

SEVERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PEDAGOGY OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

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According to Rousseau education has two underlying principles: the first claims that man is not a means but an end and the second principle aims at rediscovering the natural man.

Rousseau wants to form a complete human being who is not trained for a specific type of society. Education should therefore allow and favorise the formation of the human being in itself, as he is in its most profound nature. According to his principles three types of education emerge from Rousseau's texts:

- a. Education which comes from nature (targets the development of faculties and organs);
- b. Education which comes from people (which enables the use of this development);
- c. Education which comes from people (or the personal experience concerning objects via their observation and manipulation).

These principles come in contradiction with the society and culture of Rousseau's time which he perceived as corrupted. Man must return to nature which remained pure. Hence the idea that education must not impose a culture which may not be natural. The child must develop freely without barriers to its development. This means that education must follow the child's natural development (at intellectual, moral and emotional level).

There are three laws which govern Rousseau's pedagogical system:

1. Nature has established the necessary laws for the child's development. The teacher must observe the course of the child's mental evolution.
2. The exercise of the function develops and prepares the eclosion of subsequent

functions. The teacher must let the function act according to its own way; he can guide it, control it, but must not crush it with premature bookish and theoretical arguments.

3. The natural action is the one that tends to satisfy the interest or the need of the moment. The teacher should encourage the pupil to learn, according to the subjects that interest him.

The educational consequences of Rousseau's pedagogical principles and laws.

The child is taken as a model: his knowledge and development stages are indispensable for the one who wants to take care of his education.

The child's nature is different from that of the adult. Rousseau encourages this way the birth of modern pedagogy. The child's observation is of paramount importance as it is done in order to understand him as he is, and this based on objective criteria. He defines 5 different natural stages of the child:

1. The age of needs (infant stage 0-2 years);
2. The age of developing desires and senses (childhood age, 2-12 years);
3. The age of common sense or the age of reason (intermediate stage, 12-15 years);
4. The age of feelings (adolescence, 15-20 years);
5. The age of marriage, of the working life, of parenthood of exercising citizen's rights (adulthood, after the age of 20).

Education must observe these stages.

The active child is responsible for his own education. The goal of Rousseau's education is to form a free human being. This goal enables the child's free natural development so that he can become himself.

Rousseau emits the theory of negative education. He says that the teacher is there in order to sustain the pupil's curiosity, thus guiding him towards the explanations of his questions, without giving him the answer. The teacher chooses the content of his lessons and the right moment to teach it. The child must construct his own experiences in order to continue feeding his curiosity.

For Rousseau, the ideal education will take the form of tutoring. (A tutor for the pupil for the entire period of his education)

Rousseau's ideas are well ahead of his time. They can be seen, many of them, as good summary of the present age. Actually the idea of the same type of education without targeting a certain specialization is that of primary school. Nowadays, following his schooling, as the child grows, the more we put the stress on a specialized education (depending on his skills, of his educational choices etc.).

The concept of stages of development is innovative for Rousseau's time (let us not forget that *Emile* was banned and burnt in the public marketplace mainly due to the Savoyard vicar's confession, but also due to its being ahead of his time). Later on time has shown that childhood covers several development stages (cf. Piaget). We can see in the process of teaching that certain jokes or word-plays do not disappear until a certain age.

The child must be considered as a being in itself. Nowadays, a teacher cannot do his job without being aware of what he is doing.

The negative education as it is described by Rousseau is a good teaching method, but we shouldn't resume ourselves only to it; we must vary the approaches so that the pupils do not get bored.

The concept of the active child is interesting, but it is up to the teacher to create this type of activity for certain children.

I am completely against Rousseau's idea of tutoring. This is an elitist practice and therefore impractical and inapplicable at a larger scale, both in Rousseau's time and ours. Two major problems arise from this: the lack of financial means of the vast majority of people, and the lack of teachers. If we'd have to have a teacher per pupil, or even per, we would find ourselves in state of profound crisis as many children would be completely abandoned from the educational point of view.

Moreover, is it appropriate to leave a child alone in the process of learning, and thus desocialize him?

References

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