

ABSTRACT

Rousseau in his *Émile* gave Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* a position of importance in the education of his protégé. Despite this sponsorship on the part of Rousseau and despite there being some common ground between these two writers on education the differences of educational outlook are greater than the similarities especially in the two areas of eighteenth century educational debate concerning Nature and Nurture and Private and Public education.

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**Rousseau and defoe: a case of misguided advocacy or paradox
par excellence in eighteenth century education?**

There is, in the church of St. Mary the Virgin and St. Bartholomew, Cranborne Chase, Dorset, England, a tablet, inscribed in Latin, which records for posterity the memory of a certain John Elliott. The tablet states that John Elliott was a clever boy who died in school on February 2nd 1641, at the age of seven. This testimonial refers to his gifts of *nature* - memory, amiability and intelligence with which he was amply endowed. The poignance of the memorial tablet emerges as it continues that he died - *Dum arte sedulo et studiose perpolire conatur* - whilst striving to improve them (his natural gifts) by care and study.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose advice that during the early years learning through the senses should precede bookish education, would not have approved of such a paragon of studious virtue. Daniel Defoe, on the other hand, would be the more able to sympathise with John Elliott's early zeal for book learning. The memorial's use of the term 'Nature' would seem to be similar to the meaning employed by Defoe in the *Compleat English Gentleman* (1729)¹ where *education* is seen to be a necessary concomitant which improved the *nature* of each individual and without which the individual would remain, to use Defoe's seemingly blunt terminology, a 'blockhead'. From such an observation it may come as a surprise to many, accustomed to regarding Defoe as a subject of literary study or as the 'father of English journalism', to find him also capable of forceful and perceptive educational comment.² Rousseau was perhaps one of the first men to recognise the educational value of Defoe or at least Defoe's novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. In *Émile* Rousseau wrote:

Since we must have books, there is one book which, to my thinking, supplies the best treatise on an education according to nature. This is the first book *Émile* will read; for a long time it will form his whole library, and it will always, retain an honoured place. . .What is this wonderful book? Is it Aristotle? Pliny? Buffon? No; it is *Robinson Crusoe*.³

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Nevertheless there is some irony in the fact that although Rousseau praised Defoe for his writing a *vademecum* for those wishing to pursue education according to Nature, Defoe himself was one who recognised the limitations of Nature *per se* and who in many other of his writings emphasised the importance of Education as a vehicle for improving Nature. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, in the year 1978, the bi-centenary of Rousseau's death, to examine the appositeness of Rousseau's advocacy of *Robinson Crusoe* and determine to what extent, in view of Rousseau's encomium, agreement existed between the two men concerning basic educational ideas. What may not be so readily recognised is that 1978 also marks the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Defoe's *Augusta Triumphans*, a work of some importance for the student of Defoe and education. This work of Defoe's later years, in which he drew attention to the need for a university in the City of London, reflects his respect for education. Yet his projections for a University of London form just a small part of miscellany of suggestions for the educational improvement of society which are scattered in some forty or so miscellaneous works. Few of these works are concerned specifically with education. In the other writings, educational ideas are but part of more general concerns of a political, religious, or social nature. It is the purpose of this article to highlight aspects of Defoe's educational philosophy and in so doing to compare and contrast it with that of Rousseau, thus demonstrating that Defoe's educational ideas were *not* epitomised by *Robinson Crusoe*. The co-incidence of the two anniversaries makes this exercise particularly appropriate.

Both Rousseau and Defoe were as much enigmas in the societies to which they belonged as they are today. Rousseau, lacking the social graces of his fellow French *philosophes*, was after some initial social success an outcaste from that society which above all placed its faith on reason: he was a dissident from total rational obedience. Defoe, on the other hand, though untrammelled by the *sauvagerie* which characterised Rousseau, nevertheless in his later years led a very secretive life in order to avoid the debtors' prison, dying in Ropemaker's Alley in the kind of obscurity which has made it difficult for biographers to piece together his last days.⁴

Although they were enigmatic in differing ways, largely because of their differing attitudes to society - Defoe seeking the material rewards of contemporary society in his quest to be regarded as a gentleman;⁵ Rousseau wishing to engage himself as little as possible in the super-polite, refined society of *l'Ancien Regime* which he regarded as corrupt - they did share some common ground. Both had a religious element in their nature. Though Defoe's parents were Dissenters who had hoped that he would be a Dissenting Minister,⁶ he chose a career in commerce and later journalism and political intrigue. Rousseau, on the other hand, had wanted to be a minister⁷ but circumstance prevented him from being so. Despite the public burning of the "The Creed of a Savoyard Vicar"⁸ in 1762 for its attack on the authority of the Church, Rousseau, like Defoe, was a declared theist,⁹ a believer in a personal God.¹⁰

Both Rousseau and Defoe drew heavily from their own experience, both religious and secular, in the exposition of their ideas. It is for this reason that a knowledge of their lives becomes a necessity in achieving a greater understanding of their writings.¹¹ Further, just as it is necessary to examine a wide range of Defoe's works in order to encapsulate his educational philosophy, so it is important to go beyond the *Émile*, to his minor educational writings, if justice is to be done to Rousseau's educational philosophy vis-à-vis that of Defoe. Difficulty

descension in so far as she is regarded as being the help-meet of *Émile* rather than a person in her own right. It must be recognised too, though, that Rousseau was an advocate of women being educated more adequately for their maternal rôle in life. In a footnote to the second part of *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences* (1750) he wrote:

"We are not sufficiently sensible of what advantage it would be to society to give a better education to that half of our species which governs the other. Men will always be what women choose to make them."²²

Defoe was more forthright in his advocacy of better education for women. In *An Essay upon Projects* (1697), the earliest work in which he publicly evinced an interest in education, Defoe wrote:

I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous Customs in the world, considering us as a Civiliz'd and a Christian Country (sic), that we deny the advantages of Learning to Women. We reproach the Sex every day with Folly and Impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of education equal to us, they wou'd be guilty of less than ourselves.²³

He expressed similar sentiments in *A Review of the Affairs of France*:²⁴ he wrote in an early issue:

We always thought the Women had the quickest and justest Notions of things at first sight, tho' we have unjustly rob'd them of the Judgment, by denying them early Instruction.²⁵

Both Defoe and Rousseau, therefore, were in agreement over the rights of women to a more fitting education.

Despite these agreements in outlook, Defoe and Rousseau differed very considerably on the wider educational issues, much discussed in the eighteenth century,²⁶ of the relative importance of environment and innate dispositions in the development of children and of the relative merits of domestic as opposed to school education. It is in these two major areas of educational debate that Defoe and Rousseau appear to be in different camps.

Nature and Nurture

The debate concerning the relative contributions of environmental factors and innate propensities in the educational process is a complex one. It is a debate to which many notable thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Locke and Hobbes have contributed in persuasive terms.

Ignoring the Roman term *educatio* - the early training given by the mother - much of the debate rests on two other differing interpretations of the origins of the term 'education'. One school, loosely termed the 'traditionalist' school, sees the etymology of education as rising from the term '*educāre*', to mould: another school, again loosely, the 'progressivist' school, sees the term arising from the Latin '*educēre*', to lead out. Is education a process of pumping in knowledge and values? or is it a process of self-realization (*entelechy*) along Aristotelian lines? The practice of schools, especially grammar and English Public schools, has been in the past to attempt '*educāre*' whilst educational theorists like Pestalozzi, Froebel and Dewey have sought to encourage the process of '*educēre*'.

The complexity of the nurture/nature debate in education may perhaps be clarified when it is seen that the term 'nurture' refers not only to the traditional process of being moulded *by* the environment (which includes educational institutions) but also the Lockean process of learning through sensation *from* the environment. The former has an objective quality in its meaning: the latter a subjective one. Similarly, the term 'nature' refers not only to Platonic innate ideas but

also to Lockean innate traits. In the light of this analysis it becomes a little easier to see where individuals stand within the centuries' old debate, with Locke, clearly having a foot in both camps. Helvétius with his '*l'éducation peut tout*'; Robert Owen with his social experiments at New Lanark; James Mill with his firm belief in the powers of education; and in the twentieth century, B.F. Skinner with his theory of operant conditioning (or environmental selection of behaviour) would seem to share a common premise of education being a moulding process.

Basedow with his Philanthropinism; Pestalozzi with his *Anschauung*; and Froebel with his Kindergarten would seem similarly to share a common premise that the process of education is like growth to be found in the botanical world so that it is the teacher's function to assist this process. Such a view is consistent with the Aristotelian idea of '*entelechy*' and the Platonic doctrine of meritocracy, immanent in his concept of the education of philosopher - kings. Where do Defoe and Rousseau stand in this? It is in their respective loyalties to *Nurture* (Defoe) and *Nature* (Rousseau) that deep differences arise. Defoe is concerned that the parents engage themselves in the education of their children²⁷ -preferably at an early age²⁸ - this was the whole *raison d'être* for *The Family Instructor*.²⁹ Rousseau, in the *New Heloise*, on the other hand, gives Julie a somewhat different function when he makes her declare:

"the duty that falls to me is not to educate my sons but to prepare them for being educated."³⁰

Such a sentiment reflects of course, the contrasting concept of negative education to be found also in *Émile*, where, for example, he writes "Do not save time, but lose it"³¹ and again "Exercise his body, his limbs, his senses, his strength, but keep his mind idle as long as you can".³²

Here is then a basic gap which cannot be bridged. Defoe, presumably because of his Dissenting background was committed to the doctrine of Original Sin. The educator's role was to combat this innate predisposition towards evil. In this belief Defoe merely reflected his age when he wrote:

"the Soul is originally bent to Folly; this Bent or Inclination must be rectified or driven out either by Instruction, or if that proves insufficient by Correction, and it is to be done while the Person is young, while he is a Child and then it may be done; The Child may be wrought upon; Nature like some Vegetables is malleable when taken green and early. . .at first it bows and bends to Instruction and Reproof."³³

It was this fear of the effects of early neglect in the education of gentlemen that led Defoe to write in another work:

"The weak but wilful reasonings on the father's side joined to the fiery pride of the mother keeps the heir at play with his nurses and pages, till he is too big to go to school at all."³⁴

Rousseau, on the other hand, was of the view that man was essentially good - 'the first impulses of nature are always right' - and contrary to the common belief of the eighteenth century, saw the education process as one which drew out this innate goodness. The negative education and anti-bookish learning advocated in the *Émile* was based on this premise as was, too, his doctrine of natural consequences which offered an alternative to the doubtful efficacy of corporal punishment. Again, as an aspirant himself to polite learning, Defoe was anxious to demonstrate the continuing need for a knowledge of the Classics which were the basis of the very artificiality and urbanity which Rousseau found so abhorrent in the eighteenth century. It is ironic, therefore, in the light of such differences that he (Rousseau) should invoke *Robinson Crusoe* in support of his educational schemes.

Domestic and Public Education

A second major area of discussion in the eighteenth century was that of the relative merits and demerits of education through a tutor and education experienced in school.³⁵ Like the other in its antiquity it was a controversy which stretched back to the 2nd century B.C. With the Hellenizing process of the Roman Empire, schools were introduced which seemed to run counter to the *mos maiorum* or Roman culture. Cato the elder in 155 B.C. had denounced the Greeks for their assault on traditional Roman domestic education but Quintilian in the 1st century A.D. had come down firmly in his *Institutio Oratoria* in favour of schools. This debate had continued into the eighteenth century: for example Vicesimus Knox II of Tonbridge School confirming his belief in his own *modus vivendi*, came down heavily in favour of schools.³⁶ Schoolmasters were ranged on one side of the great divide: tutors on the other. Rousseau as a quondam private tutor and one who had written *The Project for the Education of M. de Sainte-Marie* (1740) and *Memoir on the education of the Prince of Wirtemberg's Infant Daughter Sophie* (1763) clearly favoured domestic education following the lead of John Locke in the seventeenth century. Rousseau, however, as so often in his writings, is inconsistent. Despite the domestic character of the education of *Émile* at the hands of a private tutor, Rousseau when contemplating the differences in education between the sons of rich and poor nobility in Poland, was capable of writing:

Since by the constitution of the state they are equal, they should be educated together, and in the same way.³⁷

It would seem that not only was Rousseau negating his advocacy of domestic as opposed to public education but he was also possibly abjuring his belief in intellectual differentiation. Defoe, who had attended the dissenting academy of Dr. Charles Morton³⁸ at Newington Green and who, throughout his life, had been influenced by Morton's ideas and methods,³⁹ was more forthright. He strongly attacked private tutors in *The Compleat English Gentleman*:

it would be happy for the next age, tho' the present race is past this remedy, if the ladies (sic) would show a little concern about it (the education of their sons); that they would have some pity upon their posterity, and not give them up so very early, and, at least, not so entirely to the negligence of those murderers of a child's moralls (sic), call'd tutors.⁴⁰

It would seem that on the question of domestic and public education, as on the question of nature and nurture in education, Defoe and Rousseau stand divided. Rousseau's sponsorship of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* would seem to be a case of misguided advocacy if the whole context of Defoe is taken into account. The memorial tablet of John Elliott, in the Cranbourne Chase Church, which distinguished between Nature and Education or Nature (negative education) and Nurture, was more in keeping with Defoe's sentiments. Perhaps Rousseau, the prince of paradox, unwittingly demonstrated a further paradox - that Defoe whose views on Nurture were conventional according to institutions in the eighteenth century could still, in the twentieth century, as in the extant *Émile*, be cited as a prophet of Nature. Only Rousseau could be capable of such paradox.

Resume

Dans son *Émile*, Rousseau a accordé un rôle important dans l'éducation de son protégé au livre *Robinson Crusoe* de Defoe. Malgré l'enthousiasme de Rousseau pour cette oeuvre, et malgré certaines similarités conceptuelles des deux auteurs, les différences de perspective sur l'éducation sont plus frappantes que les similarités. Ceci est le plus marqué en ce qui touche à la controverse du dix-huitième siècle concernant le rôle de la Nature dans l'instruction et concernant l'éducation publique et privée.

Notes

¹Defoe's *Compleat English Gentleman*: an unfinished treatise on education, written probably in 1729 but which was first published posthumously as late as 1890 by K. Bulbring.

²cf. D.P. Leinster-Mackay, Daniel Defoe: an eighteenth century educationist? *Education Research and Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 1, June 1978.

³J.J. Rousseau *Émile* (Everyman edition, 1974) p. 147.

⁴Early biographers like William Lee (1869) and William Minto (1879) were misled, through the obscurity of Defoe's last days into believing his death occurred on April 26th, 1731. As Michael Shinagel has indicated (1968) Defoe dies on 24th April, 1731 and was buried on the later date.

⁵Defoe was known as the "Sunday Gentleman" because of his custom of dressing up in fine clothes whilst hiding from the arm of the law in Bristol. cf. M. Shinagel: *Daniel Defoe and Middle Class Gentility*, Harvard (1968) p. 46.

⁶It was probably for this reason that Defoe was sent to the Dissenting Academy of Dr. Morton at Newington Green which was partly a seminary for the education of dissenting ministers.

⁷Rousseau's *Confessions* (Penguin Classics 1967) p. 34.

⁸Forms part of *Émile* pp. 228-278.

⁹cf. Rousseau's letter at the time of Lisbon earthquake in 1756 to Voltaire (who also died in 1778).

¹⁰This is very evident in *Robinson Crusoe*.

¹¹Paradoxically at the same time, in the case of Defoe, an understanding of his busy and active life leaves the mind in wonderment at Defoe's total energies, so vast was his literary output. cf. John Robert Moore: *A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe* (Indiana University Press, 1960).

¹²He was not discriminatory in this process of seeking anonymity so that works on education e.g. *The Family Instructor* 1715 and the *New Family Instructor* 1727, were published in Newcastle upon Tyne instead of London, in the case of the former, whilst in the latter case, the book was published anonymously by the 'Author of the *Family Instructor*'. Defoe's attempts at misleading the public were not so successful in this case. Doubts still exist, however, concerning the authorship of *History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell*, a work partly concerned with the education of the deaf and dumb.

¹³cf. *Émile*, Everyman Edition, p. 30. Rousseau writes "The only habit the child should be allowed to contract is that of having no habits". In the very next paragraph when dealing with fear of the unknown Rousseau writes: "the habit of seeing fresh things without ill effects destroys this fear".

¹⁴Volume I had reached its eighth edition by September 1720 and was therefore a very popular work; Volume II reached a third edition by June 1728.

¹⁵*The Family Instructor*, Vol. 1, p. 77.

¹⁶William Boyd (Ed.) op. cit., *New Heloise*, p. 57.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁸*The Present State of the Parties in Great Britain*, 1712, pp. 291-297.

¹⁹William Boyd (Ed.) op. cit., p. 49.

²⁰*Émile*, Everyman Edition, p. 322.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 323.

²²J.J. Rousseau: *The Social Contract and Discourses*, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, 1952, p. 133.

²³Defoe: op. cit., p. 282.

²⁴Usually referred to as the *Review*, a pioneer journal which in the course of 9 years from 1704 to 1713 had several titles and which Defoe ran single handed for most of the time: it had three issues a week for most of its existence.

²⁵*The Review*, Vol. 1, p. 156.

²⁶cf. F. Musgrove: Two educational controversies in eighteenth century England. Nature and Nurture; Private and Public Education, *Paedagogica Historica*, Vol. 2, 1962, pp. 81-94.

²⁷cf. *Family Instructor*, Vol. 1, p. 70.

²⁸The value of an early start to education was emphasised in at least four of Defoe's works viz. *The Family Instructor* (1715) Vol. 1, pp. 77/78 *Mere Nature Delineated* (1726), p. 60

The Compleat English Gentleman (1890), p. 71

The Family Instructor, Vol. II (1718), p. 263.

²⁹cf. R.G. Ivany "Defoe's Prelude to *The Family Instructor*" *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966.

³⁰Wm Boyd (Ed.) *The Minor Educational Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1962) p. 66.

³¹Rousseau: *Émile*, Everyman edition, p. 57.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 58.

³³*The Family Instructor*, Vol. 1, p. 77.

³⁴*The Compleat English Gentleman*, p. 10.

³⁵cf. F. Musgrove: Middle Class Families and Schools 1780-1880: Interaction and Exchange of function between institutions, pp. 117-125 in P.W. Musgrave (Ed.) *Sociology, History and Education*, Methuen, 1950.

³⁶Vicesimus Knox: *Liberal Education*, 1794 edition, p. 25.

³⁷*Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1772) taken from Wm Boyd (Ed.) op. cit., p. 48.

³⁸Dr. Charles Morton emigrated to America in 1686 and later became the first Vice President of Harvard University.

³⁹cf. Defoe: *The Compleat English Gentleman* pp. 218-220 in which Defoe alludes very clearly to his old school master.

⁴⁰Defoe, loc. cit., p. 71.