at this rate? Is it not so with grown men? [TCE: § 73.1]

Because of this strong desire for liberty, the wise tutor uses seasons of freedom to turn children toward learning, for “the chief art is to make all that they have to do sport and play too” (TCE: § 63). Locke insists that the love of liberty is a beneficial asset to the

reasonable man.<sup>8</sup> This is because “everyone can more easily bear a denial from himself than from anybody else” (TCE: § 107). Thus, a man with developed reason can better control his inclinations *with* liberty due to self-denial.<sup>9</sup> In grown men, such self-control is more desirable than outside coercion.

Along with a natural inquisitiveness and a love of liberty, children desire to be treated rationally. Locke explains that children “understand [reason] as early as they do language” (TCE: § 81), though they may be limited in their rational abilities due to their young age. To treat a child rationally is to treat him not out of passion, but sensibly (TCE: § 81). Children themselves may not be capable of generating abstract principles,<sup>10</sup> but Locke insists that they can recognize developed rationality in others and that they take pride in participating in the experience. By treating children as rational creatures and recognizing their innate desire to grow in this propensity, parents guide their children towards reasoning abstractly and practicing reasonable actions later in life that are “suitable to the Dignity and Excellency of a rational Creature” (TCE: § 31).

The duty of parents, and in fact, the principal reason for marriage is procreation and education (2T: VII.80 and 81). In speaking of “Paternal Power” in the *Two Treatises*, Locke charges that parents must “take care of their Off-spring, during the imperfect state of Childhood” and must “inform the Mind, and govern the Actions of their yet ignorant Nonage” (2T: VI.58). While children are ignorant, they are to look upon their parents as “their lords, their absolute governors” and stand in awe and reverence of them (TCE: § 41). But there exists a limit to this control. “Age and Reason” gradually loosen the ties of parental power, and the nurturing process, until a man reaches his full liberty in adulthood (2T: VI.55). This arrangement serves several purposes within Lockean education. Since Locke contends that children are born without a faculty to understand the law of nature, they need parents to make their decisions. Parents also can train children to submit their love of dominion to reason, for the child “that is not used to submit his will to the reason of others *when he is young*, will scarce hearken or submit to his own reason when he is of age to make use of it” (TCE: § 36). Finally, a child left uneducated risks developing vices. Although these ill habits come “from small beginnings in pins and cherrystones,” left unattended they will “grow up to higher frauds” which could result in hardened dishonesty (TCE: § 110).

Since parents have such a crucial role in their child’s development, Locke charges, “Be sure then to establish the authority of a father *as soon as* he [the child] is capable of submission and can understand in whose power he is” (TCE: § 40). In order to engender discipline, a child must be established as an obedient subject to his father in his very earliest stages. Locke advises the father to be “inflexibly severe in [his] carriage”

(TCE: § 99) and argues that a “strict hand be kept over children” (TCE: § 41). In this way the father directs his child to practices and habits that foster virtue while acting in a consistent manner towards the child. Parents who fail in this responsibility and over-indulge their little ones can “cherish their [children’s] faults” and cause perversity in them (TCE: § 34). Locke acknowledges that parents are tempted to be indulgent and familiar with their children when very young, but then to become distant and severe as they grow; yet, when this occurs, children will lack discipline and eventually become resentful of their parents (TCE: § 40).

This degree of severity and strict discipline by parents is not meant to last indefinitely but “should be relaxed as fast as their age” (TCE: § 95). Since the child longs to show independence of thought and takes pride in his liberty, granting confidence and encouraging reasonable discourse is the best method for a father to have an effective and positive influence on his older child. Once the child has grown, his own reason rules his actions and passions in the place of his parents.

Parents continue to nurture their children by crafting societal interactions, instilling their children with manners, and training them to act correctly in social situations. From the start “children are so often perplexed” (TCE: § 67) by rules thrown at them by maids and governesses. Locke advises that instead of spouting rules and precepts, parents should gently show their children what to do before a social event; during the event, the child can practice his new lesson in manners but should not be harassed if he makes a mistake (TCE: § 67). Locke reminds parents that years will teach the child as much as anything, so be patient with younger children. The more years a child is kept in good company, the more he can learn by example, until having good manners becomes practically natural. The company Locke speaks of in this case is that of adults. Parents can make certain that young children grow to love their company by ensuring that children “receive all their good things there and from their hands” (TCE: § 69) instead of from the hands of servants or other adults.

Another pragmatic lesson parents can teach children is the practice of dancing. Locke praises the art of dancing because it “gives children manly thoughts and carriage more than anything” (TCE: § 67) and provides the parents with an easy tool to instruct their children. As we can see in this area of manners, the child is given some instruction before being thrown into social situations; however, the actual development of manners comes from a child’s hands-on experiences—through dancing and interaction in the company of trusted adults.

Other social habits Locke addresses concern the company of other children. Parents must make the difficult decision of sending their children abroad for study or having their children stay at home with a tutor. When a child is sent off to a school of peers, his greatest instruction is from the other boys instead of the

teacher. Regarding the rowdy games and bold attitudes of peer pressure, Locke identifies “malapertness, tricking, or violence learned amongst schoolboys” as habits that are not easily reversed (TCE: § 70). A child taught at home runs the risk of becoming bashful or ignorant of the world, but Locke still praises the at-home education as superior to the education at school because the child is only influenced by the tutor and parents. Between the faults of learning rough, boisterous behavior or staying sheepish and ignorant, Locke chooses ignorance because “vice is the more stubborn as well as the more dangerous evil of the two and therefore in the first place to be fenced against” (TCE: § 70). Later in a child’s life, bashfulness can be cured through conversation; a loss of virtue is seldom recovered.

Locke’s preferred form of punishment involves esteem and disgrace, which are largely contingent on the pleasing of others rather than the protection or fulfillment of the self. He proposes that parents use “softer ways of shame and commendation” (TCE: § 86), employing the natural inclinations of children towards pride and reason. Children are then made sensible of societal reputation: a concept Locke believes directs the action of men and the workings of society. He explains the importance of reputation in one of his minor essays:

The principal spring from which the actions of men take their rise, the rule they conduct them by, and the end to which they direct them, seems to be credit and reputation, and that which at any rate they avoid, is in the great part shame and disgrace.<sup>11</sup>

This essay is not an approbation of reputation, for Locke describes the power of reputation in society as both positive and negative. For instance, he discusses how esteem in some countries leads to bloodshed, while in others it fosters just living.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, a gentleman’s concern with reputation should not thwart his liberty. Locke warns that reputation is “*not* the true principle and measure of virtue” (TCE: § 61, my emphasis); rather, obeying God for Divine acceptance and reward is more appropriate. Reputation, then, serves to order the actions of children and to guide them until they grow able to judge for themselves and to find what is right by their own reason (TCE: § 61).<sup>13</sup>

Since children naturally love liberty, desire to be treated rationally, and are curious about the adult world, it makes sense that, “earlier perhaps than we think,” they become “sensible of *praise* and commendation” (TCE: § 57). Locke believes that children naturally find pleasure in being esteemed by their parents. Thus, the work of parents is two-fold: award esteem or disgrace in response to a child’s action and transfer that love of esteem towards a broader concern for others. Locke explains that parents should “double the reward” of praise by commending

their children in front of others (TCE: § 62). Meanwhile, he recommends rebuking a child in private, for if a child suspects his reputation is already blemished, he “will be the less careful to preserve others’ good thoughts” (TCE: § 62). Locke suggests that parents talk with the child about the action “as a *strange monstrous matter* that it could not be imagined he would have done and so shame him out of it” (TCE: § 85). The use of the rod is confined to being a last measure and may be only used depending on the child’s temperament. From this dichotomy of praise and blame, a child will gain a liking and inclination towards the right and a hatred of vice. The child will learn how properly to interact in society, and virtue will be pleasant. Just as a tutor should teach children without burdening them (allowing their liberty), the instructors should teach goodness in such a way that only wrongdoing becomes irksome.

However, though grown men might plausibly be governed by the precepts of the law of nature (see 2T: II.6), children cannot simply be taught by “repeated cautions and rules” (TCE: § 10). Locke considers it a fault of the accepted method of education to make children memorize rules and precepts “which they often do not understand and constantly as soon forget as given” (TCE: § 64). If children are strangers in a new world, without innate ideas and without developed rationality, how can they be expected to understand rules for a culture they have just begun to explore? Locke’s discussion of natural curiosity and rationality supports this critique of rules because it holds that children, although on the path to reasoning, cannot yet think abstractly. Curiosity prompts children to discover the world, but it is quickly killed by answers that are not comprehensible to them. Instead, Locke proposes the training of children through practice, developing healthy habits that will last throughout adulthood. In *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Locke begins his discussion of practice and habits by mentioning the musician and the dancer, who come to their skill not by rules but by repetition and exercise. In the *Thoughts*, he likewise describes practicing as the gaining of skill until it becomes natural:

If it be some action you would have done...whenever they forget or do it awkwardly, make them do it over and over again till they are perfect, whereby you will get these two advantages: *first*, to see whether it be an action they can do or is fit to be expected of them...*Secondly*,...that by repeating the same action, till it be grown habitual in them, the performance will not depend on memory or reflection, the concomitant of prudence and age and not of childhood, but will be natural in them.  
[TCE: § 64]

The first advantage Locke describes in this passage relates to studying a child's natural temper. Interestingly, parents examine their child's temperament both before and at the time a practice is being established. While a child is developing a habit, the parents should observe his skill and learn what he is fit for based on how he handles his work. Then, before beginning a new practice, the parents are able to determine what other endeavors their child could successfully undertake based on this previous knowledge. In both cases, the parents are asked to make rational decisions from observation, a trait that they are hoping to engender in their children.

When Locke instructs parents to analyze their children's capabilities, he explains that "in many cases, all that we can do or should aim at is to make the best of what nature has given" and to "prevent the vices and faults to which such a constitution is most inclined" (TCE: § 66). Education makes this possible but not guaranteed, and practice is the logical means by which to attempt this aim. Through it, children can reach a level of reason and independence based on developing virtues and avoiding vices. Children need both physical and mental habits to aim for this perfection. Although outlined separately in the *Thoughts* through specific examples, these habits follow similar patterns: recognizing and considering a child's natural inclinations; firmly leading a child towards repeated practices; and correctly disciplining a child so as not to damage his curiosity or confidence.

In the end, the aim of Lockean education in the *Thoughts* is to train young children to serve in society. In the dedication to the *Thoughts*, Locke calls this obligation to country "indispensable" for every man, yet the gentleman seems to play an especially significant role.<sup>14</sup> As Locke explains in "Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman," the gentleman not only has a duty to the service of his country, but such service is his "proper calling."<sup>15</sup> Locke provides a fuller picture of this calling when he explains what kinds of study are appropriate for the gentleman. He argues that the gentleman "is most properly concerned in moral, and political knowledge; and thus the studies which more immediately belong to his calling, are those which treat of virtues and vices, of civil society, and the arts of government, and so will take in also law and history."<sup>16</sup> The duty of a gentleman to his country, then, involves governing and setting a moral and political example in society, even embodying the civic roles of the nation. Their obligation also extends to military action: "A gentleman, in any age, ought to be so bred as to be fitted to bear arms and be a soldier" (TCE: § 15). Because of this duty to govern and protect, Locke believes that if gentlemen "are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest into order" (TCE: dedication). Since

gentlemen constitute the class from which the leaders of society are drawn, parents have a duty to equip these individuals with the characteristics necessary to become “virtuous, useful, and able men” and to fulfill their governmental responsibilities (TCE: dedication).

### **Rousseau**

*“Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man.”<sup>17</sup>*

Rousseau describes an early childhood<sup>18</sup> educational method with the hope of minimizing the obstacles of civilization and bringing man as near to nature as possible, for “[e]verything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man” (EM: 11). Instead of an educated man being guided by societal norms,<sup>19</sup> Rousseau desires for a child to have no other guide than his own reason by the time he is educated. Unlike Locke, he does not rely on social expectations to train children. Rousseau contends that men can attain this freedom and independence of thought through naturalistic education.

Rousseau does not deny that men need cultivation to overcome feebleness and to develop intelligence and judgment. He understands education to come from three sources: “from nature, from men, or from things” (EM: 11). These three sources must “coincide and lead to a common goal” if the individual is to become well-educated (EM: 11), yet not all of the sources educate man in the same manner. Education from nature acts independently of man’s actions. Education from things depends on man only in a limited extent. Only education from man is entirely in his control. “Since the three educators must be mixed together for a perfect result” (EM: 12), Rousseau contends that nature, which man cannot control, must determine the course of the other two in cultivating children. Thus, he justifies naturalism as a guide to education.

What does education with an eye to nature entail? Rousseau declares that natural education relies upon inclinations rather than habits. He first argues that habits are ineffective, citing the example of a plant being forced to grow a certain way. When let free, the plant continues in its habituated posture; however, as soon as the plant has any new growth, it strains towards its natural inclination. Rousseau claims that human inclinations act in the same manner: “So long as there is no change in conditions and inclinations due to habits, however unnatural, remain unchanged, but immediately the restraint is removed the habit vanishes and nature reasserts itself” (EM: 12). Later in *Emile*, Rousseau emphasizes that “the only habit which a child should...form is that of forming none.”<sup>20</sup> With this statement Rousseau seems to contradict himself. Whereas in the example with the plant,

Rousseau stresses that habits become ineffective with time, in this later section, he notes that children should not develop habits due to the constraints these practices could cause. Hence, it seems that some habits could remain with the child through adulthood. The justification which Rousseau provides about avoiding habit helps relieve this tension. He explains that the child should form no habits so as to “[p]repare him early for the enjoyment of liberty and the exercise of his powers; leave his body its natural habits; enable him always to be master of himself and, as soon as he acquires a will, always to carry out its dictates.”<sup>21</sup> The child is meant to follow only the natural inclinations, and thus he is capable of observing *natural* habits. Unnatural habits, other than failing when restraint is removed, do not foster a love of liberty.<sup>22</sup> Included in these natural inclinations is self-esteem, which Rousseau deems as good and useful when related to ourselves, but can become either good or bad “in the social application we make of it” (EM: 40). Man’s reason can guide this esteem.

In place of habits, natural education cherishes inclination, which Rousseau describes as being “conscious of our sensations [so that] we are inclined to seek or to avoid the objects which produce them” (EM: 12). Simply, they are “our nature” to which everything else should conform (EM: 12). Although inclinations are natural, they strengthen and extend in children as the children grow in sense and intelligence. The child-grown-man, with developed reason, has learned to heed his natural inclinations and ignore the ills of society. As one scholar puts it, “Education [for Rousseau] must...conform to nature, and must be a means of not preparing for citizenship in any particular government, much less for an occupation, but of developing manhood and fitting for the duties of human life.”<sup>23</sup>

Rousseau wishes to teach natural life. When nature and society conflict with each other, one must decide between “making a man or making a citizen” (EM: 13). In this decision, Rousseau deems that “[f]irst and foremost, he will be a man” (EM: 15). Yet some scholars have found this stance to be contradictory with Rousseau’s other works. For instance, they point to the *Social Contract* where Rousseau is concerned with citizenship and the general will.<sup>24</sup> Why would Rousseau desire for Emile to be isolated from the contract? Sylvia Patterson presents a possible solution by stating, “[C]learly Rousseau did not expect his readers to take his romantic setting literally.”<sup>25</sup> She points to the preface where Rousseau explains that *Emile* is chiefly a model, and “conditions may vary indefinitely” (EM: 7) when individuals try to employ this method. Others, such as William Boyd, claim that Rousseau chose the romantic setting of the countryside because it provided the opportunity to present his thoughts in the first person.<sup>26</sup> Even with these explanations, it seems noteworthy that Rousseau extols the influence of the countryside from his personal experience. In *Confessions*,<sup>27</sup> he writes fondly of his years as a child living in the

village of Bossey, outside of Geneva. He describes the country as “such a fresh experience that I could never have enough of it” (CN: 23). Indeed, throughout his adulthood, Rousseau recalls the “happy days” he spent at Bossey; he continually longs for the “country life and its pleasures” (CN: 24).

Rousseau’s paradox could be resolved by the last sections of *Emile* where he describes the son entering society to find a wife. Rousseau explicitly notes that Emile is “not to become a leader” of society, but, nonetheless, “to become acquainted with it” (EM: 122). Emile should not stay permanently in Paris, and he should develop good “taste” in books and theater. Yet in the end, he is to enter society, at least partially, at the completion of his education, and thus, could still possibly enter the social contract. Marriage “will make him a full member of the community” (EM: 129). Rousseau is not removing the child from society for life, just for education, which teaches *how* to live.

Timothy O’Hagan admits that *Emile* offers “an imaginary educational experience,” but he furthers his comments by explaining Rousseau’s position: “[S]ince public institutions of schools and colleges were irredeemably corrupted, the only solution was to withdraw both pupil and teacher from society, and conduct the experiment in isolation from it.”<sup>28</sup> With this explanation, we are able to shift away from recommendations for the countryside being considered only as suggestions or a model. Instead, we should focus on why Rousseau recommends this setting as a backdrop to his entire experiment. For one, as O’Hagan mentions, Rousseau considered public schools and colleges to be unsound. In his opening pages of *Emile*, Rousseau describes such institutions as “ridiculous,” teaching children to become “double-minded, seemingly concerned for others, but really only concerned for themselves” (EM: 13). Rousseau believes that more intimate communities allow parents to shield their children from these “filthy morals of the town” (EM: 42). Thus, in the *Confessions*, Rousseau praises the “simplicity of this rural existence” and explains that the country “opened [his] heart to friendship” (CN: 24). In *Emile*, he further recommends the rural setting because it allows parents to be the masters of everything that surrounds their child.<sup>29</sup>

Rousseau’s account in *Confessions* of his move into the country from the city marks a significant change in his educational development as a child. Whereas in the city life Rousseau voraciously read books with his father, the country life offered him a more relaxed, childlike existence. These two activities—playing and reading—exemplify the distinction Rousseau draws between early childhood and late childhood. The difference between children of varying ages lies in their ability to use, and understand, reason.

Rousseau believes that young children are not yet capable of reason: “It is impossible to form any idea of moral facts or

social relations before the age of reason...[Children's] knowledge is all in sensation; nothing has got through to the understanding" (EM: 47). Since children cannot yet understand or employ their rationality, reasoning must be an end, not a means, to education. Rousseau's recommendations for early childhood education mirror this observation of the child's predicament. For one, the education in morals should not consist in teaching virtues, but in avoiding vices. Rousseau contends that the boy's first lessons should be "purely negative." One scholar describes this education as "intervening only to remove obstacles which would hinder the free play of nature, or to create circumstances favorable to it."<sup>30</sup>

When it comes to shielding children from moral education, Rousseau observes that, of course, it is impossible to bring up a child to the recommended age of twelve without teaching him something about human relationships and moral conduct. Until that age, however, he recommends postponing these "necessary notions" as long as one can, then only telling him limited information when needed (EM: 44). The concept of "necessary notions" is not meant to entail that a child should lack all moral qualities until twelve, for Rousseau states that Emile will become "hard working, temperate, patient, stable and courageous" just from his natural education (EM: 93). The concept of "natural education" is not meant to imply that everything the child encounters is coming about entirely naturally. O'Hagan notes, "During the period of negative education, the child is to be surrounded by an environment of artificial necessity, encountering obstacles which appear to be the inevitable outcome of his own behaviour, rather than willed by others."<sup>31</sup> Yet accompanying this negative education is the notion that children should have no verbal learning nor should they read books, for children "remember words but ideas are reflected off" (EM: 46). Rousseau equates "the greatest plague of childhood" with reading (EM: 51). Although he still contends that children should learn to read, he believes that constant reading would be a bother to children, especially if they are compelled against their will.

Rousseau's belief that children are incapable of rational thinking is not meant to entail that he believes children possess no kind of reason at all. He argues that "they think very well on everything which bears on their present and obvious interest" (EM: 57). Therefore, Rousseau recommends educational practices which focus the pupil's mind "on what directly affects him," which chiefly means exercising his body continually (EM: 53).<sup>32</sup> Rousseau argues that children should learn through their senses, through investigating and exploring the natural world.<sup>33</sup> He describes living through this state of childhood in the *Confessions*: "I felt before I thought: which is the common lot of man, though more pronounced in my case than in another's" (CN: 19). Replacing this education with books teaches the child not to reason for himself, but to rely upon the reason of others, whereas the

child's education is meant to train him to think on his own. Until he is able to do so, his education should be a joyful celebration of childhood. Rousseau beckons parents, "Love childhood. Look with friendly eyes on its games, its pleasures, its amiable dispositions" (EM: 33). Rousseau asks adults to give children "well regulated liberty" (EM: 39). By the age of twelve, then, the child may know little by heart, but he has acquired much experience. Rousseau envisions this "complete child" having pleasant thoughts, eagerness, and vigor.

Because Rousseau strongly recommends this type of early childhood education, he understands his personal development as a child to come in reverse order. He depicts two stages of his childhood development in connection with the towns in which he lived: Geneva and Bossey. Rousseau spent his first days in Geneva with his father. At an early age, he learned to read, although he claims he does not remember how. What Rousseau does recall is the effect these books had on his young mind. The types of books Rousseau first read were romantic and sensational novels. "At first it was only to give me some practice in reading," he explains, "But soon my interest in this entertaining literature became so strong that we read by turns continuously, and spent whole nights so engaged" (CN: 19-20). Rousseau describes this hunger for books as dangerous, for it gave him a "singular insight for [his] age into the passions" (CN: 20). Though he had not yet acquired knowledge of the passions through his senses, and thus had no conception of the "facts," Rousseau claims that he became "familiar with every feeling" (CN: 20) from the information in these books. Like Rousseau describes in *Emile*, he learned the passions by relying upon the reason of others. Since he had yet no understanding of ideas, he "grasped nothing" yet "sensed everything" (CN: 20). Through this experience, Rousseau claims that his reasoning powers were not warped, for at that time he had none, yet his passions were shaped in such a way as to give him the "strangest and most romantic notions about human life, which neither experience nor reflection has ever succeeded in curing me of" (CN: 20).

Later in his time with his father, Rousseau turned to his grandfather's library where he read works like the *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch. These contributed to his sense of heroism and his love of the republican spirit and of liberty, passions which continued to influence him throughout his life. In his early career, he describes "playing the anti-despot and proud Republican" in his feelings towards France, for his "earlier reading, always confined to French authors, nurtured [his] affection for France, and finally transformed it into so blind a passion that nothing has been able to conquer it" (CN: 177). Rousseau's passion for the republic, specifically that of the Romans, is echoed even when he is fully grown. Visiting the Pont du Gard he is so taken aback by the Roman remains that he passionately exclaims, "If only I had been born a Roman!" (CN:

243). Rousseau's development of this romantic viewpoint and his early love of books might be why he calls himself "a man since birth" (CN: 169).

It was not until Rousseau moved to the small village of Bossey at the age of ten that he began to prefer games and play as a relaxation. He describes the simplicity of this rural setting as bringing him invaluable benefit, such as opening him to friendship. "Up to that time," in his home in Geneva, Rousseau "had known nothing but lofty and theoretical emotions" (CN: 24). From his friendship with his cousin Bernard in Bossey, Rousseau learned both the bonds of affection and the love of freedom. The boys were allowed almost complete freedom at Bossey, which Rousseau claims they never abused. They lived from pleasure to pleasure in the outdoors, busying themselves with constructing toys like kites, drums, cages, pipes, and even model houses. Rousseau states these details to note that this "early education was on the right lines" (CN: 35). Overall, he muses that "if only [Bossey] had lasted longer it could not have failed to fix my character for ever. It was founded on the affectionate, tender, and peaceable emotions" (CN: 25).

### **Nurture versus Nature, or, The Political versus the Natural Man**

When we compare and contrast the educational works of Locke and Rousseau, we find not only differing accounts of the natural state of children and the methods of education, but varying emphases on end results. In this section, I will compare these two philosophers' views on several topics: the natural inclinations of children, the role of parents, the proposed method of education, and the duty of the educated man in society. Locke and Rousseau differ chiefly on the concept of nurture versus nature and on the role of gentlemen in relationship to politics.

Locke's understanding of natural inclinations is not entirely optimistic. Whereas parents should cherish, and even cater to, their child's curiosity and love of liberty, children must be taught to subdue their natural desire for dominion. Locke's method of education takes these natural faculties, likes and dislikes, into consideration. He proposes habits to break children of laziness (TCE: § 21) and to keep them from becoming spoiled (TCE: § 106), while insisting on other actions which will encourage the love of liberty in children, such as allowing them "seasons of freedom" to play or work, whichever the child chooses (TCE: § 125). Locke also understands children to have the natural desire to be treated rationally. He insists that children "understand it [reason] as early as they do language" (TCE: § 81). Although children themselves do not have the capability yet of employing reason, they can recognize developed rationality in others, and they take pride in participating in the experience. Because of this natural desire to be considered rational creatures, Locke

recommends that a father should not only “*talk familiarly* with [his child],” but further, “*ask his advice and consult* with him about those things where he has any knowledge or understanding” (TCE: § 95). With the goal of helping a child become a man, such familial conversation brings the young mind into serious considerations and reasoning, raising his mind above capricious amusements. Locke urges: “The sooner you *treat him as a man*, the sooner he will begin to be one” (TCE: § 95).<sup>34</sup>

Whereas Locke emphasizes that natural qualities like self-dominion and dominion over others should be curbed and that the passions should be subdued by reason, Rousseau insists that inclinations are “our nature” to which everything else should conform (EM: 12), with our first inclination being self-esteem (EM: 94) and our second, “the love [man] has for the people he sees ready to help him” (EM: 97).<sup>35</sup> For Rousseau, inclinations only strengthen and extend in children as the children grow in sense and intelligence. Children should learn to cherish their natural senses and feelings, even after developing reason. For instance, in the *Confessions* Rousseau praises Madame de Warens for her pure heart and her “upright and virtuous” inclinations. In contrast, he criticizes her for following her reason, which was false and invented, “instead of listening to her heart which gave her good counsel...When false principles led her astray, her true feelings always gave them the lie” (CN: 190). Rousseau also openly scoffs at the thought of talking to children as if they were rational beings:

Locke’s great maxim was to reason with children; and it is the most popular method at the present day. Its success does not appear to recommend it; for my own part, I have never seen anyone so silly as those children with whom they have reasoned so much. Of all man’s faculties, Reason, which is a combination for the rest, is developed last and with greatest difficulty; yet this is the faculty which we are asked to use for the development of the earlier. It is the climax of a good education to form a man who is capable of reason; and we propose to educate a young child by means of his reason! This is beginning where we ought to end, and making of the finished product an instrument in its own manufacture.<sup>36</sup>

Rousseau contends that the circular questioning of children can never be answered, and one would have to threaten children to have any sort of effect on their reason. Hence, it is best to leave the reasoning out until children have reached the proper age of twelve or fifteen.

These differences of opinion on natural inclinations between Locke and Rousseau lead these philosophers to varying strategies of education, with their projects emphasizing nurture or nature, respectively. Interestingly, both philosophers still understand the role of parents to be foundational for the right development of children. This conviction, however, is expressed differently depending on the role of nature and nurture for each. For Locke, parents serve as the child's reason and craft a social setting to guide his ideas. They practically create the society that surrounds their child, where "no ill examples [are] set before them," such as the talk of the servants or other ill-ordered children (TCE: § 76). Instead, Locke recommends that children "be in the company of their parents and those to whose care they are committed" (TCE: § 69). Locke makes these suggestions in order to shield children from the infection of vices, and, as mentioned previously, parents can begin bringing children into suitable conversation.

Likewise, Rousseau believes in the rural setting because it enables parents to protect their children from the "filthy morals of the town" (EM: 42), yet his emphasis on natural education places parents in a different role than in Locke's account.<sup>37</sup> Rousseau insists that parents should not instruct young children through teaching in social settings or through commands—unlike Locke's insistence that children learn to dance and practice sociable manners—but parents should allow the child to grow naturally by protecting the integrity of this state and keeping the evils of city life out. They should allow necessary lessons to come in the child's way, but should not instruct the child on how to think about things.

Thus, while the role of parents for each of these philosophers consists of shielding children from the vices of others, the role differs according to the use of nature versus nurture. For Locke, children are trained through nurturing more than nature, using reputation and habits. The expectations of valuable society (the child's parents, the tutor, and trusted friends) serve as a vehicle of learning through reputation, and habits become a basis of training for correct actions. Through the habit of giving, for instance, Locke understands children to learn such virtues as liberality and generosity: "[C]hildren may...be brought to conceive that those that are commended and in esteem for doing well will...have all other good things as a consequence of it" (TCE: § 58). These habits should curb the natural wants which are problematic, such as the desire for dominion. Also, habits guarantee that children learn virtues even from a young age. Children may not yet understand virtues, precepts, or rules, but they can begin practicing them.

Rousseau directly critiques Locke for teaching by habit. He calls the child who learns liberality the Lockean way a trained hypocrite, claiming that "Locke advises us to convince children by

experience that the most liberal is always the best provided for. This plan makes a child liberal in appearance and covetous in fact. He adds that children will thus acquire a habit of liberality: Yes, the liberality of a usurer, who gives a penny to get a pound.”<sup>38</sup> Unlike Locke, Rousseau understands the motives of reputation as hypocritical, and of reputation itself corrupt altogether, as it is part of society. Gabriel Compayre further argues, “Rousseau’s naturalism rejects both the use of society for training and the use of habits. On the one hand, no commands are to be given to the child; on the other, he is to be taught nothing. Hence, no moral authority, no material discipline in the child’s upbringing.”<sup>39</sup>

Rousseau, however, describes an early childhood designed to minimize the obstacles of civilization and bring man as near to nature as possible. Instead of educated men being guided by societal reputation, Rousseau desires for a child to have no other guide than his own inclinations by the time he is partially grown. Formal moral education does not begin until the child reaches adolescence, and even then he only “gradually approach[es] moral notions involving the distinction of good and evil” (EM: 71). Even then, the training of moral education still seems to follow the naturalist, instead of nurturing, path since Rousseau claims that instruction in judgment and reason does not teach the child to depart from natural tendencies: “Nature chooses her instruments, and makes use of them not according to opinion but according to necessity...The best way of learning to judge correctly is to simplify our sense experiences as much as possible” (EM: 92). In the end, Emile should cherish virtue “not merely for the love of social order...but for the love of the Author of his being which enters into his self-love” (EM: 117).

Finally, we find a remarkable difference between the purpose and aim of education for both philosophers. Locke writes his *Thoughts Concerning Education* specifically to train gentlemen who will become leaders in the political and social arena, providing for the overall project of democracy and liberalism. Gentlemen govern society in many senses, owning businesses or even participating in politics. As leaders, gentlemen can perpetuate virtue in society and increase the prospects of the lower classes. Thus, one can say that the “welfare and prosperity of the nation...depends on [their education]” (TCE: dedication). Although Locke does retain the hierarchy of rank or order through the class of gentlemen, he does not perpetuate the class structure in his philosophy. Locke does not intend for gentlemen to disregard the lower classes or put them at a disadvantage.<sup>40</sup> Instead, Locke intends for this group to serve as a key to the democratization and gradual leveling of society. The Lockean gentleman is concerned with protecting life, liberty, and property for all individuals in society. He is a new breed: instead of continuing the inequalities of the class system, this gentleman is self-controlled and hard-working; he respects people in all classes

of society. Steven Forde describes the Lockean breeding of gentlemen as that which “links virtue and happiness by being the art of deriving happiness from bringing happiness to others.”<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, though raised in the countryside, Rousseau’s child is not meant to reside entirely outside of society for life. He is instead “a savage made to inhabit cities, a street-wise adult who is happy and autonomous.”<sup>42</sup> Upon entering society, the young man should interact with those worthy of interaction, until eventually he is “educated in, though not corrupted by, the ways of the world, traveling abroad and studying politics and society.”<sup>43</sup> Yet Rousseau’s education is not meant to train the citizen. Rousseau has been criticized for making his education “*either-or*: either education for individuality, or education for community.”<sup>44</sup> He claims in *La Nouvelle Heloise* that man is too noble a being to have to serve as a mere instrument for others.<sup>45</sup> To put it in Kantian language, Rousseau believes that man should always be treated as an end in and to himself and never as a means to the community at large.

However, when Rousseau considers education in light of politics, his emphasis on personal worth largely disappears. Rousseau’s concern with the well-being of the community is expressed through the General Will principle of the *Social Contract*, which provides “the total alienation of each associate, together with all of his rights, to the entire community” (SC: 1.6). When men enter contractually, they must sacrifice all of their rights to the whole. The community itself becomes the embodied rights, and each man has equally forfeited and holds an equal, separate association. Therefore, Rousseau argues that man in this state “by himself is a perfect and solitary whole,” yet by giving in to the community alters his “constitution in order to strengthen it” (SC: 2.7). He gives himself to all, yet actually gives himself to no one (SC: 1.6).

Rousseau’s education of Emile cannot seem to fit with this interaction with society. What, then, does Rousseau mean when he claims that Emile will become “a member of society and must fulfill its obligations” (EM: 120) or a savage in the streets? Even with this contradiction, we can at least see that Rousseau recommends that a well-educated man’s presence in society be minimal, in that he should live close to nature, eat and live simply, and leave Paris.<sup>46</sup> We find such an emphasis in the *Confessions* when Rousseau praises the countryside and his escape from the ills of Parisian life. He comments that his education was not achieved until he moved again to a life that “was as simple as it was pleasant,” in the countryside with Mme de Warrens (CN: 173).

Thus, the educational methods of Locke and Rousseau emphasize either nurture or nature, based on differing views of inclinations and on varying aims for the future of the educated child. Locke’s child is trained to become an individual of action in society, while Rousseau’s child is trained to lead the simple,

natural life of beauty and simplicity slightly outside of society. These distinct goals provide the theoretical basis of their different educational philosophies. The reader's respective valuations of the two philosophers are likely to be related to his or her sense of whether education trains people for citizenship in particular or for life in general.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Locke defines innate ideas in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as "some primary Notions...Characters...stamped upon the Mind of Man, which the Soul receives in its very first Being; and brings into the World with it" (II.1).

<sup>2</sup> This section about John Locke is largely drawn from my senior honors thesis, "Education for a Liberal Polity: John Locke's Teaching on Fashioning Citizens and Statemen." Hereafter, all citations will be noted in the body of the text. The following editions and abbreviations shall be used: Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* [TCE] and *Of the Conduct of Understanding* [CU]; Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* [2T]; Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [EU].

<sup>3</sup> In this same passage, Locke stresses the variety of natural tempers even further by adding, "There are possibly scarce two children who can be conducted by exactly the same method." The array of temperaments includes the following list: stout, timorous, confident, modest, tractable, obstinate, curious, careless, quick, or slow (TCE: § 101). See also TCE: §§ 66 and 102.

<sup>4</sup> During these free moments, the child will act of his natural temperament and inclinations. In the presence of others, the child may not act as naturally. This is because children, "earlier perhaps than we think," are "sensible of *praise* and commendation" (TCE: § 57).

<sup>5</sup> "For as these are different in him, so are your methods to be different, and your authority must hence take measures to apply itself different ways to him" (TCE: § 102).

<sup>6</sup> Tarcov, *Locke's Education for Liberty*, 109. Tarcov also concludes that Locke's statement in TCE: § 101 in which he claims that original tempers cannot be mended by rules "does not mean they are not to be cured at all. Instead of by rules or a direct contest, it is 'with Art they may be much mended and turned to good purposes'" (TCE: § 102), Tarcov, 130.

<sup>7</sup> This sentiment echoes Locke's description of the political necessity of equality.

<sup>8</sup> For the reasonable man should not be ruled by passions.

<sup>9</sup> Because of this, self-denial serves as the foundation for virtue. See TCE: § 33.

<sup>10</sup> There are several sections throughout the *Thoughts* where Locke mentions that children cannot yet understand precepts, rules, and principles. One example is his explanation that children must learn from habit rather than rules (TCE: §§ 10, 64-66). A second example can be found in his discussion of justice. Locke explains, "[C]hildren cannot well comprehend what *injustice* is till they understand property and how particular persons come by it...[A]s their capacities enlarge, other rules and cases of *justice* and rights concerning *meum* and *tuum* may be proposed and inculcated" (TCE: § 110).

<sup>11</sup> Locke, *Locke: Political Essays*, 271.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 272. “He therefore that would govern the world well, had need consider rather what fashion he makes, than what laws; and to bring anything into use he need only to give it reputation.”

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, in the essay “Reputation,” and in the *Second Treatise*, Locke holds Divine reward and punishment as a significant motivator for virtuous action. However, in the *Thoughts* he relies very little on Divine ordination for teaching children virtue. See Tarcov, *Locke’s Education for Liberty*, 106.

<sup>14</sup> Locke’s concept of “gentlemen” refers mostly to the aristocracy and middle classes of England. He writes his letters on education, which became the *Thoughts*, as advice to his dear friend, and fellow Whig party member, Edward Clarke, who was a lawyer. Locke, considered a doctor, also fit into the gentleman class.

<sup>15</sup> Locke, *Locke: Political Essays*, 350.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>17</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 11. Compare this statement to the opening of his *Social Contract*: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” *Basic Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 141. Hereafter, all Rousseau quotations will be cited as follows: Rousseau, *The Emile of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, [EM]; Rousseau, *The Confessions*, [CN]; the *Social Contract* [SC], from the *Basic Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

<sup>18</sup> For Rousseau, early childhood ends at the age of twelve when the child passes from boyhood into the approach of adolescence. Rousseau divides *Emile* into five sections: infancy, boyhood, approach of adolescence, adolescence, marriage. My enquiry will focus on infancy and boyhood.

<sup>19</sup> “Dependence on things being non-moral is not prejudicial to freedom and engenders no vices; dependence on men being capricious engenders them all. The only cure for this evil in society would be to put the law in place of the individual, and to arm the general will with a real power that made it superior to every individual will” (EM: 35).

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau, *Emile, Julie and Other Writings*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>22</sup> Rousseau furthers this thought by describing the accomplishments of Emile at age 12: “Habit, routine, and custom mean nothing to him. What he did yesterday has no effect on what he does today. He never follows a fixed rule and never accepts authority or example. He only does or says what seems good to himself” (EM: 67).

<sup>23</sup> Graves, *Great Educators of Three Centuries*, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Patterson, *Rousseau’s Emile and Early Children’s Literature*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Patterson, *Rousseau’s Emile and Early Children’s Literature*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> At times, *Confessions* and *Emile* do contradict each other about early childhood education and the practices thereof. Whereas *Emile* carries a visionary structure which Rousseau may not be basing on experience from his actual life, the *Confessions* portrays the autobiography of Rousseau: what has happened, not what should happen, or should have happened. However, throughout the *Confessions*, Rousseau often analyzes, reflects upon, and even judges his past experiences as positive, negative, helpful, harmful, etc. These comments provide the best point of comparison.

Whereas Rousseau writes in detail about his life, thoughts, and happenings for the world to know, Locke was modest about sharing his personal life, telling

these sorts of thoughts and confessions only with the dearest of his friends through private letters. Locke published his *Two Treatises of Government* anonymously, even placing them under “A” in his alphabetized home library.

<sup>28</sup> O’Hagan, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” 56.

<sup>29</sup> See Rousseau, *Emile, Julie, and Other Writings*, 42. Because a father or tutor must be a “man” himself before teaching his son how to live, Rousseau calls on adults to also check their own way of living, to “make [themselves] worthy of the respect and love of everybody, so that all will seek to please [them].”

<sup>30</sup> Compayre, *Jean Jacques Rousseau and Education from Nature*. See *Emile* 41: “[T]he first education should be purely negative. It consists not in teaching virtue and truth, but in preserving the heart from vice and the mind from error.”

<sup>31</sup> O’Hagan, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” 57.

<sup>32</sup> Also see (EM: 42): “Exercise body, senses, powers, but keep the mind inactive as long as possible. Let childhood ripen in children.”

<sup>33</sup> Rousseau contends that this education is best for children on the basis of empiricism: “Since everything that enters into the human understanding comes through the senses, the first reason of man is a reason of the senses. On this the intellectual reason is based. Our first masters of philosophy are our feet, our hands and our eyes” (EM: 54).

<sup>34</sup> Of course, such conversations must be in proper perspective to a child’s age and ability. Locke does not advocate a three- or seven-year old-arguing treatises (TCE: § 81). However, with cultivation proper to these considerations, the father and son will obtain the greater consequence of friendship.

<sup>35</sup> In this comment, Rousseau seems to agree with Locke about the fundamental law of nature being self-preservation (2T: II.6), and the second law being to preserve others as one preserves the self. However, Rousseau’s explicit observation that we love those who help us seems to differ from Locke. Locke nowhere specifies that we love those who help us, but simply that we love those who do not harm us. Thus, Locke’s notion can be considered a “no harm” principle, while Rousseau’s requires more of the fellow humans.

<sup>36</sup> Rousseau, *Emile, Julie and Other Writings*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> Rousseau emphasizes the place of parents, although his mother’s death at his birth and his father’s eventual abandonment show that Rousseau himself lacked much parental guidance.

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau, *Emile, Julie and Other Writings*, 106.

<sup>39</sup> Compayre, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Education from Nature*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> This commitment to the lower level of society reflects Locke’s political affiliation as a Whig. On eighteenth-century political parties and socioeconomic status, see Kearney, *History of Education Quarterly*, 111 and Bradley, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Forde, “The Moral and Rational Requirements of Locke’s Liberalism,” 27.

<sup>42</sup> O’Hagan, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” 56.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. In *Emile*, Rousseau comments that travel is not for everyone because it can corrupt some: “It is only good for the few people who are strong enough in themselves to listen to the voice of error and not let themselves be seduced, and see examples of vice and not be led astray. Travel develops the natural bent and makes a man either good or bad” (EM: 161).

<sup>44</sup> William Boyd, editor’s epilogue of *The Emile of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 197.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, *Emile and Early Children's Literature*, 30.

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