

ROUSSEAU ET L'ÉDUCATION
ÉTUDES SUR *L'ÉMILE*

ACTES DU COLLOQUE DE NORTHFIELD
(6 - 8 MAI 1983)

publiés et présentés par
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avec une bibliographie
et des Index



ÉDITIONS NAAMAN
C.P. 697
SHERBROOKE (Québec, Canada)
J1H 5K5

Collection COLLOQUES
dirigée par le professeur Jean Terrasse

1. *Rousseau et l'Éducation: études sur l'«Émile»*. Actes du colloque de Northfield (6-8 mai 1983), publiés et présentés par Jean Terrasse, 152p.

Novembre 1984

MOTIVATION AS THE RESOLUTION OF AN EDUCATIONAL PARADOX

by Marika Brione Rosen

The aims of Rousseau's system of education are very specific; they are also very complex. Under a thoroughly supervised process of that we have come to call "self-realization", Rousseau intends the maximal development of independence, individuality, and especially morality in the learner. The calculated end of education is not the induction of wisdom but of the capacity for deliberation, the development of a thinker. Inherent in his philosophy is the crucial assumption that all of these qualities are latent within each individual; this has important implications for his educational design, namely that it is possible for an individual to realize his own potential in his own terms. Rousseau draws the further implication that moral unity — of a people — need not be accomplished at the expense of freedom or individuality. In an educational system purportedly based on — and distinguished by — free, self-actualizing behavior, how then does Rousseau justify tutorial imposition as an appropriate means to motivate the development of an autonomous individual?

First, to what extent is inherent motivation sufficient to accomplish these desired ends? In his treatises, Rousseau makes a philosophic "return" to nature in an attempt to determine what is innate in the individual to serve as a basis for a realistic and realizable educational plan. Natively the pupil supplies three essential elements: desires, interests, and curiosity, the latter of which, when "well directed, (becomes) the motive of the age..." (Bloom, 167). Rousseau banks heavily upon these natural resources: indeed their lack would have severe implications for the whole theory. But not only does he believe that "all new objects interest man" (63), these interests themselves are affiliated with — if not central to — the very quest for *happiness*, a presumably incontrovertible native stimulus:

There is an ardor to know which is founded only on the desire to be esteemed as learned; there is another ardor which is born of a curiosity

natural to man concerning all that might have a connection, close or distant, with his interests. The innate desire for well-being and the impossibility of fully satisfying this desire make him constantly seek for new means of contributing to it. This is the first principle of curiosity, a principle natural to the human heart... (167)

The importance of desire in the individual as an educational impetus hinges on Rousseau's conception of its original nature. In its natural form it derives its legitimacy from the fact that it is directed to the fulfillment of genuine needs rather than to such selfish satisfactions as avarice and lust, this need fulfillment leading ultimately to the exercise of moral preference. Even further, embedded within "desire" is a key link to the notion of utility upon which much of Rousseau's philosophy rests. That which is useful is desired; usefulness becomes the object and standard of desire. Therefore as a function of desire, utility serves as an important motivational stimulus: "they can learn nothing of which they do not feel the real and present advantage in either pleasure or utility." (116) Rousseau implies that the very perception of the prospect of utility serves as a self-motivator for the pupil. Furthermore, utility, or perceived self-interest is to be the active inspiration (motivation) for the creation and maintenance of the moral state. An incentive for submission to the social contract is that each "gains the equivalent of everything he loses, plus greater power to preserve what he has,"¹ a net benefit for the individual. At risk of implying false simplicity, I add that utility, although a major factor of Rousseau's philosophy, is far from being the only one. More specifically, the essential task is to get each individual to see altruistic actions not in terms of "done for others" but done for *all*, a more complex notion than Benthamite utilitarianism.

Despite his claims of "natural education", Rousseau, far from obviating the need for external guidance has indicated the insufficiency of nature alone to cultivate a moral citizen. In designating a prominent role for the tutor in the educational process and justifying a certain amount of imposition on his part, Rousseau seems to contradict the very foundation of his educational philosophy, namely its "natural-ness", as well as its self-developmental character. What is the function of motivation

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," *The Essential Rousseau*, trans. by Lowell Bair (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1974), p. 17.

within this impositional framework?

The tutor's role, albeit impositional, is not tyrannical, nor is it in conflict with nature, as Rousseau sees it. This imposition has two distinct dimensions — to reinforce that which is natural, but not necessarily forthcoming, and to supplement nature. Clearly Rousseau did not want to simply “return” children to a condition of noble ignorance in nature, but to educate them to go beyond it, to participate in the eminently worthwhile construct of the State.

In conspicuously purging the environment of deleterious social influences, it would seem that Rousseau is only giving *Émile* the illusion of freedom, and not “The Real Thing”. Furthermore certain passages containing “appropriate” responses to questions concerning such subjects as anger and reproduction seem questionable in themselves as artificially repressing natural curiosity. Rousseau however, would argue that nature, to a large degree, has provided for education, and inherent to its plan is a certain logical sequence. This order, though intrinsic, is not necessarily *manifest* under present social conditions. It is the tutor's task to restrict the child's experience to that which would have been encountered in a free, natural environment, untainted by society's accelerative forces. Therefore, according to Rousseau, the tutor is not stifling “*natural*” desires, but “*unnatural*” desires, especially premature ones. He would not be restricting *Émile* from nature, but only limiting him to it, in its appropriate sequence. The assumption is that while *Émile*'s environment would seem to be contrived, it is justified as being at least “more natural” than society in its current state, which is thoroughly artificial and furthermore morally destructive. Rousseau's aim is to preclude exposure to the corruptive effect of society until the child's mind has matured to the point where it has attained a certain deliverative capacity, enabling him to make decisions by active will and not mere passive accommodation. The second justification of imposition involves supplementing that which nature cannot provide but which is useful or perhaps even necessary to life as a citizen. The tutor needs to introduce certain subjects, such as math, which would be beyond the realm of natural educational encounters at a given stage. But instead of imposing them as subjects in their own right, the tutor contrives the educational experience in such a way as to make the student want to learn them as a means to facilitate the solution of problems of interest to him. Although

strictly speaking they are unquestionably "imposed", Rousseau has actually transcended that paradox by attempting instead to create the desire (Cf. p. 117). Since it is not the subject but the process of reasoning that is important, Rousseau proposes that the tutor should be guided by the pupil's own interests to maximize the learner's receptivity to education. In this pedagogical method the pupil supplies his own motivation, the tutor has directed the means, and utility is to be one ultimate criterion of value. Although utility was the justification for the inclusion of certain subjects in the curriculum in the first place, at a later stage it re-emerges to evaluate the experience on the basis of its consequences. Ultimately utility will not be accepted at the tutor's word but will need to be substantiated and validated through the pupil's own experiences. Experience is to be the basis of morality by conviction and not merely habit.

The tutor's imposition goes only so far as to select the appropriate means or methods of education. He is guiding the student toward the student's own highest potential but that potential itself is already determined by nature. The essence of motivation in the educational process is a complex interaction of native curiosity, certain pedagogical mechanisms, and individual interests and desires. An example of the interoperation of these elements is evident in the use of problem solving as a chief means to the acquisition of the qualities enumerated as the desired aims and ends of Rousseau's education. There is a certain mechanistic attraction of a problem sequence which is a natural motivator. The interconnectedness of the parts induces a certain intellectual dynamism naturally drawing toward the apprehension of a conclusion. Put simply, conflict supplies a potential stimulus: by providing disequilibrium it provokes deliberation, but this condition is only operative if put in conjunction with the student's own interests. It is the tutor's responsibility to connect the two — interests and problems — thereby achieving something greater than the sum of the separate parts. The tutor's task is not to give the student the right answers but to get him to ask the right questions, to engage him in the deliberative process.

The paradox of imposition and free self-realizing behavior in Rousseau's educational system is resolved by the nature of motivation in the pupil. Imposition is not a substitute for personal motivation. It is theoretically antithetical to coercion. Motivation is inherent in the pupil because it is the manifestation

of his natural curiosity when associated with his own interests. The duty of the tutor is neither to create nor to circumvent his native motivation but to mobilize it around a sequence of directed experiences designed to promote the acquisition of certain virtues. This educational imposition is not the imposition of will nor of "correct belief". The imposition which Rousseau justifies on the part of the tutor is really nothing more than a *proposal* of truth which, as far as the pupil is concerned, remains hypothetical until confirmed by his own experience and independent reasoning. The tutor is not making any ultimate decisions; what he professes is not only transient but also reversible if the pupil's experience were to prove otherwise. Thus the tutor is not stifling self-development, but rather acting as an agent to direct existing motivation toward more far-sighted goals, pushing individual capacity to its greatest potential, not merely existence in the state of nature but to the realization of a higher freedom: a life of moral autonomy in the sovereign state.

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