

Rousseau and the Image of “Modern Education”)*

“Nous réservons notre indulgence pour les parfaits”
(Vauvenargues)

In 1939 JEAN PIAGET, then director of the *International Bureau of Education* in Geneva, published the two key articles for the Volume 15 “Education and Instruction” of the *Encyclopédie Française*¹. It was the first time that “education” was given a volume of its own within the *Encyclopédie*, and it was the first time that “new education” was documented so prominently as a force of modernization in the leading French encyclopedia. The spokesman was PIAGET, who in fact, what is little known, was the central figure for the development of *éducation nouvelle* between the wars in the French speaking world². Later PIAGET became somewhat reserved about “education”, but before World War II he was an integral part of the scene of educational reformers. Geneva, especially the *Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, was the leading research centre, at the same time it was the centre for international communication on “new education” with far reaching contacts throughout the world³.

The Institute was founded in 1912, on the occasion of ROUSSEAU’S 200th birthday. It was not the first and not the only research center for “new education” in Europe, London’s Institute of Education, the Berlin “Zentralinstitut” or OVIDE DECROLY’S Institute at the University of Bruxelles were similar foundings all intended to give empirical evidence for the intuitions of “modern education”⁴. *Modern* education in these circles was *child-centered* education, PIAGET concluded the second of his articles for the *Encyclopédie Française* concerning “new methods” of education with the remarkable words: “L’unité des ces techniques, c’est l’enfant” (PIAGET 1939a, p. 15’28, 13). What is called “méthodes nouvelles” had *predecessors*, especially and substantially ROUSSEAU, who gave, according to PIAGET, the key *intuitions* for modern education⁵ without, of course, being able to refer to the laws of develop-

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¹ Written in 1935 the two articles were published in Summer 1939. *Directeur général* of the *Encyclopédie Française* was LUCIEN FEBVRE, who wrote an “Avant-propos” for Volume XV. This volume was edited by CLAUDE BOUGLÉ then Director of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*.

² Since 1921 PIAGET worked at the *Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau* in Geneva. 1932 he became Co-Director of the Institute that was reformed for teacher-training under PIAGET the following years. Since 1929 PIAGET served as director of the *Bureau Internationale de l’Education* in Geneva. Both, the *Institut* and the *Bureau*, were pillars for “new education” in France and the French speaking world. PIAGET published widely on topics of new education, he was part of the *New Education Fellowship* and he shared the social optimism of that reform movement (see PIAGET 1933 and similar titles; cf. OELKERS 1996)

³ The special spirit of psychological research and educational reform in Geneva is described by PIAGET (1942, 1944).

⁴ OVIDE DECROLY was elected in 1921 for a chair *médico-pédagogique* in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Bruxelles. Since 1901 DECROLY led a private Institute for experimental research in education, 1907 he founded *l’Ecole de l’Ermitage*, an experimental School in Bruxelles. The *Zentralinstitut für Erziehung und Unterricht* in Berlin was founded in 1915. University of London’s *Institute of Education* (former “London Day Training College”) developed as a center for educational reform under the directorship of PERCY NUNN (1922-1936).

⁵ “Sans doute ROUSSEAU a-t-il entrevu que ,chaque âge a ses ressorts’, que ,l’enfant a des manières de voir, de penser et de sentir qui lui sont propre’; sans doute a-t-il éloquentement démontré qu’on n’apprend rien, sinon

ment in PIAGET'S own psychology of education. The ideal of the "active child" was fully worked out only in PIAGET'S "lois du développement mental" (PIAGET 1939, p. 15.26-5), grounding on ROUSSEAU'S concept of child and childhood. Therefore it was ROUSSEAU to start "new education".

But why ROUSSEAU? PIAGET'S knowledge was restricted, he was not an expert on ROUSSEAU, the only reference he gave was an article by EDOUARD CLAPARÈDE on ROUSSEAU'S "functional theory" of education that had appeared in 1912 (ibid.). So the status of ROUSSEAU being a "précurseur" for new education was and is *not* a result of research⁶. In terms of research it is an open question what exactly ROUSSEAU has in common with 20th century's "new education" given what PIAGET himself called "les a-priori philosophiques de Jean-Jacques" (ibid.) i.e. the metaphysical implications of ROUSSEAU'S concept of education. That they are devious or misleading does not hinder to give ROUSSEAU the crown of having been the first advocate of the child and thus the first "modernist" in education. What interests me in the following are three questions: Reading ROUSSEAU must put into light paradoxes, strange improbabilities, simple contradictions and a masterful rhetoric but no "new education". So why PIAGET payed tribute and called him his predecessor? (1) Educational readers, at least schoolmasters, always were sceptical about ROUSSEAU'S concept of education and its practicability. So why ROUSSEAU became the hero of "modern education"? (2) ROUSSEAU was no "modernist", at least not in terms of 18th century philosophy. So why his concept of education is called "new" or "modern" up today? (3)

I will start with the third question, the dualism of "old" and "new" in education that was established *before* ROUSSEAU. Then I will turn to the second question, the role of ROUSSEAU in constructing the discourse of "new education" since the end of 19th century. I will end with the first question, the image of "modern" education. The image is linked with ROUSSEAU but only with his cult and a collection of slogans. ROUSSEAU'S theory of education had been selected and reduced for the image, losing its sharp points and becoming sentimental. To show this I have to go into history of theory of education, but what I have to say is *not* more history than philosophy, dealing with ROUSSEAU is dealing with some of the more basic problems in modern philosophy of education, even though –or because – ROUSSEAU posed the problems, not the solutions.

1. "Ancient" and "modern"

To distinguish between "old" and "new" in education is not a very old possibility, at least not in terms of history of theory of education. The latin concepts of *educatio* and *eruditio* could not be divided into old and new concepts that refer to an obsolete past in favour of a promising future. Not before FRANCIS BACON'S "Advancement of Learning" (1605) could be made a distinction between "old" and "new" in education that was simultaneously used to separate *ancient* and *modern* concepts of learning. "Old" then is no longer equivalent with "approved" or "time-tested", the past, especially the past of antique philosophy and science,

par une conquête active, et que l'élève doit réinventer la science au lieu d'en répéter les formules verbales; c'est même lui qui a donné ce conseil, pour lequel il lui sera beaucoup pardonné: „Commercez par étudier vos élèves, car assurément vous ne les connaissez point" (PIAGET 1939, p. 15'26-5).

⁶ What PIAGET in 1935 could have read but did not consult was e.g. BARTISSOL'S (1914) documentation of Rousseau's medical sources, CHINNI'S (1908) interpretation of his literal sources, EMILE DURKHEIMS (1914) critique of ROUSSEAU'S *pédagogie*, G.R. HAVENS' (1924/1925) extensive view on the contexts of Rousseau's theory of "good nature", J.E. MORELS (1926) evidence how much PLUTARCH is in ROUSSEAU or L.P.Spinks' (1934) interpretation what role *Geneva* (city, culture and memory) played in ROUSSEAU'S thinking.

can no longer be regarded as superior to the present, because new and better knowledge can be expected *from the future* due to the new methods of observation and research. Classical scholarship before BACON was restricted to *canonized* knowledge taught with text-books and methods that preferred antique authors implying that all knowledge needed in philosophy and science is already available. Given this “newness” in philosophy is doubtful or improbable, because of the greatness of the truths of the past.

BACON turned the relation of old and new around. If future learning can bring new truths old knowledge can no longer be regarded as perfect, thus antique authors cannot be the masters of the present. Studying PLATO or reading HOMER is not to fill the mind with eternal truths in philosophy or literature. Education then must open to future learning, at least in terms of research and the production of knowledge (KELLER 2000). The term “modern” in this respect refers to constant and progressive change in the future that has to be considered as an “open horizon” for learning. Future knowledge can *devalue* past knowledge in every aspect even though not at once. The past, at least the intellectual past, can no longer be regarded as “tradition” that is not only *reliable* but *closed* once for all. What BACON called “new learning” opened the chance to overcome conservatism in education, i.e. the ruling of *canon* over *experience*.

The story of this idea is well known, and it has funny aspects, too. JONATHAN SWIFT⁷ noticed how strange it is to discuss dimensions of time with books. The battle between “antients” and “moderns” therefore took place within a *library*, real learning had not to be considered because books can refer to themselves. SWIFT’S Essay on “The Battle of Books” was written in 1697, SWIFT then was engaged as Secretary of Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE, a famous diplomat and writer who played a central role in what is called the *Querelle des anciens et modernes*. The *Querelle* was at first sight a quarrel between writers and critics on what is authoritative in literature, masters of the past or greats of the present. SWIFT took sides with TEMPLE⁸ who defended vehemently and rigorously the superiority of the past and thus of ancient education. The opponents, the “modernists” in England, were led by WILLIAM WOTTON who extended BACON’S concept of new learning as the basis for “*Modern Methods of Philosophizing*”. Modern methods are in four respects *not* compatible with ancient methods,

- (i) all arguments or principles of philosophy must be in themselves intelligible, not because they are established by “celebrated philosophers”,
- (ii) forming of sects and parties in philosophy, that shall take their denominations from, and think themselves obliged to stand by the Opinions of any particular Philosophers, is wholly laid aside,
- (iii) philosophy has to be combined with other disciplines of learning, especially mathematics and physiology, for the understanding of men and nature, and
- (iv) general conclusions are to be avoided until a great number of experiments or observations upon the things at hand are done (WOTTON 1694, pp. 300/301).

⁷ A Full and True Account of the BATTLE Fought last FRIDAY, Between the Antient and the Modern BOOKS in St. JAMES’S LIBRARY (published 1704) (SWIFT 1989, pp. 1-22).

⁸ TEMPLE led the “army of the Ancients”. This army was “much fewer in number” compared with the army of the modernists, but what quality it has: “Homer led the horse, and Pindar the light-horse; Euclid was chief engineer; Plato and Aristotle commanded the bowmen, Herodotus and Livy the foot, Hippocrates the dragoons” (SWIFT 1989, p. 11).

In England the “Battle of the Books” became a battle on the principles of philosophy and thus of learning (LEVINE 1991)⁹. It was more than funny, as a result it allowed the loosening and abandoning of *canonical* knowledge. The canon of learning is not valid only because authorities of the past produced it. WOTTON (1694, p. 301) called this the liberation of knowledge through experiments and observations, and if this is the “modern” i.e. the scientific way of learning, JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU was by no means a “modernist”. To use WOTTON’S criteria: ROUSSEAU strongly believed in philosophical authorities, especially those of the antique (LEDUC-FAYETTE 1974); even though he was not part of a philosophical “sect” he was obliged to certain philosophical doctrines throughout his lifetime; he never used scientific knowledge apart from certain studies in medicine and other practical arts, and he was a master of generalization *without* observation beside botany and music.

On the other hand at least in philosophy of education he was not a true conservative. One of the central thoughts in ROUSSEAU’S *Emile* refers to the problem of time. There is no reference to the *Querelle* given, probably ROUSSEAU did not know anything about it. But it is of no chance that he centers the problem of *time* in education as early as the *Manuscrit Favre*, the first draft of his theory of education. Let me quote this passage in the French original:

“Que faut-il donc penser de cette education barbare qui sacrifie le present à un avenir incertain et commence par rendre un enfant miserable pour lui préparer au loin je ne sais quel prétendu bonheur dont il est croire qu’il ne jouira jamais?” (O.C. IV/p. 81)¹⁰

All education is *barbaric* that sacrifices the present for the future, because and insofar the future is uncertain and the child would be prepared for a future happiness that is out of reach. So the time for education is the *present*, neither the future nor the past. What ROUSSEAU called “progress of education” is bound to the order of nature, not to the will of education (ibid., p. 311). Apart from nature there is no need for educational will¹¹ i.e. intentions of educators that define the future of the child. Nature is timeless thus education can happen without a concept of future, provided that the ways of education will not contradict nature (ibid., p. 312)¹². Only *this* will grant that education does not “agir au hazard” (ibid., pp. 324/325) – acting by chance. Educational will is not only too weak, it is too corrupt to really put into account nature’s route (ibid., p. 290). Thus education is not habituation, the only habit a child should fall into is the habit of not accepting habits (ibid., p. 282)¹³.

ROUSSEAU nowhere defines “nature” or “natural”¹⁴, but it clear that the idea of habitfree spontaneity fascinates his followers up to PIAGET. And the basic idea really seems to be “modern”, ROUSSEAU took for granted that the self-development of the child is driven by *immediate interests* (ibid., p. 358) thus neither by instruction nor by formal education. The otherwise strange idea that reading books is the whip (le fléau) of childhood (ibid., p. 357) becomes very suggestive if it is taken into account what ROUSSEAU made out to be the “order of nature”. If educators let the child always be himself attending only *what touches him immediately*, then

⁹ The French discussion starting with PERRAULT (1687) and ending with FÉNELON (1714) was far more a discussion of politics and theology, not aiming at problems of philosophy of education (see SCHLOBACH (1980) for the context; some arguments for philosophy of education in OELKERS 2000)).

¹⁰ This thought was included at the beginning of the second book of *Emile* in a slightly different version: “Que faut-il donc penser de cette éducation barbare qui sacrifie le présent à un avenir incertain, qui charge un enfant de chaînes de toute espèce et commence par le rendre misérable pour lui préparer au loin je ne sais quel prétendu bonheur dont il est à croire qu’il ne jouira jamais?” (O.C. IV/p. 301).

¹¹ See RAVIER (1941, vol. II/S. 508f..

¹² “La nature a, pour fortifier le corps et le faire croître, des moyens qu’on ne doit jamais contrarier” (O.C. IV/p. 312).

¹³ “La seule habitude qu’on doit laisser prendre à l’enfant est de n’en contracter aucune” (O.C. IV/p. 282). “Contracter” is *taking and accepting*.

¹⁴ Both terms were established within discourses of education long *before* ROUSSEAU (MERCIER 1961). He used and sharpened common meaning, so it was not ROUSSEAU who “discovered” natural education.

and only then they will find the child learning, capable of perceiving, memorizing and even reasoning. Because it is of central importance for the image of modern education let me quote this passage again in the French original:

“Pour mon élève, ou plutôt¹⁵ celui de la nature, exercé de bonne heure à se suffire à lui-même autant qu’il est possible, il ne s’accoutume point à recourir sans cesse aux autres, encore moins à leur étaler son grand savoir. En revanche il juge, il prévoit, il raisonne en tout ce qui se rapporte *immédiatement* à lui” (ibid, p. 361; italic J.O.).

Emile, the paradigmatic child of nature’s education, is from his earliest days and as far as possible exercised in *self-sufficiency*, thus he is independent from others and can learn what is immediately around him without being disturbed. Judgement, foresight and reasoning, in general knowledge or “savoir”, are bound to the situation of learning. *Immediacy* is two-folded, meaning the moment and situation of experience, “present” therefore means the continuation of immediate learning guided by the interests of the child and restricted to the offerings of situations.

The *place* of ROUSSEAU’S natural education is not “nature” but a landscape in the country, far from villages and cities but at the same time protected against evil nature. Emile and his governor¹⁶ are not persons with identities and history, but paradigmatic figures to demonstrate the principles of education. Childhood can be life *in present* if it is free from the burdens of the past but also from the uncertainties of the future. Nature is a grant for the continuation of the present only if it can be considered as peaceful, that means without dangers that cannot be handled within the situations of education. So the scene is extremely artificial, continuation without time, nature without risk and persons without faces. Even Emile’s *name* reveals nothing apart from literary allusions¹⁷. Artificialness is not, as PIAGET suspected, the price for placing the scene of education outside society, this puts too much reality into a novel; the scene is artificial because the novel tells no history, but demonstrates the beginning and ending of the ideal education, that is basically fatal because everything is ordered to the principles of nature without any account to the freedom of history. ROUSSEAU, the narrator of the story, *knows* the end before the story begins, and the end seems to be only the verification of the beginning.

There is only one surprise in the development of ROUSSEAU’S reasoning. At the beginning of the 5th book of *Emile* it became clear that the natural education of “man” has been the education of a “male”. After the introduction of Sophie, chosen to be Emile’s wife and as faceless as he, the concept of education is left with *two different* versions¹⁸, one of the male and the other of the female. It is remarkable that this evidence had *not* influenced readers up to PIAGET to *doubt* the concept of “child” and “childhood”. 20th century’s new education was that of *child-centeredness*, not that of girl’s and boy’s childhood, so that gender differences concerning the central notions and metaphors of progressive education must not be made. PIAGET’S construction of the child is accordingly referring to mind or morals, but not to gender and with that not to cultures or the social stratification of childhood. This is possible because and insofar ROUSSEAU’S scene is *adopted*, viewing the child as a natural unity outside or at least independent from culture, law, economy, and politics, independent, in other words, from the goods and evils of society. Therefore ROUSSEAU argues basically not for *natural* but for *negative* education, as long as childhood is lasting. This first education is purely negative:

¹⁵ T he *Edition Pleiade* of ROUSSEAU’S Works does not eliminate grammatical mistakes.

¹⁶ *Gouverneur* (O.C. IV/p. 263)

¹⁷ See SHANKS (1927).

¹⁸ “Dès qu’une fois il est démontré que l’homme et la femme ne sont ni ne doivent être constitués de même, de caractère ni de temperament, il s’ensuit qu’ils ne doivent pas avoir la même éducation” (O.C. IV/p. 700).

“Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le coeur du vice et l’esprit de l’erreur” (ibid, p. 323).

Virtue and truth, as nearly all other theories of education supposed, *cannot* be instructed positively, because children are not able to understand and accept morals apart from their selfishness, and because the truths of instruction are not the truths of their own fields of learning. Thus what only matters in education is to *guard* the child i.e. to grant that no vices can reach the heart and no errors can fill the mind. Again this is unlogical and paradox¹⁹, because no heart can be defended against vices if the heart did not feel what *virtues* are, and no error can be avoided if the mind knows of no *truths*. But the argument is nevertheless seductive: If children have no morals and if this is their natural condition, then education is only successful if it accords to the natural condition, and moreover, if children do not need morals because they live in their own world without morality, then *negative* education is the *only legitimate* form of education.

This seems to be extreme and plausible only if one adopts ROUSSEAU’S basic scene of education. But it is written against reality, what fascinates is the playing with possibilities beside the conventions of education. The child cannot be “a little bit” moral, morality cannot be *dosed*, the little child does not have small portions of what later will be the whole dosage, so even PIAGET’S laws of moral development fall behind ROUSSEAU’S radicalness whose only concession is to protect the heart from vices, because the child cannot himself ban vices with virtues. It will not do what adults call moral reasoning, because it lives outside the laws being a savage to test his forces. Thus the ultimate maxime of the first education is the following:

“Employez la force avec les enfans et la raison avec les hommes; tel est l’ordre naturel: le sage n’a pas besoin de loix” (ibid, p. 320).

PIAGET thought that there are laws of mental development to overcome savageness and that childish reasoning is a cognitive force that perpetually develops into adults reasoning. What ROUSSEAU doubted is the concept of “perpetuality”, he was Augustinian enough to reflect education with a theory of *two worlds*, that are and have to be strictly separated, one childish, isolated and innocent, the other adult, social and corrupt. The rebirth of society out of the education of nature would be the harmonizing of the two worlds, who are connected not simply with psychological laws of development. ROUSSEAU never succeeded in connecting the world of society and the world of education, simply because the two worlds have two completely different ideals, the theory of *contract* on one side and the theory of *nature* on the other side. Even the best social contract can only be a restriction of nature, because every society forces the “savage” to compare himself with others, and so no natural education can prepare for what is in fact the refutation of its principles.

My second point is the question why this curious, often uneasy, not really sentimental and in fact provocative theory found followers, moreover admirers, who contrary to what VOLTAIRE wrote to DAVID HUME in 1766²⁰ are *not* convinced that all what ROUSSEAU wrote and lived “tombe bientôt dans un éternel oubli” (VOLTAIRE 1961, p. 845). ROUSSEAU only found followers *or* opponents²¹, leaving nobody indifferent. But this does not explain how and why he became the hero of “new education”. His own concept tried to give back education its own golden age (TERRASSE 1970) i.e. Spartan rigour and Socratic ignorance. The future is thought with the ideal past, it is not an “open horizon”. “Modern education” has nothing to do

¹⁹ ROUSSEAU would not have been impressed because paradoxes are what matters: “Lecteurs vulgaires, pardonnez-moi mes paradoxes. Il en faut faire quand on réfléchit, et quoi que vous puissiez dire, j’aime mieux être homme à paradoxes qu’homme à préjugés” (O.C. IV/p. 323).

²⁰ *Lettre de M. de Voltaire a M. Hume*, Ferney, 24 octobre 1766 (VOLTAIRE 1961, pp. 841-846).

²¹ *Amis ou Ennemis* (STRECKEISEN 1865). The dualism is part of the legend and was retailed throughout 19th century.

with this, PIAGET is right in that it grew out of child psychology, so how then ROUSSEAU became its hero?

2. ROUSSEAU and “new education”

One of the books mostly paved the way for “new education” in the anglosaxon discussion was EVELYN and JOHN DEWEY’S “Schools of To-Morrow”, published in 1915. Chapter two begins with the following statement:

“Rousseau’s teaching that education is *a process of natural growth* has influenced most theorizing upon education since his time” (DEWEY 1985, p. 222; italics J.O.).

Again, this is a statement without research data. What is called “theorizing upon education” since ROUSSEAU, that means educational theory since 1762, was not concentrated on the question of “natural growth”. If there had been concepts of “natural growth” they were quite different from that of ROUSSEAU. And those who favoured “natural growth” like FRÖBEL had not been “Rousseauists”. But what is more important, the concept of “natural growth”, as the DEWEYS understood it in 1915, is *not* at the heart of ROUSSEAU’S theory. His theory is read with the eyes of protagonists of child-centered education²²:

“The child is best prepared for life as an adult by experiencing in childhood what has meaning to him as a child; and, further, the child has a right to enjoy his childhood. Because he is a growing animal who must develop so as to live successfully in the grown-up world, nothing should be done to *interfere with growth*, and everything should be done to further *the full and free development* of his body and his mind” (ibid.; italics J.O.)

Child-centered education had two sources, the Kindergarten-Movement on one side, the new child-psychology on the other side. Both sources often mingled, Fröbelian motives were at the heart of child-studies, empiricial results seemed to verify the principles of child-centered education who mostly was a reaction against schooling at the end of 19th century. Modern *schooling* in this view contradicted modern *education*, because schooling did not respect the natural growth of the child. It *interfered* with growth and *did not* everything to further the “full and free development” of the child. America’s Public Schools, as for example JOHN RICE described them in 1893²³, can hardly be judged, at least not in a fair way, with principles of Kindergarten, but Kindergarten’s principles are *not* what JOHN and EVELYN DEWEY called “Rousseau’s central idea”. If there is any “central idea” in ROUSSEAU, it must be looked for in a very different context, not “natural growth” but *solitude* (STAROBINSKI 1971).

ROUSSEAU spoke of an “*éducation solitaire*” (O.C. IV/p. 341), “solitaire” meaning both, secluded or out-of-the-way and alone, not lonely or forelorn. The term does not refer to the drama of life, the stoic implications of ROUSSEAU’S theory forbid to suffer from life and change with the suffering. The aim of education is not just growth but protection of the inner self by living with the true proportions of things (ibid, p. 455)²⁴. The *inner self* has two faculties, the one is called “l’amour de soi”, the other “l’amour porpre”. Both are faculties of *love*,

²² The following quotation is a resultat of EVELYN DEWEY’S research work. She interviewed a teacher from Fairhope, Alabama und concluded that “her main underlying principle is Rousseau’s central idea” (DEWEY 1985, p. 222). “Schools of To-Morrow”, after all, was fully researched and mostly written by EVELYN DEWEY while it was ascribed totally to JOHN DEWEY.

²³ RICE’S Study was of considerable influence on the forming of JOHN DEWEY’S views on education.

²⁴ *Les vrais rapports des choses* (O.C. IV/p. 455). “Rapport” is generally translated best with *relation*, but in the context of ROUSSEAU’S argument it is more *porportion*.

but the one faculty is good the other is evil. It is not possible to avoid the evil and follow the good only. *Both* faculties are *unavoidable*.

“L’amour de soi, qui ne regarde qu’à nous, est content quand nos vrais besoins sont satisfaits; mais l’amour propre, qui se compare, n’est jamais content et ne sauroit l’être, parce que ce sentiment, en nous préférant aux autres, exige aussi que les autres nous préfèrent à eux, ce qui est impossible” (ibid, p. 493).

PIAGET and the whole psychology of development *never* referred to this somewhat “dark” passage if only because both faculties, *l’amour de soi* and *l’amour propre*, are not considered to “develop”. They will not change by learning, on the contrary all learning, at least all moral education, must refer to them. There are “true needs” communicated with *amour de soi* who looks only to himself²⁵ and thus is “content” because he knows nothing other. *L’amour propre* compared himself with others and can never be content, not because all others do the same but because all others can only prefer themselves. *L’amour propre* may be translated with “self-love”, for which it is basic that the self can *not* prefer others, only himself, while it would be “content” only if others would prefer him, which is impossible because of the self-love of all others.

L’amour propre is the key concept in French moral literature in 17th and early 18th century. It is used here nearly almost as a *negative* force that must be restricted by education. Writers like LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, PIERRE NICOLE, BLAISE PASCAL, LA BRUYÈRE or CHAMFORD unanimously conceived education *against* self-love, because self-love, as ROUSSEAU later put it, causes passions of hate and irascibility (ibid.)²⁶. But that left the inner self completely dependent on education, like the sensualistic *tabula rasa* with the difference that educating self-love means repression of self-love not just filling the mind with ideas. Because of this ROUSSEAU introduced the *second* faculty, the self-sufficient *amour de soi* that brings about all the passions of sweetness and affection. So self-sufficiency – not repression of self – will make men good. It is not just nature and thus not just development but *inner strength*.

“Ainsi ce qui rend l’homme essentiellement bon est d’avoir peu de besoins et de peu se comparer aux autres; ce qui le rend essentiellement méchant est d’avoir beaucoup de besoins et de tenir beaucoup à l’opinion” (ibid.)²⁷.

This stoic picture is *not* what “modern education” is made of. ROUSSEAU became its hero mostly out of cult and legend, not because he was read but because he found admiration. Even *reading* ROUSSEAU, like ANDRÉ RAVIER did in 1941 in his magistral doctoral thesis²⁸, was studying him as a source for “new education”. RAVIER, who wrote by far the best work on ROUSSEAU’s theory of education in the first half of 20th century, made two points, first the mal-reception of the *Emile* in 18th century-literature²⁹ and second the rediscovery within the context of new education. In this context *Emile* was viewed as the basic theory of *l’homme*

²⁵ *Un amour*.

²⁶ “Les passions haineuses et irascibles naissent de l’amour propre” (O.C. IV/p. 493).

²⁷ “Sur ce principe, il est aisé de voir comment on peut diriger au bien et au mal toutes les passions des enfants et des hommes. Il est vrai que ne pouvant vivre toujours seuls, ils vivront difficilement toujours bons: cette difficulté même augmentera nécessairement avec leurs relations, et c’est en ceci surtout que les dangers de la société nous rendent l’art et les soins plus indispensables pour prévenir dans le cœur humain la dépravation qui naît de ses nouveaux besoins” (O.C. IV/p. 493).

²⁸ Université de Grenoble (Faculty of Letters) (*nihil obstat* 7th december 1940).

²⁹ There have been more than fifteen french books against *Emile* alone in 1762, the year of publication, one it called Rousseau “Philosophes modernes” (VERNES 1762). In the following years ROUSSEAU was charged not only being non-christian (MALEVILLE 1769) but also being a plagiarist (CAJOT 1766). Several authors tried to “correct” Rousseau, like FORMEY’S *Emile chrétien* (1764) or BEAUVRIEU’S *Elève de a nature* (1771). The last “nouvel Emile” appeared in 1814 (LA NOUË 1814).

nouveau – the renewal of man. And in this sense ROUSSEAU was regarded as the “pioneer” of modern education.

It is in fact illuminating to see that between the last (catholic) refutation of ROUSSEAU’S *Emile* in 1860³⁰ and ROUSSEAU’S first ennobling as founderfather of “modern education” in 1879³¹ lay only twenty years³². At the end of 19th century this classification was beyond doubt not only in Europe but also in America. “Education according to Nature” was firmly tied up with the name of ROUSSEAU (e.g. DAVIDSON 1898 and others). ALBERT SCHINZ in 1909 had no problem to label ROUSSEAU as “Forerunner of Pragmatism”, while on the other hand JOHN DEWEY and WILLIAM JAMES were welcomed in the French discussion as renewer of ROUSSEAU’S education³³. Before World War II it was common sense that “new education” started with ROUSSEAU (EHM 1938, MILLOT 1938 and several others). PIAGET, then, was not alone, what he wrote for the *Encyclopédie Française* was mainstream. Most of ROUSSEAU’S educational commentators did not, like ANDRÉ RAVIER, explained ROUSSEAU’S theory out of its centre, the stoic self-sufficiency of *l’amour de soi*. The mainstream adopted ROUSSEAU’S scene of the first education thus the metaphors of “activity” and “self-development” without reading *Emile* to the end. But the point with ROUSSEAU is the end, not the beginning of *Emile*.

In the end *Emile* had the choice between marriage and republic. The choice is left open because the final grand tour with the governor does not reveal any country or any government that fits to *Emile*’s education. Without any “patrie” he is left with a “pays” (O.C. IV/p.858). And because both theories, the *Contrat Social* and the *Emile*, could not be united, the stoic element defines the outcome of education, not happiness, not civic virtues but solitude³⁴. It is clear that this outcome contradicts “modern education”, ROUSSEAU was not the sentimental advocat of childhood but the stoic barrister of *selfhood* that is not a “product” of education. It is a theory of proud solitude, not a psychology of development. The postscript for *Emile* is called: “*Emile et Sophie, ou les solitaires*” (ibid., pp. 879-924)³⁵.

And that leaves the question what is so “modern” about modern education? If “modernity” had three facets, progress, optimism and technical knowledge, ROUSSEAU by no means was “modern”. On the other hand “modern education”, as a result of the 19th century, was mainly discussed with concepts of progress, educational optimism and “new methods” of reform. For PIAGET the competence of *methods* marked the real difference between ROUSSEAU and progressive education before World War II³⁶. New Psychology should be the basis of modern education, because knowing the laws of mental and moral development enables educati-

³⁰ ABBÉ CARMAGNOLE: *Nouvelle refutation de l’Emile de J.-J. Rousseau*. Draguignan: Gimbert 1860.

³¹ GABRIEL COMPAYRÉ: *Histoire critique des Doctrines de l’Education en France depuis le Seizième siècle*. Paris: Hachette 1879. (Volume II/Book 5). The construction is the following: ROUSSEAU had “précurseurs” but he developed the *first real* “philosophy of education” (COMPAYRÉ 1879, T. II/p. 40) that influenced “disciples” from BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE via KANT and the German “Philantropes” up to GERMAINE DE STAEL (ibid, pp. 95-137). The opponents (“contradicteurs”) only *confirmed* “la puissance d’un grand penseur” (ibid., p. 137). On COMPAYRÉ’S role in the development of French historiography of education see: CHARBONEL (1999); the forming of educational historiography in 19th century is discussed in OELKERS (1999) and GONON (1999).

³² This is valid for French history of education. That ROUSSEAU’S *Emile* founded “new education” is the basic thesis of ROBERT QUICKS “Essays on Educational Reformers”, published in its first edition 1868.

³³ DEWEYS “Child and Society” was translated into French in 1913, JAMES’ “Talks to Teachers” appeared in 1917.

³⁴ Following MONTAIGNE (Essais I/XXXIX: *De la Solitude*).

³⁵ Sophie became untrue, *Emile* was left alone, the end after the end is stoic. The postscript, written in in two letters, was published by P.A. DU PEYROU (1729-1794), Rousseau’s friend in Neuchâtel, in 1780, two years after the death of ROUSSEAU.

³⁶ “D’une manière générale, on le voit: si l’idéal d’activité et les principes des méthodes nouvelles d’éducation peuvent être retrouvés sans peine chez les grands classiques de la pédagogie, une différence essentielle les sépare de nous. Malgré leur connaissance intuitive ou pratique de l’enfance, ils n’ont pas constitué *la psychologie nécessaire* à l’élaboration de techniques éducatives vraiment adaptées aux lois du développement mental” (Piaget 1939, p. 15’26-5; italics J.O.).

on to act on nature's ground. But this is not the whole picture, because most of ROUSSEAU'S followers had not been educationists or psychologists. The term "Rousseauisme" was not used before 1903 (cf. NOURRISSON 1903), but the cult was established by his readers, often female readers, already during ROUSSEAU'S lifetime³⁷. It was a literary cult communicated with a handful of slogans, most prominently the "good nature", the "return to nature" or "the good savage" as a model for mankind. The themes of education were placed within this cult³⁸, thus the "good and innocent child", the "active child", the "education according to nature", the "evils of society" and with this the "evils of schooling" were ascriptions that used ROUSSEAU'S name and avoided his theory.

Most commentators on "modern education" in the first half of 20th century were not theorists like JOHN DEWEY or JEAN PIAGET but writers or publicists like BERNARD SHAW, THOMAS MANN or ELLEN KEY. Most of them were devoted "Rousseauists" in the aforementioned sense, being polemical against society and especially society's schooling and arguing for "natural education" and child's freedom without really defining it. SHAW, for example, wrote a pure "rousseauistic" pamphlet against modern schooling in 1914³⁹ construing the "strong" and "self-confident" child that needs no education as far as schools or parents can offer it. In a similar sense D.H. LAWRENCE, a former school-teacher, argued in favour of the child's natural growing not to mention H.G. WELLS and several other literates⁴⁰. Thus not only the activists of "radical education" constitute the camp of "modernists", writers like SHAW or LAWRENCE often had been far more radical in what "new education" should do and, more important, should *not* do.

But "modern education" can not simply be protest, not even for the best of child's nature. The label "modern education" is manyfolded and flexible, in the 1939th edition of *Encyclopédie Française* even "national-socialist" education seemed to "modern"⁴¹. Thus it is *not* a term of theory but really an image that has unity only as a point of view⁴². "Modern" is the opposition to "traditional" or "old" education in *every* respect and independent from political, social or economical contexts. Thus in 20th century's educational discourses "modern" could have been bolshevist, fascist, liberal, socialist and democratic views, to name only political education. And there have been "modern" approaches in vocational training, special education, general schooling, education for the handicapped and so on. The label has only one use, to discriminate effectively between *old* education that should be abandoned, and *new* education that is regarded as the only way out. So *every* educational reform *must* be called "modern" because the reform must define the obsolete. Today's economical jargon in education could be very successful in replacing philosophy of education, because it took the lead in defining what "modern education" *is* and what *not*.

My final point is the question what is left for *educational theory* if "modern education" is just an image and because of this an untrue promise. I will discuss this question going back to ROUSSEAU, because one of the interesting points is how far future development of educational theory can *resolve* what was defined by ROUSSEAU. Can we overcome his problems?

³⁷ The PESTALOZZI cult was completely different. At the end of his life (1827) PESTALOZZI was almost completely forgotten, the cult was that of educators (most of them working in teacher training) and the cult itself was strictly personal not referring to literature (OSTERWALDER 1996). (I used OSTERWALDER'S concept of "cult" for my analysis)

³⁸ CAVAYE (1799) and a bulk of others.

³⁹ BERNARD SHAW: *Misalliance, the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and Fanny's First Play. With a Treatise on Parents and Children*. (London 1914).

⁴⁰ I am indebted to MACK (1940) (see OELKERS 1999a).

⁴¹ Henri Jourdan, then director of the French Institute in Berlin, wrote the article "La pédagogie nationale-socialiste" in 1937. He was not uncritical but compared the Third Reich with Sparta thus allowing readers to associate Rousseauisms (JOURDAN 1937).

⁴² "Anschauung" is not translatable.

3. The Task for Theory

ROUSSEAU'S theory has three axes, the political dualism of *homme civile* and *homme naturel*, the assumption of *phases* of "natural development" and the anthropological difference between *amour de soi* and *amour propre*. This simple machinery is very effective. All axes are thought with the scheme of the "two worlds": The civil and the natural are not contradictions within *one* world, they are oppositions of *two* worlds. The original state of man is that of one true nature, social evolution did not overcome the natural state of man but corrupted it. The "natural condition" is at the same time the *initial* and the *definite* state of man within one true world provided that there is another world that is opposite in every aspect. Because this can hardly be convincing given the facts of history ROUSSEAU separated between politics and education. All education is basically the renewal of man's original nature insofar society will not interfere natural development. So education does not represent society, neither past nor present or future. Education must have its own place within "nature" to grant that the child potentials can develop according to the rhythm of nature and not to the time of society. The governor is no teacher and no parent, his only task is to guide nature, given that "nature" in a pure form is "in" every child. Thus *Emile* is meant not historical but paradigmatic, ROUSSEAU wanted to demonstrate how *pure education* works⁴³.

It is very easy to refute this fancy but only if it is taken "realistic". Most readers did not pay attention to the *fictional* character of ROUSSEAU'S novel. He did not talk about "real" education, the place is fictional as are the persons or the didactic arrangements not to mention the strange couple and their virtual happiness at the end of the novel. To be precise, the novel is only in a very minimalistic sense a "novel", the story told does not refer to experiences and biographies but to "phases" of education and thus to artificial time independent of real learning. It is striking how long, dull and thin the story is, demonstrating *principles* of education instead of telling the adventures of educational life. The story is long not because so much happens but because so much has to be demonstrated. ROUSSEAU in fact wanted to refute all other theories of education to give ground for the only true one. So the story is one long way of *theoretical* defense and justification disguised as a novel that ignored even basic rules of novel writing. The novel has no real plot, no suspense, only one surprise, no inner time, no change of characters and above all no events outside the didactic expectations. So why it could become one of the classical positions of educational theory?

I have three answers, first the basic scene of "natural education" seems to be the only possibility to establish critical theory of education outside or apart from social conventions. Thus the two worlds are crucial for educational discourse, only a theory of two worlds can discriminate between the evil past and the unladen future. Second, the theory of two worlds allows in the easiest way to fix education with moral dualisms. Again this is crucial for educational discourse, because all aims in education must discriminate not only between present and future but also between good and bad. Third, ROUSSEAU'S theory grants the power of education, knowing nature's "route" is unique knowledge that must not be shared with others. The paradigmatic governor handles his knowledge and is not obliged to give reasons why and how he gained it. The route of nature defines education's *insiders* who can act on the grounds of nature itself.

⁴³ This had not been done before (see OELKERS 2000a).

The structure of educational reflections is twofolded, on one hand education must refer to the *future* that is discussed with aims, on the other hand education's "reality" can only be the *present* whatever concept of time is used. Aims that should define future cannot simply double the present, otherwise no difference can be made between the present and the future whereas all education is done for the future better. "Modern education" is a promise in this sense. Even conservative theories must idealize "tradition" as the *better future* drawing a line between the world at hand and the world to come. Because no aim really anticipates "future", if only the concept of future is inevitably a concept of the present, ROUSSEAU'S basic scene of natural education is very suggestive. The time of education then is not the time of ongoing events that cannot be foreseen but the time of nature itself that can be foreseen. PIAGET'S *laws* of development mirror this suggestion. It allows to discriminate between one education that accords to "nature" or "laws of development" and the other that does not. Only the one education according to nature and development is legitimate, so the ground scene of ROUSSEAU'S *Emile* spares all others thoughts of legitimation. Education according to nature thus is the easiest way to solve the basic question of theory, why and how education is justified. "Education" is not an entity of its own but a derivation from nature. So no puzzle is left, and as a surplus, the knowledge of nature's "route" grants the position of power in education.

But Augustinian concepts of two worlds can only justify *salvation*, the sinful world of men and the grace of God coming from the other world. So any post-Rousseauian theory of education has to abandon the theory of two worlds, the advantages of this theory have high costs, especially that education - in some way or another - must be considered as the way from sin to salvation. ROUSSEAU shifted sin from soul to society but he still used the concept showing how effective theology is translated into sociology. But AUGUSTIN had the better insight for the problem, there is only *one* original sin or *no* sin at all, so that a society full of evils must presume the original sin. ROUSSEAU sketched true mankind out of the golden age of sinless origins, but this cannot explain how evil came into society. For ROUSSEAU society *is* the evil⁴⁴, but this is only to translate sin and thus using the demonical to separate between the true world of nature and the corrupt world of society.

It is hard to overcome dualisms like these in educational discourses. Even JOHN DEWEY, the advocat for a non-dualistic philosophy of education, used dualisms, otherwise he could have made no moral statements. But using morals is not reflecting them. The history of "Rousseauism" demonstrates how easy it is to use ROUSSEAU'S concepts for the purpose of moral communication without taking into account *what* was used. So the task of theory *after* ROUSSEAU is not simply to discuss, check and possibly refute his concepts but to clarify the ways of educational discourses and demarcate trivial from substantial assertions. The history of "Rousseauism" is linked with effective trivialization, what is called "modern education" is often not more than watchwords or slogans feeded up with "big names" to grant the image. In this there is no need for theory, even though ROUSSEAU would have had no charisma without his theoretical provocations. But they must not be used substantially and can be left to experts. No "Rousseauist" ever tried to *refute* the theory, this would be self-contradictory because what would be refuted is what constitutes the circle of believers.

But theory of education needs no circle of believers, only arguments that must be discussed without any guarantees, "nature", "society", "history", the "holy child" or what ever. ROUSSEAU, DURKHEIM, FICHTE or MONTESSORI do not *confirm* these concepts but left only

⁴⁴ The "état primitif" is the condition without morals (O.C. III/p.147, 152). Leaving this condition is to set free ambitions and losing independency (ibid., p. 175). Ambitions form hierarchies and thus social difference. And this Fall of Man is irreversible: Forming *one* society is to form *all* (ibid., p. 178). (Quotation from the Second **Discours**)

combative, sometimes militant, theories that cannot or should not oblige any reader. Critical theory of education therefore is not referring to names, how sacrosanct they ever seem to be. Sacrosanct names *imply* the two worlds, pro and con, right and left or bad and good. It is not sufficient to use historiographical fixations but to overcome them with new and better arguments. And more than this: if educational theory refers to concepts like “nature”, “society”, “history” or “child” it can use only *one* general term. ROUSSEAU’S education *according to nature* can imagine only one nature, similar DURKHEIM specified only one society, FICHTE saw only one progress of history promoted by the one true education, and MONTESSORI had only one concept of natural childhood. References like these had dominated theory-construction in philosophy of education at least in the past, but with this it is not possible to cope with *pluralistic* conditions.

ROUSSEAU is a good example for hagiography. He was the hero of the right and the left, like NIETZSCHE he was used for every camp in education being an authority whose concepts define the one and only education free from any test. “Testing” theories does not mean to shift from one accepted author to another, it is not enough to show how and why KANT is superior to HEGEL or *vice versa*. What should be tested is the construction of references, and this is a task for theory. There are no independent criteria for KANT’S oder HEGEL’S “superiority” apart from accepting the premises of the one or the other system. On the other hand, as HANS-GEORG GADAMER pointed out, no one can simply abandon traditions of theory; being a *tabula rasa* is being without any understanding, to built up understanding inevitably touches the horizon of established understandings. Only ROUSSEAU’S *homme sauvage* avoided culture, for the price of ignorance. Most readers of *Emile* did not ask how meagre the resultat of “natural education” was and how effective, compared to this, normal schooling must be. ROUSSEAU’S appeal is normative polemics, not that of a consistent theory of education. *Emile* is to grant education’s other side, but if there are no two worlds there can be no “other side”. Then - *without* the other side – education can no longer be equated with salvation, whereas what is called “modern education” is bound to secular grace, governors knowing nature’s route to lead the child without touching sin and evil. Rousseau overlooked that any “good” must refer to the *opposite*, thus there can be no paradise of education, wherever it will be expected.

The task for theory will be to consider education in secular terms, without simple constructions of “future”, “nature” or “innocence”, with a sense for risks and the limits of predictions and with a disciplined language that does not simply follow the dualisms of morality. But this is to good to be true: Educational theory *does* refer to fields of public discussions, political dualisms and simple solutions. So being distant and critical within theory implies the dilemma of being remote to what counts as “reality”. Without reality educational theory seems to be useless, within reality it runs danger to lose itself *as* theory. There is no easy way out of this dilemma, sophistication of theory is necessary for theory only, translated into jargon it will lose its analytical force while it is hard to avoid jargon in public discussions on education. There *is* public resonance for educational theories, but very often it is resonance like that of “Rousseauism”, resonance that missed the subtleties and the dark sides of the theory. But the advantage for theory is that it must not say “yes” but can say “no”, even against public consent. For this ROUSSEAU was the true role-model.

To give a summary: What is called “modern education” mostly is image and only randomly argument. ROUSSEAU’S theory of “natural education” is widely used for communication of slogans within camps of activists. The term “modern” within “modern education” refers to a vague but suggestive future using “education” both as medium and guarantee. Thus *aims* of education together with *new methods* form the scope of “modern educator”. Its image is that of hope and salvation discussed via the new possibilities of education as a future *in reach*.

Because no future is “in reach”, “modern education” can constantly be renewed. It can not become out of date, as long as there are two worlds, one of “true education” according to man’s nature and the other of “untrue education” that can only violate man’s nature. It is the strength of ROUSSEAU’S shadow that it is easy to overcome the relation of education and nature but not to overcome the dualism. But do we need “true education” as long as the prize is to construe “untrue education”?

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⁴⁵ Published originally as “C.D.”

⁴⁶ Published originally “An V.”

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