

# An honest man?: Rousseau's critique of Locke's character education

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/ept](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ept)**Timothy T Tennyson and Michelle Schwarze** 

Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

## Abstract

John Locke's educational program has long been considered to have two primary aims: to habituate children to reason and to raise children capable of meeting the demands of citizenship that he details in his *Two Treatises of Government*. Yet Locke's educational prescriptions undermine citizens' capacity for honesty, a critical political virtue for Locke. To explain how Locke's educational prescriptions are self-undermining, we turn to Rousseau's extended critique of Locke's *Some Thoughts on Education* in his *Émile*. We argue that Rousseau explains why such an education allows a natural desire to dominate to flourish, rendering children who receive it dishonest and incapable of self-government. Rousseau's critique exposes how a liberal education focused solely on autonomy cannot produce the kinds of citizens a Lockean politics requires.

## Keywords

Locke, honesty, character, education, Rousseau

## Introduction

John Locke's educational program has long been considered to have two primary aims: to habituate children to reason and to raise children capable of meeting the demands of citizenship that Locke envisions in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). However, the extent to which those aims—of independent thought and the capacity for self-government—are either inconsistent or achievable via the means Locke proposes has more recently been called into question. While early commentators viewed Lockean pedagogy as a

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### Corresponding author:

Michelle Schwarze, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Madison, WI, USA.

Email: [mschwarze@wisc.edu](mailto:mschwarze@wisc.edu)

conventional attempt to inculcate moral virtue through habituation (Axtell, 1968; Gay, 1964; Yolton, 1971), various scholars, inspired by a Foucauldian reading of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693),<sup>1</sup> have since advanced critical readings of Lockean pedagogy as a form of indoctrination intended to secure the perpetuation of dominant social beliefs and values. These later interpretations see the rational self-government promised by Lockean education as no more than a molding of the will to paternal and—eventually—civic obedience (Baltes, 2013; Carrig, 2001; Durst, 2001; Mehta, 1992; Sumser, 1994). Several scholars have responded to these readings by attempting to reaffirm Locke’s genuine commitment to the cultivation of an independent will in children by demonstrating the consistency of his methods with a version of autonomy that emphasizes the individual’s ability to follow reason in the face of both natural impulse and social fashion (Koganzon, 2016, 2021; Nazar, 2017).

We argue here that, despite its sincere commitment to a pedagogy that cultivates children’s rational capacity for self-government, Locke’s approach would fail to produce good citizens. We demonstrate the limitations of Locke’s pedagogy using one of his contemporary critic’s sustained engagement with it: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his educational treatise *Émile* (1762). Using Rousseau as a lens to view *Some Thoughts* allows us to show how Locke’s project fails to achieve its own ends because it undermines children’s capacity for honesty—a critical moral virtue for citizens inhabiting the kind of ideal political society Locke envisions.<sup>2</sup> We are not the first to turn to Rousseau as a means of assessing Locke’s educational method or aim. Jonathan Marks (2012), for example, has already shown how Rousseau demonstrates the incompatibility of the Lockean educational model with Locke’s conception of individual freedom.<sup>3</sup> Our innovation here lies in extending Rousseau’s criticism beyond freedom. We argue that Rousseau’s engagement with Locke additionally reveals that the over-privileging of autonomy in Locke’s education allows children’s “love of dominion” to flourish, rendering them dishonest and thus incapable of good citizenship.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, Rousseau highlights the tension in a civic education aimed at both autonomy and character.

In what follows, we explore the tension between an education for autonomy and for honesty in Locke’s educational theory in two major parts. First, we explain Locke’s pedagogy and connect it to his political theory, especially his account of the virtues necessary for self-government. We then shift our discussion to Rousseau’s critique of the Lockean model, first highlighting the theoretical limitations of Locke’s pedagogy—namely, that he treats children as though they are adults in terms of their emotional and moral development (and corruption)—before demonstrating why Locke’s educational prescriptions would foster dishonesty in children instead of the kind of character needed in an ideal political society. Before concluding, we put Locke back in dialogue with Rousseau and address how he might have responded to the concerns that Rousseau raises.

## Locke’s education for self-government

Locke’s education for self-government is committed to twin goals, the cultivation of rational self-reflection and the suppression of children’s natural “desire for dominion.” His strong belief in the power of education to shape human nature is evident from the

outset of his pedagogical treatise. He begins *Some Thoughts* with the claim that “of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their education” (*ST* §1). Because children’s first impressions have “lasting consequences,” early childhood education is critical to their future bodily and mental fitness. For Locke, a person whose body is “crazy and feeble” and whose mind “directs not wisely” will never take the “right way.” A central goal of education, then, is to raise a child that is capable of autonomously directing their physical and mental conduct in accordance with reason: “The Great Principle and Foundation of all virtue and worth, is placed in this, That a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follow what Reason directs as best, tho’ the appetite lean the other way” (*ST* §33; see also *ST* §45). Despite Locke’s focus on desire here, his education for self-government is not limited to the regulation of appetites. It is also concerned with the cultivation of the “understanding” in preparation for what Neill (1989) refers to as “epistemic autonomy.” As Neill (1989: 229) demonstrates, Locke’s interest in education is informed by his epistemology and philosophy of mind. In the *Essay*, Locke makes frequent references to the origination and development of “ideas” in children and the process of belief formation and revision. Thus, Locke’s education for self-government includes both the regulation of appetites and the development of certain cognitive faculties (reason and judgment) that—once the child reaches maturity—will allow them to autonomously regulate their beliefs and commitments. As he summarizes, the “principal business [of education] is, to set the mind right, that on all occasions it may be disposed to consent to nothing, but what may be suitable to the dignity and excellency of a rational creature” (*ST* §31).

Locke’s aim of educating children capable of rational consent has political import. In *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, a complementary essay to *Some Thoughts* on how to educate oneself in adulthood, Locke offers an explicit indictment of uncritical education: “There is, I know, a great fault among all sorts of people of principling their children and scholars; which...amounts to no more but making them imbibe their teacher’s notions and tenets by an implicit faith, and firmly to adhere to them whether true or false” (*CU* §41). An education that neglects the cultivation of reason and judgment contributes to “defects and weakness in men’s understandings” (*CU* §4) and is apt to lead them to “rest their opinions upon foundations that have no more certainty nor solidity than the propositions built on them and embraced for their sake” (*CU* §6).<sup>5</sup> Instead, it is only “practice that improves our minds as well as bodys, and we must expect nothing from our understandings any farther than they are perfected by habits” (*CU* §6). Thus, Locke’s chief interest is to prepare children for rational thought and conduct, which—in time—will serve as their primary means of navigating social and political life. He elaborates on those social and political demands in the *Second Treatise of Government*, broadly explaining the nature of consent and its connection to political legitimacy (“Every man, as has been shewed, naturally free, and nothing being able to put him into subjection to any Earthly Power, but only by his own Consent,” *STG* §119), as well as legitimate resistance (to answer the question of “who shall be judge?” to determine appropriate exercise of the right to resist, *STG* §240). In his writings on religion, including the four letters on toleration and the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke further

makes clear that the capacity for reason requires some forms of religious toleration by the state: “such is the nature of the Understanding, that it cannot be compell’d to the belief of any thing by outward Force” (Locke, 2010: 13). As Rita Koganzon (2016: 548) summarizes, Locke’s educational program is intended to both “support the liberal order” and promote the “epistemic autonomy” necessary for individuals to “understand, invent and discover ideas” beyond received customs and habits (see also Grant, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

Locke’s disciplinary prescriptions for the cultivation of self-government are rooted in his understanding of children’s natural desire for “dominion” (*ST* §103). Although it is generally acknowledged that Locke rejects the Augustinian doctrine of original sin in favor of an alternative conception of human beings as “blank slates” (Spellman, 1988: 215), this content-neutral reading of Lockean human nature is somewhat misleading. In both the *Essay* and *Some Thoughts*, Locke argues that human beings are born with an innate (amoral) impulse to pursue pleasure and avoid pain (*Essay* II.xx.1; *ST* §47–48). This impulse is the source of all human action and industriousness—it ensures that “those faculties which he [the Creator] has endowed us with might not remain wholly idle and unemployed by us” (*Essay* II.vii.3–4). Despite its amoral character, this “natural propensity to indulge corporal and present pleasure, and to avoid pain at any rate” if left unchecked by habit or reason, “is the root from whence springs all vicious actions and irregularities of life” (*ST* §47–48). According to Locke, the deleterious effects of this pain/pleasure impulse can be seen in children’s “natural desire for dominion.” All children are born with a natural love of dominion, which he defines as the “first original” or the most “vicious habits that are ordinary and natural” (*ST* §103). This in-born propensity for corruption, which supersedes the child’s natural “love of liberty,” manifests itself in two “humors” that are “the root of almost all injustice and contention” (*ST* §103). First, before the child can speak, he desires to have others submit to his will. This is accompanied by an impulse to enforce hierarchies by having those “near or beneath him in age or degree” acknowledge his superiority (*ST* §105). Second, the child expresses a natural compulsion to possess “things” (i.e. property), which indicates both a desire for the thing itself and the power to dispose of it at will.

The love of dominion is so pernicious that Locke structures nearly his entire pedagogy around curbing its development. He argues that parents must actively “weed out” this impulse by carefully judging when the love of dominion should (and should not) be indulged. In particular, Locke is concerned with the risks posed by “wants of fancy,” which he distinguishes from “wants of nature” (*ST* §107), or those that “reason alone” cannot possibly master (e.g. hunger, cold, sickness) without damaging the “sound body and mind” required to maintain “a happy state in this world” (*ST* §1). Wants of fancy, by contrast, are those that the child could deny himself—if his reason was fully developed—with no undue harm to his body or spirit. Typically, wants of fancy are dangerous manifestations of the love of dominion that, if left unchecked, will lead to “vicious habits” that limit one’s capacity for rational self-government in adulthood. Parents and caregivers should therefore aim to stifle the love of dominion by cultivating a spirit of self-denial in children.

Luckily, Locke thinks children have other natural impulses that might control their need to domineer. He argues that authority figures can exploit children’s inherent

desire for esteem and their love of liberty to suppress their love of dominion. As Locke explains, “Reward and Punishment, are the only motives to a rational creature, therefore they are to be made use of to children too” (*ST* §54). Yet not all rewards and punishments affect children equally: some promote corruption or diminish children’s spirits. Excessive corporal punishment and frequent gifts, for example, flatter children’s natural pain/pleasure impulse. Instead, Locke suggests that “esteem and disgrace” are “the most powerful incentives of the mind” to “incline children to the right” (*ST* §56). The goal of all discipline is to instill a love of “credit” or reputation in children by tapping into their natural pleasure in “being well thought on” by their elders and superiors. Doing so allows parents to inculcate habits of thought and action without resorting to the rod or filling their children’s heads with countless rules. Ultimately, Locke acknowledges that reputation is not “the true measure of virtue.” However, “it is the thing that comes nearest to it...[and] it is the proper guide and encouragement of children, till they grow able to judge for themselves, and to find what is right, by their own reason” (*ST* §61).<sup>7</sup>

Alongside this reliance on esteem, Locke also suggests that parents treat their children as “rational creatures.” By making their commands appear “reasonable” and displaying “mildness” and “composure” in correction, Locke thinks a father (or tutor) can draw on the child’s pride and love of liberty to secure their obedience (*ST* §81). Finally, to further incentivize children’s desire for praise and commendation, other “agreeable or disagreeable things should constantly accompany these different states” (*ST* §58). In this way, children come to associate “the things they delight in” with their good standing and reputation.

As his suggestions for manipulating the love of liberty imply, Locke is not solely concerned with curbing vice. While a Lockean education privileges the ability to rationally consent, it is also concerned with the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, breeding, and learning—what we might consider collectively as a character education. Virtue is described broadly as “the first and most necessary of those Endowments, that belong to a Man or a Gentleman; as absolutely requisite to make him valued and beloved by others, acceptable or tolerable to himself” (*ST* §135). In other words, a virtuous character makes human beings sociable.

Beyond rational consent, the moral and civic virtue of honesty is a chief component of this ideal character. In his brief discussion of the virtues, Locke grants honesty, or the “speaking of truth,” priority after “laying the foundations of virtue in a true notion of God” (*ST* §139). He goes so far in his defense of honesty as a central part of an education in good character as to say,

Let him know that Twenty Faults are sooner to be forgiven, then the straining of Truth, to cover any one by an Excuse. And to teach him betimes to love, and to be good natured to others, is to lay early the true Foundation of an honest man: all injustice generally springing from too great love of ourselves and too little of others. (*ST* §139)

Unfortunately, as with the love of dominion, children are predisposed to the vice of dishonesty: “Lying is so ready and cheap a cover for any miscarriage...that children can hardly avoid the use that is made of it on all occasions” (*ST* §131). Locke suggests

discouraging “cunningness” or “the want of understanding; which, because it cannot compass its ends by direct ways, would do it by a Trick and Circumvention” (*ST* §140). He contends that “crafty men” are despised in public life and “all the World forwardly join to oppose and defeat them” (*ST* §199). In the *Essay*, Locke chastises those who “cheat and abuse” others by deliberately manipulating language to serve their ends. Indeed, he considers cheating “a greater dishonesty than the misplacing of counters in the casting up a debt; and the cheat greater, by how much truth is of greater concernment and value than money” (*Essay* II.x.v). Authorities therefore need to instill an aversion to this “ill quality” in children, but preventing outright dishonesty is not the sole aim of a good tutor. To prevent these various forms of dishonesty and manipulation, parents must inculcate honesty: they must “accustom them [children] to Truth and sincerity; to a submission to Reason; and, as much as may be, to reflection on their own Actions” (*ST* §140). For Locke, a proper character education has both positive and negative elements.

Locke’s political vision also requires honesty and reflectiveness about one’s actions. In the dedicatory letter of *Some Thoughts*, Locke writes that the “welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends” on the proper education of children (Locke, 1996: 8). Integral to the welfare of nation is the Lockean right to resist unjust government, which undergirds his model of limited government. The right to resist is capacious and famously relies on the people themselves as the ultimate judges of violations of their rights (*STG* §240). Such a grant might make us worry that the people would be particularly likely to rebel—a concern Locke entertains at length in *Second Treatise*. His confidence that such a concern is overblown lies, in large part, in his belief that a certain forthrightness about violations of right will prevent improper or excessive uses of the right to resist (e.g. *STG* §207, §226, §228). Indeed, he compares the just exercise of a subject’s right to resist against a tyrannical magistrate to “honest Men” who “oppose Robbers or Pirates” (*STG* §228). Locke suggests that honest citizens can be truthful (to themselves and their magistrates) about the injury done to them, and thus can ensure their governments are just rather than merely peaceful. Honesty thereby enables citizens to be more than passively obedient, a posture toward one’s government that Locke condemns as the effectual rule of force and fraud. As he says, “if the innocent honest man must quietly quit all he has for Peace sake, to him who will lay violent hands upon it, I desire it may be considered, what a kind of Peace there will be in the World, which consists only in Violence and Rapine” (*ibid.*). Locke’s model of just resistance is therefore reliant on honest citizens.

Locke sees honesty as an important virtue for politicians themselves, too. *Some Thoughts* was explicitly intended to provide guidelines on how to properly educate “young gentlemen” (including the children of his friend Edward Clarke, to whom the letters in which the text was originally developed were addressed) (*ST*, Dedication). These children of elites grew up to be in positions of political authority and thus it is unsurprising that Locke discusses important character traits of good politicians as well as of citizens. For example, he claims that a monarch’s “Honesty and Prudence” are the primary reasons why subjects submit to their rule (*STG* §112). According to Anderson (1992), Locke thinks that honesty is critical for good governors and, therefore, his education is primarily intended to inculcate the qualities necessary for trustworthy

rule. Broadly, Locke's discussion of the origin of a father or single head of government's authority to rule consistently focuses on the fact that such a figure was "fittest to be trusted" (*STG* §105) because of their good character.

Although Locke's pedagogical goals are to cultivate rational thought and honesty in children, critics have highlighted that his educational prescriptions rely on strict submission to authority and the questionable use of habituation. Because children's reason is latent, they must be habituated to "follow the will of their parents [or tutors] in everything" (*ST* §40). Their lack of judgment requires constant parental "restraint and discipline" that only gives way to a more familiar and congenial relationship "as they grow up to the use of reason" (*ST* §41). Such authoritarian methods are frequently cited in support of the "disciplinary" interpretation of Lockean pedagogy. Locke even appears to grant parents total authority in shaping the wills of their children and sowing beliefs and actions "into the very principles of their nature" (*ST* §42). According to Carrig (2001: 72), for example, "[Locke's] 'liberal education' is merely the habituation to liberalism—the unreflective commitment to liberal values and 'liberal virtue.'"<sup>8</sup>

While these critics raise important questions about the compatibility of Lockean pedagogy with individual autonomy, they also downplay Locke's description of the character and duration of parental authority. He insists that the exercise of parental authority should be "rational" and his emphasis on the inculcation of habits is consistent with the *future* exercise of critical rationality—rather than non-reflective obedience to public authority (see Schouls, 1992: 230–232). As Nazar (2017: 225) explains, "the importance Locke attributes to education derives from his sense that it has the potential to cultivate autonomy-friendly habits." Moreover, Locke includes consistent prescriptions for educating (or re-educating) adults for self-government in the *Conduct*. Locke's attention there to the critical examination of pre-existing beliefs and opinions supports the argument that his pedagogy is genuinely concerned with the cultivation of independent thought. One of the chief "miscarriages" of the understanding it addresses, for example, is "those who seldom reason at all, but do and think according to the example of others, whether parents, neighbors, ministers, or who else they are pleased to make choice of to have an implicit faith in for the saving of themselves the pains and trouble of thinking and examining for themselves" (*CU* §3). For Locke, the exercise of parental authority should be strong but short-lived, and habit should not come to replace reflection in the age of maturity.

Nevertheless, the question of whether Locke's methods are appropriate to achieve their desired ends is a fair one. In the next part of this paper, we explain why we think this question should be answered in the negative. Using Jean-Jacques Rousseau's critique of Locke's pedagogy in his *Émile*, we argue that Locke's method not only fails to develop autonomy but more crucially undermines children's capacity for honesty.

## Rousseau's critique of the Lockean model

The aim of the remainder of this paper will be to demonstrate the shortcomings of Locke's approach to educating children for autonomy or self-government through the lens of Rousseau's critique of Lockean pedagogy in *Émile*. Rousseau's specific criticisms

of Lockean education are united by his concern for the preservation of “natural” goodness and his motivation to prevent the dishonesty that epitomize bourgeois man.<sup>9</sup> Rousseau’s engagement with Locke, in this sense, can be read as an attempt to show how educational practices that might appear to foster autonomy in practice undermine children’s honesty by placing the child “outside of nature” and “setting himself in contradiction to himself” (E 213).

Chief among Rousseau’s criticisms of the Lockean approach is Locke’s treatment of children as already developed and corrupted beings. Specifically, it is in the concept of children’s “natural love of dominion” that Rousseau locates his critique of Locke’s understanding of “childhood” and the educational schema that follows from it. In the Preface to *Emile*, Rousseau states: “Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false ideas one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one’s way” (E 33). Rousseau accuses Locke, like Hobbes before him, of attributing the vices of socialized man to human beings in nature, or to the first movements of childhood, because Locke is incapable of distinguishing between natural, amoral behaviors and expressions of the “love of dominion.” On this point, Rousseau offers two examples. First, the initial cries of children are merely an expression of their “weakness” and “dependence.” The “idea of empire and dominion” is only introduced after the child has succeeded in “getting themselves served” (E 66). The external experience of being served breeds the love of dominion. Second, what matters more than a child silently attempting to grab an object is how a parent responds: once the object is *brought* to him he sees himself as the master of “men” and “things” (E 66). What Locke fails to see is that “before the age of reason, we do good and bad without knowing it, and there is no morality in our actions” (E 67). The actions that Locke mischaracterizes as examples of love of dominion are merely natural impulses to meet natural desires, later interpreted as attempts to possess or dominate. This mistaken tendency to locate vice and corruption in the amoral behavior of children causes Locke to advocate for “positive” educational and disciplinary practices that inadvertently stoke the child’s *amour-propre*, or pride, and, in doing so, introduce “hateful and irascible passions” that encourage further vice. Rousseau characterizes this ironic miscalculation as such: “With each lesson that one wants to put into their heads before its proper time, a vice is planted in the depths of their hearts. Senseless teachers think they work wonders when they make children wicked in order to teach them what goodness is” (E 92; LB 35).

Aside from ascribing moral behavior to beings who do not yet know right from wrong, Rousseau sees “Locke’s great maxim...to reason with children,” which he describes as “the one most in vogue today” (E 89), as the most ill-suited method to allow reason to develop well. Rousseau makes an apparent argument against reason in Book II of *Emile* that in fact reveals a more fundamental underlying concern. In Rousseau’s genealogy of human nature, reason is a “composite” of all other human faculties that “develops with the most difficulty and the latest” (E 89). Although a “good education” like the one Locke proposes is intended to produce a “reasonable man,” Rousseau insists that those who reason with children before they can grasp the “language of reason” not only incorrectly presume that children understand “good and bad” but also that they are able to “sense the reason for man’s duties” (E 89). Instead of imparting useful lessons, an education grounded in appeals to reason accustoms children

To show off with words, to control all that is said to them, to believe themselves as wise as their masters, to become disputatious and rebellious, and everything that is thought to be gotten from them out of reasonable motives is never obtained other than out of motives of covetousness or fear or vanity. (*E* 89–90)

In other words, a Lockean educational model encourages the development of pride rather than autonomy.

Now, if Rousseau's primary charge against Locke is that he attributes *fully developed* reason to children, his critique appears to be overdrawn. In *Some Thoughts*, Locke initially admits that children "understand [reason] as early as they do language; and... they love to be treated as rational creatures" (*ST* §81). But he qualifies this claim by explaining that "nobody thinks a boy of three or seven years old should be argued with as a grown man" (*ST* §81). Most men—let alone children—have difficulty grasping the "foundations of duties" or the "fountains of right and wrong from which they spring." Instead, Locke thinks that children are reasonable enough to understand—through observation of their father's mildness and composure—that his instruction is "reasonable, useful, and necessary," rather than arbitrary and capricious. The "reasons" that convince children of the utility and necessity of obedience "must be obvious and level to their thoughts" (*ST* §81). Furthermore, a close examination of Locke's language reveals that it is not "reason" itself, but the fact that children love to be "treated as rational creatures" that serves as the "greatest instrument to turn them by" (*ST* §81; Tarcov, 1984: 117–118). By drawing on children's pride and their natural love of liberty the father or tutor can habituate the child to obedience even if he lacks the rational capacity to grasp abstract concepts like duty and obligation. Finally, Locke explains in various passages that the practice of reasoning with children must be worked up to gradually (see *ST* §41, §43, §81).

In this sense, it is difficult to argue—as Rousseau appears to—that Locke attributes fully- developed reason to children. However, Rousseau's true concern becomes clearer when interpreted through the lens of his own understanding of the "reason" available to children. In a later passage from Book II, Rousseau clarifies this point: "I am, however, very far from thinking that children have no kind of reasoning. On the contrary, I see that they reason very well in everything they know that relates to their *immediate and palpable interest*" (*E* 108, emphasis added). In a dialogue between a hypothetical master and child in Book II of *Emile*, Rousseau illustrates that children reason quite well about their practical well-being: when the master forbids the child from doing something that is "bad" to do, the child realizes that he can escape punishment—the only thing he understands to be "bad" about bad actions—by "fix[ing] it so that nothing is known about it" (*E* 90). The will of any master who determines an action "bad" is simply an external barrier to the attainment of children's interests. Children perceive any master as an arbitrary authority (or impediment) that they must either appease or elude to achieve their ends. Thus, children possess an instinctual form of practical reasoning that allows them to "see quite well" which behaviors and actions will best promote their interests (the most fundamental of which is self-preservation). Once we

acknowledge this unique form of reasoning available to children, Rousseau's critique of Locke can be read in a new light.

Rather than fostering autonomy or honesty by appealing to children's reason, Rousseau understands Locke's method to encourage dishonesty. According to Rousseau, the "inevitable" circularity of attempts to convince children to act against their immediate interests can only be broken with the introduction of rewards and punishments. As such, Locke uses "force and threats" and "flattery and promises" to "persuade" the child to follow reason. Once these appeals are made, children are introduced to the utility of separating their apparent self from their actual self. As Rousseau explains: "Lured by profit or constrained by force, they pretend to be convinced by reason. They see quite well that obedience is advantageous to them and rebellion harmful when you notice either...[and] they are persuaded that what they do is right if their disobedience is unknown" (E 90). If children are caught, they feign genuine remorse only to avoid a "worse evil" (E 91). Thus, by attempting to convince children of their "duty" (a word that they cannot understand), Locke's approach mistakenly enflames the child's *amour-propre*.

For Rousseau, Locke's method has three effects that are directly connected to honesty. First, the child will pretend to love his parents, but actually resent their arbitrary "tyranny." Second, he will become a "dissembler, faker, and liar in order to extort rewards or escape punishment." Third, the child will "deceive ceaselessly" by "covering [his] secret motive[s] with apparent motive[s]" (E 91). Once the child has learned to separate appearance from reality in his relations with others, it is impossible to distinguish between his "true character" and the mask that he hides behind to achieve his ends.

Rousseau's criticism of Locke's mistaken synthesis of reason and incentive can be further clarified by examining their divergent approaches to "teaching" honesty. As noted above, Locke sees lying as a natural expression of the love of dominion that serves as a "ready and cheap cover for any miscarriage" (ST §131, §139). Thus, it must be actively rooted out at an early age by appealing to the child's reason and his desire for esteem. First, he recommends teaching the child that "twenty faults are sooner to be forgiven, than the straining of truth, to cover any one by an excuse" (ST §139). If this lesson fails, Locke suggests persuading the child that lying will ruin his reputation and cause him to fall to the rank of "the most contemptible part of mankind" (ST §131). On the chance that the child continues to lie, the parent should "rebuke" him and make certain that everyone around him "takes notice of it." Finally, when all else fails, the child must be beaten and "never be permitted to escape unpunished" (ST §131).

Unlike Locke, Rousseau understands lying to be an unnatural outgrowth of *amour-propre* introduced by parents who give lectures in honesty (as Locke suggests) to naturally honest children. As Rousseau explains, "To want to teach them to tell the truth is nothing other than to teach them to lie...one prefers that they know their lessons and lie, rather than remain ignorant and true" (E 102). Now that the child knows how to lie—and is encouraged to do so—he will secretly violate the "law of obedience" whenever possible and will always choose to avoid punishments and gain rewards over telling the truth for its own sake (E 101–102). Locke's method of reasoning with children—

coupled with his emphasis on rewards and punishments—encourages a permanent fissure between appearance and reality. Much like bourgeois man in Rousseau's criticism of the civil state in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), the dishonest child is no longer self-sufficient or wholly good for himself. Caught between his dependence on his superiors and his desire to exploit them—which mirrors the tension between mutual dependence and self-interest in bourgeois social relations—the child is no longer incentivized to display his true self. Instead, he becomes a slave to whatever false self will allow him to fulfill his “needs” by exploiting others.

Rousseau's critique of didactic fables as means of moral education offers another example of why he thinks a Lockean education encourages such dishonesty in children. Far from simply teaching children to read through “harmless” entertainment, Rousseau argues that fables hasten the division of the self that occurs with the emergence of *amour-propre* and set the child on a path to becoming a liar, a “rascal,” and a cheat. Although Rousseau's critique of didactic fables does not reference Locke directly, there is credible textual evidence to link Rousseau's analysis of La Fontaine's fables with Locke's discussion of fables in *Some Thoughts*. First, La Fontaine's fables are based on Aesop's *Fables*, which Locke himself recommends for young children. Second, Locke also endorses *Reynard the Fox* (a volume of medieval animal fables) as a supplement to Aesop, which may have informed Rousseau's decision to analyze La Fontaine's “The Crow and the Fox.” Finally (as will be shown), the primary takeaway of Rousseau's critique of fables speaks directly to his broader criticism of Locke's failure to “know” childhood or the nature of children.

Locke's discussion of didactic fables appears in the context of his prescriptions for teaching children how to read without rendering the task burdensome. To achieve this aim, he suggests introducing the child to Aesop's *Fables*, “an easy and pleasant book, suited to his capacity” (*ST* §156). These fables are “apt to delight and entertain the child” without filling their minds with “useless trumpery” or sowing the seeds of “vice and folly” (*ST* §156). Although the child learns little from memorizing these stories, they will “afford useful reflections to a grown man” who recalls them to his memory. Also, books with the names and pictures of animals can teach children how to spell in lieu of tedious lessons. The child can be further encouraged to read if the adults around him demonstrate interest and allow him to tell the stories in front of them. Finally, Locke cautions against making children read the Bible in its entirety, but he suggests that certain parts of the scriptures (e.g. David and Goliath, David and Jonathan, etc.) can be made into fables with “easy and plain moral rules” appended to them (*ST* §159). Overall, Locke views didactic fables as an entertaining and innocuous method of teaching children to read without compulsion.

When Rousseau announces his intention to critique “children's” fables, his initial objection is directly addressed to Locke's method:

How can people be so blinded as to call fables the morality of children? They do not think about how the apologue, in giving enjoyment to children, deceives them; about how, seduced by the lie, they let the truth escape; and about how what is done to make instruction agreeable to them prevents them from profiting from it. (*E* 112)

Although Rousseau correctly identifies Locke's rationale for using fables—that is they “make instruction agreeable”—he *appears* to miss Locke's point that children are incapable of gleaning moral lessons from these stories and that they only become useful in adulthood. However, if we read Rousseau's critique of fables in light of his understanding of children's practical reason, it appears both logical and consistent. According to Rousseau, all children are taught La Fontaine's fables, but “not a single one” *understands* them because their morals are “mixed” and “disproportionate” to children's capabilities and fables employ ideas, concepts, and literary devices that must all be explained before the moral can be understood.

To demonstrate this point, Rousseau conducts a line-by-line analysis of “The Crow and the Fox,” a fable “especially for children,” that tells the story of a crow that drops a piece of cheese from its beak after a fox praises its plumage and coaxes it into singing. The moral of this fable is supposedly simple: “Learn that every flatterer lives at the expense of one who listens to him” (E 114). In comic fashion, Rousseau scrutinizes each line and highlights words that are beyond children's understandings. This argument in itself does not undermine Locke's method because (as noted) Locke never claims that children will understand the fables they memorize. Yet, when Rousseau arrives at the “moral” of the fable, his true critique becomes clear: Locke underestimates children's ability to reason about their own interests and, in doing so, undermines their natural honesty and independence: “I ask whether it is necessary to teach six-year-old children that there are men who flatter and lie for profit?...But the cheese spoils everything. They are taught less not to let it fall from their beaks than to make it fall from the beak of another” (E 115). When the child reads “The Crow and the Fox,” they are more apt to “take a fancy to the fox” and “make fun of the crow” because the fox attains his interests at the expense of the crow's “humiliation.” By teaching children that there are “men who flatter and lie for profit,” they learn less not to be flatterers than how to attain their interests via flattery and dishonesty. Instead of “looking within themselves for the shortcoming,” they learn the benefits of “taking advantage of others' shortcomings” (E 115). Rousseau argues that children's practical reason always leads them to identify with the “advantageous role,” which encourages them to acquire the very vice that the fable is meant to prevent and introduces them to the pleasure of dominating others.

To solidify this point, Rousseau references other La Fontaine fables in which the child is led to accept the “rascal's example” at the expense of the “dupe's example.” For instance, in the fable of the ant and the cicada, the child is supposed to identify with the cicada who learns the importance of hard work, preparation, and self-sufficiency. Instead, he is taught to be like the ant who refuses to show humanity to the cicada because there is no material or social benefit for doing so. Francis Ferguson argues that “for Rousseau, fables constitute a flattery directed at the child's understanding... they continually exaggerate the child's appropriate self-love (*amour de soi-même*) into vanity (*amour-propre*)...and trick the child into a false sense of superiority of his understanding” (Ferguson, 1984: 77). Whereas Locke thinks that the pleasure children derive from fables is morally benign and pedagogically useful, Rousseau has a more accurate understanding of children's psychology: “They will always take the advantageous role. It is the choice of *amour-propre*; it is a very natural choice” (E 115).

The unnatural passions introduced by *amour-propre* can only be satiated by separating one's social self (i.e. self in relation to others) from one's true self. As Melzer explains, "the other-directed egoist...is prevented by his need to use others from ever being himself" (Melzer, 1995: 10). He must always appear truthful, benevolent, and moral to those that he needs to exploit, while never sincerely desiring to be so. The fox appears to genuinely praise the crow to obtain his cheese, while the ant scorns the virtue of humanity when there is no benefit to appearing humane. For the insincere child, an appeal to the appearance of virtue is always motivated by a calculated effort to attain some material or social benefit. Fables teach the child that there is an unbridgeable gap between the utility of "seeming" and the burden of "being." As a result, the child is encouraged to become a dissembler, a flatterer, and an all-around "double-man."

Rousseau insists fables are only appropriate pedagogical tools for young adults and men who are able to understand their morals. In Book IV of *Émile*, he reintroduces fables *after* the development of judgment and reason and *during* the earliest expansion of *amour-propre*. According to Rousseau, "the time of mistakes is the time of fables" (E 247). Now that the child has had the experience of being "the dupe of the flatterer" he can "conceive marvelously that the crow was only a fool" (E 248). By connecting the child's experiences to the maxim conveyed in the fable, the experience itself will be permanently imprinted on his judgment. Now the child is in a position to understand "from the truth he applies to himself" (i.e. from introspection) that "the apologue is not a lie" (E 247). Of course, Rousseau is not content to simply hand over La Fontaine's fables to Emile. Rather, he suggests excising explicit statements on the "moral" of each fable to allow for individual judgment and reordering the fables to reflect "the progress of the young adolescent's sentiments and understanding" (E 248). Rousseau's point is that significant natural development must take place before fables can serve as anything but catalysts of *amour-propre* and the permanent corruption of natural honesty. Thus, his critique of Locke's use of didactic fables demonstrates his overwhelming concern for the preservation of honesty and serves as a useful foil to his overarching "negative" approach to education. Instead of filling children's heads with dangerous lessons and concepts, Rousseau privileges natural "goodness" by keeping them ignorant of moral, intellectual, and religious "knowledge" until their faculties are prepared to receive it.

As we have already noted, many critics of *Some Thoughts* highlight Locke's reliance on habit as a means of inculcating beliefs and behaviors prior to the age of fully developed reason. Locke characterizes habituation as "a method of teaching children by repeated practice, and the same action done over and over again, under the eye and direction of the tutor, till they have got the habit of doing it well" (ST §66). Although Locke admits that "every man must some time or other be trusted to himself, and his own conduct," habits can "sway and influence his life" if they are early "woven into the very principles of his nature" (ST §42). Ultimately, habitual repetition is intended to make certain behaviors "easy and natural" until it is practiced "without reflection" (ST §66). For Locke, habit plays a part in both physical and mental development. Because children only possess potential reason, they must be habituated to "the principle of all virtue and excellency," which "lies the power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own desires, where reason does not authorize them" (ST §38). Of course, the

“reason” that children follow is not their own. Rather, the father must determine for the child whether their desire is an unnecessary “want of fancy” or an essential “want of nature” (*ST* §107). Thus, the habits inculcated by paternal authority are meant to “influence his mind from the very dawning of any knowledge in him, that it may operate as a natural principle” (*ST* §100).

Although Rousseau seems initially to reject wholesale habit as an educational method, closer analysis reveals his concern with habit to again lie in the authority on which it is founded. In Books I and II of *Emile*, Rousseau derides habit as appealing to “the laziness natural to man, and that laziness increases in abandoning oneself to habit...the only habit useful to children it to subject themselves without difficulty to the necessity of things... every other habit is vice” (*E* 160n). But this criticism implies that habit itself is not problematic. By contrast, “useful” habits are those children “*subject themselves* without difficulty to.” In other words, children themselves are the legitimate sources of authority for imposing habits. Or, put differently, Rousseau is fundamentally concerned with respecting and developing children’s autonomy.

And here is how Locke’s method fails to achieve its own ends. For Locke, habit is dictated by paternal authority, which is intended to serve as a stand-in for reason (Carrig, 2001: 48). Conversely, Rousseau claims that habituation is only effective when grounded in nature or the “law of necessity” (*E* 160). While Locke uses habits imposed by paternal authority to root out “natural” impulses like the will to possess and the desire to dominate, Rousseau thinks that both children’s goodness and their capacity for free choice can only be preserved via habituation to the dictates of nature.

Although Rousseau and Locke both allow for some habituation in children’s physical education, they diverge significantly on the use of habituation in the sphere of moral development because of Rousseau’s “negative” or naturalistic approach to cultivating autonomy. According to Locke, the child should obtain “knowledge of virtue” by “repeating the same action, till it be grown habitual in them” (*ST* §64, §136). Locke is clear that this virtuous “knowledge” will “not depend on memory, or reflection...but will be natural in them.” In this way, the father can “weed out” any natural vice and “plant what habits [he] please” without undue opposition from the child (*ST* §64). Before he can do so, however, he must “very early set up his authority” by making the child aware that 1) he is dependent on the father and that 2) he is totally “in his power.” Above all, he must “imprint on the mind that awe which is necessary” to establish his authority (*ST* §99). As Joseph Carrig (2001: 48–49) argues, Lockean habituation is only effective if the child’s reverence and awe for the father persists until adulthood (see also Marks, 2012: 702–703). By establishing a “perpetual respect” for paternal authority, the child will be less apt to question the “virtuous” behaviors to which he is habituated. In other words, Locke precludes children from developing the psychological resources necessary for autonomy. Although many scholars argue that these paternally-dictated moral habits are intended to be re-evaluated once the child reaches the age of reason (e.g. Neill, 1989; Tarcov, 1984), this position is difficult to defend on two accounts. First, when Locke discusses the habits instilled by paternal authority, he uses language that implies permanency: “Having this way cured your child of any fault, it is cured *forever*” (*ST* §64—emphasis added; Carrig, 2001: 49). Thus, he intimates that

these habits will remain stable and unchallenged. Second, Locke is vague on the transitional period between late childhood and adulthood. He never mentions when or how the habits “woven into the very principles of his nature” should be subjected to rational re-evaluation. Locke’s method of moral habituation is so focused on subjugating children’s dangerous wills and inherent vices that he overlooks the damage done to their capacity for willing freely in adulthood.

By contrast, Rousseau understands obvious exercises of parental authority to produce dependence and to stifle children’s individual wills. Because the “first movements of nature” are always right, the goal of Rousseau’s “negative” education is to keep the child in a state of amoral goodness by only allowing him to freely develop “moral” habits that accord with nature. Johnathan Marks (2012: 698) locates an example of this “habituation to nature” in Rousseau’s discussion of benevolence. The “sentiment” of benevolence is a natural outgrowth of *amour de soi* or desire for self-preservation. As such, the child is “naturally inclined to benevolence, because he sees that everything approaching him is inclined to assist him” (E 213). By continually observing the assistance of his nurse and his governess, the child “gets *the habit* of a sentiment favorable to his species” (E 213—emphasis added). Ultimately, “moral” habits acquired in childhood should be limited to spontaneous outgrowths of the child’s natural goodness. It is only after the development of judgment and reason that the young man is made to enter the “moral order” (E 235).

Where Locke errs, for Rousseau, is in his substitution of natural authority (i.e. the law of necessity) for paternal authority as the foundation of habit. While Locke assumes that “awe” and “reverence” for the father will lead the child to permanently accept his imposed habits, Rousseau claims that “most of the habits you believe you give to children and young people are not true habits. Because children only adopt such habits by force and stick to them grudgingly, they are only waiting for the occasion to be rid of them” (E 432). Again, Rousseau criticizes Locke for underestimating children’s ability to reason about their own interests. Because the father is a barrier to the fulfillment of his desires, the child will perceive paternal authority as an arbitrary will that must either be appeased or circumvented. Thus, by imposing forced “habits” of morality on the child, Locke inadvertently compromises his natural honesty and sets him on a path to becoming a “double-man” who *appears* moral and virtuous, while in reality being neither. By forcing the child to perform acts of “virtue” before he can understand the reasons for his actions, the father ensures that the child will forever see virtue and morality as either (1) an arbitrary dictate of the “stronger” or (2) a means of exploiting others for personal gain.

When the Lockean pupil reaches adulthood, he is no longer incentivized by rewards and punishments to maintain his father’s moral “habits.” Instead “in passing to a new age,” he will develop a “contempt for the preceding one” and in “contracting new habits” he will “abandon [his] old ones” (E 432). These new habits will have no grounding in sincere respect for virtue and morality. Instead, they will constantly change to suit the opinions of others and to exploit them via flattery, lies, and deception. Ultimately, a careful examination of Rousseau’s critique of Lockean habituation elucidates his concern for honesty and his motivation to prevent a specific type of bourgeois character in which

“everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes fabricated and staged—honor, friendship, virtue, and often even vices themselves...[they] have only a deceitful and frivolous exterior” (*SD* 117).

## A Lockean reply to Rousseau?

As we have argued, Rousseau successfully demonstrates how a Lockean approach to cultivating self-government and honesty fails to achieve its own ends. But how might Locke respond to Rousseau’s comprehensive critique? In this final section, we anticipate what a principled Lockean response to Rousseau might look like but, ultimately, show why Rousseau’s central criticisms of Locke’s educational model still stand. In doing so, we focus on the effects of Locke’s model—instead of his purported aims—and the practicability of Rousseau’s alternatives.

Our first set of possible Lockean replies to Rousseau’s critique center on clarifying his intentions in developing his pedagogical model. First, Locke might argue that he does not impute *moral* intent to children’s instinctual expressions of the desire to possess and dominate. Instead, he views these as amoral outgrowths of children’s pain–pleasure impulse that only later take on moral form if not actively prevented in infancy and early childhood. Second, on the charge that he mistakenly endorses “reasoning” with children, Locke might insist that he never intends to advocate for discursively reasoning with *young* children and that Rousseau is wrong to assume that treating children as “reasonable” will undermine their honesty. If authority figures present their commands as reasonable and establish themselves as benevolent and respectable figures rather than mere foreign wills, as Locke suggests, children might habitually acquiesce to authority only until the age of reason. Finally, Locke might challenge Rousseau’s critique of his reliance on reason and incentive (i.e. praise and blame) as an exaggerated fear of *amour-propre* on the latter’s part. From a Lockean standpoint, Rousseau unfairly dismisses reputation and esteem as useful disciplinary resources that reinforce obedience to parental authority and direct the learning process because of his fixation on the prevention of enflamed *amour-propre*.

Yet none of these replies adequately address Rousseau’s underlying concerns with the *effects* rather than the aim of Locke’s model. Whether Locke imputes moral content to natural expressions of the love of dominion, he still assumes that children’s most basic impulses inevitably lead to moral corruption absent active intervention. As Rousseau’s rightly identifies, Locke also ignores the possibility that societal influences—not inborn passions—corrupt amoral children. The problem with Locke’s approach to “reasoning” with children—even on our favorable reading—is that he never presents parents as “rational” interlocutors but instead as authority figures not to be questioned. Locke initially establishes the father as an awe-inducing “absolute governor” who introduces moral concepts before the child can understand why they are “reasonable” (*ST* §41). Even if the child is not a skillful practical reasoner about his own interests, he will likely see the father’s “reasons” as dictates of a foreign “will” opposed his own will. As Rousseau shows, then, Locke’s reliance on authority and treating children as “reasonable” cannot establish a stable foundation for “rational” moral behavior once the child is no

longer subject to an “arbitrary” will. Finally, Rousseau explains why, in practice, Locke’s disciplinary method makes children dependent on the opinions (i.e. praise and blame) of others and never addresses the threat posed by the habitual love of esteem in adulthood. If a child enters civil society and realizes that rational traits and behaviors are not afforded much praise or esteem in it—or that corrupted behaviors are—why would he still prefer to act in a reasonable way? Locke himself admits in the *Essay* that people espouse the irrational or prejudicial beliefs of their party to maintain their reputation and avoid blame (*E* I.iii.11). Rousseau clarifies why the effects of Locke’s pedagogy would inadvertently promote this type of dishonesty, whatever its aim.

Another set of potential replies Locke might develop to address Rousseau’s concerns could be directed at the impracticability of Rousseau’s own model. To begin, Locke might challenge the empirical validity of Rousseau’s belief in children’s “goodness.” Rousseau claims that children’s first movements are amoral and not expressive of a love of dominion, yet their “goodness” appears to be ruined by the slightest error in their education. In an extreme example, Rousseau suggests that if the governor merely carries an object to the child, he will forever think himself the master of “men” and “things” (*E* 66). If goodness is so precarious, then Rousseau’s image of children’s natures might be closer to Locke’s view than his critique implies. Second, Locke might point out that Rousseau—ironically—overestimates children’s capacity for “practical reason” concerning their interests. Rousseau suggests that any *human* opposition to the child’s desire will immediately activate their instinctual “practical reason” and lead to enflamed *amour-propre*. Locke could respond that children—especially young children—are not skillful practical reasoners who will engage in any behavior to attain their desires. Instead, they might be more amenable to direct commands from “rational” authority figures than Rousseau is willing to concede. Finally, Locke might defend his model as a more realistic approach to a civic education for character than Rousseau’s “negative” model. Although Locke places significant trust in the father’s ability—and willingness—to act as a stand-in for reason, his model of discipline and pedagogy is arguably easier to implement than Rousseau’s vision of “well-regulated freedom.” Locke’s model appears more practical and scalable than Rousseau’s, whose pupil and tutor both seem modeled on unachievable ideals.

Although Rousseau’s own rhetoric invites misinterpretations of his work, his educational program is not as impractical as Locke might suggest—and, more importantly, any advantage of Locke’s program is eliminated by the problematic effects Rousseau identifies. First, Rousseau’s account of the ubiquitous sources of corruption in modern society is consistent with his recognition how fragile goodness is in childhood and thus how precarious—but not impossible—his own educational project is. As he quips, “Did I tell you that natural education was an easy undertaking...I sense these difficulties; I agree that they are difficulties. Perhaps they are insurmountable” (*E* 94–95). However alluring it is to view the challenges of a good education as insurmountable, Rousseau insists that his negative education requires neither perfect conditions nor execution to achieve meaningful results (*E* 95). Rousseau’s consistent use of imperfect or already corrupted children (e.g. *E* 65–66, 98, 172–174) and flawed educators (e.g. the Savoyard Vicar, 257–313) as examples throughout *Émile* supports this concern for

educating *actual* children as they are rather than mere ideals (see also Scott, 2020, esp. 27–74, 126–163). Moreover, Rousseau’s assessment of the fundamental flaws of the Lockean model—that it inculcates dishonesty in children and makes them dependent on authority—would make its practicability and scalability irrelevant. Even if it were easier to implement Locke’s civic educational model, students educated under such a model would not be capable of governing themselves as Locke would hope.

## Conclusion

Rousseau’s various criticisms of Lockean pedagogy, when considered comprehensively, demonstrate how Locke’s education for autonomy—or rational self-government—fails to achieve its own ends and, more problematically, how it promotes dishonesty. Against the disciplinary reading of Locke’s educational thought, we have argued that Locke’s pedagogical prescriptions constitute a *genuine* attempt to foster a capacity for epistemic autonomy and rational self-denial in children and, in doing so, prepare them for life in civil society. Locke expresses optimism in the power of education to foster the type of autonomy that he sees as crucial to both individual flourishing and the well-functioning political society. The ability of citizens to regulate their wills and understandings according to the dictates of reason serves as a basic assumption underpinning his doctrines of political legitimacy, religious toleration, and moral responsibility. Nevertheless, Rousseau forcefully shows that Locke’s fixation on children’s instinctual “desire for dominion,” coupled with his various approaches to rooting out this instinct, inadvertently undermine his educational project. His method of “reasoning” with children, which hinges on a synthesis of reason and incentive, unintentionally breeds dishonesty by teaching children to deceive and/or lie to authority figures. Instead of promoting rational self-government, it shows children how to satisfy their desires and impulses with impunity. Similarly, Locke’s use of didactic fables in moral education—far from harmless entertainment—teaches children (who are not yet prepared to understand their morals) the advantages of cheating and flattering others to get their way. In this case, Locke’s method unknowingly promotes the child’s *amour-propre* (self-love) and encourages dishonest behavior. Finally, Locke’s approach to habituation is colored by his mistaken view of children as naturally disposed to corruption. Because children display a natural love of dominion and an insufficient ability to regulate this impulse via reason, Locke uses habits dictated and imposed by paternal authority to prevent this nascent corruption. However, Rousseau shows that habituation to parental dictates promotes dishonesty. In short, Rousseau’s analysis of Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*—taken as a whole—demonstrates why a Lockean education cannot produce the kinds of citizens a Lockean politics requires.

If we view Locke’s aim of producing citizens capable of rational self-government as largely compatible with the chief aim of the contemporary liberal state, the analysis we provide here should make us weary of embracing a civic educational model like Locke’s today. Yet much of contemporary scholarship on liberal education is dominated by attempts to advance comprehensive or civic educational projects that privilege autonomy as their guiding standard (even though many disagree about the proper conceptualization of autonomy) (Christman, 2015; Coburn, 2010; Morgan, 1996).<sup>10</sup> The Rousseauan critique we

develop here exposes the disastrous effects of an overreliance on esteem and authority in childhood on a pupil's capacity for rational self-government in adulthood. However, as we noted at the outset of this paper, we are also not interested in endorsing Rousseau's pedagogy as normatively superior to Locke's. Instead, we suggest that engaging with Rousseau's critique might provide a cautionary tale for modern liberals interested in cultivating autonomy in children. The threat of breeding deceit rather than honesty by reasoning with children too early, of instilling a pernicious desire to dominate in place of an innocent self-love, and of unintentionally creating dependence on authority figures, should be taken seriously in any contemporary educational project.

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### ORCID iD

Michelle Schwarze  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8063-9941>

### Notes

1. Abbreviated *ST* throughout the paper. We abbreviate Locke's *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706) as *CU*; his *Second Treatise of Government* (1688) as *STG*; and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1608) as *Essay*. We abbreviate Rousseau's *Émile* as *E*.
2. Much contemporary scholarship has focused on, as Hannah Dawson puts it, "the various ways in which Locke is emphatically not a liberal" (Dawson, 2022: 60), which is why we hesitate to use that moniker to describe the ideal political society he describes. See also Duncan Bell (2014); Rosenblatt (2018); Stanton (2018). Cf. Koganzon (2016, 2021) and Zuckert (2002).
3. See also Tomaselli (2008: 245–260) for a comparative analysis of Locke's and Rousseau's approaches to cultivating moral autonomy.

4. We are not interested in endorsing Rousseau's pedagogy as practically or normatively superior to Locke's. Instead, our aim here is to utilize Rousseau's analysis to show how Locke fails to meet his own aims.
5. Also: "It is conceit, fancy, extravagance, any thing rather than understanding, if it must be under the constraint of receiving and holding opinions by the authority of anything but their own, not fancied, but perceived evidence" (*CU* §12).
6. We do not use the term "liberal" to describe Locke's politics, but Locke's educational writings demonstrate a commitment to raising children capable of exercising independent thought, a key component of some contemporary liberal educational models, for example Levinson (1999).
7. Stuart-Buttle (2017) contextualizes Locke's use of the concern for reputation as a beneficial motive (despite his dismay about its actual use in contemporary Christian societies) to morality as an alternative to the harmonizing role played by the absolute Hobbesian monarch.
8. Similarly, Mehta (1992: 142–143) claims that "Locke's ostensibly liberal and compassionate program is counterbalanced by the demand that the child internalize the standards...of shame, guilt, and responsibility." Berrett Brown (2010: 160) similarly contends that *Emile* develops an educational model that requires "submission to authority, but under the guise of liberty." As we do not aim to defend Rousseau's educational model we do not take up this criticism, but it is worth noting that Rousseau often suggests freedom is compatible with the constructive role of authority figures (e.g. the lawgiver).
9. In Rousseau's thought, bourgeois man serves as an archetype for the physical and psychological condition of the human species in modern society. Rousseau uses the bourgeois as both a foil for his own pedagogical ideal in *Emile* and a device for critiquing material and social relations in commercial society. In bourgeois man, *amour-propre* compromises the unity of the "self" by introducing unnatural passions that extend beyond his strength to satisfy them. As a result, he "finds himself outside of nature and sets himself in contradiction to himself" (*E* 213). As soon as he learns to use others, he becomes dependent on them to satisfy his ever-expanding needs (*SD* 147). For Rousseau, dependence on others is "without order, engenders all vices, and by it master and slave are mutually corrupted" (*E* 85). This dependence necessitates the creation of a private self and a public self. The "bourgeois double man" is "always appearing to relate everything to others and never relating anything except to himself alone" (*E* 41, 243).
10. Some scholars have expressed concern that an excessive focus on autonomy has the potential to undermine citizens' commitment to other liberal institutions and civic values. See Grey (1993); Galston (1995, 2002); Larmore (2008).

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