

# **Civic Virtue and the Domestic Sphere: Examining the Role of Women in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America***

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This summer, I received a ten-week Surdna Research Fellowship to begin research for my Honors thesis in Political Philosophy. In this thesis, I am comparing the role of women in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Although both of these works are major components of Political Philosophy courses at Bowdoin, and their treatment of women is an essential aspect of their projects, no political theory concentrator at Bowdoin has completed an Honors thesis exploring this topic. In this way, my research project this summer has been the initial stage of an original contribution to Political Philosophy at Bowdoin and to the field as a whole.

This summer, I continued research initiated by my first reading of Rousseau's *Émile* in Professor Yarbrough's Eros and Politics class in the spring. I began extended secondary literature readings on Tocqueville and Rousseau. Because an Honors project requires situating my own thesis within the context of a larger debate, I compiled a bibliography for this project which explores multiple facets of and critical positions on these two thinkers. I used the first six weeks of my research to situate Rousseau's treatment of women in the *Émile* and elsewhere within the context of my Honors thesis. During this time, I read the sections of Allan Bloom's *Love and Friendship* that deal with the *Émile*. I also read, among other sources of secondary literature, Joseph Reiser's *Friend of Virtue*, Joel Schwartz's *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, and Arthur Melzer's *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought*. During this exploration of the secondary literature, I was led to several relevant essays, "Sur les femmes" and "Événements importants dont les femmes ont été la cause secrète," by Rousseau himself which have not been translated into English but are valuable sources of insight into Rousseau's thought on women. This translation of source texts for use in my Honors thesis is an exciting opportunity for original scholarship.

For the remaining four weeks of my fellowship, I returned to the secondary literature on Tocqueville. Here I concentrated on writings by Pierre Manent, Harvey Mansfield, and Delba Winthrop. I focused specifically on the role of religion in democracy and Tocqueville's formulation of mores, or democratic customs central to Tocqueville's understanding of women in democracy. These are essential elements of Tocqueville's discussion of democracy and critical to understanding his treatment of women. Here, I found works by Peter Augustine Lawler and Catherine Zuckert helpful. I also read extensively on the hotly-debated issue of Rousseau's influence on Tocqueville, notably works by Allan Bloom and Peter Augustine Lawler. This influence will be a central focus of my thesis. While I have come to accept readings such as Bloom's that position Tocqueville as a direct theoretical descendant of Rousseau, I will reject in my thesis a complete conflation of their projects. Rousseau's romantic project and Tocqueville's description of the gendered division of labor in the United States emerge from different understandings of human nature. Rousseau's conception of the state of nature, in which humans have no social ties nor any desire to have them, is the starting point of his understanding of women. Unlike many of the modern philosopher, Tocqueville does not begin in the state of nature. This difference is the central point of divergence between their thoughts.

This summer, my research has allowed me to develop a bibliography encompassing the major works on the questions that my thesis will explore. It has also opened new avenues of investigation which will give my argument further nuance, notably into understandings of the public and domestic spheres. The research I have completed this summer has allowed me more time to explore these questions and incorporate my answers thoughtfully into a final Honors thesis.

**Faculty Mentor: Jean Yarbrough**

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