

The following text was originally published in *PROSPECTS: quarterly review of comparative education* (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education),
vol. XXIV, no. 3/4, 1994, p. 423-38.

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JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

(1712-78)

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who preferred to take the risk of presenting himself as a ‘man of paradoxes’ rather than remaining a ‘man of prejudices’, confronts the historian of educational thought with a considerable paradox. The work that has indisputably had the deepest and most lasting impact on teaching methods, that in the words of Pestalozzi has been a focal point of development in both the Old and the New Worlds in matters of education, was written in total disdain of all education practice, dismissed out of hand by Rousseau in his Preface to *Émile*, mocked when an admiring father presented to him his child whom he had brought up in accordance with the ‘new principles’ and held up to the greatest ridicule through the abandonment of his own children, figments of the imagination though they might be. Rousseau was not a very successful private tutor. The enigma remains: Why have men like Pestalozzi, Fröbel, Makarenko, Dewey and Freinet, all of them practitioners, embarked upon historic experiments, never lost sight of that ‘utopian work’ that *Émile* was intended to be, and why have they regularly returned to it as to a source book? Was it simply to draw consolation from it for their own continual failures and setbacks, or was there rather in Rousseau’s work something that continued to inspire them, and still is an inspiration to others?

The philosophy of education

To the question so often asked—‘What was really new in Rousseau’s approach to education?’—the replies are legion, and must be critically reviewed. Rousseau, the initiator of a ‘Copernican revolution’, is said to have made the child the focus of the educational process. To be sure, *Émile* did make a major contribution to this change of focus, but it should be pointed out that, after a long period of indifference, a new interest was beginning to be shown in children anyway; in fact it was even tending to become something of a fashion. Moralists, administrators and doctors were vying with one another in urging mothers to take good care of their offspring, beginning by breast-feeding them. Rousseau helped to develop this ‘feeling for childhood’, around which was to grow the concept of the ‘nuclear family’. However, he also reacted against the thoughtless over-indulgence of children, whom there was a tendency to see as the centre of the world. While the image of the child as the fruit of sin had to be rejected, there was no need to go to the opposite extreme and regard the child’s slightest whim as a divine command.

Much had already been written on education when Rousseau wrote *Émile*. The books, sections of books and articles on the subject were literarily legion. Everyone had to have his say: philosophers such as Helvetius, who, in his work *De l’esprit* [Of the mind] published in 1758, expressed the view that everything, in man and in the state, depended on education; scholars and

utopians like the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, the author of *Projet pour perfectionner l'éducation* [Project to improve education]; even poets, who set their educational precepts down in quatrains. Around the same time a plethora of manuals appeared, aimed at introducing children from their very earliest age to the experimental method. For example, in 1732 the *bureau typographique* (typographic desk) was invented, whose purpose was to teach children to read by means of movable letters, which they arranged in appropriate boxes. La Chalotais was preparing to publish his *Essai d'éducation nationale* [Essay on national education], in which he noted that the public of Europe was working itself into 'a kind of ferment' on the subject.

Scholars have endeavoured to sort out Rousseau's borrowings, both from great precursors and from brilliant contemporaries: from Montaigne, quoted a dozen times in *Émile*, and from Locke, whom he criticizes in such a way as to make it quite clear how much he is indebted to him, and finally Fénelon and Condillac. It is easy to find in the works of these established authors, and in those of others who have made less of a mark—the 'scholarly Fleury', author of the best-seller *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* [Treatise on study choices and methods], published in 1686 and republished in 1753 and 1759, the 'wise Rollin', author of *Traité des études* [Treatise on studies]—many ideas that herald those of Rousseau. However, it will readily be acknowledged that the author of *Du contrat social* [On a social contract] and *Émile* is anything but eclectic. These borrowings are in fact totally recast by a mind that seeks in its thinking to be both systematic and innovatory. In his preface to *Émile*, for example, he observes: 'I write not about others' ideas, but about my own. I do not see as other men see; it is a thing I have long been reproached with.'

Rousseau's stroke of genius, which established the radical originality of his approach, was to have perceived education as the new form of a world that had embarked upon a historical process of dislocation. Where the more active of his contemporaries, themselves also inspired by educational ideals, endeavoured to 'produce education', and where the intellectual luminaries sought, through education, to cast man in a new mould—be it that of the humanist, the good Christian, the gentleman or the good citizen—Rousseau dismissed all techniques and broke all moulds by proclaiming that the child did not have to become anything other than what he was destined to be: 'Living is the business that I wish to teach him. When he leaves my care he will, I grant, be neither magistrate, nor soldier, nor priest: he will be, primarily, a man.'¹

The great problem was that the humanist ideal of man had had its day: that of man living in harmony with nature and his fellows, governed by institutions whose authority he did not challenge. Now need had freed itself from nature, engendering in man a passion to possess, an ambition that in its turn fuelled a race for power. Stretching beyond the limits of natural needs, self-interest was spreading, and would soon contaminate the entire social fabric. The institutions whose traditional function it was to contain it must henceforth be regarded as the instruments of a vast process of manipulation designed to entrench the power of the strongest. Knowledge too, to which man had since Plato looked for salvation, was but a fraud: the sciences were born of the desire to protect oneself, the arts of the ambition to shine, philosophy of a will to dominate. The indictment contained in the two *Discours* published in 1750 and 1755 thus strikes at the roots of any attempt to define man's essence in principle, so true it is that any definition pertains to the order of social representation and partakes of that corruption through the self-interest that is a feature of historical societies.

Reading *Du contrat social* we may of course dream of a world in which conflicts of interest have been reconciled and in which the general will has become the appropriate expression of the individual will. But what more can we do than dream, in a world doomed to see its needs left unsatisfied? And woe to whoever might wish to give some historical consistency to that dream: he would run the risk of allowing individual interests, artificially contained by the authoritarian installation of a 'natural society' within this civilized world, to explode, all the more violently, a structure that had become utterly alien to them. Society had been set adrift: 'We are approaching a state of crisis, and the century of revolutions. Who can answer to you for what will then become of

you?' The injunction is consequently all the more urgent: 'Suit man's education to man, and not to what is not man. Do you not see that, in working to fashion him solely for one state, you render him useless for any other?'²

Must we then go along with the general trend and accept the dislocation of society as inevitable, unscrupulously pursue our own private interests and fling ourselves into the social whirligig? In his wandering and parasitic existence, Rousseau may have given, indeed gave, the impression of being a hedonistic sceptic. But to accept this impression at its true value would be to fail to appreciate his will to serve man, his Calvinistic sense of the need for law, even though that law is bereft of all historical substance, and the role that he assigns to society in developing the qualities that make man what he is. It would also be to forget that Rousseau always had a repugnance for anarchic disorder and an almost obsessive love of order, reflected in his well-groomed appearance, his neat and tidy living quarters, his careful handwriting, his meticulously arranged herbariums. His thinking, systematic in its form, aimed constantly for unity.

The world thus being what it is, what is to be done? Rousseau finally gives us his answer in the work which was initially intended to gather together a number of reflections and which was subsequently expanded into a 'treatise on man's original goodness', namely, *Émile*, which he came to regard as 'the best of his writings, and the most important', the one that gave him the best claim to the gratitude of men and of God: his aim now being to educate. Education was to be the Ark in which humanity, as a social entity, might be saved from the flood. Where man can no longer develop his potential by yielding solely to his natural impetuses, where he runs the risk of another form of alienation by becoming that 'fragmentary unit that cleaves to the denominator, and whose value lies in its relation to the whole, which is the body politic', it would seem that a specific form of action may be implemented that 'stage-manages' the meeting between desire (natural) and the law (established) in such a way that *Homo educandus* makes his own law for himself, makes himself, in the etymological sense of the term, autonomous.

In other words, the idea of education, far from giving rise to a new ideology continued to be rooted in the contradiction-fraught human condition. Rousseau's work, and particularly *Émile*, is in fact a crossroads where the great currents and counter-currents of the age jostle and mingle together, the same currents indeed that have continued to exercise Western thinkers and shape their thinking right from their Platonic-Christian origins. Freedom and necessity, heart and head, the individual and the state, knowledge and experience, each of the terms of the antinomy finds sustenance in *Émile*, published by Rousseau in 1762. Rousseau remains a product of the Enlightenment, but rationalism cohabits openly in him with its sempiternal adversary, the one against which Plato and Descartes had erected their system: the feeling individual asserting its own truth in the authenticity of an existence in harmony with itself. Thus, education was to be for Rousseau the art of managing opposites with an eye to the development of a truly autonomous or self-reliant freedom.

Consider the problem of freedom and authority. From the outset, Rousseau will have no truck with any form of education based on the principle of authority which claims to subordinate the child's will to that of its governor. But should the child then be left to itself? The world being what it is, this would be a fatal error, one that would jeopardize its development. If the feeling individual is to win through to a state of automatic awareness, he needs to meet reality head-on, and it would be utterly pointless to recreate around the child a necessarily artificial paradise in which its desires could be fully met. While appearing to 'follow nature', it would in fact only be following opinion. As the career of *Émile*'s eponymous hero well illustrates, it is on the contrary for freedom and selfhood to be won by transcending the conflict-fraught encounter with the stubborn realities of the world, other people and society. And it is here that the educator regains a decisive role in managing the formative experience, in accompanying the child throughout its trials and ordeals, and, last and most importantly, in providing an essential stimulus when the time comes for it to endeavour to emerge, regenerated, from the wreckage of its shattered desires. The educator's

whole art must be to perform his task in such that his will is never imposed upon that of the child.

Consider further the encounter between knowledge and experience, another contradictory situation. Although it is true that knowledge is the death of the more spontaneous, unpredictable aspects of experience, it none the less remains vital for all who have to cope with this world of self-interest and calculation. Education is therefore essential. However, purely and simply transmitting the knowledge needed for life in society exposes the individual to the danger of alienation. Although science liberates, it may equally well trap the individual in a new form of intellectual conformity. It is therefore important to organize the transmission of knowledge in such a way that the child takes the task upon itself. What is needed is an educational approach that is not a mere process of adapting the 'message' to a 'receiver' but is rooted, independently, in the significance of the knowledge transmitted in regard to the interest that each individual has in receiving it.

It follows that society must henceforth create within itself an educational environment that fosters, through action suitably geared to the goal aimed at, each individual's access to freedom and selfhood. One thinks of the school. But Rousseau's purpose goes beyond the limits of an institution, whether it be the school or the family or, in a general manner, the social institution, to seek to identify a form of action that enables the individual to become free, despite the mutilation that society inflicts upon individual sensitivity.

Misunderstandings

It is understandable that this style of argumentation, so skilfully contrasted and so subtly dialectical, should have given rise to all kinds of misunderstanding.

First, there are those who insist on regarding *Émile* as a practical treatise on education. But it is a work of fiction, in which educational thinking is presented or acted out in the persons of *Émile*, who lacks a clearly defined character, and a governor who has neither name nor personal background, who undergo a series of experiences that appear to have been concocted purely in order to illustrate a particular approach. In the third of the *Dialogues*, in which he adopts the persona of 'judge of Jean-Jacques', Rousseau finally acknowledges that his *Émile*, a book 'read by so many, understood by so few, and so ill appreciated' was in the final analysis merely a 'treatise on man's original goodness, intended to show how vice and error, so alien to his constitution, work their way in from outside and imperceptibly debase him.'³ Whereas the two *Discours* had effected a total deconstruction of the human universe, *Émile* would attempt to reconstruct it, albeit in the manner of a 'metaphysics of education' that, as Rousseau warned in his Preface, aimed solely at identifying principles, openly pooh-poohing any possible applications.

It may even be feared that putting the precepts of *Émile* into practice, scrupulously and to the letter, would lead the educator to catastrophe. Pestalozzi was to have the painful proof of this in educating his son Jakob. The four-year-old boy was usually left to follow his natural impulses, but his father made a point, regularly and without explanation, of crushing his egocentric sensibility in the hope that a sense of the law would be born in the child of this collision of wills. What this actually produced was a child that no longer understood what sort of a father he was dealing with: a father who was sometimes liberal in the extreme, at other times an intolerable tyrant. Jakob's nervous constitution, by nature already vulnerable, was to suffer irreparable damage.⁴

Then there are those who, unable to accommodate Rousseau's antinomies, tug him in the direction that best suits them, in accordance with their own presuppositions or with the social representation of a given epoch. This has led to *Émile* being generally regarded—both by those who had a bone to pick with the French Revolution (in which Rousseau found himself compromised very much against his will) and by those who pined for a return of the educational revolution—as a Bible as far as the 'pedagogics of freedom' were concerned, calling for the liberation and non-interference in the development of the child. To be sure, Rousseau builds

deliberately on the principle of freedom. Any attitude that might subordinate Émile's will to that of another is systematically rejected. However, his will is none the less educated through continuous and energetic action against that 'love of self' that constitutes its root. It is indeed intended that Émile should commit himself to obeying a law, and that law cannot fall from the heavens, and even less can it be the mere reflection of his own interests. It is for him to fashion it in the course of his conflict-fraught encounters with his fellows. The atmosphere of the book is indeed in no way paradisiacal, and Émile does not gambol about as he pleases in some idyllic countryside: the episodes that follow one another are generally fraught with drama.

Rousseau's plea to observe and to get to know the child has also been regularly seized upon in order to reduce his project to a psychological approach grafted onto education. This is to overlook the fact that his psychology is highly approximate, and far from scientific in the sense in which this is understood by modern experimentalists (Rousseau was, nevertheless, fascinated by scientific experiments!). The concepts he uses (passion, self-interest, desire, etc.) remain shrouded in ambiguity. Psychologists and psychoanalysts would have every reason to sneer at such amateurishness were it not for the fact that Rousseau's purpose lies elsewhere. To be sure, it is important for him that the educator should be well acquainted with the subject (i.e. the child) who is to be educated, and the then emergent human sciences were able to make a useful contribution to that investigation. However, the subject of education remains none the less for him a subject, that is a free being, resistant to any attempt to determine in principle what he is and what he is capable of becoming: 'We do not know what our nature permits us to be.'

While psychology, like any other human science, predicates its purposes and its investigations on the premise of a nature that is already constituted—and which will indeed be interpreted from as many standpoints as there are sciences—teaching focuses on a nature that is wholly open to freedom's infinite potentialities.

The misunderstanding is no less great on the part of educationists, who have regularly mistaken the presentation in fictional form of a principle of action for a directive to be applied as such. When Rousseau attacks books and delays Émile's access to reading to an extreme degree, this in no way means that he rejects books, any more than the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* [Essay on science and art] is aimed at destroying culture. What Rousseau really wishes to indicate thereby is that to introduce children prematurely to 'predigested' texts, accepted judgements and abstractions that mean nothing to them is to imprison them in a prefabricated world in which they think entirely and continuously through others. While the concept, the structured sentence, the printed text remain the instruments pre-eminently suited to ensuring man's intellectual mastery over the world, it is nevertheless essential that he should be given the means to accede thereto by himself. This is the whole purpose of a pedagogical approach to reading. Reading is not an end in itself; it must come at the right moment, which may indeed vary enormously from one child to another, in the process of intellectual reappropriation of the world. It is indeed this movement or impetus that gives its meaning to reading, it is to the extent that it is harnessed at source and followed in its development that the desire to read is created in the child.

Another subject of controversy is Sophie's education, and the way in which the egalitarian philosopher appears to abandon his principle as soon as he finds himself dealing with a member of the opposite sex. Certain statements in Book V of *Émile* are indeed calculated to make feminists froth at the mouth: 'woman is made specially to please man', she must be educated in accordance with the duties of her sex, must refrain from seeking truths of an abstract or speculative nature and confine herself to household management and domestic duties. If Rousseau's thinking here is hardly very bold, this is no doubt to be largely attributed to his pathological quest for the woman who would be his refuge in a world that had become completely alien to him. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to overlook those other passages in Book V where Rousseau denounces the trap that egalitarianism represented for women in their claim to power-sharing. With their predominantly sensitive, practical nature, women do indeed possess a talent that puts them on an equal footing

with their partners:

Woman's own violence lies in her charms. [. . .] This specific adroitness given to her sex is very equitable compensation for what she lacks in strength; without which woman would not be man's companion, but his slave. It is thanks to this superiority of talent that she maintains herself as his equal, and that she governs him by obeying him. [. . .] Suppose you decided to bring women up like men; men would willingly consent. The more women sought to resemble them, the less they would govern them, and it is then that men would truly be the masters.⁵

This debate leads us to clarify Rousseau's conception of the principle of equality, as it is established in the 1755 *Discours* and as it is put into practice in the educational blueprint that *Émile* represents. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the state of reference remains that 'state of nature' evoked in the first part of the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* [Essay on the origin of inequality], characterized by a complete inequality of forces, each individual being entirely free to develop on his or her own in a world without barriers. Once they have entered the social arena, these forces must come to terms with one another, eventually handing over their power to a higher authority capable of arbitrating conflicts. But this power has itself entered an era of generalized contestation that unleashes the natural forces once again. It is in this context that education is called upon to accomplish its mission: it endeavours at one and the same time the management of opposites, being the name of the game to foster the social integration of natural desires within a universe threatened by violence, and to promote the self-directed liberation of those desires within the context of the social dissatisfaction that is a feature of our modern societies. In other words, it is the school's task less to ensure equality through all-out integration than to provide everyone with the means of securing his or her freedom in a context of active responsibility and solidarity.⁶

It is important therefore to look twice before honouring Rousseau as the father of 'republican education'. Even at the time of the French Revolution, those responsible for planning public instruction experienced the greatest difficulty, once they had paid the obligatory tribute to Rousseau, in incorporating in their schemes the approach outlined in *Émile*, which was regarded rather as a form of private education. They accordingly went to the lengths of deducing from a strictly political interpretation of *Du contrat social* the necessity of a type of civic education devised for the sole purpose of ensuring integration into the new citizenship, attributing the embarrassing statements contained in *Émile* to its author's exacerbated subjectivity. The posthumous publication of the manuscript of *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* [Thoughts on the governing of Poland], in which Rousseau advocates setting up a national education system, occurred just at the right moment to bolster the socio-centric interpretation.

The drawback of this political interpretation is that it rather hastily overlooks certain provocative statements that open and close *Émile*:

Public institutions no longer exist, and can no longer exist; because where there is no longer a fatherland, there can no longer be citizens. These two terms, fatherland and citizen, must be eliminated from modern languages [Book I].

'Tis in vain that we aspire to freedom under the protection of the law. Law! Where is there law, and where is it respected? What you have seen reigning everywhere under that guise is but men's private interests and passions [Book V].

This makes it clear that Rousseau's scepticism *vis-à-vis* all forms of government had remained undiminished since the scathing analyses contained in the two *Discours*. The corruption of institutions being what it is, *Du contrat social*—that is, the social contract outlined in that work—remains a dream, a necessary dream, to be sure, which gives focus to political action, but a dream none the less, one that we must be careful not to transform into reality.

For human reality is henceforth essentially an educative process. It calls for the rebuilding of human society on the basis of the interest each individual finds therein, beginning with the

adolescent who has the advantage of being involved from the inception of this process. And politics, itself caught up in a contradiction leading nowhere, can thus receive a new meaning from education.

In saying this, we are merely re-establishing the proper balance between *Émile* and *Du contrat social*, such as Rousseau himself envisaged it. He did in fact attach far more importance to his treatise on education than to his political tract, which was the digest of a vast work on political institutions that he never managed to complete. Although ‘the two together make a complete whole’, as he wrote to a correspondent, it remained understood that *Du contrat social* ‘must be taken as a sort of appendix’ to the treatise on education.⁷ And it is a fact that the substance of *Du contrat social* is recapitulated in Book V of *Émile*, albeit in the form of ‘propositions and questions’ which are to be discussed and which will be converted into principles ‘only once they have been adequately proved or solved’.⁸ It is here that politics’ roots in the educational sphere become palpable.

Of all the misunderstandings that have bedevilled the interpretation of *Émile*, the political misunderstanding has undoubtedly had the most serious consequences. It barred access to the original anthropological approach to the idea of education that Rousseau had succeeded in formulating, and that provided human action with a new basis of meaning. This ‘hi-jacking’ operation can be explained by the anxiety of our modern societies, products as they are of the great upheaval of the French Revolution, to regain at all costs a measure of stability. It is to be hoped that, the revolutionary idea having spent its strength, a reasonable reappraisal may restore to education all its chances of success.

A posterity fraught with contradictions

Referring to ‘Rousseau and his posterity eternally at variance with itself’, an excellent analyst of contemporary educational thinking has written:

It is understandable that hasty readers, educationalists little concerned to probe Rousseau’s philosophical ideas so as to better grasp his theories on education, should have failed to appreciate the finely balanced nature of his thought. *Émile* was misinterpreted even in the eighteenth century, and today it is still not being read correctly.⁹

We fully concur with this judgement.

The fact remains that Rousseau would be quite prepared to accept responsibility for the contradictions of his heirs and inheritors. Thus the advocates of adult non-intervention and child self-determination (the school communities in Hamburg, A. S. Neill at Summerhill), and those who are willing to confine themselves to ‘facilitating’ the free development of the child’s natural desire to learn (Rogers and non-directivity) have been able to legitimize their approaches by reference to the principle of ‘negative education’, according to which the teacher is expected ‘by doing nothing, to do everything’ and to ‘give the child the desire to learn’ by turning each and every method to account. However, such educationists pay little heed to the ability of social institutions to denature desire. As Georges Snyders quite properly points out, our society being what it is,

it would be idle to wish to entrust a child to its own spontaneous impulses, for what would be expressed in that child would never be the promptings of nature but the whole congeries of uncriticized, uncorrected influences that cloak those promptings.

He then quotes this passage from Book III of *Émile*:

A man who wished to regard himself as an isolated being, attached to absolutely nothing and quite self-sufficient, could not help but be wretched.¹⁰

The ‘liberators of natural desire’ were indeed rapidly obliged by reality to make endless compromises with those social institutions that they claimed to be able to do without.

The educator cannot therefore escape his responsibilities in the world as it is. Against all opposition, he must accomplish his mission of educating, albeit in such a way that ‘your pupil always believes himself to be the master, whereas it is always you who are’.¹¹ The educator’s concern must be to take charge of the child’s desires while at the same time allowing him his freedom, indeed, forcing it upon him. To ensure that this second requirement is met, recourse will be had to an educational project that is both explicit and explained to the child, whereby instruction will be mediated through the ‘necessity of things’, beyond reach of man’s will. The only problem is that such a project can be established only on the basis of a presupposition that itself refers to a point of view predicated on man and on what man must be. It is here that, with *Émile* as their starting-point, the major currents begin to emerge that will constitute the history of the modern pedagogical movement, whose development was foreshadowed by Pestalozzi with his focus on three main axes designated by the triad—heart, head, hand.

Rousseau opened the doors of humanity to the heart—to sensibility, sentiment and passion—demanding that it should be placed on an equal footing with reason. Into this breach plunge a whole host of educators determined to base their action on the primacy of love, trust and the unity of life: from Fröbel to Korczak, by way of all those experiments that sought to create a ‘living area’ for and around the child, right up to our modern educationists, much concerned with communication, eagerly seeking identity in the transparency of relationships. But what they all forget is that the character who probably best embodies Rousseau’s ideal of the educator Julie in *La nouvelle Héloïse*, while she may be prone to (pre-)Romantic effusions, does none the less maintain a constant detachment from her entourage, and in particular from her children. In the end she reveals herself to be a woman more of duty than of love. To say nothing of the coldness and apparent indifference of the governor: the feelings that bind Émile to his mentor are a mixture of affection and a form of fear, love being weighed down by esteem.

Indeed, for the governor, everything appears to be resolved in a loftier and more arithmetical vision of things. Education seen from this angle is first and foremost a matter of intelligence, a form of intelligence able essentially to grasp the laws that govern the development of human nature, and thereby to anticipate the patterns of that development. It is the starting-point for that line of educationists who base their approach on a positive assessment of the factors determining human development, be they bio-psychological (Decroly, Montessori), psychological (from Herbart to Piaget) or sociological (Spencer, Durkheim, *Emanzipationspädagogik*). It is in fact the meeting-point of several approaches, each of which may draw its legitimacy from Rousseau’s work: the law of vital interests coexists peacefully with the genetic approach, against a background of social criticism that never flags. Indeed, ever since the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* we have known what to think of these branches of social science and their respective claims each to take the measure of human nature in its totality.

Another major current was to draw its inspiration from the fact that Émile is always placed in a situation where he is required to be active, that he is regularly involved in practical action on which he is led to reflect on experience, and that the obligation imposed upon him to have a manual job locates him within the sphere of socially useful work: education was to be essentially a practical process. This current was to develop ‘activity methods’—such as those aimed at making the child a technician in charge of its own knowledge (Freinet) or the training-through-work experiments (Dewey, Makarenko)—to the point of seeking to harness modern technologies for the purpose of transforming teachers’ attitudes and practices. The fact remains that Rousseau’s entire work proclaims that if the child is indeed to achieve self-realization in and through action, such a praxis can be meaningful only in the context of a higher understanding that does not pertain to the sphere of action. Here again, the aim is as always to understand what is at stake in the act of educating.

Educating the heart, educating the head, educating the hand: Rousseau assumes full responsibility for the contradictions with which his posterity is fraught. But he is also there when, in the aftermath of their historical failure, these eager advocates of the affective relationship, of discursive intelligence and of productive action, invariably ask the question: Has education any chance of making headway in this historical world in which their action has finally bogged down? When they begin to despair, as Pestalozzi did in his Neuhof retreat, it is to *Émile* that they turn, it is always that 'dream book' that they avidly reread, as though it had not yielded all its secrets, as though it remained, to quote the expression used by Pestalozzi towards the close of an existence so rich in experience, a 'sealed book'.

What then is the book's essential secret? Perhaps it is quite simply that man—and first and foremost *Homo educandus*—must ever transcend the reach of what I may or can think of him in scientific, philosophical or political terms. That he is essentially free, and that all efforts to love him, understand him, involve him, which are exerted in disregard of this freedom are, ultimately, doomed to failure. If education is really an affair of the heart, there is an ever-present risk of smothering the child with affection. It then becomes important for love to be kept within bounds by an attitude of faith in what nature truly intends for the other, in this case the child. If education is really a matter of gaining a positive understanding of the subject to be educated and of the factors by which it is determined, then the risk of treating that subject as the mere product of those determinants is indeed considerable. It is then vital to keep an eye on the limit beyond which such positive knowledge overwhelms man's ability to direct his own nature. If education is really a matter of action, then there is a danger of making it a mere matter of technical production. It is then crucial constantly to resituate the techniques involved within the context of self-reliant freedom.

Education will then become, in the spirit of *Émile*, less a project to be integrated into historical reality than a form to be given to pedagogical action in itself, taking account of what it is that is sought through education and the checks and balances that it brings into play. This would not be the least of the paradoxes of Rousseau's work: the educational dreamer, because he pursued his dream to its logical conclusion, would prove in the final analysis to be a master of the practical art of teaching.

That is no doubt why Rousseau was able to see the idea of education as the keystone of our modernity, while we ourselves persist in consigning it to the scrap-heap of projects that have reached stalemate. And that is why Rousseau still stands before us and still has something to say to us as we grapple with the major challenges of our age.

We need only consider, for example, the cultural confrontations that are increasingly stretching the fabric of nations and that threaten to rend them irreparably asunder. Rousseau, himself torn between two worlds, the republican, Calvinist and particularist world of Geneva and that of the homeland of his choice, monarchist and Catholic, universalist, pronounced in his two *Discours* a pitiless diagnosis of the dislocation of the cultural universes whose stability had seemed guaranteed for all eternity. Culture, far from floating in some ideal firmament, remains tied to the vital interests of those who support it, and in those who possess it nurtures a sense of domination. Are not the sciences born of the need to seek protection, the arts of the desire to shine, and philosophy of the urge to dominate? It is for the more cultured and ablest citizens to make skilful use of that jewel in culture's crown: speech—and the power of speech! It is with this dawning awareness that the 'crisis of culture' begins.

Historically constituted states cannot be expected to overcome a crisis in which they are themselves caught up. There is therefore a need for a specific social environment in which can be freely developed a process of reconstruction of culture that transcends its newly recovered diversity, in which its form, universal despite all challenges, can receive a new substance that is more in keeping with the interests of its constituents—an educational environment. But here again, it will be less a question of an institution, delivered up to man's folly and contradictions, than the effect of a course of educational action designed to foster in everyone, in a context that transcends

the social confrontation of cultures, the capacity to discover and reappropriate the values that underlie those cultures. When in Book V of *Émile* its eponymous hero returns from his European travels, in the course of which he has taken the full measure of the historical diversity of its peoples and the relative nature of their social constitutions, he concludes by acknowledging that, while man owes much to the homeland that bore him and the culture that nurtured him, he cannot expect from them more than they can give him within the historical limits assigned to them. And it is ultimately in a most Socratic manner, in his innermost self, in his heart of hearts as a free man, that he will be called upon to discover the well-spring of the necessary cultural regeneration.

Through his analysis of the contradictions by which societies continue to be rent, Rousseau has thus opened for us the doors of modernity, and pointed out the path to be followed: that of man's education and training. If he did not himself embark upon this path, that is because, having dismissed established practice, he refused to be content to 'follow the right path halfway'. What mattered to him, as he explained once again in the Preface to *Émile*, was that the type of education proposed should be 'fitting for man and well suited to the human heart'.

Can education still be said to be so in this final decade of the twentieth century? It is a readily observable fact that the contradictions have become more radical. Never have the claims of science and technology been so great, but never has their authority been so challenged. Never has the desire to communicate become so deeply embedded, at a time when so many resources are deployed in order to satisfy it. Never, doubtless, has there been so much talk of action, but never has there been such an awareness of the incoherences of praxis. What all this ultimately testifies to is a great conceptual vulnerability, manifest in particular in educational thinking, torn between current fads and fashions. Were Rousseau to help us to rebuild the Idea of education, we should indeed have reason, historically, to be grateful to him.

Notes

1. *Oeuvres complètes* [Complete works], vol. 4, p. 252, Paris, Gallimard/Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 934.
4. See Michel Soëtard, *Pestalozzi ou la naissance de l'éducateur* [Pestalozzi or the birth of the educator], pp. 84 et seq., pp. 204 et seq., Berne, P. Lang, 1981.
5. *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, p. 701.
6. An excellent illustration of this form of action is presented in the *Lettre de Stans* published by Pestalozzi in 1799. Generally speaking, Pestalozzi's approach clearly reflects, throughout a life's work devoted to practical issues, the evolution of Rousseau's educational project, from a literal application of that project to an understanding of its spirit (see Michel Soëtard, *Rousseau*, pp. 149-50, Geneva, Editions Coeckelberghe, 1988).
7. T. Dufour (ed.), *Correspondance générale de J.-J. Rousseau* [General correspondence of J.-J. Rousseau], vol. 7, p. 233, Paris, P. P. Plan, 1924-34.
8. *Oeuvres complètes*, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 837 et seq.
9. J. Ulmann, Introduction, *La pensée éducative contemporaine* [Modern educational thought], Paris, Vrin, 1982.
10. G. Snyders, *La pédagogie en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* [Education in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries], Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965.
11. *Oeuvres complètes*, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 362.

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An international bibliography of writings on *Émile* in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been compiled:

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Among works that study the entirety of Rousseau's work, particularly *Emile*, mention may be made of:

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