



The Anti-Emile: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Education against the Principles of Rousseau

H. S. Gerdil

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“In his *Emile* Rousseau proposes a new plan of education closely connected with a universal overthrow of civil order. The goal of the *Emile* is to prepare souls by means of a total revolution in their modes of thinking.”—These words were penned in 1763, by the young Catholic philosopher, H. S. Gerdil, more than two decades before the French revolution. In a prophetic moment in the history of the philosophy of education, Gerdil noted that the pedagogy of Rousseau’s book will inspire “vexation with and aversion for religious and social institutions . . . it will make bad Christians and bad citizens.” The disenchantment with any authority or social forms sunk deep roots in the modern European social imagination. It has informed the many liberal reforms of education of the last two centuries. The *Emile* is still with us.

In his eminently readable reflections, H. S. Gerdil exposes the error of Rousseau’s Romantic naturalism. In the process, he illustrates sensible judgment regarding concrete curricular matters and pedagogical practices. Gerdil’s philosophy of education is grounded in the reality of original sin and the transcendent destiny of mankind. He provides both philosophical principles and concrete suggestions as to how parents and teachers might craft hearts and minds capable of serving “peace of families, the tranquility of states, and the general advantage of all men.” Gerdil’s humane Christian realism has lost none of its timeliness.

The Anti-Emile is an original English translation of Gerdil’s work, first published in French under the title *Réflexions sur la théorie, & la pratique de l’éducation contre les principes de Mr. Rousseau*. In its day, the book was quickly diffused throughout Europe in its original French as well as in English, German, and Italian translations, and it soon picked up its popular title, *The Anti-Emile*. This translation is preceded by Frank’s Introductory Essay, which draws out the radically different views of human nature represented by Rousseau and Gerdil. It makes clear what is at issue in Rousseau’s rejection and Gerdil’s advancement of the living tradition of classical education. In his essay, Frank also introduces H. S. Gerdil as an historical figure with a distinctive place in the history of modern philosophy.

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