

THE CONCEPTS OF NATURE IN ROUSSEAU'S EDUCATIONAL THEORY

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In the last two thousand years some of the well known Greek, European and Arab philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Avicenna, Ibn Tufail, and Sahrawardi have written about nature and natural education. Eight hundred years ago Ibn Tufail(1) wrote his great imaginative story called "Hay ibn Yaqdan" which seems to be very similar to what Rousseau wrote six hundred years later. The story of Hay ibn Yaqdan was translated into several European languages; namely, Latin in 1761, German in 1782, Spanish in 1900, English in 1904 and into Russian in 1920. It was also translated into other languages all over the world.(2)

Rousseau, like other philosophers before him, realized the usefulness of nature and placed great emphasis on this idea in his masterpiece of writing, "Emile". Rousseau believed that 'everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the World but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man.'(3)

It is not easy to understand what Rousseau meant by "Nature", especially since he was not explicit in his explanation of the term which he uses on different occasions without clarifying his use of the word in each case. There are words which linguistically have more than one meaning, such as God, Nature, Love. However, the writer must clarify the ambiguity of these words by giving a definite meaning for them, especially when he wants to use them as a main word or central idea in the exposition of his theory so that his readers would not remain confused in reading it. Therefore it is unfortunate that Rousseau did not explain what he meant by nature in his educational theory in "Emile", for with this consistent neglect, whether intentional or not, he opened the door for philosophers to think about it and find an explanation for it.

One might consider plants, animals, geographical features etc, or the places where these exist "largely free of human influence"(4) as equivalent to the word "nature". We might also consider the environment which

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exists around us with the whole universe as that which serves to explain the word nature. There are tens if not hundreds of explanations and descriptions for the word "nature" in dictionaries and encyclopedias that invariably return to one basic theme. What seems to me closer to what Rousseau meant by nature is that everything that is achieved or created without the influence of human beings. I think that Rousseau was referring to this meaning when he said that 'everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the World ...' (nature).

Rusk in his book *Doctrines of the Great Educators*(5) gives a good illustration of what Rousseau meant by nature. He says that for that writer "Nature" has more than one meaning. For instance, when he says that "education comes to us from nature, from men, and from things"(6) he regards nature as something equivalent to an "endowment". The word nature was used in this way by Aristotle, too, when he said "now some hold that we become good by nature, some that we become so by habit, and others that it is clearly not in our powers; it is something vouchsafed to the truly fortunate by some divine cause."(7)

When, in consideration of the natural man, no doubt Rousseau did not have in mind a savage; in other words, he did not mean by "I want to train a natural man" that he wants to make a savage man and send him back to the forest or desert. What Rousseau meant by nature is that he wants to make a man who can live his life naturally and comfortably in his society. In other words, Rousseau is not saying "back to nature" but rather forward towards the fulfilment of human nature.(8)

We should bear in mind that Rousseau was not against his society nor against the people of cities. However, he wants Emile to be brought up "naturally" and in a "natural environment," not among the artificialities of society.

The other meaning attached to the term "nature" is a negative one. I mean it is derived as a consequence of Rousseau's thoughts on the anti-social attitude. Society, as mentioned earlier, is artificial, not natural, and therefore it is not good at all. Being as it is, Rousseau expresses dislike for it and so does not wish that his Emile should be spoiled by it. He wants Emile to develop "naturally", apart from other children and away from the vanity and artifice of civilized society. As we know, Rousseau called for about twelve years of negative education. For him, negative education or natural education does not mean no education at

all but signifies a new social education.(9) In other words, he wants Emile to be kept away from books : "I hate books; they only teach us to talk about things we know nothing about."(10) Things, according to Rousseau, should be experienced directly and naturally. Things should not be read in books, because that is an artificial way of learning. Rousseau thinks that "artificial" books should be postponed to the later period of Emile's life.

Ibn Tufail in his educational theory "Hay ibn Yaqdan" called for a more natural environment for Hay than Rousseau did for Emile. "Hay" in Arabic means alive; Ibn means the son of; Yaqdan means awake. The whole name is a symbol for someone such as Emile.

"Hay" does not know his parents. A doe was taking care of him during his infancy until boyhood. She was taking care of Hay's food only. Hay was living on an island with the doe far away from the people of the city. He spent his childhood with this doe and other animals of the island. He learned their languages and, since he was not like them, he always thought of how to protect himself from the wild animals. Hay was also thinking of how to learn and understand things. Nobody was there to teach him; he was learning naturally and from nature. In other words, he was learning without books. Hay was afraid of the wild animals. Once he found the dead body of a gazelle. He took away its skin and used it for clothing. He found that its horns were good tools to protect himself from other animals. In this way, "Hay" learned to cover his body and how to protect his body from the ferocious animals. This was the lesson of nature to Hay, not the lesson of books or teachers. Here we can obviously see the more natural life of Hay in comparison to that of Emile.

The third meaning of "nature" in Rousseau's theory of education could be a positive one. Stoics and even Plato see that nature or the universe is governed by divine providence.(11) Living according to nature means living in accordance with the rational principle of the universe, which means living according to reason : "He who obeys his conscience is following nature."(12)

Referring to the word reason, I would like to point to what Ibn Tufail meant by reason in Hay's story. Hay ibn Yaqdan grew up in the natural environment of the island and learned a lot of things by thinking and reasoning. Once Hay tried to discover some new things. He therefore went to the nearby island. He realized that there were people like him

living there. He spent some time in learning their language, in addition to which he learned other things; namely, about their religion. However, he refused whatever he felt was not reasonable. He realized that these people believe in something called "Allah" or God and that their religious belief was called Islam.

Hay learned a lot of Islamic rules until he arrived at the rule which says that every rich Moslem should pay a certain amount of his money to the poor and needy. This kind of payment is called "Zakat"(13) Hay stopped at this point and said that this was not a reasonable rule. Why should the rich people pay zakat to the poor. This rule encourages laziness among Moslems. He asked the people of the island to reject this rule and drop it from the Islamic Codes. The reaction of the ignorant people was so strong that they not only refused Hay's idea but also planned to kill him. He realized this and so he fled to his island.

If we think deeply about the political idea of nature Rousseau expressed when he said that the Church and Christianity had some unnatural rules, we can say that Rousseau was very close to what Ibn Tufail meant by that incident. Ibn Tufail was saying that there are some artificial laws in the Islamic Religion which must be neglected or corrected. In other words, he thought that there are some unnatural rules in the religion which are against the human or "natural" being. But he, like Rousseau, was not allowed to say it openly to the people of his time because some of them had accepted the Islamic codes blindly, not rationally, and when he tried to express his ideas on the subject, the people planned to kill his Hay as the government of France did with Rousseau when they banned his Emile.

Aside from the political considerations of the idea of nature, it seems to me that at least one of the reasons which influenced Rousseau's mind about nature is that the human being is a part of nature and the universe. Man was made from the elements of nature and therefore natural education is the best educational for him and the most perfect tool to be educated with. Artificial education seems to be like false teeth or the artificial hand. No matter what the false teeth or the artificial hand look like, they can not do the same jobs the natural one. The artificial object might cover one's faults or limitations, but it does not cure them. It is equally true in the case of artificial education which does not fit the natural being nor do him justice. Therefore the best education for him is the natural one.

Since the artificial hand can not be replaced by a natural one, likewise we can not replace artificial education with a natural one, especially in the early time of our childrens' lives. This is why Rousseau puts such great emphasis on the first twelve years of Emile's life : "Would that you keep him as nature made him. Watch over him from his birth. Take possession of him as soon as he comes into the world and keep him till he is a man; you will never succeed otherwise. The real nurse is the mother and the real teacher is the father."(14)

Rousseau does not only admires parents as a real nurse and teacher, but he also admires old people and the ancients. Rousseau's admiration for them is not because of their age but because of their natural life: "The ancients are nearer to nature and their genius is more distinct."(15) This is why he thought that peasants' lives are much better than the life of the people of the city, because theirs is more natural, and because they live in a natural environment. They breath the fresh air and eat natural food. Their bodies are stronger and they are healthier than the people of the cities. Their life is still simple and there is not a touch of artificiality in it. "Accustomed like the children of peasants to expose themselves to the heat and cold, grow as hardy, they are equally capable of bearing the inclemencies of the weather and become more robust as living more at their ease. This is the way to provide against the age of maturity, and the accidents of humanity.(16)

Rousseau's opinion of peasants comes very close to what Avicenna said about nomads when he was expressing his opinion about the subject of logic. Avicenna said that it is very useful for the student of philosophy to start with the subject of logic, except for nomads, who do not need it. Nomads are not in need of the art of logic because they speak their language perfectly and naturally and their language has yet not been spoiled by the artificial language of the city. Therefore Rousseau, very much like Avicenna, believes that peasants still retain the natural endowment.

In terms of nature, Rousseau gives a good and natural methodology for the study of geography. Rousseau says that geography is to be learnt by observation of natural phenomena. "His geography will begin with the town he lives in and the father's country house, then the places between them, the rivers near them and then the sun's aspects and how to find one's way by its aid."(17) It means that Rousseau wants Emile

to learn geography naturally, by observation of the closest things and views, step by step proceeding from the nearest to the farther points. "Let him make his own map, at first containing only two places; others may be added from time to time, as he is able to estimate their distance and position : you see at once a good start we have given him by making his eye his compass."(18)

The idea of natural education seems to be popular nowadays. In the last few years UNESCO has published a book about "Geography Teaching" which seems to me carries Rousseau's idea of nature very clearly. The authors of this book have emphasized the natural method of teaching geography. "It is wrong to teach geography from books. We should show them the natural and real views such as rivers, waterfalls, etc., and let them discover things. No beautiful artificial pictures can replace the the natural ones in the student's mind."(19)

In short, I have tried to talk about nature and natural education in Rousseau's educational theory which seems to be more or less that which is not wholly in man's control and should be reached without the imposition of artifacts, but through direct experience of nature.

One must consider the reasons which led Rousseau to think about nature and write about it placing so much emphasis in the manner as we have described. First of all, we should bear in mind that Rousseau did not ask for natural education for the whole of Emile's life. Rather, he divided Emile's life into stages such as from birth to the age of twelve representing the age of nature; from the age of twelve to fifteen as the age of reason; from the age of fifteen to twenty as the age of force; from the age of twenty to the age of twenty-five as the age of wisdom, and from the age of twenty-five to the time of his death as the age of happiness.(20)

Although Rousseau did not emphasise the natural education throughout Emile's life, he nevertheless did view it as a requirement for the duration of his childhood. Indeed, he was aware of the most important period of the child's life.

One of the other reasons why the idea of nature is worth mentioning is that "education in eighteenth-century France was distinctly gloomy. The classrooms were dark and caning was the principal means of motivation; memorization, particularly of Latin grammar, was up-

permost.”(21) What makes this assumption more concrete is what Abloe Galiani said in 1720 : “Education is the same thing for man and for beast. It can be reduced to two principles : to learn to put up with injustice, to learn to endure ennui. What does one do when one breaks in a horse? Left to himself, the horse ambles, trots, gallops, walks, but he does it when he wishes, as he pleases. We teach him to move thus or thus, contrary to his own desire, against his own instinct — there is the injustice : we make him keep at it for a couple of hours — there is the ennui. It is just the same thing when we make a child learn Latin or Greek or French The aim is that he should habituate himself to obey another person’s will (and so bore himself) that he should be beaten by a creature born his equal (and so learn endurance) All pleasant methods of teaching children necessary knowledge are false and ridiculous. It is not a question of learning geography or geometry : it is a question of learning to work, of learning the weariness of concentrating one’s attention on the matter at hand Develop these ideas, and then you will have a book the precise opposite of *Emile* and worth very much more.”(22)

Those miserable conditions of Rousseau’s life, in addition to failures in his natural education, were a very crucial force in driving Rousseau towards elaborating his idea of natural education and natural life.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Ibn Tufail is a famous Moslem Scholar. He was born in 1110 and died in 1185.
- (2) Amin, Ahmed. Hay ibn Yaqdan, Avicenna, Ibn Tufail, Al Sahrawardi : Education Institute for Printing and Press, Cairo : 1959.
- (3) Rousseau, Jean Jacques, Emile, Trans. by Foxley, Barbara. Everyman’s Library’s Library, New York; 1963.
- (4) Urdang, Lawrence. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Random House Inc., 1968 : p. 887.
- (5) Rusk, Robert R. *Doctrines of the Great Educators*; Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965 : p. 169.
- (6) Emile; p. 6.
- (7) Aristotle, Ethics; Book X.
- (8) Broome, J. H. Rousseau A Study of His Thought; Barnes and Noble Inc. New York, 1963 : p. 49.

- (9) Rusk, Robert R. Doctrines of the Great Educators : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965 : p. 171.
- (10) Emile : p. 147.
- (11) Rusk, op. cit., p. 171.
- (12) Emile : p. 250.
- (13) Zakat is a certain amount of money or product which every rich Moslem should pay yearly to the poor.
- (14) Emile : p. 16.
- (15) Ibid : p. 166.
- (16) Rusk, op. cit., 1965.
- (17) Emile : pp. 131-134.
- (18) Ibid., pp. 131-4.
- (19) Pierre Deffontaines : Qu'est-ce que la geographie humaine In : Georges Hardy's Geographie et Colonisation; Paris, Gallimard, 1933 : p. 9.
- (20) Browne, J.H. : Rousseau, A Study of His Thought. Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963.
- (21) Jarrett, James : Philosophy for the Study of Education. Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, 1969 : p. 231.
- (22) Galiani, Abbe : Letters to Mme. d'Epinay, 1770 cited in William Boyd's The Educational Theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau (New York : Russel and Russel, 1963).



فكرة « الطبيعة » في النظرية التربوية

لجان جاك روسو

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يحاول الباحث في بحثه المعنون بـ « فكرة الطبيعة » في النظرية التربوية لجان جاك روسو أن يبين ماهية « الطبيعة » والمقصود بها بصورة عامة ، وما تصده المربي روسو بـ « الطبيعة » بصورة خاصة .

وفي محاولات الباحث للكشف عن معنى « الطبيعة » عند جان جاك روسو ، حاول مقارنتها بالتربية الطبيعية التي وردت على نحو من النظريات والكتابات التربوية عند كل من فلاسفة اليونان كأفلاطون وأرسطو وفلاسفة المسلمين ومفكرهم كابن سينا وابن طفيل والسهوروردي في « حي بن يقظان » .

وفي نهاية البحث حاول الباحث أن يبين الجوانب الايجابية والسلبية لفكرة « الطبيعة » التي وردت في نظرية جان جاك روسو التربوية .

666