

ON UNDERSTANDING ROUSSEAU'S PRAISE OF ROBINSON CRUSOE

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau was deeply impressed by Defoe's 1719 story of Robinson Crusoe—indeed, he was charmed, captivated and, at the same time, troubled by the novel. Rousseau's correspondence of the early 1760s contains the intriguing revelation that during this period he considered writing his own version of *Robinson Crusoe*. Not only does an admirer explicitly recommend this idea, but, in addition, Rousseau's publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, asks him, in August 1763 and again in January 1764, whether he should send along a copy of *Crusoe* so that Rousseau may commence work on it. But Rousseau was deterred from the project mainly by the difficulties he suffered following the condemnation by French and Swiss authorities of the *Social Contract* (1762) and *Emile* (1762). In March 1764, Rousseau informs Rey that he will abandon the Robinson project because he no longer has the courage or strength for such work.¹

Although Rousseau never wrote his own full-length version of *Crusoe*, his writings are replete with Crusoe references. Best known is the influential and extraordinary praise given to *Robinson Crusoe* in *Emile* where the tutor lauds Defoe's novel as "the most felicitous treatise on natural education" ever written.² Rousseau was apparently the first to indicate the broad philosophic value of *Crusoe* and his remarks in *Emile* prompted a number of new translations and imitations of Defoe's novel. Robinson is also mentioned in the *Social Contract* and an implicit link is drawn to *Crusoe* in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761): St. Preux, who earlier spent several months on a desert island, likens Julie's secret garden to Juan Fernandez, the very island where Crusoe's prototype, Alexander Selkirk, was marooned.³ Finally, there are the powerful statements of self-identification with Crusoe which Rousseau makes in each of his major autobiographies, *The Confessions*, the *Dialogues*, and *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Careful study of these references suggests that Rousseau did begin to refashion Defoe's novel to suit his own purposes. The Robinson Crusoe so admired by Rousseau is, in many ways, *not* the character to be found in Defoe's novel. Rather, Rousseau seems to create two new Crusoes, one for *Emile* and another for himself as portrayed in his personal writings. Furthermore, each figure represents not simply a modification of Defoe's character, but a new type.

It was most likely the inaccurate and incomplete translation of *Robinson Crusoe* by Saint-Hyacinthe and Van Effen that Rousseau read, yet the failings of this translation cannot alone account for Rousseau's treatment of the story. It seems that Rousseau read the book, for the first time at least, when he was only about fifteen—long before he began serious writing. There is a passage in his

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Confessions which suggests that Rousseau read a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* from a lending library in Geneva sometime between 1725 and 1728. Though Rousseau mentions no specific titles from this library, he declares that he avidly read all of its contents and that some of the books forcefully affected his imagination:

What it [my imagination] did was to nourish itself on situations that had interested me in my reading, recalling them, varying them, combining them, and giving me so great a part in them, that I became one of the characters I imagined, and saw myself always in the pleasantest situations of my own choosing. So, in the end, the fictions I succeeded in building up made me forget my real condition, which so dissatisfied me. My love for imaginary objects and my facility in lending myself to them ended by disillusioning me with everything around me, and determined that love of solitude which I have retained ever since that time.⁴

Along with the ideas of self-identification and solitude contained in this passage, the enormous popularity of *Crusoe* at the time supports this dating of Rousseau's reading. Yet since Rousseau's alterations are neither haphazard nor casual they do not seem to be the result of a fallible memory. On the contrary one strongly suspects that Rousseau reread *Crusoe* as he was writing about it.

My thesis is that Rousseau recreates *Crusoe* in one way in *Emile* and in another in his personal writings. (My interest here is with Rousseau's interpretation of the *Crusoe* tale, not the Defoe novel itself.) For scrutiny of Rousseau's treatment of *Crusoe* sheds light on his criticism of nascent capitalism and its relation to modern culture. It also suggests that Rousseau considered the recasting of popular literature as a significant moral strategy, one which might serve as a complement to the Platonic censorship defended in the *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758). Finally, study of Rousseau's handling of *Crusoe* helps to clarify his attitudes toward nature: neglect of *Emile* has often meant forgetting that the "père du romantisme" held a practical as well as an amorous attitude toward nature.

The Solitary Walker as Crusoe

The image of *Crusoe* recurs throughout Rousseau's personal writings. For example, in the *Confessions* Rousseau describes how, when quarantined at Genoa, he chose to be confined alone in the *lazaretto* and felt "like another Robinson Crusoe" in making arrangements for his stay.⁵ Rousseau further

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signifies this identification near the end of the *Confessions* when he describes his life on the then rustic Swiss island of Saint Pierre. In the second *Dialogue* Rousseau expresses his affection for this novel in a discussion of his love of solitude; further on, he speaks of how he saw himself "more alone in the middle of Paris than Robinson was on his island."⁶

Although Crusoe is not mentioned by name in the *Reveries*, Rousseau invokes his image even more strongly in his last work when referring to his own solitude and, especially, when speaking of a desert island. Throughout the *Reveries* Rousseau explains that he is accustomed to nourish his heart with its own substance and to seek all its pasturage within himself. Reaffirming that he will no longer find happiness among men and recalling the famous personal reform from which he dates his "lively taste for solitude," Rousseau claims that he could have done all his studies equally well on a desert island. Describing the island of Saint Pierre even more lyrically than in the *Confessions*, he declares that he would like to spend the rest of his days on this "fertile and solitary island," "singularly situated for the happiness of a man who loves to limit himself" (*se circonscrire*). Further on, Rousseau explains his love of botany and reveals that, while botanizing, he compared himself "to those great travellers who discover a desert island."⁷

What does *le promeneur solitaire* admire in Crusoe and what in the novel is altered to achieve this self-identification? Several features of Defoe's story and the Rousseau autobiographies reward comparison, including the type of narration, the spiritual value accorded solitude, attitudes toward nature and ideas expressed on the need to work versus the enjoyment of leisure. A fundamental similarity between Defoe's novel and the Genevan's autobiographies is the subjective and individualist spiritual pattern evident in both. Defoe and Rousseau were both raised under Calvinist discipline and the spiritual pattern in *Crusoe* and the autobiographies is derived in part from the Calvinist insistence on moral self-examination as the duty of the individual. Broadly speaking, the introspective and egocentric qualities of Crusoe and Rousseau relate to a larger cultural pattern resulting in part from Protestantism's displacement of the Church as mediator between the individual and God. A related similarity between Defoe's novel and the Rousseau autobiographies is their form. The autobiographical memoir is perhaps rivaled only by the dialogue as the literary form best suited to provide the reader with intimate knowledge of the inner moral being of the narrator. (Rousseau combines these two forms in his second major autobiography, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*.) While *Robinson Crusoe* is generally regarded as the first instance in the history of fiction in which a hero's daily mental and moral life is fully exposed to the reader, Rousseau's *Confessions*, in its unprecedented achievement of moral and sentimental self-exposure, stands as one of the decisive cultural events of the modern epoch.

The rise of individualism, increasingly significant in Western Europe from the late sixteenth century onwards, contributed to both the success of the novel form, with its frequent early guise as autobiographical memoir, and the heightened

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value placed on sincerity. The autobiographical form allows the individual to reveal his or her own self—"that private and uniquely interesting individuality."⁸ In the case of *Robinson Crusoe* the narrator's experiences are "uniquely interesting": his responses and personality are not particularly strange or unknown to us. As Coleridge perceived, Robinson is "the universal representative, the person for whom every reader could substitute himself ... nothing is done, thought, suffered, or desired, but what every man can imagine himself doing, thinking, feeling, or wishing for."⁹ Rousseau justifies his own autobiographical impulse by claiming he is both unique and representative: he argues that he is the only one in his generation who retains *true* human nature. Like Crusoe, Rousseau engages in moral self-examination. But the Genevan seems more concerned to expose his own shameful acts and, at the same time, to excuse his actions based on the avowed innocence of his intentions. In Rousseau the French and English conceptions of sincerity, drawn into a fascinating though too sweeping distinction by Lionel Trilling, are seen combined for the first time. Trilling's distinction also separates Crusoe from Rousseau:

In French literature sincerity consists in telling the truth about oneself to oneself and to others; by truth is meant a recognition of such of one's own traits or actions as are morally or socially discreditable and, in conventional course, concealed. English sincerity does not demand this confrontation of what is base or shameful in oneself. The English ask of the sincere man that he communicate without deceiving or misleading. Beyond this what is required is only a single-minded commitment to whatever dutiful enterprise he may have in hand. Not to know oneself in the French fashion and make public what one knows, but to be oneself, in action, in deeds; what Matthew Arnold called 'tasks'—this is what the English sincerity consists in.¹⁰

While Crusoe's commitment to his tasks is often construed as exemplary, Rousseau's admission of wrong-doing is meant as an even more profound moral lesson.

The Protestant introspective habit undergoes secularization in both Defoe's fiction and Rousseau's autobiographies, though the form of secularization varies. Among recent critics, Ian Watt especially stresses the secularization of Defoe's outlook, while scholars such as George Starr and J. Paul Hunter dispute this reading, emphasizing instead Crusoe's spiritual reflections and the importance of Defoe's religious background.¹¹ Rousseau, for his part, remains remarkably silent concerning the religious side of the tale: he draws no attention to the fact that Crusoe turns to God and in his isolation experiences a conversion. Moreover,

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in contrast to works such as Augustine's *Confessions*, both Defoe and Rousseau primarily address the reader, not God, in their narratives. Rousseau's autobiographies are almost devoid of orthodox turning to God, though his *Confessions* retains a moral intent: namely, to spur the reader to engage in his or her *own* moral self-examination and improvement.

In its attention to detail and chronological ordering, *Robinson Crusoe* is more like Rousseau's *Confessions* than his *Reveries*.¹² The *Reveries* is more stylized, concentrating on fewer moods and events. Yet, as its full title suggests, the *Reveries* is mainly about solitude (and thus invites comparison with *Crusoe*). For both Defoe and Rousseau, solitude has important spiritual value, though the two authors differ on the nature of that value. *Crusoe* comes to value his solitude because it leads him to read the Bible, turn to God and be thankful to Providence. At first he deplors his island existence and though he later takes some enjoyment in it his presence there is always involuntary: he always wants to escape his solitude and the island itself.

The main benefit Rousseau derives from solitude is not religious. Rather, in solitude Rousseau can experience the almost perfect happiness of reverie, a happiness that does not derive from virtue nor depend at all on God—either contemplation of God, God's grace, or future rewards granted by God in an afterlife. Rousseau offers a description of his reverie on the island of Saint Pierre:

When the evening approached, I descended from the summits of the island, and I went gladly to sit down on the border of the lake, on the shore, in some hidden nook: there, the sound of the waves and the agitation of the water, fixing my senses and driving every other agitation from my soul, plunged it into a delicious reverie, where the night often surprised me without my having perceived it. The flux and reflux of this water, its continual sound, swelling at intervals, struck ceaselessly my ears and eyes, responding to the internal movements which the reverie extinguished in me, and sufficed to make me feel my existence with pleasure, without taking the trouble to think. From time to time was born some weak and brief reflection on the instability of earthly things, of which the brief reflection on the instability of earthly things, of which the surface of the water offered me the image; but soon these light impressions effaced themselves in the uniformity of continuous movement which rocked me, and which, without any active help from my soul, did not fail to attach me to such an extent that when summoned by the hour and the signal agreed upon, I could not tear away without an effort.¹³

With the rhythms and breaks of this prose—"musical and yet analytical"¹⁴—Rousseau recreates the atmosphere of reverie. The sight of the water moving

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back and forth and the continual sound of the waves fix his senses and plunge his soul into reverie. The object of the reverie is simultaneously the water and the self (*le moi*). There is a progression from the use of the senses of sight and sound to their effacement by, or absorption in, the sense of tactilely uniform, continuous, gentle movement. The water grows increasingly indistinct and limitless as the night falls. The self spreads outward and seems to merge with the totality of existence. The exterior movement of the water harmonizes with and replaces the agitation within Rousseau's soul. His mind is at rest, he does not think. With his faculties in this passive state, Rousseau is better able to feel his existence.

At the heart of this experience, and the real source of happiness, is the feeling Rousseau terms "the sentiment of existence":

What is the nature of one's enjoyment in such a situation? Nothing external to oneself, nothing except oneself and one's own existence; so long as this state lasts, one suffices to oneself, like God. The sentiment of existence, stripped of all other affection, is in itself a precious sentiment of contentment and of peace, which suffices alone to render this existence dear and sweet to whoever knows how to remove from himself all the sensual and terrestrial impressions which come unceasingly to distract us, and to trouble the sweetness here below.¹⁵

To feel that one exists—that one is alive—brings happiness.

Throughout his writings, Rousseau stresses the value of spiritual self-sufficiency of various types, but the particular happiness of the sentiment of existence—despite its apparent simplicity—is, in his view, a rare experience. Rousseau suggests that this sentiment is available only to "natural man" living in solitude—himself as *le promeneur solitaire* and the primitive described in his *Second Discourse*.¹⁶ Rousseau discounts the happiness of reverie as a political good because reverie requires "a delicious idleness" (*farniente*). While the solitary walker is "devoted to idleness" (*oisiveté*) and the primitive of the *Second Discourse* "breathes only repose and freedom...wants only to live and remain idle," most humans must work.¹⁷ Contrasting the primitive with social man, Rousseau comments that the latter is "always active, agitates himself, torments himself incessantly in order to seek still more laborious occupations."¹⁸ At the same time, Rousseau makes the judgment that, under present conditions, it is better that most men not abandon work for reverie:

But the greater part of men, agitated by continual passions, know little of this state, and having tasted it only imperfectly for a few instants, do not retain anything but an obscure and

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confused idea, which does not permit them to feel the charm. It would not even be good in the present state of affairs, that avid of these sweet ecstasies, they should be disgusted with the active life, of which their needs, always being reborn, prescribe to them the duty.¹⁹

For Rousseau, the good citizen must work; the only blameless idler is one living apart from society. Reverie is left out of his prescriptions for remodeling society.

Despite Rousseau's autobiographical identification with Robinson, Crusoe experiences nothing like reverie and the sentiment of existence. On the contrary, Robinson is more like Rousseau's social man—continually laboring. Likewise, the two differ in the way they experience time. Rousseau tosses away his watch and feels the sentiment of existence as an "eternal present," without past or future. Crusoe, thinking so much about time and yearning to keep it accurately, is more like Rousseau's social man, a creature anxious about time, full of regrets about the past and hopes for the future.²⁰

Rousseau and Robinson's attitudes also differ in writing and reflection. Often absorbed, Robinson is diligent in keeping his journal, the ultimate bookkeeper who dreads running out of ink. On the other hand, Rousseau stresses that reverie can only occur when the mind is devoid of intellectual activity. He claims that reflection was painful for him and that one of his greatest joys on the island of Saint Pierre was to leave his books packed and do without a writing desk. Poor Robinson, in contrast, expends "infinite labor" to make himself a table so that he may write with more pleasure.

Reverie also requires an absence of painful ideas: "It is necessary that the heart should be at peace and that no passion should come to trouble the calm."²¹ Rousseau elaborates in the fifth Promenade:

But if there is a state where the soul finds a position sufficiently solid to repose thereon, and to gather together all its being, without having need for recalling the past, no—to climb on into the future; where time counts for nothing, where the present lasts forever, without marking its duration in any way, and without any trace of succession, without any other sentiment of privation, neither of enjoyment, of pleasure nor pain, of desire nor of fear, than this alone of our existence, and which this feeling alone can fill entirely: so long as this state lasts, he who finds it may be called happy, not with an imperfect happiness, poor and relative, such as that which one finds in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficing happiness, perfect and full, which does not leave in the soul any void which it feels the need of filling.²²

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In these claims about the sentiment of existence during reverie, Rousseau denies Hobbes' assertion that humans are *always* dominated by feelings of privation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear. Hobbes gives the following definition of happiness or, as he calls it, "felicity" in the *Leviathan*:

Continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continuall prospering, is that men call FELICITY; I mean the Felicity of this life. For there is no such thing as perpetuall Tranquility of mind, while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Morion, and can never be without Desire nor without Feare, no more than without Sense.²³

For Hobbes, perfect happiness is impossible because humans can never attain a state of contentment where nothing more would be desired. Hobbes also claims that one of the most important characteristics of human beings is fear of (violent) death. This is the primary fear and "the passion to be reckoned upon" for getting human beings to leave the state of nature and join civil society.

In his experience of full contentment from the sentiment of existence and in his lack of fear of death, Rousseau's self-portrait as *le promeneur solitaire* repudiates Hobbes' claims about human nature. On the other hand, Defoe's Crusoe closely approximates Hobbesian man. Crusoe's felicity consists in "continual prospering"; he is continually *restless*; deeply motivated by fear of death, he labors enormously to assure his defense against other men. Rousseau's omission of these Hobbesian aspects of Crusoe is an expression of his personal view of the Defoe character.

Related to these differences and equally significant is the divergence in the attitudes of Robinson and Rousseau toward nature. Reverie may be possible even in the Bastille, but the ideal environment is a lush and solitary island. The perfect setting, in other words, would be an island like that of Crusoe, as Rousseau explicitly suggests when describing his experience on the island of Saint Pierre in the *Confessions*.²⁴ But, while proximity to nature encourages reverie, one must possess enough sensitivity to appreciate nature's beauty. Not for instruction, but to amuse himself, Rousseau takes up botany on the island of Saint Pierre where his room is filled with flowers and seeds instead of papers and books. The expansive character of Rousseau's inclinations leads him to immerse himself in nature and identify with 'the whole of nature.' Yet, in his view, most men are unable to experience the same sweet sensations as he did because of their habit of seeking ingredients for medicines in nature: "No one will go seeking garlands for shepherdesses among herbs for enemas."²⁵ The philosopher (Theophrastus in the ancient world; Rousseau in the modern one) botanizes for a different reason: simply to enjoy the act of observation itself. In more general terms, Rousseau

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attacks the tendency to reduce everything to material interest.

Crusoe's attitude toward nature is not at all aesthetic but, instead, entirely utilitarian:

Defoe's "nature" appeals not for adoration but for exploitation ... Crusoe observes nature... with the calculating gaze of a colonial capitalist; wherever he looks he sees acres that cry out for improvement, and as he settles down to the task he glows, not with noble savagery, but with purposive possession.²⁶

Thus, Crusoe uses his art and labor to domesticate and reorder his island. Crops are grown, goats and fowl tamed, enclosures built, trees felled: the island is mastered, not lauded for its beauty. Crusoe wants to impose man-made order to urbanize his countryside; Rousseau seeks to accommodate himself to the natural harmony of his idyll.

Robinson Crusoe and Emile

After complaining that he hates books because they "only teach one to talk about what one does not know," Emile's tutor announces that Emile will read *Robinson Crusoe*. Emile is to read this novel at about fourteen; it will be his first reading and, for a long time, his entire library. Emile is even "to think he is Robinson himself, to see himself dressed in skins, wearing a large cap, carrying a large saber and all the rest of the character's grotesque equipment."²⁷

Why should Emile study and even impersonate Robinson Crusoe? One lesson Emile is to learn from the novel is a kind of psychological independence. Emile is raised to be a "natural man" and "natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind."²⁸ Rousseau thinks, in contrast, that most humans are *slaves* to the opinions of others and even the good citizen is only a fractional unity whose value is determined by his relation to the social body. Emile, a natural man destined to live in a corrupt society, is to learn to resist the yoke—the poison—of opinion. Commenting on the value of *Robinson Crusoe*, Emile's tutor advises:

the surest means of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one's judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge everything as this man himself ought to judge it with respect to his own utility.²⁹

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Emile is to learn to escape the influence of *amour-propre*, of vanity. He is to be continually concerned with the utility or use-value of objects, not their exchange-value. Moreover from studying Robinson he is to learn to be practical, ingenious, and to have foresight.

The story of Robinson will also help Emile to gain a kind of economic independence. Unlike the solitary walker, Emile will live in society and so must work. Emile's tutor instructs:

Outside of society isolated man, owing nothing to anyone, has a right to live as he pleases. But in society, where he necessarily lives at the expense of others, he owes them the price of his keep in work....To work is therefore an indispensable duty for social man.³⁰

To avoid snobbery and to gain economic security, Emile will follow Crusoe in choosing manual labor as his occupation. With Crusoe as a model, Emile will become "laborious, temperate, patient, firm, and full of courage."³¹

Emile is also to imitate Crusoe in learning to do a variety of complex tasks from beginning to end. Part of what made the novel so fascinating to eighteenth-century readers, and has ensured its popularity since, is the way Crusoe—when making his bread, his candles, his pottery, his cheese and all his possessions—escapes the division of labor, a dominant characteristic of production by Defoe's day.³² Emile's tutor associates the division of labor with the introduction of luxury and directs the reader of *Emile* to study the *Second Discourse* to understand the consequences of division of labor. There we read that as long as humans

applied themselves only to tasks that a single person could do and to arts that did not require the cooperation of several hands, they lived free, healthy, good, and happy insofar as they could be according to their nature, and they continued to enjoy among themselves the sweetness of independent intercourse. But from the moment one man needed the help of another, as soon as they observed that it was useful for a single person to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary; and vast forests were changed into smiling fields which had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow with the crops.³³

Rousseau's analysis thus prefigures that of Marx and contrasts sharply with the oft-celebrated pinmakers of Adam Smith.³⁴

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Emile's tutor criticizes those occupations that require humans to act like "automatons" or like a "machine." He claims that the most general and indispensable arts ought to be the most esteemed; he judges agriculture the noblest, ironworking second in rank, and woodworking third. He exclaims, "what important reflections on this point our Emile will draw from Robinson Crusoe!" and counsels Emile to learn a variety of manual trades and to specialize in carpentry.³⁵

In Book Three of *Emile*—where *Crusoe* is lauded—the tutor comments at length on the economic and social changes occurring in eighteenth-century France. While it is correct to speak generally of *Emile* as an "anti-bourgeois" work, it is useful to distinguish between the different strata of the bourgeoisie of that period. Rousseau's position opposed that of the more capitalistically oriented *marchands-fabricants* and many of Rousseau's ideas—"his hatred of luxury, his attack on finance, his concern with morality, his fear of economic development, his criticisms of despotic government and aristocracy"—supported the values of the old craftsmen as well as the rentiers in the larger cities of France.³⁶ As Lionel Gossman points out,

the differences within the bourgeoisie between the more capitalistically minded *maîtres-marchands* or *marchands-fabricants* and their traditionally oriented brethren with their emphasis on the immediate relation of supply and demand, of producer and client, found an early expression in the conflict within the Enlightenment between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the main army of the philosophies.³⁷

It is paradoxical that Rousseau employs *Robinson Crusoe* in his attack on commercialism and nascent capitalism since Robinson in some ways epitomizes capitalism and his story has become a significant myth supporting capitalist culture. Rousseau is able to use the story for his own purposes in part because Emile reads an abridged version of the novel, "disencumbered of all its rigmarole, beginning with Robinson's shipwreck near his island and ending with the arrival of the ship which comes to take him from it."³⁸

With this abridgement, Crusoe's treatment of Xury and much of the information on Crusoe's acceptance and willingness to profit from slavery and the slave trade is excised. Apparently left in is Crusoe's relationship with Friday, but perhaps Emile's tutor would stress the educability, if not natural goodness, of Friday rather than his slave-like status.³⁹ A more important aim of this abridgement is to buttress Rousseau's argument on the need to limit desires. In Rousseau's perspective, curtailing desire is crucial both to psychological and economic independence; it is thus a key lesson for Emile to learn. Rousseau is decisively influenced by Plato in his formulation of this issue and when he says of

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Emile "all our delicate relishes do not please him,"⁴⁰ he repudiates arguments in favor of luxury made by his near contemporaries like Mandeville and Montesquieu as well as Glaucon's call for relish in Book Two of Plato's *Republic*. Socrates' best regime is born out of the reform of that second city—the feverish city of luxury and imperialist war—and the reform is based on educating the soul to limit desires. So too, Emile's soul must be educated.⁴¹

Near the beginning of Book Three of *Emile*, Rousseau asserts that human weakness comes from the inequality between our strength and our desires. He continues, "it is our passions that make us weak, because to satisfy them we would need more strength than nature gives us. Therefore, diminish desires, and you will increase strength."⁴² Rousseau sees the period just prior to puberty as unique because it is then that strength outweighs desire.⁴³ Emile at this age will be "self-sufficient," not tormented by imaginary needs, and unaffected by opinion.

But how can Crusoe provide an object lesson for Emile when "Defoe rejoices in worldly comfort"⁴⁴ and Robinson is always after more material comforts? While Crusoe himself is anxious to overcome the Lockean 'spoilage' and 'labor' limitations on accumulation of private property, he cannot so long as he is alone on his island. So it is during the period when money is useless to Crusoe and when there is no one else to labor for him that Emile will study the fellow. Crusoe comes to recognize that on his island:

I had nothing to covet; for I had all that I was capable of enjoying....I had no Competitor...I might have rais'd Ship Loadings of Corn; but I had no use for it; so I let as little grow as I thought enough for my Occasion. I had Tortoise and Turtles enough; but now and then one, was as much as I could put to any use. I had Timber enough to have built a Fleet of Ships....But all I could make use of was, All that was valuable. I had enough to eat, and to supply my Wants, and, what was all the rest to me? If I kill'd more Flesh than I could eat, the Dog must eat it, or the Vermin. If I sow'd more Corn than I could eat, it must be spoil'd. The Trees that I cut down, were lying to rot on the Ground. I could make no more use of them than for Fewel; and that I had no Occasion for, but to dress my Food. In a Word, The Nature and Experience of Things dictated to me upon just Reflection, That all the good Things of this World, are no farther good to us, than they are for our Use; and that whatever we may heap up indeed to give others, we enjoy just as much as we can use, and no more. The most covetous griping Miser in the World would have been cur'd of the Vice of Covetousness, if he had been in my Case; for I possess'd infinitely more than I knew what to do with.⁴⁵

Yet Robinson's moderation is not a quality of his soul, only of his circumstances.

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He relates that he "had no room for Desire, except it was of Things which I had not, and they were but Trifles, though indeed of Use to me."⁴⁶ He still wants more, though his desire is temporarily circumscribed by utility. Emile will not witness the utter relentlessness and true heights of Crusoe's ambition for wealth, but instead he will focus on Crusoe's patient island labors as farmer, shepherd and carpenter. Emile will be attentive to Crusoe's speeches about the uselessness of money on the island, and not read that Crusoe's greatest thrill—his heart flutters, he grows pale, sick and almost dies on the spot with joy—is when he learns he is rich in pounds sterling!⁴⁷

Emile's soul is educated to moderation; he is taught to prefer the simple and condemn luxury. He will not be idle like the solitary walker but, since his desires will remain limited, neither will be labor endlessly like most humans. Likewise Emile's concept of time is neither the eternal present of reverie nor the anxious concern with past and future experienced by Crusoe and most humans in society. Instead, Emile "enjoys time without being its slave....the calm of passions, which makes the passage of time always uniform, takes the place for him of an instrument for measuring it at need."⁴⁸

Finally, there is an important relation between Crusoe and Emile in their attitudes towards science and its practical applications. The Ancients, broadly speaking, counseled both human moderation and accommodation with nature. The modern tradition, running from Francis Bacon through Marx and dominating our world, calls instead for a new science to be developed to *conquer* nature. With the power of science, an abundance of goods will be produced to meet all human desires. Politics becomes a problem of distribution, not educating to moderation. To the Moderns, then, science undermined Socrates' argument on the need to limit desires.

Crusoe accepts this modern outlook: he is willing to use all the technology he can muster to exploit his island as well as control others. But Rousseau, while respectful toward science of the first rank, is deeply suspicious of its use and consequences in modern society. He wants Emile to use science to become independent, not dependent.

Like Crusoe, Emile will learn by experience and avoid an overly deferential attitude toward scientific authority: "forced to learn by himself, he uses his reason and not another's; for to give nothing to opinion, one must give nothing to authority, and most of our errors come to us far less from ourselves than from others."⁴⁹ The tutor adds that his object is not to give Emile science but "to teach him to acquire science when needed, to make him estimate it for exactly what it is worth."⁵⁰

Rousseau illustrates a further lesson—unknown to Crusoe—with the remarkable tale of how Emile exploits his new knowledge of magnets to ridicule a showman at a local fair, only to be humiliated in turn by the more canny performer. Rousseau uses the magnet anecdote to teach that knowledge of nature and science must not be used to dominate others, nor as a source of pride or vainglory. Just as a deferential attitude toward scientific authority carries dangers, so too, does the use of technological authority to gain dominion over others.

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Conclusion

Studying Rousseau's praise of Robinson Crusoe provides a critical perspective on modern culture and economy. Rousseau—both a political theorist and the author of the best-selling novel of his day—recognizes the mythic power of Defoe's tale. Rousseau creates two somewhat different images of Crusoe, one for himself and one for Emile, and thereby reveals a division in his own thought between a more passive side that delights in nature's beauty and a more active, social and political side. (A related dichotomy continues in the next century, represented on one side by Thoreau and on the other by Marx.) Rousseau's apparent attempt to transform the economic individualism of Defoe's hero is brilliant but, in the long run, a failure: Emile's moderate, anti-capitalist Crusoe has not displaced Defoe's character as culture hero. On the contrary, the modern imagination remains drawn to Crusoe as the relentless developer who reorders nature with an eye to profit, not beauty.

Rousseau never brings together his two Crusoes, but he provides a prophetic hint of their fate in the Seventh Promenade. There Rousseau describes how he interrupted a mountain hike to investigate an odd clicking noise: he crawls through the brush only to discover a stocking factory hidden in what he took to be remote wilderness. Rousseau remarks, "But, after all, who would ever have expected to find a mill in a ravine? In the whole world, only Switzerland presents this mixture of wild nature and human industry."⁵¹ This vision prefigures the image of the machine in the wilderness that will come to dominate North America in the next century. Rousseau, not deluded by a static view of history, shares none of the buoyant optimism that overtakes nineteenth-century America—when some held that gazing upon the *mechanized* landscape would induce an ideal state of mind.⁵² The arguments on moderation and science in *Emile* have not prevailed. Little wilderness remains. The loss, from a Rousseau-like perspective, is to be measured perhaps not so much in the fewer haunts for reverie—which, after all, Rousseau claimed could be accomplished even in prison—but instead in the diminished quality of the soul of Everyman.

Rousseau's economic plan appears radical and simple: he argues against the division of labor and applauds farming.⁵³ This vision has been generally discounted as undeveloped and unrealistic. One critic, for example, speaks of "the petit-bourgeois nature of Rousseau's solution" and censures Rousseau for failing to describe the material basis of the new society of the *Social Contract*. In this perspective, Rousseau's "plan for the political regeneration of man involves a regressive movement of his economic and material being, which *in fact* seems as impossible as a return to the pre-social, pre-moral state of nature."⁵⁴ Similarly, compared with a rigorous Marxist analysis of *Crusoe*, Rousseau's treatment may seem to further obscure the significance of the labor of others in Defoe's story.⁵⁵ But this is not because Rousseau supports antagonistic social and economic

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relations; rather, the differences arise because Rousseau emphasises a positive model of *Crusoe* and thus largely removes these relations from Defoe's tale instead of directly attacking them. Neither Marxists, who have drawn inspiration from Rousseau's attack on inequality, nor liberals, who have applauded his call for individual producers, have heeded Rousseau's basic teaching that society cannot attain both material wealth and liberty. Rousseau's call for moderation of wants and economic self-sufficiency in the name of liberty and happiness merits re-examination.

Perhaps partly because of its reinforcement of dominant economic values, Defoe's *Crusoe* has been shunted to the children's library. Originally written for an adult audience, *Robinson Crusoe* is one of a number of classics, including *Gulliver's Travels* and *Moby Dick*, now widely read by children as well as adults. Rousseau not only recognizes *Crusoe's* potential appeal to young readers, he is attentive to the social power of literature and the ability of fictional heroes to inspire identification and imitation in youthful readers. Echoing Plato's *Republic*, Rousseau argues in the *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* that the good society requires censorship. He explores an alternative strategy for an already corrupt world by writing not only political treatises like the *Social Contract* but also popular fiction designed to have broad and beneficial moral influence (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*), as well as recasting popular literature such as *Crusoe* to encourage more desirable social values.

Defoe's *Crusoe* has remained remarkably popular. Even if Rousseau had written his full-length version of *Robinson Crusoe*, one suspects that it would not have displaced Defoe's as a popular myth. The heart of the explanation lies beyond the merits or failings of Rousseau's prose; it is to be found instead in the enormity of the task Rousseau attempted: to turn his audience away from Hobbesian acquisitive values and the lure of power held out by that modern-day ring of Gyges, science and technology.

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Notes

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1. *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R.A. Leigh, Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, and Oxfordshire: Voltaire Foundation, 1965-, Vol. 15, letters 2544, 2556; Vol. 16, letter 2782; Vol. 17, letter 2897; Vol. 19, letters 3114, 3187.
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvre Complètes*, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, Paris Pléiade, 1959-, IV, 454. This edition hereafter cited as *O.C.* On the influence of the *Emile* praise of *Crusoe*, see Joseph text, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature*,

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- trans. J.W. Matthews, New York: Macmillan, 1899, pp. 127-128 and William-Edward Mann, *Robinson Crusoe en France*, Paris: A. Davy, 1916.
3. *Du Contract Social*, O.C., III, 354; *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, O.C., II, 413, 471.
 4. Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen, Baltimore: Penguin, 1954, pp. 47-48; O.C. I, 39-41. Cf. Georges Pire, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Robinson Crusoe," *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, XXX (1956), 493-95.
 5. *Confessions*, O.C., I, 296.
 6. *Deuxième Dialogue*, O.C., I, 812, 826.
 7. *Rêveries*, O.C., I, 1015, 1048, 1040, 1071.
 8. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 25.
 9. Quoted in Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Berkeley: University of California, 1957, p. 78.
 10. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, pp. 57ff.
 11. Watt depicts Robinson Crusoe as *homo economicus* in "Robinson Crusoe as a Myth," in Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel, New York: W.W. Norton, 1975, pp. 311-32; and in *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 60-92. On the spiritual side of the tale, see esp. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, pp. 74-125; Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966; and William H. Halewood, "Religion and Invention in *Robinson Crusoe*," *Essays in Criticism*, XIV (October 1964), 339-51.
 12. Crusoe's arithmetic is often flawed when he reports dates, and strict factual accuracy is not a primary aim of Rousseau's *Confessions*.
 13. *The Reveries of a Solitary*, trans. John Gould Fletcher, New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; reprint of 1927 ed., pp. 110-11; O.C., I, 1045. I have made a few improvements in the quotations from the Fletcher translation.
 14. Marcel Raymond, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Quête de Soi et La Rêverie*, Paris: José Corti, 1962, pp. 146-47.
 15. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., pp. 113-14; O.C., I, 1047.
 16. *Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité*, O.C., III, 144.
 17. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., p. 106; O.C., I, 1042. *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Roger D. and Judith R. Masters, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964, p. 179; O.C., III, 192.
 18. *Second Discourse*, Masters trans., p. 179; O.C., III, 192.
 19. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., p. 114; O.C., I, 1047.
 20. *Rêveries*, O.C., I, 1014. Cf. E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,"

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Past and Present, No. 38 (December 1967), pp. 56-97.

21. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., p. 114; *O.C.*, I, 1047.
22. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., p. 113; *O.C.*, I, 1046.
23. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson, Baltimore: Penguin, 1968, pp. 129-30. (Admittedly, Rousseau's happiness is not "perpetual.") See also the beginning of chap. 11 of *Leviathan*.
24. *Rêveries*, *O.C.*, I, 1047-1048; *Confessions*, *O.C.*, I, 644. Cf. Rousseau's letter to M. de Malesherbes of Jan. 4, 1762; *Confessions*, *O.C.*, I, 171-73; and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Part IV, Letter XI.
25. *Rêveries*, Fletcher trans., p. 141; *O.C.*, I, 1064.
26. Watt, "Robinson Crusoe as a Myth," p. 316.
27. *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom, New York: Basic Books, 1979, pp. 184-85; *O.C.*, IV, 454-55.
28. *Emile*, Bloom trans., pp. 39-40; *O.C.*, IV, 249.
29. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 185; *O.C.*, IV, 455.
30. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 195; *O.C.*, IV, 470.
31. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 208; *O.C.*, IV, 487.
32. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 71-73; "Robinson Crusoe as a Myth", pp. 317-319.
33. *Second Discourse*, Masters ed., pp. 151-52; *O.C.*, III, 171.
34. While Smith himself applauds the division of labor in Book I of *The Wealth of Nations*, he castigates it in Book V.
35. *Emile*, Bloom trans., pp. 201, 188; *O.C.*, IV, 477, 460, 478.
36. Lionel Gossman, *French Society and Culture: Background for 18th Century Literature*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 28-29
37. *Ibid.*, p. 26. Cf. the economic autarchy of Clarens in *Nouvelle Héloïse* where utility counts for all, money is rarely employed and instead there is an advanced system of barter.
38. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 185; *O.C.*, IV, 455.
39. This announced abridgement of *Crusoe* would probably be extended to remove the sections on cannibalism. If left, the cannibalism at least would be interpreted differently by Emile's tutor than by Montaigne in 'Of Custom,' an essay condemned in Book Four of *Emile* for the way it cites bizarre practices—including cannibalism—to disprove the existence of 'inner conscience' as a universal moral faculty.

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40. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 191; *O.C.*, IV, 465.
 41. Indeed, the problem of expansion of needs is more severe for Rousseau than Plato since the Genevan accepts the historicity of human needs, a view later adopted by Marx. See *Second Discourse*, Masters ed., p. 147.
 42. *Emile*, *O.C.*, IV, 426.
 43. Like Plato, Rousseau views sexual desire as one of the most important and yet difficult passions to control. Since the tutor seeks to postpone the development of Emile's puberty, Crusoe's peculiar asexuality is convenient.
 44. Gordon Vichert, "The Theory of Conspicuous Consumption in the 18th Century," in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Peter Hughes and David Williams, Toronto: A.M. Hakkert, 1971, p. 260.
 45. *Robinson Crusoe*, Norton ed., pp. 101-02.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
 48. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 187; *O.C.*, IV, 459.
 49. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 207; *O.C.*, IV, 486.
 50. *Emile*, Bloom trans., p. 207; *O.C.*, IV, 487.
 51. *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth New York: New York University Press, 1979, pp. 101; *O.C.*, I, 1071-72.
 52. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, see esp. chap. IV.
 53. See Henri Grange, "Rousseau et la division du travail," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* (April-June 1957), pp. 143-55.
 54. Lionel Gossman, "Rousseau's Idealism," *Romantic Review*, LII, 3 (October 1961), pp. 173-82.
 55. See Stephen Hymer, "Robinson Crusoe and the Secret of Primitive Accumulation," *Monthly Review*, XXIII, 4 (September 1971), pp. 11-36.
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