

Exploring Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Nature Education Thought from Emile

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Abstract—Emile is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work on his educational ideas. The main purpose of this paper is to explore Rousseau's Emile nature education thought and its influence on the development of modern education. This paper mainly uses the method of literature research. With Emile as the bibliography and the social situation of France in the 18th century as the background, this paper analyzes the educational purpose, process, principles and methods of Rousseau's nature education. Finally, it comes to the conclusion that Rousseau's view of natural education is based on the criticism of feudal education and has the limitations of the times and revolutionary radicalization to a certain extent. However, it is undeniable that Rousseau's natural education thought played an important role in opposing the feudal thought at that time and made a great contribution to the development of pedagogy in later generations.

Keywords—Rousseau; Emile; Nature education; Natural person

I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE FORMATION OF ROUSSEAU'S THOUGHT OF NATURAL EDUCATION

Introduction: Emile is one of the main works of Rousseau, a famous French enlightenment thinker in the 18th century. Emile, Plato's Republic and Dewey's Democracy and Education are called the three immortal educational treasures of the West. Rousseau starts from the moment of man's birth, counts the course of man's life, and discusses his unique concept of nature education in detail. Based on Rousseau's Emile, this paper analyzes Rousseau's view of natural education in three parts. The first part mainly introduces the social situation of France in the 18th century, taking the social background as the breakthrough point, analyzes the theoretical source of Rousseau's philosophy, politics and educational thought. The second part mainly introduces the characteristics of Rousseau's natural education thought from four aspects: educational purpose, process, principle and method. It can be summarized as follows: the educational purpose of cultivating natural person; the educational process divided by age; the educational principles of adapting to the natural nature of children and imparting useful knowledge and means of earning a living; and the educational methods of sensory teaching and intuitionistic teaching. The third part analyzes the influence of Rousseau's natural education thought on the later educational view, as well as the reference significance for modern education. The emergence of Rousseau's view of natural education is based on the criticism of feudal education, to a certain extent, it has the limitations of the times and revolutionary radicalization, but it is undeniable that it has played an important role in opposing the imprisonment of

feudal thought. It has made great contributions to the development of pedagogy in later generations.

Social and historical background: France in the 18th century was still a feudal state with a monarchy, and social life and the ideas of the people were still controlled by the dominant dignitaries using Catholic thought. In this period of France, the contradictions between the feudal ruling class, the bourgeoisie and the broad masses of the people can be said to have reached the point of tension. Through collusion with the Catholic Church, the feudal monarchy carried out harsh ideological autocracy, constantly strengthened the implementation of authoritarianism and obscurantism, eradicated dissent, and deceived and intimidated the people by means of religious superstition. To subjugate the people to this autocratic rule. At this time, the cause of education was completely shrouded in feudal theology, not only unable to play the role of education, but hindered the pace of young people to explore the truth. Fortunately, at the same time, the emerging bourgeois forces are also gradually growing, they are not willing to be exploited, a fierce tide of anti-feudalism and anti-church in the ideological field will be quietly set off. This is the Enlightenment in France, and Rousseau is one of the representatives. The Enlightenment laid a certain foundation for the bourgeois revolution in France at the end of the 18th century in terms of ideological preparation and public opinion propaganda, and at the same time brought a new dawn to the educational cause at that time.

Ideological and theoretical basis: Rousseau, as the ideological forerunner of the French Revolution in the 18th century, is a famous thinker, philosopher and educator. Through his philosophical point of view, he violently rebelled and criticized the feudal system and feudal thought in France at that time. He believes that the motion of objects in the universe is governed by some law of nature, but does not recognize that this law of necessity is inherent in the object itself. The theory of sexual goodness is the basis of Rousseau's ethics. from the point of view of sexual goodness, he believes that human conscience is the natural emotion of talent, so he advocates that human beings should pursue and continue their good nature in the natural state. Socially and politically, Rousseau, like most modern philosophers before him, believed that there was a natural state before human beings entered society. Rousseau also divided human history into natural state and social state, and took natural state as the starting point of social and political theory. But unlike other philosophers, he believes that nature frees life, but when man enters society, he slowly loses his freedom because of all kinds of inequalities. He focuses on

the reality of this inequality, and puts forward his conception of the ideal state of freedom and equality in Social contract Theory. Based on the philosophical basis of theism of nature and the theory of goodness of nature, as well as the political desire to establish an ideal kingdom and a free and equal society, Rousseau advocated natural education in education. He hopes that through the implementation of the educational concept of nature education, the ideal state of natural person in a free and equal society can be cultivated. In view of the phenomenon that the feudal education system did harm to the physical and mental health of young children, Rousseau held a fierce critical attitude, and advocated the reform of educational content and educational methods to achieve the rescue of education. Rousseau's educational idea and educational thought can be seen in *Emile*. In the book, Rousseau describes in detail the educational process of the virtual character Emil, and puts forward the educational concept that different educational methods should be adopted for people of different ages. It can be said that *Emile* expounds Rousseau's educational thought from the relationship between man and society, and emphatically discusses how individuals should maintain their natural and kind nature in the torrent of social development and realize healthy, free and all-round development.

II. ROUSSEAU'S THOUGHT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NATURE EDUCATION

In epistemology, Rousseau believes that the source of cognition is feeling, and the concrete reflection of this feeling theory in his educational thought is the naturalness of education that he has been trying to pursue. The biggest characteristic of Rousseau's thought of natural education is that from the view of human nature, people should always follow the principles of nature, so that children's body and mind can be developed freely in education.

The characteristics of Rousseau's natural education thought can be reflected mainly from four aspects: educational purpose, educational process, educational principles and educational methods. Rousseau believes that the ultimate goal of education is to cultivate the natural person he advocates, in the process of education, Rousseau according to the different characteristics of people of different ages, Rousseau believes that in each different stage should focus on different aspects; In terms of educational principles, He advocated imparting useful knowledge and means of livelihood to educate on the basis of adaptation to nature; in educational methods, physical teaching and intuitive teaching were strongly advocated by Rousseau. He believes that the knowledge gained through intuitive feeling and real experience in life practice is more conducive to the growth of children.

(1) Educational purposes. In the purpose of education, Rousseau believes that the natural person trained by natural education, that is, the new person who is free and coordinated development of body and mind, free from social bondage and oppression, is relative to the non-natural person of the old era oppressed by the privileged class. Rousseau vehemently criticized the feudal system for the imprisonment of human nature and thought, so he strongly advocated the cultivation of a kind of social natural person who fully followed his own nature and natural development. He said *Emile* is not a

barbarian running into the wilderness, he is a barbarian to live in the city. He must know how to meet his needs in the city, how to use the inhabitants of the city, and how to live with them, although he does not live like them. Thus it can be seen that Rousseau's concept of natural person does not mean a person who is completely independent of society and absolutely free, but refers to the concept of natural person in social life. The kind of natural person who can follow the nature of nature to the greatest extent and can perform his social duties, that is, the kind of natural person who can be calmly in a free and equal society, as he mentioned in the *Theory of Social contract*. Such natural persons often have the following characteristics: first, they are not bound by tradition and class, are not bound by position, and can develop according to their natural nature; second, they are independent individuals who do not need to be attached to others. Can be engaged in social labor practice to earn their own living; third, physical and mental health, coordinated development of people.

(2) Educational process. In the process of education, Rousseau will cultivate natural persons as the purpose, adapt to nature as the premise, education will be divided into four different stages according to age, and according to the different characteristics of children in each stage to teach according to their aptitude. The first stage is the infant period before the age of 2: in this period, attention should be paid to the physical development of the baby, with emphasis on physical education and natural and healthy development. The second stage is the childhood period of 2 ~ 12 years old: in this period, the children are mainly given sensory and sensory education. The level of intellectual development of children of this age group is not yet sufficient to support them in abstract conceptual awareness and rational thinking activities, while physical activity and language skills develop rapidly during this period. It is beneficial to carry out different degrees of sensory education for them. Rousseau specially, through games, music and other children's activities, according to the tactile, visual, auditory order of the development of feelings. The third stage is the adolescence of 12 to 15 years of age: mainly engaged in intellectual education activities. In this period, the body and senses have been developed to a certain extent, and they have made full preparations for the development of intelligence. It is worth noting, however, that the education carried out during this period must be carefully selected and should be aimed at providing the educated with knowledge that is truly beneficial to happiness. The fourth stage is the youth of 15 and 20 years old: the educate in this period are mainly carried out moral education. Young people in this period are just beginning to enter society, need to learn how to deal with the relationship between people, people and society, but also need to cultivate good quality and firm will through social practice and labor.

(3) Educational principles. In the principle of education, Rousseau advocates that the most important thing is to follow the principle of nature, that is, to pursue the natural nature of human beings through education in order to achieve the state of freedom. In the pursuit of freedom, Rousseau also highlighted the principle of practicality, which is mainly reflected in Rousseau's emphasis on teaching pro-children useful knowledge and means of livelihood for their growth and

development. Knowledge is various. in the choice of knowledge, Rousseau tends to take the specific function of knowledge as the basis of choice. Because only really useful knowledge can promote the physical and mental health and coordinated development of human beings, so that people can become a natural person in a society that does not need to be dependent on others and can support themselves. The question is not what he has learned, but what he has learned to be useful, he points out.

(4) Educational methods. In the educational method, Rousseau opposes rigid dogmatism and compulsory indoctrination, advocates conforming to the natural nature of students, through a variety of teaching activities, while stimulating students' interest in learning, enhance students' sensory knowledge. Rousseau's teaching methods are embodied in the following three points: first, he insists that students should conform to their natural nature, encourages children to come into independent contact with things and explore the truth, and by highlighting the focus of different stages of education, To the maximum extent to maintain the natural nature of students and character of the good. However, it is not absolutely laissez-faire, but on the basis of respecting the natural nature of children, it is also necessary to cultivate children's sensory experience through certain teaching activities. Secondly, he strongly opposed compulsory education and hated the feudal educational model. He advocates stimulating students' interest and cultivating the ability of autonomous learning in educational practice. Finally, Rousseau stressed that educators should play an exemplary role in educational activities, education should not be limited to words, but should be taught by practical action.

III. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF ROUSSEAU'S NATURAL EDUCATION

Looking at Rousseau's naturalistic educational thought, we can see that his educational idea is based on criticizing the feudal educational system. Starting from the view of natural human nature, Rousseau thought that human beings were born free and equal, criticized the inequality of the society at that time, and advocated that the society should be free and equal. He believes that the ideal human beings in the ideal society should be cultivated through education. In his educational work *Emile*, he systematically expounds the purpose, process and method of nature education. Although his educational thought has certain time limitation and revolutionary radical color, it has played an important role in breaking the old idea and enlightening the new thought.

First of all, he recognized the uniqueness of children and attached importance to the physical and mental health development of children, rather than treating children as small adults, but as children, as previously believed in the concept of backward education. By paying attention to the education of children of different ages, this paper puts forward his targeted views, which is undoubtedly a great progress in the history of education. He regards children as an independent, important and special group and attaches importance to their natural

nature, which provides important enlightenment for the development of pedagogy and child psychology in later generations. Starting from humanitarianism, Rousseau demanded to love and respect children, which directly affected the development of pan-loving education at the end of the 18th century.

Secondly, on the basis of attaching importance to children's education, Rousseau expounds the purpose and principles of his natural education through *Emile*, and systematically discusses his educational methods, and has a positive and effective impact on later generations. In the educational method, he advocates to respect the natural nature of students as the premise to develop students' sensory talent, attach importance to the practical function of education to cultivate self-supporting, coordinated development of social natural persons; In order to promote active learning and standardize teachers' activities, we should pay attention to personality and stimulate interest in education. Rousseau's theories on educational methods provide important methodological guidance for the development of pedagogy in later generations: influenced by Rousseau's natural education, advocates that teaching should come from the road of nature; Dewey, as a pragmatist educator, absorbed Rousseau's practical function of education and carried out teaching activities to enhance sensory knowledge, and constructed his systematic ideological system of open teaching.

Finally, Rousseau's *Emile* not only has a great impact on western educational thought, but also plays a positive role in China's educational reform after it was introduced into China at the beginning of the 20th century. In the period of the Republic of China, Chinese advanced intellectuals put forward new views on the cultural and educational system at that time by accepting the western advanced thought theory, while Rousseau's educational theory showed new educational viewpoints and methods. It indirectly promotes the reform of Chinese education and provides a theoretical basis and methodological reference for the development of modern education.

IV. CONCLUSION

Emile is one of Rousseau's main works on educational thought. Rousseau talks about the moment of birth and gives a detailed account of the course of one's life. In *Emile*, Rousseau discusses his unique concept of nature education in detail. With Rousseau's *Emile* as the main bibliography and the social and historical situation of France in the 18th century as the background, this paper analyzes the educational purpose, process, principles and methods of Rousseau's view of nature education. It is concluded that Rousseau's concept of natural education is based on the criticism of feudal education. To a certain extent, the view of natural education has the limitations of the times and revolutionary radicalization. However, it is undeniable that Rousseau's view of natural education has played an important role in opposing the imprisonment of feudal thought, and has also made a great contribution to the development of pedagogy in later generations.

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