

J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* and Religious Education

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Abstract J. J. Rousseau, thinker of the Age of Enlightenment, breaks a new ground in education with his work *Emile*. In his novel, *Emile* is the name of the child he has grown up imaginatively. Rousseau, describing Emile's life and his relationship with his instructor from birth to adolescence, discusses teacher-student relationship, and he defends that children are innate, pure and noble, and that they must be protected from the negative effects of society. This vision, called the return to nature and aiming to protect children from society's artificiality and self-esteem, is recognized as Naturalism in education world. The basic idea of this movement is that child development is carried out without undue interference and limitations. Parents and educators should be good observers, helpers for providing appropriate experiences, and should be in a position that allows children to grow according to their natural abilities. Rousseau, recommending Robinson Crusoe lifestyle, is opposed to compulsory and restricted education. Rousseau himself, who seems to have influenced many thinkers such as Daniel Defoe, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Vygotsky and Piaget, has also been influenced by others. *Emile* is thought to have been influenced by the work Hayy Ibn Yaqzan written by Avicenna and Ibn Tufail centuries ago. Rousseau also mentions religious and moral education in his work. To him, it is more meaningful to teach children how to choose truthfully, how to choose by using their minds and experiences and to respect their free will, rather than giving them a religious education shaped and modified by society. Although it is not possible to practice today, important points to be taken into consideration in religious education draw attention. In our theoretical article, we have tried to investigate the still-influential Naturalism movement and Rousseau's views on religious-moral education, and contribute to the field. We aim to create an awareness of this subject which has not been researched by any independent study.

Keywords Avicenna, Ibn Tufail, Rousseau, *Emile*, Religious Education

1. Introduction

J.J. Rousseau, who lived in the 18th century (1712-1778),

is considered one of the forerunners of the Enlightenment movement. In this period when the tendency to connect nature and man with a new passion has been seen, the thought that the individual attaches importance to other values than himself emerges. This period in which rationalism, sensualism and mysticism have been popular, experimental and sensory approaches that attach importance to scientific thought in order to provide better living conditions to human beings, are optimistic about all the developments of the period [1]. Rousseau is distinguished from other thinkers of the period with his views on the unconditional acceptance of all that life brings and the betterness of man's future. Rousseau's goal has been to show that the nature of man is a good being, but worsened by traditional perceptions of institutions and society. For Rousseau, the difference between man and animal is the ability of man to act freely. The spiritual power of man especially manifests itself in this freedom consciousness. It is very important for people to have the will of choice in the face of circumstances [2].

Throughout the time we live, we are being trained by people and matured with the things we experience from events that affect us. When the way created by trainers for us and the appropriate way to our genesis point out opposite directions, we are living spiritual reactions. Knowing that the end of the way they want us to walk will not bring us happiness, we are not encouraged to walk in the other way. As we have been fighting and rippling all our lives, we are completing our lives without harmonizing with ourselves and doing good things for neither ourselves nor others.

We must free the children to reveal their talents and to be what they want to be. We must teach them not to be judges, soldiers, or clergy, but to live. In fact, before our children become a profession, they have to be human. Because a person can be what s/he wants to be or what s/he should be, then s/he can give up and become something else, but s/he must always remain herself. The most distinctive aim of Rousseau in *Emile* is to protect man's natural well-being and create a society that is fully developed. Education right should be presented to all children and members of society. Educational aim is to nurture the natural values and to improve social unity, social equality. Education should protect the child from all evil. If we train the child

according to his tendencies and abilities, the child will find a solution to the future needs. Education should start in the family and then be taken over by the state. We can summarize the two important views of Rousseau that will be the basis for education: a- Education should be discussed by considering the child's instinctive interest and activities. b- Education should be discussed in parallel with the development of the child [3].

Rousseau, penning the *Social Contract*, must be understood that people cannot solve the problems between them with a set of written contracts, then by writing *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau is convinced that people can be ameliorated only with education and social problems can be eliminated with this channel. The first edition of Rousseau's book was published in 1762, but the book was forbidden in Paris and Genoa at that time and was burnt publicly. After all, when the French Revolution began, this book was used as a source of education, but dear Rousseau could not see it [4].

In his book *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau bases education on 7 principles:

1. Giving self-esteem to childhood: Rousseau has said that the childhood should be evaluated in itself, and it is not true to discuss childhood as a preliminary stage in the transition to adulthood.
2. Investigating childhood: It is not true to educate a child as a citizen without researching the childhood and evaluating it as the beginning of human life. In childhood, the child is in the process of generating himself physically, intellectually, emotionally, and this process is very important as it is fundamental.
3. Negative education: The concept of morality must never be included in the education of children until the child is 12 years old. Because the sense of morality that we inflict on the child is more of an individual understanding of the teacher or trainer who trains him, and this will eventually turn into the immorality of education.
4. Learning by experience: For Rousseau, there are three types of teachers. Nature, Society and the Case [5]. Nature develops our abilities and power, and society develops where we will use our power and ability. The cases are acquisitions by looking at our experiences. The task of the instructor is to ensure that these three vehicles are equally involved in the training, in other words equilibrium. The instructor or the teacher certainly should not use authority as a means of dictation to the child and should never be tough. Everything that must be learned as difficult or compulsory must be grasped as a need. This is a measure taken against the teacher-student hierarchy because children should learn not to follow orders but to maintain their existence as human beings.
5. Age-appropriate education: Rousseau defines transition from childhood to adulthood as four stages. Pre-childhood (0-5 years - Animal Stage), childhood

(5-12 years - Wild Stage), pre-adolescence (12-15 years -Rational Stage), adolescence (15-20 years - Social Stage) [6]. The instructor should play a role according to the needs of these stages. In the pre-childhood period, the child should be encouraged to form his / her discovery ability and power. Physical development, interest in learning by imitating, desire to learn by trial-and-error, and experiencing should be supported in childhood. During pre-adolescence, perception and logic must be strengthened because reasoning is formed at this time. As the basis of the quest for life's essence depends on the ability of reasoning, no pressure should be placed on the formation of the moral concept in this period and the child should acquire sense of decency through the method of comparing. In adolescence, the child will begin to feel love for other people and objects outside him. As the child will meet with enthusiasm, passion, ambition and many other similar feelings at this age, the task of the trainer will be to become friends with the child and accompany him in this process. In adolescence, the teacher has the obligation to encourage the child to reveal the feeling of the suffering of others and to develop this awareness.

6. Citizenship education: After adolescence, the individual is now ready to fulfill his/her responsibilities to society. Previously, the opportunity to be presented to each individual (when considered for that period and France), is that every individual travels all over Europe and decides where and how s/he will live by comparing his own and foreign societies. Individual should decide on his/her own in which society and which country s/he will live.
7. Religious education: The adult individual must freely decide which religion to choose, judging from experiences s/he has experienced.

Rousseau has identified five basic education principles in *Emile*: Naturalism, Experience, Humanism, Dimensionality and Autonomy [7]. This educational model, which is very progressive compared to its own period, is still not practiced in any country in the world at all. Because all education systems based on the nation-state have turned their schools into a places disciplined strictly with one language, one race and one religion. The guards of these places disciplined strictly are unfortunately; teachers. Since the individual does not have the ability to reason freely within such systems, in the following years, individual will not feel the pain of his/her side and will believe in everything that is said on TV, politicians, clerics, security forces, in short, everyone except himself/ herself, because he could not learn to feel someone else's pain [8]. It can be said that Rousseau's *Emile* is a turning point for education world, and is accepted as such. What is the prominence and feature of this work that continues its

influence until today? What's in it? Has Rousseau been influenced by previous work? What does Rousseau think about religious and moral education? We will try to examine these issues in our work.

2. Who Has Influenced Rousseau?

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is a philosophical work written for the first time by Avicenna and described in detail in his *The Book of Healing*. Then Andalusian Ibn Tufail wrote a book with the same name, which affected the 17th and 18th century European thought. Three important translations in English and translations in other languages guided Rousseau [9]. Ibn Tufail (whose real name is Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Abdulmalik b. Tufayl) is called by the westerners as Ebubacer. He has been a clerk in Girnata for a while, has worked as vizier and doctor for Abu Yaqub Yusuf from Almohades and died in Marrakech in 1185 A.D in 581 B.C. Besides his other works, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* is known in the Islamic World and in the West [10]. *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, which we can translate into today's Turkish as "Alive, son of Awake", was written in the form of novel. Hayy(Alive), our character, is generated spontaneously in a deserted island, or he is a boy who has come to the deserted island by the waves drifting a chest left to the sea by his mother. Hayy grows up here by himself, and is never trained. He learns all his knowledge not from people, but from events and experiences. Hayy is suckled by a gazelle. He continues his life by eating the fruits and extracts of the trees when he comes to the age of walking, and he obtains technical knowledge by making clothes from tree leaves. He does the care of the aged gazelle and learns that the soul leaves the body in death. He travels around the island and discovers new foods using his mind. Over time, he makes progress in mental information, begins to link events and understands that there is a causality principle. Hayy notices that the objects occupy space and moves. He comes to realize that the living beings have an end, and becomes lost in metaphysical thoughts. He feels deeply the life of sufistic people and enters to the path of the disappearance in god by passing his selfness. While he desires to live in a spiritual world and escape the troubles of the world, he meets with Absal [11].

Salamon and Absal are two friends living in a community in another island. Both are busy searching for the truth. While Salamon, leader of the community, attaches importance to the exoteric religion, Absal gives importance to esoteric, that is, contemplation and spiritual knowledge, and he likes loneliness. For this reason, Absal goes to an island to live alone and meets with Hayy there. Absal teaches Hayy talking, religious information and worships, and Hayy tells Absal his thoughts. Thus it is revealed that Hayy's thoughts are the same with those of religion. Absal has a terrific change in this situation and his heart is opened. Synchronization of rational sciences and apocalyptic sciences makes them extremely happy. Two

good friends see that wisdom, philosophy, and religious sciences all express the same truth. Together, they decide to go to the island where Salamon is, and they begin to tell the people divine truths and their thoughts there. The people who cannot understand the peculiarities of the philosophical and spiritual information become dissatisfied. Hayy observes that the people cannot think freely from their enthusiasm and customs. Hayy feels bad about this situation and returns to the isolated island with Absal [12].

It is possible to summarize the result of this event: prophets are right about importance given to the exoteric religion. The people who are not at enough cultural level cannot easily understand the facts. They usually attach importance to the exoteric religion, which is natural. They have no power to understand the essence of spiritual truths. It is not an action that everyone can achieve to understand divine truths through love, perception and philosophy. For this reason, Hayy and Absal complete their lives with contemplation and worship until they die in the deserted island [13].

In this work, Ibn Tufail has tried to show that human can find the truths without religion and revelation. There is no need for teaching in the philosophical and metaphysical thinker. For Ibn Tufail, revelation and reason are the realities feeding on the same divine source. Those who think that religion is contrary to the mind are those who do not know the rules of interpretation (te'vil). Asceticism and the way of sufism would be possible with the salvation of mind from material things. The disagreement between exoteric and esoteric is not in esoteric, but in exoteric. Not everyone has the power to see the esoteric. With these views, Ibn Tufail has actually tried to reconcile religion with philosophy [14]. We see that these views of Ibn Tufail are compatible with Hanefism and Maturidism [15].

In "Alive, Son of Awake", Avicenna, in order to show that knowledge based on reason can be self-sufficient, has fictionalized a person who has realised and reached knowledge in total loneliness. For this reason, Avicenna has titled his book like that against the drowsiness. In his book, Avicenna discusses the thought that human can make contact with the divine source of information by overcoming the flesh and carnal forces [16]. In the following periods, "Journey to the West" by Sohrevardi, the work with the same name "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan" written by Ibn Tufail [17]. Robinson-style works written in Europe [18]. "Emile", still considered being training classic, written by J. J. Rousseau are the works inspired by Avicenna. For Rousseau and his follower Pestalozzi "God (Nature, in my view) makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil." Young children are born innocent and clean, and should be protected from the negative effects of society [19]. Centuries ago, Avicenna reveals these views that are called Naturalism of Rousseau. "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan", written by Ibn Tufail inspired by Avicenna, was published with the name of "Philosophus Autodidactus" in 1671 in the Enlightenment Age, and was translated by Eichorn into German with the name of

"*Natural Man*" in 1783 [20]. The dates in which mentioned authors lived confirms this thesis [21]. It is highly probable that Rousseau has seen and read "*Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*". Events, heroes and trying to find the truth with experience and reason are common issues in the books. For Ibn Tufail, the child left alone become only a monster. It is not possible to live outside the society even if the society disregards human's nature. Rousseau, on the other hand, thinks that this young feeling, *Emile*, must be raised and protected from the steamrollers of social traditions [22].

3. Religious and Moral Education of Rousseau

The essence of Rousseau's pedagogy is the religion, but this religion is not based on holy writings, but based on Deism in a philosophical sense. *Emile* is an imaginary child. Rousseau trains this imaginary child to his own ideas from his childhood to death. When *Emile* grows up, he marries Sophie, who is also an imaginary girl. We learn Rousseau's views on decency in *Emile's* and Sophie's personalities and in the growth processes. His two other works; "*Vicaire Savoyard*" and "*the Social Contract*" completes Rousseau's views. "*the Social Contract*" is very important in terms of democracy and authority concepts. In view of these works, Rousseau's views on education and decency can be summarized as follows:

- a) For Rousseau, everything that is out of the hands of the creator is good [23]. Human come to the world with feelings like conscience and compassion. Conscience is the basis of morality, and compassion is the basis of religious sentiment. He states this situation with his own words as follows: "Conscience, conscience! Immortal instinct and divine voice, reassuring guide of an ignorant and limited but intelligent and free creature. Infallible judge of good and bad who makes people like God. You are the one who glorifies the nature of man and makes him moral. Without you, I have no feeling that I can separate myself from animals. I would drift from fallacy to fallacy with an irregular perception and an unprincipled mind [24]. Rousseau declares that the moral conscience lives in human nature. For Rousseau, every living being created by the creator is good and he calls it "state of nature". The fact that people have to live collectively leads to deterioration. Civilization status degenerates good people. Decency is necessary to stop this moral corruption. In this case, the role of decency is preventive, protective and negative. The child must learn everything by travelling and experiencing nature. The trainer intervenes in cases of life-threatening situations. However, this intervention should not be to the child's living as a natural person in the nature. *Emile* takes his lessons from the nature; nature and phenomenon are guides to *Emile*.
- b) The child will not be given religious education at a young age. It is an evil done to him to break *Emile's* natural decency with the surprising, frightening and irrational suggestions of the church. When *Emile* reaches 12-13 years old, he starts asking questions to nature. The size of the sky, the stars, the struggle of the living beings, the order in nature, functioning, beauties; horrible phenomena such as lightning, storm allow him to revive his mind and think. After this phase, *Emile* spontaneously finds that this greatness and order have an originator. In short, *Emile* discovers the creator without need any guide and teacher. After this discovery, *Emile* feels admiration, love and loyalty to the creator consideringly the possibilities and blessings given to the people by the Creator. He begins to express these feelings with thanks, pray and worship.
- c) It is worthwhile to look at Rousseau's several statements on the subject: "We should avoid trying to tell Him (the Creator), to those who are incapable of understanding the divine truth." "It is better not to have any idea if you are stuck in imaginary, miserable ideas about God. It is a lighter crime not to know Him than to insult God" [25]. "I shall always maintain that whoso says in his heart, There is no God, while takes the name of God upon his lips, is either a liar or a madman" [26].

Rousseau justifies that there may be some who are amazed at the fact that he never mentions about religion when he grows up *Emile*: "When *Emile* was 15, he did not know if he had a soul or not. *Emile* does not need to know it even if he reaches 18, because the time to learn this knowledge has not yet come. If you teach religion ahead of time, you may never teach" [27]. What Rousseau really wants to say here is that, as Piaget has stated, it is necessary for the organism to reach biological maturity in order to make progress in cognitive development [28]. Furthermore, the transition to the "Abstract Transactions Period" in the taxonomy of age groups in Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development and the characteristics of this period should be taken into consideration. Along with the beginning of adolescence, changes in brain and brain functions are observed as well as physical changes. The brain can now perform abstract operations, but the ability to do so depends on the incoming requests, the interactions with the environment and on gaining experiences by these interactions [29]. Some field researches on Religion Education in our country also reveal that students have problems with understanding abstract subjects before a certain age [30]. The fact that religious information is compatible with the living world can lead children to find religious teachings unnecessary. Because the language used in that world that is depicted is very different from the real world in which the attitudes taken are. Rousseau thinks that the community is not at this level and that the child will most likely get the wrong information and experience.

Rousseau has concerns about the attitude of the church,

and utters these concerns with these expressions: "If you want to make a child an annoying fool, be a lecturer who teaches him religious lessons. If you want to drive her/him crazy, ask her/him to explain the religious information s/he has learned [31]. Rousseau's concern is not religious or ethical information, but giving this information before the time and by unqualified people. There are other thinkers like Salzmann sharing the same concerns. In his book translated into Turkish with the name of "*Book of the Crab*" or "*What Did We Do Wrong?*" Salzmann shares the concerns of Rousseau with these expressions: "If you want to make your children be alienated from religion, you should press for religious knowledge learning, and even beat them for this reason" [32]. He states that forced dictation of the dogmatic, mysterious teachings of Christianity and the Church makes the child liar, and repeating certain words cannot make children moral [33]. According to Rousseau, the language to be used in child education is also very important. It is necessary to use innocent and simple language that children like to be pure and clean and to communicate with them. How many people can do that? Adult's infrastructure, knowledge and training are appropriate for such communication? Rousseau has a wish: "I would very much like to write an akaid book for them that knows a lot of child intelligence" [34]. The same concerns are shared by contemporary religious educators. Selcuk, understanding most of the words and concepts in religion is a hard work for children. God, death, holiness, sin, reward, afterlife, goodness, and so on. Concepts are abstract concepts and are difficult to understand for children. The primary task of adults is to use the language of religion in a simple and appropriate manner. Religion should be presented to the child as "the religion of the child"; it should not be presented as a ready, finished, abstract, abstract teaching system [35].

Rousseau states that children's beliefs do not originate from a researching and conscious choice; but the geography and society, they are born, originate children's beliefs. No one has the right to send the children born in Mecca and Rome to the Heaven and Hell. Rousseau also declares favorable opinions to Islam saying "All the children who dies before the age of reason have eternal salvation" [34]. The views of contemporary religious educators are also striking. For Tosun, "In religious education, it is essential not to availably present and memorize the meaning and value, on the contrary, it is essential that the students appreciate and interiorise the values. For this reason, in the teaching of values, the teacher should not be expressive and presenting available information; on the contrary, the student should be active and interiorise the values" [35]. What kind of religious education will we give Emile? Which denomination will we put the human of nature into? Rousseau answers the questions above in this way: "We will not impose anyone; we will only bring him to a position where he can choose the best of them" [36]. Although human beings are in society and are informed, they can only reach the mystery

of god recognition later ages [37].

In his book, Rousseau tells the confrontation of an Italian boy searching for the truth and a priest who comes to the Italian's residence, priest's gentle manner, teachings, and methods [38]. This priest is actually Rousseau himself. Honest and virtuous priest firstly builds his speech with the Italian boy on thinking and doubting as Descartes. The priest continues with the arguments of "I exist" and "Senses affect me". He says that philosophers are arrogant, confirmative and dogmatic. When they are confident of their own existence, they turn their eyes to the outside world and examine the subject of the presence of substance. He states that general and abstract ideas can deceive human, and comes to the idea of God creating everything in order. Rousseau describes what he talks about as "natural religion". Religious ceremonies and what the clergy does should not be confused with religion [39]. Rousseau, who finds it wrong to restrict worship into certain rituals, states that there are two types of worship that can be classified as internal and external worship. For Rousseau, the important thing is the contemplative worship that is not compressed into certain patterns, which is the same in all religions; The important thing is that it is a contemplative worship that is not compressed into certain patterns, which is the same in all religions; external worship requires uniformitarianism and order [40]. This view is very similar to Avicenna's view of worship. As it is known, Avicenna divides the prayer into two parts as esoteric and exoteric, and states that the most important thing is the esoteric prayer that has no time, place, and certain ritual [41]. Rousseau states that all the denominations in the world are clashing with each other and they all give the answer "Mine is good" to the question "Which one is the best?". Either all religions are good and acceptable in the presence of God, or God has sent the only religion that can be understood by all, bearing clear signs. In this case, what do people do who have never heard of religion and have not met with it? After these determinations, Rousseau says that we should remember the necessity of sincerely seeking the truth, and the things taught by our mind and conscience since childhood without sheltering natural concessions and the authority of the priests [42]. "I would like to hear from first-hand and originally what God has said. I could accomplish my duties against him, bless his works, and find him utilizing the talents given by him [43].

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

With *Emile*, Rousseau breaks a new ground in education and he has influenced posterior educators such as Pestalozzi, Vygotsky, Dewey, Piaget, and Froebel. This effect has reached the view of "the society without schools" that is a current issue. It is possible to find the roots of the paradigm of Rousseau's Naturalism in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan (Alive, son of Awake)* written by Avicenna and Ibn Tufail centuries ago. Events, heroes, subjects such as the use of

the mind and the experience to find the truth show a great degree of similarity. Discovery of the information and theories belonging to us by others and promotion to the whole world must be appreciated. However, it is not a forgivable situation to be unaware of the Turkish-Islamic thinkers, their opinions, and discoveries that have influenced even the beginning of the Renaissance. First of all, the lives, works, views and the theories of thinkers such as Farabi, Biruni, Avicenna and Maturidi, that affect the whole world, should be well researched and examined; if necessary, independent research institutes and centers should be set up to transfer this scientific tradition to a new generation.

Rousseau, on the other hand, expresses his views on religious and moral education. The essence of Rousseau's pedagogy is religion. However, this religion is not based on basic sacred texts. Nature is religion. Rousseau advises that children are not mentioned about religious and moral education up to a certain age; to mention about religion and morality when they reach appropriate ages and to consider their own preference. We can say that Rousseau is right when considering abstract and concrete issues in teaching religion and morality, and the ages that these subjects should be taught. We can say that the behaviours of religionists and the church is influential in Rousseau's attitude towards religion and morality. For Rousseau, the biggest harm is given to religion by the religionists. Children can perceive the behaviors of those whom they choose as role models as religion itself. Rousseau certainly knows that religion is never the same as the religionists. But, who will tell this to the children, how will they tell it, and how will the children grasp it? The real problem lies here. According to Rousseau, it is necessary to use a simple and understandable language for children to express their religion and values. The use of such language will protect the child from all kinds of doubt and deliberately. Modern education has the same troubles, as well. The information transferred to the children is ultimately the ones that fit the understanding of society, institutions and adults. For Rousseau, the family, the society and the state are obliged to educate children in their natural state, to respect their own choices and not to canalize. It is not appropriate to study religion only at the cognitive level and with recommendations. According to Rousseau, children are not the most effective way to teach value and morality. It is also crucial that the words and behavior of adults are not in conflict. Considering the developments and communication possibilities in technology, it is very difficult to pass on the theory of Rousseau's theory. It does not seem possible that all children will be able to find the truth with nature using their minds and free from all influences. Despite all, Rousseau is an important thinker and educator who still need to be read, not understood enough.

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