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**"...à la chasse des idées:"
the Educational Ideas of Claude Adrien Helvétius in Context**

Jeffrey Sworowski

**A Thesis
in the
Humanities Program**

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada.**

November 1995

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ABSTRACT

"...à la chasse des idées:"
The Educational Ideas of Claude Adrien Helvétius in Context

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Claude Adrien Helvétius was a devout materialist, as were most of his confrères in the 'enlightened' circles of eighteenth-century Paris. What set Helvétius apart from his fellows was the extreme nature of his commitment. Other philosophes retained materialist ideas, yet subscribed to the notion of in-born talent. Helvétius differed, believing all to be similarly capable, and thereby equally responsive to the beneficial stimulus which education could be. That education determines human achievement was the theory which Helvétius adopted from Locke, and developed as the core of his philosophy.

Helvétius found little sympathy for his ideas though. Other materialists shunned his views as naïve and extreme, and Rousseau took them as a sounding-board to articulate his counter-Enlightenment philosophy. So effective was Rousseau in this respect that, from the era of materialist-based educational theory, his are the (educational) ideas which are widely viewed as typifying the age (and inspiring the Romantic era which followed). However, Helvétius' ideas polarized Rousseau's views, or sharpened the Genevan's treatment of education in Emile.

Rousseau's was not a new educational philosophy, but largely an adaptation of Locke's educational ideas, in opposition to Helvétius'

treatise. Helvétius provided a focus against which Rousseau articulated his pedagogy. Rousseau's work, however, and the materialist criticisms of the d'Holbach coterie, eroded Helvétius' profile as a philosopher.

Nevertheless, Bentham saw tools for social improvement in Helvétius' call for related improvement in education and legislation, and the human tendency to pursue pleasure. He mounted a life-long campaign of political lobbying, and, through what became the Utilitarian movement, influenced the progress of social justice. But, Bentham did not acknowledge mentors after the early years, and Helvétius' ideas became absorbed as Benthamite, or Utilitarian.

This dissertation examines how Helvétius' ideas provided the focus for the Utilitarian's pursuit of education as a facilitator of social justice, and the way in which, inadvertently, Helvétius enhanced Rousseau's reputation as an educational theorist. It particularly aims to assert Helvétius' important role in the development of enlightened educational ideas.

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Sue - Thanks.

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1. Introduction

The hypothesis of this dissertation is that Claude Adrien Helvétius warrants greater recognition in the history of ideas than has been the case hitherto. His was the new pedagogy; he held the promise of a positive and beneficial change to the way education was administered. The 'affair' surrounding the suppression of Helvétius' De l'Esprit encouraged wide interest. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at the time, was still refining his own pedagogical ideas; he became a beneficiary of the sounding-board which his fellow philosophe's work constituted for him. Helvétius had absorbed the doctrines of Locke, Condillac and others and developed a revolutionary pedagogical concept based on the equality of human potential for learning. Despite close alignment, in principle, with the 'enlightened' writers of his era, Helvétius experienced difficulty in convincing his peers of the psychology in support of his educational ideas. Rousseau, equally thorough in his knowledge of Locke's thought, pounced on Helvétius' rough handling of the subject, and effectively discredited much of what Helvétius had to say. Diderot, a fellow theorist of the materialist camp, and supposed friend of the author of De l'Esprit and De l'Homme, equally worked to discredit Helvétius' project; not essentially by denial of the positive educational process, but through ridicule of the supporting psychology.¹

¹ Diderot wrote Réflexions sur le livre De l'Esprit par M. Helvétius in 1758, and the far more critical Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé l'Homme in 1773.

Helvétius is not widely known today.² In the mid-eighteenth century, however, he provoked the social scandal of his era. It was not the reaction which the aspiring French philosopher was looking for. He sought fame for the originality of his ideas, but instead he achieved notoriety for the audacity of his endeavours. Today, recognition emanates all too often from the 'affair' rather than the originality of his thinking. However, what Helvétius wrote, in the scandalous De l'Esprit of 1758, constitutes an important milestone in the history of ideas. From it grew a tradition of social philosophy in English Utilitarianism, which in turn stimulated modern socialism. Helvétius proposed a closely controlled pedagogy; a 'positive' education which addresses the child in an active manner, as opposed to the passivity of Rousseau's Emile. In De l'Esprit the author pursued the prevalent doctrine of materialism in applications to education and legislation - materialism views everything in terms of matter, and rejects notions of the spiritual. Helvétius developed the implication that education has to be imposed or the child's potential will be wasted. The articulation of a materialist pedagogy which Helvétius presented in De l'Esprit is notable both for its closeness to the central current of French Enlightenment thought, and consequently for its role in providing a

² In 1898, Ferdinand Brunetière summarized his view of the demise of Helvétius' reputation after the publication of De l'Esprit in the following terms:

"... - Émoi suscité par son livre. - Complète et piteuse rétraction d'Helvétius; - il rentre dans le silence; - et disparaît de la scène littéraire."

Manuel de l'Histoire de la Littérature française (Paris: Delagrave, 1898), p323.

sounding-board against which Jean-Jacques Rousseau could formulate his 'negative' education - in tandem with his overall anti-Enlightenment philosophy.

The timing of De l'Esprit was most propitious for Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It came four years before his own educational tract, which was published in 1762; sufficient time to understand the implications of Helvétius' work, and to address them. A secondary hypothesis of this thesis is that Rousseau's educational thinking benefitted from the opposition of Helvétius.³ In the four years between the publications of De l'Esprit and Emile, Helvétius' ideas became established as the French Enlightenment's philosophy of education. Rousseau could not ignore it in his ambitions to establish a new pedagogical doctrine, and thereby to overcome all others. He found it necessary to refute De l'Esprit and, in the process, he articulated a more sophisticated psychology than would have been necessary without the existence of Helvétius' earlier work. In Helvétius' De l'Esprit Jean-Jacques was given the French Enlightenment's views to work with and his own retention of the essential aspects of Locke's views (of the workings of the mind) could be compared and contrasted with the (materialist) revisionist view.⁴ Without Helvétius

³ This secondary hypothesis is analogous to D.W. Smith's claim that Helvétius provided a focus for Denis Diderot to finally work out his views on materialism. Helvétius: A Study in Persecution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p202.

⁴ This assertion, that De l'Esprit first truly incorporated the materialist ideals of the French Enlightenment into an educational work should not be taken to imply that it was the only, or first, educational venture of the era. The need for education or the most appropriate means of 'delivering' it, were important themes of several eighteenth-century French writers. For example, the 1746 publication of the Introduction à
(continued...)

there would have been no need to resurrect much of Locke's pedagogy. Rousseau might well have gone down in educational history merely as the author of a philosophical novel which largely embraced Locke's pedagogical ideas, much as Samuel Richardson had done with Pamela, Or, Virtue Rewarded. In Emile Rousseau excused himself from repetition of Locke's educational concepts, explaining that he found them generally acceptable, only drawing attention to some deviations from them. Without Helvétius to contend with, the Lockean aspects of La Nouvelle Héloïse, and the 'Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard', in Emile, would have been merely repetitious. Much of what Rousseau wrote on education would have broken no new ground had Helvétius' ideas not been there to assail. In merely 'warming over' Locke's ideas Rousseau could hardly have had a serious impact on his own, or later, generations of pedagogical scholars. It is in his critique of the French Enlightenment, by way of the foil presented by Helvétius' De l'Esprit, that Rousseau made a major

'(...continued)

la connaissance de l'esprit humain, by the Marquis de Vauvenargues, addressed "des Conseils à un jeune homme". However, it would come to be described as a contradictory work, interrupted by the premature demise of the author at thirty-two years of age; yet analogous to the later ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Brunetière, pp303 & 305). Vauvenargue, in fact, argued that "...education cannot take the place of genius" [Geraldine Hodgson, Studies in French Education from Rabelais to Rousseau (Cambridge, 1908 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969, p154). Such a stance would not have aligned his ideas with those articulated by Helvétius. The materialism of the latter philosophe supported his argument that humans attain genius by the proper application of education - not in spite of it.

Madame Roland is a good example of one who embraced the pedagogy of De l'Esprit, but who came to favour Rousseau's "genre humaine" over the "...conséquences dangereuses du matérialisme absolu et de sensualisme mécaniste d'Helvétius..." [Gita May, De Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Madame Roland (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1964), pp104-6]

contribution to educational theory.

Two centuries of scholarly analysis have led to firm categorizations of the leading characters of the French Enlightenment. To Voltaire is attributed the role of philosophical novelist, historian, satirist, and inspiration of the 'lumière' group, centred in Paris. Montesquieu is the legislative reformer, d'Alembert and Diderot the encyclopedists, with the latter also recognized as art critic and as another important philosophical novelist. To Rousseau falls the role of political reformer, educationalist, and most important of all, Enlightenment renegade and conscience of the movement. While he participated in the Enlightenment project, he came to reject the direction it was taking. There are, of course, many others, each with their particular concerns, whom scholarship has positioned for their relative importance to the development of social conscience in eighteenth-century France, and beyond. One of those 'others' is Claude Adrien Helvétius.⁵

Helvétius' views were considered to be somewhat outrageous by many; particularly by Rousseau, Diderot and Condorcet, who each

⁵ Comments by R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, and by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, are indicative of the ranking which Helvétius is accorded in current scholarship. Palmer and Colton claim that the "Most famous of all the philosophes were "...Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau." A History of the Modern World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p293. And, Lévy-Bruhl indicates that there is no room for Helvétius even in the second rank when he says that, "Even when compared with lesser men than d'Alembert and Diderot, Helvétius is not the most original of the 'philosophers',..." History of Modern Philosophy in France (New York, 1899 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), p227.

published ideas on education.⁶ Helvétius suggested that all humans were equally endowed in their propensity to learn, leading to a concept of equal opportunities for all; he believed that all could, and should, benefit from this innovative social view. He had no sympathy for the select pedagogy of 'talent', whereby the child is examined for some sign of aptitude for education, and only thereafter, assuming success at 'passing the test', being allowed into the sphere of serious scholarly pursuits. Helvétius, instead, began from the premise that all stand to benefit equally from education. He placed all children in an environment conducive to learning, and all would be assumed capable of success.

This egalitarian approach to education, which Helvétius presented, found no support among his contemporaries. Despite the characterization of Rousseau as a 'watershed' in his concerns for childhood,⁷ his educational philosophy was grounded on the assumption of differential talent, and he was so attached to the hereditary processes that he saw no reason for educating the peasant classes,⁸ because they have no use

⁶ Rousseau and Diderot refuted Helvétius' pedagogical ideas. Condorcet was in some ways a disciple of Helvétius, but was not convinced of the theory of mental equality. Francisque Vial found a statement in Condorcet's unedited papers where he speaks of "...des ingénieux sophisms d'Helvétius..." and refutes the 'pure' materialism of the older philosophe in the assertion that "...les esprits sont naturellement inégaux..." - in Condorcet et l'Éducation Démocratique (Paris: Librairie Paul Delaplane, 1903), p37.

⁷ In The Rise and Fall of Childhood (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) C. John Sommerville echoes many educational theorists in suggesting that Rousseau's Emile "...is most often treated as the dividing line between the dark age of childhood and the beginning of an enlightened concern..."(p149).

⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile ou De l'Éducation in J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, Tome IV (Dijon: Pléiade, 1969), p267; Le
(continued...)

for such an indulgence. Condorcet and Diderot, on the other hand, provided for the initial education of all, but incorporated filtering processes in their 'systems' in order to quickly exclude a large proportion of their pupils. Both of their designs offered improvements over what prevailed in the pedagogical schemes of their time, by proposing at least basic schooling for all children. Helvétius, however, went one stage further by not including a filter in his structure. Instead, his system assumed all to be potentially worthy, and required the establishment of an environment which would benefit all participants, and ultimately society-at-large.

The message which Helvétius presented was commendable for its principle of individual equality. The offer of education by competition favours the competitive to the exclusion of many who would have been well served by the learning opportunity, but who have difficulties handling the testing processes. It is also particularly amenable to those who are able to employ their wealth in order to 'bring out' the talent in their offsprings. The competitive are not necessarily the most mentally adept, nor are the most mentally adept necessarily competitive. The very notion that a pyramid-like pattern of educational assimilation exists will, in itself, persuade a large portion of the population to resign itself to pedagogical under-achievement. Elitist educational systems, based on the ideas of Rousseau, Diderot and Condorcet, established an environment which conditioned young people to assume

^{*}(...continued)
pauvre n'a pas besoin d'éducation; celle de son état est forcée; il n'en sauroit avoir d'autre."

higher education to be a difficult and possibly unattainable goal. Helvétius presented the only educational system worthy of the label 'enlightened', to the extent that his pedagogy addresses the improvement of society in general - it is not a competition for the benefit of the few winners. All are assumed capable; it was a positive view, and its author is more readily identifiable as the Enlightenment spokesperson on education. True, not every child has equal capability, but do other approaches always benefit all of the talented? It is a commendable, if not fully supportable, starting point. The educational philosophy which Helvétius presented held the promise that access to schooling would be open to all, and no longer the preserve of privilege alone - whether that privilege be based on hereditary right, or on a person's fortunate ability to succeed in the modern meritocracy.

It may be asked how Helvétius' ideas could be at once unique, and yet typical of the Enlightenment genre. This is not a contradictory notion. Across any spectrum of different conditions there can be a collective description, or prevailing direction, and one element of the various cases which most closely identifies with the overall flow of ideas. In his concepts Helvétius is unquestionably a materialist, using the collective term for all shades of writers of that persuasion. So also, were d'Holbach and Diderot. Helvétius' uniqueness resided in his uncompromising interpretation of the materialist doctrine. Rousseau completely rejected materialism for its integral rejection of individuality; and its consequences in what he saw as the corruption of prevailing Parisian society. There were materialists, however, like

d'Holbach and Diderot, who compromised their materialism by accepting some degree of individual uniqueness; they subscribed to materialism, but retained the notion of natural talent. Helvétius' more purist view of materialism, despite its lack of popular support with his peers, was both unique to him, and yet commensurate with "mainstream"⁹ materialist thinking. Helvétius was *more materialist*¹⁰ than others who are likewise labelled.¹¹ He interpreted the mental facilities as pure matter - acted upon only by physical action and devoid of spiritual stimulus. There is no role for 'inclinations' because such notions jeopardize the concept of the mind as functioning in a purely mechanical manner. So, as Rousseau launched his attack on both materialism, and the process of 'enlightenment', Helvétius found himself defending the implications of the new order with respect to education.

The discussion of Helvétius' role in the Enlightenment movement warrants examination of just what is meant by that term. Carl Becker

⁹ Helmut Pappé suggests that "...the thinkers of the *mainstream** of the Enlightenment restrict themselves... to the critique of society to the extent that it is sociologically determined." [Phillip P. Weiner (ed.), Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p99] Helvétius was one of those "thinkers of the *mainstream*" and his particular concern was the consequence of materialism for education. (* my italics)

¹⁰ Jean-Philbert Dameron, after comparing Helvétius, La Mettrie, Diderot and d'Holbach, explained;

"On peut même dire qu'Helvétius est à un certain point de vue plus matérialiste qu'un autre..."

Mémoires sur Helvétius (Paris: Durand, 1855 - reprinted in Mémoires sur les Encyclopédistes, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), p59.

¹¹ Degrees of materialism are relative. Preserved Smith wanted to situate Voltaire on a spectrum of materialist thought by reference to the "...extreme materialism of Holbach and Diderot,..." A History of Modern Culture, Vol. II (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957), p187.

described "...the essential articles of the religion of the Enlightenment..." as:

- (1) man is not natively depraved,
- (2) the end of life is life itself, the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death;
- (3) man is capable, guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth; and
- (4) the first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition...¹²

Enlightenment was a revolt against religious control over society. For more than a millennium, in the West, ideas had been constrained by Christian doctrine. Consequently, philosophers now began to examine human capability in a manner which was unbiased by theology - humans were no longer (necessarily) considered to be 'pre-charged' with spiritual guilt.

Materialism is intrinsically tied to Enlightenment. Both spring from considerations of human motivation which do not necessitate a role for God. Lester Crocker notes, however, that,

...the Age of Enlightenment does not divide itself, cleanly and conveniently, into Christian and anti-Christian. The Christian remained strong, and found a welcome in the camp of the *philosophes* in disguised forms.¹³

There were, then, different shades of Enlightenment. There were those like Diderot, d'Holbach and Helvétius, who were willing to cast off most of the vestiges of religion. Yet others favoured a diminished or reconfigured religion; often rejecting the infrastructure of church

¹² Carl L. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp102-3.

¹³ Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p180.

organization but retaining the notion of God. However, to the extent that materialism (and the rejection of religious influence) so closely aligns with the ideal of Enlightenment, the *mainstream* of Enlightenment thinkers are those who most closely identify with materialist concepts.

In order to establish a claim of Enlightenment spokesperson for education, it is essential to examine closely the 'critical interface' between Helvétius and Rousseau, and to trace the roots of the ideas of both writers; both trails lead back to the educational and psychological ideas of John Locke. The conflict between these two eighteenth-century philosophes centred around the way they perceived the mind to operate, and each worked from his own interpretation of Locke's thought. Locke, then, is essential to the Helvétius - Rousseau interface. In order to situate the conflict between Rousseau and Helvétius it is important to note that Locke had by no means worked out all of the implications of his ideas, and it can be asserted that these two later theorists were attempting (whether or not consciously) to complete a thought process which their mentor had left open.

In the task which Helvétius brought upon himself, he was at a significant disadvantage. He had neither the skills of authorship, nor the passionate belief in his cause, which Jean-Jacques Rousseau possessed. The Genevan was an eloquent writer, a rebel with firm ideals, and by the time of his writing of Emile he could claim two decades of literary accomplishment, which was reflected in public appreciation of his talent. For Helvétius, however, De l'Esprit was more the product of ambition than of passion, and this publication was the first work of any

significance which he had produced. It may be assumed that his influential position at Versailles permitted him to come to publication without the literary reputation that a person of lower 'rank' would have required. This worked to his detriment because the natural difficulties encountered by developing writers, and especially those manipulating difficult philosophical concepts, were by-passed. He was unable to avail himself of the usual learning process achieved in overcoming early obstacles and failures, which are the 'building blocks' of a literary career.

Helvétius' reputation continues to suffer from the fact that he was not articulate at presenting his ideas, especially when his works are considered against those of an accomplished writer like Rousseau. But is literary merit the only consideration of a fine concept, or is there room for appreciation of the idea aside from its expression? Is the current impact of a philosopher the only thing which matters, or is it more appropriate to view Helvétius' ideas in the context of his own time, and of the process of social improvement which the Enlightenment movement pursued? Helvétius was undoubtedly a powerful influence on Jeremy Bentham and his followers,¹⁴ which gives credence to the considerable interest which his ideas generated in his own time.

Great theorists of the past are frequently judged on the basis of their present worth. It may be that they were the first to try something

¹⁴ Jeremy Bentham wrote to his brother Sam, of "...le divin Helvétius..." (25/6 Sept. 1775) and explained to Voltaire that "I have built solely on the foundations of utility, laid as it is by Helvétius" (Nov. 1776). Timothy L.S. Sprigge (ed.), The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. I 1752-1776 (London: The Athlone Press, 1968) pp261 & 367.

out which we now class as a fundamental tenet of our society, or they are judged as being the inspiration of an important initiative, which was born after their own demise. For example, Locke has been characterized as the founder of the bourgeois economic order, and Rousseau as an inspiration of the French Revolution. The problem with this type of assertion is that the current scholar may be approaching the object of his study fully laden with preconceptions. The later achievements of an individual's ideas are credited to him, despite the fact that he quite likely had no such ambition for them. Certainly Rousseau by no means expected, nor wished, his ideas to lead to armed revolt, and despite his aspirations as an economist, Locke did not see himself as the founder of a new (economic) order.

A scholarly movement has emerged intent on looking at important thinkers, not in the context of our times, but in the context of their own. Instead of beginning with their achievements as a premise, academic interest has focused on the social and political environment in which their subjects were working, in order to determine what forces were bearing on them. In fact, people of real genius are rare. Most great thinkers are known to us because they became spokespersons for a certain consensus. It takes more than one person's opinion to convert a grievance into a work of social consequence. It is the realization that the need for change is widespread which prompts the writer, and it is assimilation with emerging ideas which ensures circulation of the ultimate publication (and the rising fame of the writer). Thinkers and writers, then, have usually been 'spokespersons' - propagandists for

some degree of popular opinion.

It is in this context that the more useful investigations into the history of ideas have been pursued. Notable for their works on philosophers in context have been John Dunn, Quentin Skinner and James Tully, particularly with respect to their approaches to the writings of John Locke. Their works, and those of other writers of like mind, are generating a bibliography in the history of ideas which views important philosophical writers in the context of what they were trying to achieve, of the socio-political environment in which they worked, and of what their personal motivation was. In this dissertation I will argue that Helvétius is a theorist who deserves to be reconsidered in the context of his era. His views on the importance of education and legislation became (in the hands of Jeremy Bentham) valuable tools for Bentham's own pursuit of a new social morality. Helvétius' ideas on utility were grounded in the materialism of his age, and he chose to speak to the educational consequences of the materialist viewpoint. As such, his pedagogical interests represented those of the Enlightenment, because materialism constituted the central philosophical thrust of the movement.

During the years immediately after publication of their respective educational works both Rousseau and Helvétius appear to have been widely read throughout Europe, and their ideas pursued in some form. In Britain members of the progressive Lunar Society favoured Rousseau's views on education and two of their number, Richard Edgeworth and Thomas Day,

experimented with the notion of raising an 'Emile'.¹⁵ The strongest support for the ideas of Helvétius came from the British Utilitarian school, and particularly from its leaders, Jeremy Bentham, and James and John Stuart Mill. Robert Owen, whom Marx was to label the founder of English communism,¹⁶ is believed to have based his 1813 tract A New View of Society on concepts adopted from Helvétius. Robert Weyant notes that Owen's book reads like "...a handbook in behaviour modification... a culmination of that tradition begun with Helvétius."¹⁷ But, while the Soviet scholar Momdjian attributes Owen's views to Helvétius, he recognises the inconsistency of the fact that Owen, "...admet des aptitudes natives qui varient avec les individus,..."¹⁸ So although he was predominantly Helvetian, scholars have differed on the matter of Owen's true mentor. The thesis of Frank Podmore's 1906 work was that Owen was in fact a Rousseauist,¹⁹ but, as Brian Simon says of Owen, he "...enunciated his educational theory as if he had discovered it for

¹⁵ Edgeworth raised his first child according to the tenets of Rousseau's Emile, and went so far as to take the boy to Rousseau for evaluation. The enterprise is explained in Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq., (Boston: Wells & Lilly, 1821), Vol. I, pp123/4.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, "The Materialist Conception of History 1844-47" in David McLellan (ed.), Karl Marx, Selected Writings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp154/5.

¹⁷ Robert G. Weyant, "Helvétius and Jefferson: Studies of Human Nature and Government in the Eighteenth Century" Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences, Vol. IX, Jan. 1973, p35.

¹⁸ Kh. Momdjian, trans. M. Katsovitch, La Philosophie d'Helvétius (Moscou: Editions en Langues Etrangères, 1959), p409.

¹⁹ Frank Podmore, Robert Owen: A Biography (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1906 - reprinted 1968).

himself."²⁰

Rousseau quickly captured the attention of the French public, and a wider European audience. This may have been a consequence of the broad spectrum of his thought, or the fact that his novel, La Nouvelle Héloïse, reached a readership beyond what was usual for 'philosophical' writings. One may speculate that his romantic novelistic style, in the Héloïse, persuaded a certain readership to remain with Rousseau through his 'heavier' philosophical works. A major event in the consolidation of Rousseau's reputation, however, was the posthumous adulation rendered to him by the Jacobin leaders of the French Revolution.²¹ Rousseau's ideas became woven into the fabric of Jacobin thought, and his educational ideas thus gained wide attention. Although one might have supposed the association of Rousseau with the 'Terror' to have adversely affected his reputation, this was not to be the case. When Robespierre ordered the destruction of the bust of Helvétius on the 5th December 1792,²² he appears to have been recognizing the relative positions of the two

²⁰ Brian Simon, The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p195.

²¹ See Jeffrey Sworowski, "Condorcet's education: haunted by the ghost of Rousseau", International Journal of Lifelong Education, Vol. 14, No. 4, July - August 1995, pp320-30.

²² The bust of Helvétius, along with that of Mirabeau had been seized from "l'armoire de fer de Tuileries." The actual proposal to destroy them had come from Duplay, and was seconded by Robespierre, whose justification for such an act was that "Helvétius était... un être immoral, un des plus cruel persécuteurs de ce bon J.J. Rousseau, le plus digne de nos hommages." Marc Bouloiseau, et al, (ed.'s) Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre, Tome IX (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p144. Robespierre's justification may well refer to Helvétius' role in supporting Walpole's mock letter from Frederick the Great of Prussia, to Rousseau, which caused the Genevan so much torment.

educational theorists for posterity. Rousseau remained on the pedestal and Helvétius was consigned to obscurity.

But, it was Helvétius who had first gained notoriety for his educational ideas, with his publication of De l'Esprit in 1758. He had lived in a very desirable style. His father was principal physician to the Queen of France, and he, as a consequence of the fame and fortune which that brought, moved in the highest circles of Parisian society. Helvétius' financial security was ensured through many years as a tax-farmer, and his social status was enhanced by his position as 'maître d'hôtel' to the Queen. When he began his philosophical pursuits, Helvétius gave up his tax-farming, perhaps finding it incompatible with his dawning ambitions as a 'philosopher'. Conversely, he may have made all the money he needed, bought land and settled down. The French bourgeoisie of the eighteenth-century were in the habit of retiring to the country as soon as they had amassed sufficient funding, and Helvétius was not alone in devoting that early retirement to an intellectual pursuit.²³ Philosophy may well have become merely the product of his leisure time. Claude Adrien highly valued his position at court, but gave up his remunerative occupation for philosophy. Ultimately however, his philosophy led the court to give up on Helvétius.

Censorship was rigorous in eighteenth-century France, rooted in religious concern but given secular emphasis in the reign of Louis XIV.

²³ Elinor G. Barber, The Bourgeoisie in 18th Century France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp89-90 and p97.

By mid-century it had grown into an important aspect of French social administration. Those responsible for censorship were particularly keen, knowing that while responsibility resided with the King, both the Church and the Parlements coveted the role. In order to receive a 'royal privilege' it was necessary to convince a censor that a written work showed due respect for God, King and (conventional) morality. Consequently, many of the philosophes had been refused permission to publish their writings, as they frequently infringed on the first and third restrictions, and sometimes on the other. Some of their number, like Denis Diderot, had been imprisoned in the Bastille for their activities. So, many a 'philosophical' writer refrained from divulging his identity, and frequently publication occurred beyond the borders of France, whence copies were smuggled in to booksellers.

Helvétius appeared to be beyond reproach. His De l'Esprit was examined and approved by a royal censor, Jean-Pierre Tercier, and received a 'privilege' to publish on the 12th May 1758. But by the 10th of August in the same year the 'privilege' had been revoked, and subsequent events were referred to simply as 'the affair'. It became the subject for all the gossip-mongers of Paris, and even the theme for a mocking song:

Admirez tous cet auteur-là
Qui de l'Esprit intitula
Un livre qui n'est que matière,
Laire, lanlaire, etc.

Le censeur qui l'examina
Par habitude imagina
Que c'était affaire étrangère,

Laire, lanlaire.²⁴

The song, which Grimm recorded many years later, is interesting for two particular reasons. Firstly, it calls attention to Tercier's real expertise in foreign affairs which gave him no preparation for a risqué philosophical like De l'Esprit. And, it can be seen that Helvétius' philosophical grounding in materialism was not lost on his popular audience.

For the rest of his life Helvétius would live under the shadow of 'the affair'. By his pen he had precipitated the greatest scandal of elegant French society in his era, and, while he became the famous author he had aspired to, he also became a particularly notorious one. Life was forever changed for Helvétius, as the Queen dismissed him from court. De l'Esprit was condemned by Malesherbes (representing the King as director of the book trade), by the Parlement de Paris, by Archbishop Beaumont of Paris (who was also to condemn Rousseau's Emile four years later) and even by Pope Clement XIII. And, in an age when torture and execution for blasphemy still received legal sanction, Helvétius feared for his life. He issued (two) retractions, and received the benefit of some support from the court (particularly from Madame de Pompadour). Nevertheless, Helvétius contemplated self-imposed exile, much as La Mettrie had found appropriate earlier in the same decade.

The censorship had given banned philosophical works a risqué dimension, and heightened their desirability. After 'the affair' copies

²⁴ F.M. von Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, Tome second, 1770-1782 (Paris: Librairie Buisson, 1812), p349.

of De l'Esprit became particularly desirable, and Helvétius, despite his uneasiness, was acclaimed as a person of literary consequence. As the title suggests, Helvétius presented his views on the workings of the mind. The important innovations of De l'Esprit were his ideas for social change; to be achieved through education and legislation.²⁵ It was a revisionist elaboration drawing inspiration from more than a century of epicurean and materialist scholarship, and from John Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.²⁶ Particularly notable was Helvétius' reworking of notions, from Locke, on the use of pleasure and pain as motivating principles (the central tenets of what would ultimately inspire utilitarianism).

At the time of 'the affair' though, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had removed himself from the company of the philosophes, and was embarked on his own grand quest to set the world in order. At the centre of his enterprise was the intention to present a major work of educational philosophy, which ultimately became the Emile. One can imagine the impact which De l'Esprit would have had on him. He was developing his anti-Enlightenment stance, and here was an educational tract exemplifying, in principle, the ideas of his former colleagues. His first reaction was to formulate a response to De l'Esprit, presumably much as he did (also in 1758) in response to d'Alembert's Encyclopédie

²⁵ The inter-connection of education with legislation is a focus of De l'Esprit, which is discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

²⁶ As D.W. Smith points out with respect to the "...possibility of thinking matter..." Locke's Essay gave "...fresh impetus..." to ideas which had been articulated earlier by Pierre Gassendi. A Study in Persecution, p106.

article "Genève" - which had favoured a theatre for his city-state home. In parallel with defence of his homeland against the corruption of the Enlightenment he would defend his educational views against those of Helvétius and the Parisian coterie around the Baron d'Holbach.

Rousseau did pen a formal response to Helvétius. But as the condemnation of De l'Esprit gathered force he wanted no part of it, and dispatched his refutation to the flames.²⁷ An indication of the aspects of De l'Esprit which troubled Rousseau (and the reasons why) does remain, in his personal copy of Helvétius' book. In it he has presented extensive criticisms, hand-written in the margins. It can also be seen that when, in the early 1760's, Rousseau finally went to press with his major writings, aspects of both La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile were directed against assertions made in De l'Esprit. Nowhere in those works, however, does Rousseau overtly identify his target, but in his marginal notes on Helvétius' work he referred to "...la première partie de la profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard."²⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible to be quite certain of Rousseau's intentions, both by correlation of the marginal notes with passages in his own books, and by the fact that Helvétius recognized the implications of Rousseau's words. To the end of

²⁷ Rousseau, "Letters Written from the Mountain" in The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. J.J. Rousseau, Vol. IV (London: T. Becket & P.A. De Hondt, 1767 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), p11.

²⁸ Rousseau's note in the margin of p256 of his copy of De l'Esprit (Paris: Durand, 1758). This document is held in the Réserve des livres rares et précieux at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

his life Helvétius was troubled about Rousseau's views on his ideas.²⁹ He had heard of the marginal notes, which Rousseau had parted with on fleeing France after publication of Emile, and Helvétius did discover the essential criticisms contained in the notes, but only in the month immediately prior to his death.³⁰ In his second major work, De l'Homme, Helvétius printed out extracts from La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile so that he could openly refute them. Rousseau did not respond to De l'Homme. It was published posthumously, and he may have ignored it out of respect for the author, or perhaps because he did not see it as having contributed anything new to the discussion.

In writing De l'Esprit Helvétius undoubtedly sought his own aggrandizement.³¹ Yet, Helvétius' ideas inspired the Benthamites, and they in turn influenced educational and political reforms in Britain. But Helvétius unwittingly provided the foil for Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

²⁹ Helvétius wrote to Vincent Louis Dutens on the 22nd October 1771 asking after the margin notes. Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) p364. Rousseau had left much of his documentation with Dutens prior to his departure for England with David Hume, in 1766.

³⁰ In a November 1771 letter to Dutens, Helvétius said, "Je vous remercie bien des notes que vous m'avez envoyées. Vous avez le tact sûr. C'est dans la note 4 et la dernière que se trouvent les plus fortes objections contre mes principes." Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, pp370/1.

Dutens had sent Helvétius an extract of Rousseau's notes as a four page attachment to a letter sent from Newcastle, England, on the 5th November 1771. Dutens took the liberty of remarking that his fourth note, "appercevoir les objets c'est sentir; appercevoir les rapports c'est juger" was Jean-Jacques' "plus forte objection." The original copy of this letter is held at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, but it was not included in the Correspondance générale d'Helvétius.

³¹ Grimm, Correspondence littéraire, Tome II (1812), pp142/3.

Despite his early fame Helvétius' efforts would contribute more to the lasting fame of his competitor, in the centuries which followed, than to his own stature as a philosopher.

One is left wondering, however, why Helvétius has attracted such 'bad press' - to the extent that his work is highly unlikely to appear on an undergraduate student's list of recommended readings today.³² Yet, in his own era, his writing prowess was subjected to the whole range of critical appraisals. He received both adulation and condemnation in like measure, much as Rousseau was to encounter four years later. Helvétius' ideas, though, failed to capture broad support to the extent enjoyed by the more eloquent Rousseau. The Genevan's ideas, despite critiques from the likes of Samuel Johnson,³³ and though adopted and adapted by Immanuel Kant, were to attain high profile with the revolutionary Jacobins, and retain a prominent position in the school of social reform.

³² A recent historical textbook presents a brief "chronology" of "Works of the Philosophes" which excludes Helvétius, but includes the following writers of the French Enlightenment, and what are considered their major works:

Montesquieu:	<i>Persian Letters and Spirit of the Laws</i>
Voltaire:	<i>Philosophic Letters, Age of Louis XIV and Treatise on Toleration</i>
Diderot:	<i>Encyclopedia</i>
Rousseau:	<i>Social Contract and Emile</i>
Holbach:	<i>System of Nature</i>
Condorcet:	<i>Progress of the Human Mind</i>

Jackson J. Spielvogel, Western Civilization, Volume B (1300-1815) (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Publishing, 1994), p605.

³³ Johnson is quoted as having said of Rousseau, "...I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years." James Boswell, Life of Johnson (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p359.

Exactly why a theorist falls from popular appeal is more a qualitative than a quantitative assessment. It is an important concern of this dissertation to show that Helvétius' ideas retained great merit in the progress of educational ideas through his own era and in their assimilation with social reform in early nineteenth-century Britain. In fact similar concepts may be recognized (even if they are not acknowledged) in important educational initiatives at the present time. While Jean-Jacques is occasionally caricatured in current popular press articles, in order to focus on some aspect of social debate, Helvétius is now far too obscure to warrant recognition.

When Rousseau felt persecuted by his former philosophe colleagues, it was to the "coterie Holbachique" that he looked for the cause. In his Confessions he was the first to articulate the term in print.²⁴ The philosophical theme of the coterie was materialist. Rousseau came to recognize this, and the implicit contradiction which 'passive' materialism maintains against his developing 'active' principle of human capability. His divorce from the group became inevitable, and it was not an amicable parting, but at least the demarcation line between himself and the group around Baron d'Holbach was clear. Rousseau knew who his enemies were, and the coterie came to view Jean-Jacques in like terms.

²⁴ Alan Charles Kors, "The Myth of the Coterie Holbachique" French Historical Studies, No. 4, Vol. IX, Fall 1976, p578. See also the opening sentence of Rousseau's Confessions, Book IX:

"... L'impatience d'habiter l'hermitage ne me permit pas d'attendre le retour de la belle saison, et sitôt que mon logement fut prêt, je me hâtai de m'y rendre, aux grandes huées de la coterie Holbachique..."

J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, Tome I (Bruges: Pléiade, 1959), p401.

The coterie Holbachique likewise shunned Helvétius, but not in an openly hostile way. Unlike Rousseau, Helvétius retained power and influence. He was quite as wealthy as d'Holbach; his wife's salon in Paris and their country retreat at Voré, were always open to their 'friends'. Helvétius, then, functioned as a leading member of the coterie Holbachique, attending the Baron's soirées and participating in the prevailing intellectual exchange. Instead of an open rift between Helvétius and his two contemporaries, Diderot and d'Holbach (as occurred with Rousseau), the author of De l'Esprit appears to have been humoured for being a little misguided and unreasonable. This view accords with Diderot's actions in praising De l'Esprit as a major work of their era, while also going on to give a most severely critical and insulting review of the posthumously published De l'Homme. Likewise David Hume, an occasional member of the coterie Holbachique, was most pleased to be associated and correspond with Helvétius, but opined in a letter to Adam Smith on the inferiority of the Frenchman's philosophy.³⁵ It will be seen from the remarks of Grimm, Marmontel and Morellet that d'Holbach's associates treated Helvétius with great condescension.

Rousseau had the good fortune of having established a doctrine so clearly in opposition to d'Holbach's coterie that he could no longer suffer their influence. Jean-Jacques' work became distinctly an

³⁵ J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), The Letters of David Hume (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932) Vol. I, p304:

"I believe that I have mentioned to you already Helvétius's book De l'Esprit. It is worth your reading, not for its philosophy, which I do not highly value, but for its agreeable composition."

alternative to theirs, and his reading public was able to clearly position his views. Also, any criticism from the coterie became, in a sense, predictable. Helvétius, on the other hand, would have been surprised at an overt attack from his supposed friends. And, the scathing attack which Diderot unleashed, coming from a leading member of the materialist thinkers, held the potential to be much more damaging than if it had come from a clear and open enemy. There is, however, nothing fundamental in De l'Homme which cannot be identified in some form in De l'Esprit. To Rousseau's critique of De l'Esprit Helvétius was able to respond in De l'Homme, but against the coterie's Brutus, he was unprepared. Diderot's love of things Roman fitted him for the role, but it attached to Helvétius' literary legacy the label of one who was rejected by friend and foe alike.

A review of the available bibliography on Helvétius betrays the low level of attention which scholars have paid to him. His two major works were soon translated to English; De l'Esprit the year following first publication in French, and De l'Homme four years after its initial release. This early widening of circulation is indicative of the broad attention which his ideas received. In this century, however, material on Helvétius has been scarce. At the turn of the century Albert Keim's Helvétius, sa vie et son oeuvre, and journal articles by Pierre-Maurice Masson, and Albert Schinz, provided a literary discussion of his works and the conflict of his educational thought with that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Then in 1926 Mordecai Grossman focused on Helvétius' pedagogical concepts, particularly with respect to his sensationalism,

in The Philosophy of Helvétius with special emphasis on the educational implications of sensationalism.

In the period since, however, works addressing Helvétius directly have been few. I submit that the most appropriate support work for a scholarly investigation of Helvétius' educational ideas is Ian Cumming's Helvétius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought. At the time of publication, in 1955, this book was cited as being "...long, immensely detailed, and somewhat pedestrian in style."³⁶ Nevertheless, Cumming has concentrated on Helvétius' educational ideas to a depth that no other writer has done, and his discussion of the Helvétius - Rousseau interface forms a useful foundation work for this dissertation. Cumming does not, however, attempt to attribute a debt to Rousseau for the help he received, in the form of De l'Esprit, in articulating his own pedagogical concepts. Even Masson, who certainly identified the most convincing links between Rousseau's writings and the aspects of Helvétius' work which were being addressed therein, does not make the case for Jean-Jacques' debt. And, in the few texts which have been presented on Helvétius' pedagogical concepts, their authors tend to adopt a defensive posture. Writers have been inclined to apologise for Helvétius, rather than argue the benefits of his concepts. The attitude of this dissertation - that Helvétius did have a socially useful message - sets it apart from most renditions.

³⁶ "Theories of Education" Times Literary Supplement, 30th December 1955, p796.

The most recent complete work in English is D.W. Smith's (1965) Helvétius: A Study in Persecution; a solid foundation work on the philosopher and his ideas. Other works include Lester G. Crocker's An Age of Crisis (1959) and Nature and Culture (1963), which devote an unusually high degree of attention to Helvétius for general works on the Enlightenment; a Russian perspective is provided in G.V. Plekhanov's Essays in the history of materialism and K. Momdjian's La Philosophie d'Helvétius. More recent contributions are to be found in a scattering of journal articles and in the discussions of Helvétius in works covering the broad scope of either materialist, educational or enlightenment ideas.³⁷

It is notable that, in major works dealing with education and the Enlightenment, Helvétius gains little respectful comment. In his major Enlightenment text, Peter Gay's most significant note on Helvétius is to wonder why Diderot gave him such credibility.³⁸ And, in Studies in the History of Educational Theory, G.H. Bantock gave Helvétius scant comment, moving directly from a section on John Locke to one on Rousseau. Whilst Bantock explains that a work concentrating on the ideas of particular individuals will obviously have its limitations in

³⁷ The most notable articles for this dissertation are Jean Bloch's thorough investigation of the psychology of Helvétius and Rousseau in "Rousseau and Helvétius on Innate and Acquired Traits: The Final Stages of the Rousseau-Helvétius Controversy" (1979) and Gerhardt Stenger's strong criticism of Diderot in "Diderot lecteur de l'Homme: Une Nouvelle Approche de la Réfutation d'Helvétius" (1984).

³⁸ Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Vol. II, "The Science of Freedom" (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p514.

scope," his is a typical treatment of Helvétius. He ignores the spokesman for Enlightenment education in Helvétius. Helvétius spoke for a pedagogy commensurate with Enlightenment, yet eminent educational writers like Bantock represent this great movement towards social reform by reference to the counter-Enlightenment pedagogy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁴⁰ A full appreciation of that period, and of the phenomenon which Rousseau became, necessitates an understanding of the contribution which Helvétius made in the formulation of his ideas.

D.W. Smith is thorough in his analysis of Helvétius and his ideas, yet he is most particularly concerned with De l'Esprit and (as the title of his book suggests) his subject's actual and perceived persecution. Smith's scholarship also extends to Diderot, providing discussion of the interface between these men and their ideas. He is not, however, notably critical of Diderot. In his article 'The "Useful Lie"' he characterizes Diderot as having been shocked into a response to De l'Homme; a view

³⁹ G.H. Bantock, Studies in the History of Educational Theory, Vol. I (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1980), p3.

⁴⁰ Isaiah Berlin notes that, "Opposition to the central ideas of the French Enlightenment... is as old as the movement itself." He goes on to point out the faith of Voltaire, d'Alembert and Condorcet in the arts and science as tools of enlightenment, and notes the contrary views of Mably and Rousseau. Berlin focuses on Rousseau's influence on counter-Enlightenment thought, noting that:

Kant acknowledged a profound debt to Rousseau who, particularly in the "profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar" in *Emile*, spoke of man as an active being in contrast with the passivity of material nature,...

Jean-Jacques may have been "of the Enlightenment", but his ideas were to fuel the counter-case. And, it was his work on education which Kant found so inspirational.

See Dictionary of the History of Ideas, pp100-107, and Peter Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p529.

which is contested here on the basis that all of the important concepts were already contained in the earlier De l'Esprit.⁴¹

The central primary sources used, as the closest emulations of original publication copies, are the recent Fayard versions of De l'Esprit and De l'Homme, and the Pléiade versions of Emile and La Nouvelle Héloïse. Access was also granted to Rousseau's personal copy of De l'Esprit, containing his handwritten marginal notes, at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Apart from others of Rousseau's writings, and some few pieces by Helvétius, primary source material for Locke, Bentham, etc. is taken from readily available scholarly reprints, e.g. Axtell's Education and Laslett's Two Treatises. Important, however, particularly in the verification of secondary source material, are the correspondence and mémoires of contemporaries of the central characters of the dissertation.

The three volume set of Helvétius' correspondence (published by the University of Toronto Press) has been a valuable guide to just who (in that period when letter correspondence was so important) was really close to Helvétius, and why. Access to unpublished manuscripts associated with the Helvétius correspondence was also provided by the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library at the University of Toronto. The correspondence of Diderot, Frederick II, Hume, Rousseau and Voltaire

⁴¹ It should be noted that Dr. Smith directed my research towards Stenger's article (referenced in Chapter 4) which comes to Helvétius' defence against the criticisms of Diderot. My own suggestion of the poor regard which d'Holbach's coterie held for Helvétius, and the way it found voice in Diderot's refutation, takes support from Stenger's thesis.

provides a window into the social intercourse of eighteenth-century France. Through collected letters it has been possible to identify trends of association and influence. The other facility for such historical 'eavesdropping' is through the mémoires of F.M. von Grimm, the abbé Morellet, Marmontel, St. Lambert, Suard and others.

Nineteenth-century scholarship, relating to Helvétius, is represented by reference to the writings of John Stuart Mill. The younger of the leading British Utilitarians is examined for his perpetuation of important aspects of Helvétius' ideas and for his willingness to recognize the importance of the French philosophe in the development of his own ideas. Also, later in the century, Jean-Marie Guyau's writings focus on Helvétius, Bentham and the Mills. La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine and La Morale d'Epicure provide valuable support in connecting Helvétius' ideas to those of the Utilitarians, and in recognizing the movements of focus of epicurean ideas between Britain and France.

This dissertation, then, is based on analysis of primary works against a review of relatively recent scholarship. The concern to appreciate and evaluate Helvétius' ideas has necessitated a careful review of his own writings, and what people were writing to him, and about him. Of course, each of his correspondents and observers had their own thesis, which in turn biases their appreciation or critique of him. There is, however, a consensus which emerges of the role which Helvétius played amongst his peers and the legacy which he left for social reformers. His legacy was more important than his prominence among his

circle of contemporaries would lead one to believe. Despite denigration of his ideas by some of his peers, those same ideas found utility beyond his own era. And, although he was not looking to implement his ideas directly, he inspired others to do just that. Unfortunately though, he is obscured today by the consequences of the low esteem of his 'friends' - and the fact that his ideas were incorporated in the doctrine of Utilitarianism.

At thirty-five years of age, in 1750, Helvétius resigned his position as a fermier-général, to pursue philosophical and literary interests. In a recapitulation of the important aspects of Helvétius' life, written soon after his unexpected death, Baron von Grimm said of the changes in his circumstances which had taken place in 1750,

Il forma dès lors le dessein de changer entièrement de vie. Le livre de président de Montesquieu avait paru au commencement de 1749. En 1750, M. Helvétius résigna sa place de fermier général, épousa mademoiselle de Ligniville, fille de qualité, de Lorraine, fort pauvre, mais d'une figure très distinguée; et, après son mariage il alla s'enfermer dans ses terres, où il partageait tout son temps entre l'étude, la chasse et la société de sa femme.⁴²

Grimm saw it as Helvétius' project "...de s'immortaliser."

The characterization which Grimm presented was one of a fickle personality. Only eight years before the publication of De l'Esprit we see Helvétius impressed by Montesquieu's seminal tract, and deciding that he would also like to become famous as a philosopher. He took a Montaigne-like retreat to his country estate at Voré, taking along a beautiful wife at the same time, almost as one of the comforts of his

⁴² Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Tome II (1812), p143.

enterprise, along with his love of 'la chasse'.⁴³ The impression left is of an ambitious man who chose his project regardless of personal intellect or literary capability. In fact, it is more appropriate to regard Helvétius as a determined person, willing to thoroughly pursue his ideas.⁴⁴ Grimm's characterization, however, has led some scholars to assert that Helvétius made up for his lack of capability by leaning heavily on his friends for inspiration, and for help with his ideas. Plekhanov suggests that,

To Helvétius,... there came the idea of writing a book. To accomplish this, at the conversations with the philosophers whom he invited to dinner, he collected their theories, views and paradoxes. By artificially exciting interesting arguments he succeeded in arousing the fiery temperament of Diderot, the wit of Suard, the amusing and caustic humour of the Abbé Galiani. Then, whilst conscientiously expounding them, he brought their views into a compact theory. The result of these conversations which he had heard, collected and analyzed, was the book 'De l'Esprit'...⁴⁵

This characterization, of course, presumes Diderot, et al, to be innocent dupes, who have their best ideas stolen away for the price of a meal.

⁴³ Helvétius may well have boasted of the analogy of his fondness for hunting, and his philosophical pursuits as Saint-Lambert refers to his "...chasse des idées." and Suard mentions it as "...la chasse aux idées." Saint-Lambert, Oeuvres Philosophiques de Saint-Lambert, Tome IV (Paris: Agasse, 1798), p283; Suard, Mémoires Historiques sur le XVIII Siècle, et sur M. Suard, Deuxième Edition, Tome I (Paris: Belin, 1821), p229.

⁴⁴ Saint-Lambert noted that even in his school days Helvétius was motivated by what he read: "...lorsqu'il lut l'Illiade et Quinte-Curce. Ces deux lectures changerent son caractere," Saint-Lambert, V, p216.

⁴⁵ G.V. Plekhanov; Ralph Fox (trans.), Essays in the History of Materialism (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), p79.

The philosophes who came to the Helvétius home expected to test out their ideas on others, and certainly, Helvétius did gain a thorough grounding in Enlightenment thought. In fact, as Mordecai Grossman suggests, Helvétius' greatest contribution was in the very fact that he assimilated the ideas of his era. Grossman claims that, "He was the epitome of his age. His works more than any single writer reflect all the interests, ideas and ideals of his time."⁴⁶ Helvétius was not merely parroting the other philosophes. By his thorough assimilation of the ideas of his era he qualified himself to project prevailing materialist ideas into an educational context. However if, as Plekhanov implies, Helvétius was continuously plagiarizing Diderot's ideas, then why did Diderot see fit to reflect favourably on Helvétius' first publication, and refute at length the second? In fact, the notion that Helvétius collected his ideas from among the philosophes may have come from his habit of discussing points at his social gatherings. Morellet said of him that he was so insistent on doing so that, "...il faisait continuellement son livre en société."⁴⁷ But that is not to say that he gave nothing, and only took from his visitors. Helvétius likely saw himself more as a catalyst of intellectual investigation, and even as a motivator of progressive thought. As Suard suggested,

A la table d'Helvétius, il voulut, sans doute, agiter les esprits pour les mettre dans un grand mouvement d'idées,

⁴⁶ Mordecai Grossman, The Philosophy of Helvétius, with special emphasis on the educational implications of sensationalism (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926), p77.

⁴⁷ Morellet, Mémoires de l'abbé Morellet (Paris: Librairie Française de l'Avocat, Palais-Royal, 1821), p156.

pour rendre la *chasse* plus abondante.⁴⁸

Morellet also said of Helvétius that, "...je n'ai connu aucun homme de lettres travaillait avec tant de peine et d'effort."⁴⁹ And, for a man who was supposedly so keenly plagiarizing the minds of his guests, it is interesting to note,

Le plus souvent même il sortait peu de temps après le dîner pour aller à l'Opéra ou ailleurs, laissant sa femme faire dans le reste de la journée les honneurs de sa maison, où se trouvait toujours bonne compagnie de gens de lettres, ...⁵⁰

Morellet's description of the happenings 'chez Helvétius' does not support the characterization of the host generating a social circle from whom to steal ideas.

Morellet's observations coincide with those of Marmontel. In his *mémoires*, the latter writer noted, with apparent pride, his good fortune at having been privileged to attend the Baron d'Holbach's social gatherings at which he had met Diderot, Helvétius, Grimm, and Rousseau (before his estrangement).⁵¹ Marmontel used interesting phraseology, noting that Helvétius came with "...la tête encore fumante de son travail de la matinée," and he proceeded to explain the amusement which the gathered host felt at the spectacle as Helvétius "...jeter successivement sur le tapis questions qui l'occupaient, ou les

⁴⁸ Suard, p245.

⁴⁹ Morellet, p69.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p157.

⁵¹ Marmontel, Mémoires de Marmontel (Paris: Didot, 1857), p155.

difficultés dont il était en peine..."⁵² Marmontel's description of Helvétius' activities certainly does not align with one who is out to poach ideas. On the contrary, he appears to have come overflowing with ideas and was seeking help in ordering them. In a passage immediately following the last quotation Marmontel described the way Helvétius was humoured until he could be prevailed upon to allow the evening's conversation to follow its pre-interruption course.

Another question which may be posed is why a work which is seen as a plagiarization of his contemporaries should raise such a scandal at publication. The answer is that De l'Esprit was a singular work, and, although Helvétius tested his ideas on those around him, his treatment of those ideas was unique. Chapter 3 of this dissertation addresses the 'shoulders' Rousseau climbed in his philosophical endeavours. Everyone is influenced by the environment they find themselves in and Helvétius doubtless benefitted from association with some of the best thinkers from any age. Hence, among the shoulders on which Helvétius climbed were those of his contemporaries when he exchanged ideas with them. Such was the quality of what he produced however, that it was to his shoulders that Bentham and his followers would flock, and not to those whose ideas he supposedly stole. De l'Esprit focused attention on unique pedagogical ideas, and Helvétius became a spokesperson for the educational concepts of the Enlightenment. The singular feature of his materialist doctrine, within the immediate coterie, was that he grounded education on a pure tabula rasa assumption, whilst others failed to go so far.

⁵² Ibid, p229.

De l'Esprit begins immediately with a discussion of what would now be termed psychology. Helvétius' view of the mind may be summarized as mechanically capable, but with all stimuli coming from outside.⁵³ It relies only on what the environment, or education, conditions it to do,⁵⁴ and by implication has no role for spiritual activity which would contradict the notion of an inert state at birth. These notions were not new in Helvétius' work, but had been common to materialist adherents in the Enlightenment era. D.W. Smith supports this point by suggesting that Helvétius was coordinating the acceptable ideas of Condillac's Traité des sensations with the unacceptable aspects of La Mettrie's L'Homme Machine.⁵⁵ What was original in Helvétius' work was his willingness to trace his materialist psychology to logical conclusions. This was his objective in De l'Esprit; leading to the implications of his materialism for education, and for legislation, which he further explored in De l'Homme.

Unfortunately, as D.W. Smith mentions in association with his notes on Condillac and La Mettrie, whilst the former writer was acceptable to religious and secular authorities, the latter's materialist thought certainly was not. In simple terms, the extreme implications of materialist psychology are incompatible with Christian

⁵³ Helvétius, De l'Esprit (Paris: Durand, 1758 - reprinted Paris: Fayard, 1988) I, i, pp15-25.

⁵⁴ Helvétius asks, "...qui peut assurer que la différence de l'éducation ne produise la différence qu'on remarque entre les esprits?" Ibid, III, i, p233.

⁵⁵ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p13.

theology. If humans are conditioned only by environment and education, then they cannot be said to be born with inherent obligations to God; a machine does not know its maker.

The 'Affair' deeply affected the author, perhaps as nothing before in his life of leisure and privilege had, with the possible exception of the loss of his father three years earlier.⁵⁶ It certainly influenced his decision not to publish De l'Homme, but to permit its posthumous release instead. De l'Esprit became the catalyst for conservative opposition to the philosophes. Nicolas-Claude Thierot, writing about Helvétius to Voltaire on the 12th September 1758, ventured that, "Ils lui ont présenté la Bastille"⁵⁷, indicating that at the height of the uproar against the author of De l'Esprit the possibility of imprisonment was quite real. Helvétius, in fact, was a significant target; he was a man of influence, and if he could be shown to be vulnerable, then all were. Evidence to support this assertion is the fact that the event of suppression of De l'Esprit was taken as a suitable occasion to also suppress Diderot's Encyclopédie. Not only was Diderot, as editor of the Encyclopédie, at least as vulnerable as Helvétius, but his major undertaking was viewed as the source of the 'worst' ideas which were presented in De l'Esprit.⁵⁸ Grimm argued strongly against this

⁵⁶ Saint-Lambert, V, p231.

⁵⁷ D.W. Smith et al (eds.), Correspondance générale d'Helvétius (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), Vol. II, p115.

⁵⁸ The Attorney General, Omer Joly de Fleury told the Paris parlement, on the 23rd January 1759, that,
"In the picture we have just drawn of the principal maxims of this work [De l'Esprit] you are seeing in fact,
(continued...)

association of Diderot with Helvétius. He suggested that,

Pour perdre M. Diderot, on a publié par-tout qu'il était l'auteur de tous les morceaux qui avaient révolté dans l'ouvrage de M. Helvétius,..."

knowing that the major theses of Helvétius' work were quite unique to him.

It is certainly ironic that Helvétius should have been so unfortunate, as he likely thought of himself as merely pursuing ideas which were logical elaborations of what Locke had suggested in the Essay and what Condillac had articulated in his Traité.⁶⁰ Locke's, and the abbé de Condillac's, work were both tolerated by the religious authorities, and freely available in France at that time. It appears to have been only when Helvétius outlined the implications of their ideas that religious authorities became concerned. And when they did, it was at all levels; to the Archbishop of Paris, and even to the Pope.

⁵⁸(...continued)

Messieurs, simply the principles and detestable consequences of many other books published earlier, especially the Encyclopedical Dictionary. The book De l'Esprit is, as it were, the abridgement of this too-famous work,..."

In Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p333.

⁵⁹ Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Tome II (1812), p385.

⁶⁰ John Morley, Diderot and the Encyclopedists, Tome I (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), p127.

"When... we look beyond the smoke of the ecclesiastical battle,... we see quite plainly that Helvétius was thinking less of the theological disputes of the day than of bringing the philosophy of sensation, the philosophy of Locke and Condillac, into the political field, and of deriving from it new standards and new forces for social reconstruction."

The powerful nature of the response by religious, and secular, authorities reflects the vulnerability which they felt. They saw the 'philosophes' as targeting their very existence, and much evidence to that effect had come from the pens of Voltaire and Diderot. At the height of the French Revolution, in 1794, Catherine II of Russia was to convey to Grimm her reflections on the fact that Frederick the Great claimed to have been told by Helvétius that the aim of both the Encyclopédie, and its authors, was the destruction of Europe's monarchy and religions.⁶¹ Helvétius' fear of persecution was either short-lived, for him to be so bold as to say such a thing to a ruling monarch, or he was using the existence of the Encyclopédie to excuse the liberties of his own work. Perhaps, on the other hand, by the time of his conversation with Frederick of Prussia, Helvétius was coming to realise that the real threat to his lasting reputation as a writer and philosopher was neither the monarchs, nor the priests, but his erstwhile confrères, the encyclopédistes. The exclusive group of materialists who gathered around the Baron d'Holbach's table appeared to humour Helvétius, likely more for his wealth than his ideas, and Denis Diderot was to do more damage to the lasting reputation of the author of De l'Homme than all the charges of parlement and church.

⁶¹ Isabela de Madariaga, Catherine the Great (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p201, refers to a letter from Catherine II to Grimm dated 11th February 1794.

The philosophical reservoir from which the French lumières drew in their attack on all things traditional, notably the church, was the work of John Locke. This is ironic - Locke remained every bit a Christian, albeit of a heterodox persuasion. Despite his concern with Church interpretations of the scriptures he was far from being a supporter of atheism or any other form of 'godlessness'. But, in its pursuit of a morality independent of the established church, the Enlightenment examined two possibilities. One was the notion that there exist natural laws, which are known by their comprehensibility to all people. It was supposed that all should be educated to know these laws, and that they will prove to be the foundation of good thinking. The advantage of this view of moral judgement is that, in method, it is not far removed from religious doctrine. Natural laws are seen as Locke saw them, emanating from the Creator. Thus, the leap from traditional ecclesiastical thinking to this rationalist model is not so great.

The second possibility, however, involves complete divorce from the church. It requires basing moral judgement on utility. In other words, right action is that which tends to offer the most pleasurable consequences. Thus personal, or group, well-being becomes the only concern of moral questions. Matters of duty, and, particularly for the Christian observer, of the acceptance of pain in this life for pleasure in the next, no longer have a role. Interestingly however, John Locke, the philosophical reservoir of the Enlightenment thinkers, provided some support for both of these attempts to establish a new morality. His Two Treatises on Government was based on a premise of natural law. But, from

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Helvétius and the utilitarians drew support for their own, quite distinct, ideas. Locke's suggestion that "Nature,... has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery,"⁶² appears (perhaps unwittingly) to have directed attention to 'utility', or at least to have provided powerful support to those already inclined towards an epicurean philosophy. Helvétius, a thorough-going utilitarian, believed that in this doctrine there existed a new and wonderful guideline to all moral concerns. Jeremy Bentham likewise picked up the same enthusiasm from Helvétius, dedicating himself towards lobbying for the improvement of society by incorporating utilitarian principles into the law, and into education. Rousseau, however, adhered to the individualist notions emanating from Locke. Societal improvement was to be achieved by enhancing the competence of the individual. He wrestled with a 'system' for developing good individuals and thereby providing society with useful participants. Rousseau wanted each individual (male) to be educated sufficiently in order to participate effectively in government. His citizens needed no protection from the state - they would be full participants in the governing process.

The reconciliation of Locke's rationalist morality with his presentation of the notion of a utilitarian morality did not come to fruition under his own pen. John Dunn makes the, albeit arguable,

⁶² John Locke; Peter H. Nidditch (ed.), An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book I, Chapter iii, Section #3, p67.

assertion that it is the unfinished work⁶³ of the last chapter of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Nevertheless, Locke was sufficiently convincing in his rationale of both doctrines that his ideas were to be acknowledged by two schools of moral thought, which split mid-eighteenth century social and educational thinking. The Enlightenment, with its intrinsic rejection of religion, embraced utilitarianism.⁶⁴ A means of moral assessment based on immediate sensation tied in with the rejection of past authorities; it was particularly commensurate with the hedonism which dominated the

⁶³ John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp188/9.

⁶⁴ The term *utilitarianism* is used here, and elsewhere, to denote the tendency of moral philosophers to address what became known as the principle of utility. Despite the fact that the word *utilitarian* appears to have originated with the British Utilitarians, the term *utilitarianism* is applicable to ideas which pre-date them.

In the Dictionary of the History of Ideas (Vol. IV, p444), D.H. Monro suggests that the term (Utilitarianism), ...is most commonly used... to refer to the... view put forward in the eighteenth-century by Helvétius in France and Jeremy Bentham and his followers, the Philosophical Radicals, in England,...

John Plamenatz, in The English Utilitarians, addresses David Hume as one of the most important utilitarians, and, in A History of English Utilitarianism (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1901, p1) Ernest Albee preferred to refer to Bishop Richard Cumberland, a philosophical opponent of Hobbes, as "...the true founder of English Utilitarianism."

John Stuart Mill founded the Utilitarian Society in the winter of 1822-3. Despite reference to Galt's novel "Annals of the Parish" in 1821, Mill believed that his use of the word *Utilitarian* had caused it "...to enter into the language" [John Stuart Mill, The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p56]. In fact, The Oxford English Dictionary records the actual entry to the English language as occurring with Jeremy Bentham's use of it in 1781. That use, however, in a letter from Bentham to George Wilson, carries no implication that the word is in some way new or unique, so it is reasonable to assume that Willson and Bentham had prior experience of it. See John Bowring (ed.) The Works of Jeremy Bentham (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), Vol. X, p92.

bourgeois scene in Paris, the fertile base of lumière thought. Rousseau, however, engaging in a role he appears to have been born to - the 'thorn in the side' of the new age - pursued the rationalist (natural law) morality. He was the stoic believer in laws based on nature, individual rights preserved by participation in government, and the need for individuals to respect their duty to the state - even to the detriment of their personal happiness. This apparent contradiction in Rousseau's philosophy is addressed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

The consequence for educational thought was that Rousseau and Helvétius, two philosophes of the next generation, took on the mantle of the incompatibilities of John Locke's philosophy - played out in their attempts to elucidate an educational doctrine. Thus, discussion of the differences between the Helvetian and Rousseauan pedagogical doctrines begins logically with Locke. He inspired both later writers, so it is germane to examine the extent to which his moral dilemma became their pedagogical conflict. The 'critical' interface, between Rousseau and Helvétius, is extended to John Locke, into a triangle of interfaces. Locke was important as a mentor to both of his philosophical protégés to such an extent that discussion of Rousseau's and Helvétius' respective merits, on the matter of educational ideas, cannot adequately be enjoined without Locke's presence. It was his unfinished work which the other two found themselves attempting to complete and complement, and it was Helvétius' attempts to extend Condillac's reworking of Locke's psychology which left him prey to Rousseau's superior analysis and eloquence. Following discussion of John Locke, Rousseau and Helvétius

are examined in order to assess why, as 'modern' thinkers, they should adopt different, and often opposing, ideas. Despite some similarity in their literary aspirations, these were two very different thinkers, bringing with them quite distinct baggage, even though each contained the works of John Locke. And, ultimately, discussion leads to the direct verbal conflict between Rousseau and Helvétius, and to the impact of this interface on their work and authority. Both commanded a certain degree of public interest, but to Rousseau has been (ironically) attributed the lasting role of Enlightenment spokesman for education. This discussion culminates in demonstrating that Rousseau's lasting pedagogical influence owes much to the presence of De l'Esprit. By his eloquence he stole the show from his contemporary, but his educational concept was not as 'enlightened' as that of Helvétius. The author of De l'Esprit offered a new, and positive, approach to the way the education of children should be addressed; all would be assumed to benefit. It was a concept ready for implementation. Rousseau envisaged no such practical potential. His was a deeper philosophical exercise, based on a singular model, yet he usurped the position of the Enlightenment's pedagogical spokesperson with his eloquent rendition - perpetuating Locke's pedagogy, but with a kinder face.

2. Locke's 'thoughts on education' in context

A proper study of Helvétius' ideas, not least those on education, begins with Locke. The ideas of the English philosopher constituted a 'common-denominator' of lumière thought in the French Enlightenment. Individual philosophes clashed, but all respected Locke as an important stepping-stone on the route to an improved society. This attitude led Condillac to regard Locke as the greatest philosopher of modern times yet, at the same time, he set about reworking the fundamental philosophy of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Likewise, Helvétius and Rousseau accepted Locke's ideas as the authoritative voice of enlightenment, but extended his pedagogical concepts in their own chosen directions.

Knowledge of roots facilitates comprehension of the whole, and Locke's ideas are fundamental to understanding Helvétius. Helvétius was of the Enlightenment as the Enlightenment was of Locke. The Frenchman cherished his connections to the English sage, and in De l'Homme he dedicated a short concluding chapter to remind his readership of that fact.⁶⁵ Helvétius would (presumably) have concurred with tracing his educational ideas back to the influence of his English mentor. It is however, important to note Helvétius' perspective. In Locke's work he found support for the materialist ideas which he had chosen to pursue; those epicurean principles of the Essay and not the natural law articulations of the Two Treatises. This chapter of the dissertation

⁶⁵ Claude Adrien Helvétius, De l'Homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles, et de son éducation (London: Société Typographiques, 1773 - reprinted Paris: Fayard, 1989), Récapitulation, chapitre I.

looks at both aspects of Locke's philosophy, as it influenced his ideas on education. A complete understanding of Locke's implications for pedagogy not only facilitates a thorough understanding of Helvétius, it also reflects on the philosophy of his greatest dissenter. Thus, this dissertation about eighteenth-century ideas begins about a hundred years earlier.

England in the mid 1600's was a place of challenge and change. The 'divine right' proclaimed by the Stuart kings was challenged in the most abrupt way, when Charles I had his head severed. However, nothing was straightforward about those turbulent times. Parliament challenged the king, he fell, but a relatively short time later the monarchy was restored. Thereupon the country went into a period in which many were preoccupied with the perceived religious bias of their rulers. However, if the period was one of unrest in the nation, it was also a fertile environment for intellectual analysis. The legacy of Francis Bacon's hopes for science and free investigation prompted an attitude that nothing - neither the sciences, nor the social orders - should be accepted on trust. Everything was worthy of review and justification. In this intellectual environment John Locke came to focus his scholarly training onto the very foundations of the society in which he lived.

Although no great thinker can be seen as completely original, Locke worked in an era of unprecedented social and spiritual change. Consequently, he came to articulate ideas which made him the herald of the Enlightenment. He is germane to this dissertation because his ideas and investigations began a process of political and social justification

(based on the rights of the individual), which have been echoed through to our own time.

Locke, Helvétius and Rousseau would each have described social justice differently, but as a generic term it is not out of place. Locke and Rousseau sought social improvement through a balance of individual rights and the necessary compromises of the human collectivity. In each case the need for education to facilitate change was recognized as paramount. Helvétius, on the other hand, began with an investigation of individual motivation and, rather than interesting himself with the compromises necessary to social peace, was more concerned with the notion of moulding individuals into social creatures. If behaviour patterns could be predicted there was no need for compromise; education and appropriate legislation would ensure an amicable social entity. The similarity between Locke, Helvétius and Rousseau's ideas, however, is that each saw that the only route to social justice was through education. Locke's endeavour, however, was not immediately focused on education. His important tracts addressed toleration, politics and psychology, yet pedagogy is implied in much of what he wrote. It is only among his later writings that we find education as the single focus of a manuscript.

John Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education, then, is a consequential work. Firstly it is chronologically consequential, in that it followed, by several years, his seminal writings. Also, as Locke was looking for society to operate differently from what prevailed in his time, then education would be a function of change and, if properly

applied, could prepare the population to participate in the 'modern world'; its consequences would be beneficial. The third consequential aspect of Locke's 'education' is the way that it forms a continuity with his fundamental philosophy. Locke wrestled for much of his active life with the notion of natural laws, emanating from God, as guidelines for human activity, and his 'thoughts on education' pursue these guidelines into the formation of young citizens.

Into the future, however, are carried both the refined aspects of Locke's thoughts, and those which are in some sense unresolved. Such was the case with his views on hedonism. He was thoroughly convinced of God-given natural laws, but also, in the later decades of his life, came to believe in a form of moral judgement based on utility. This latter concept pursues the belief that humans should take pain and pleasure as the arbiters of morality. Those things which tend to induce pain, on a personal and societal basis, are judged bad, whilst good things are those which tend to enhance pleasure. Such notions appear attractive, but can be seen as contradictory to Locke's lifelong pursuit of natural laws. God's laws, whilst intended for the benefit of humankind, would not necessarily work to the greater pleasure of the individual. There is a requirement, inherent in natural law, that each member of society perform their 'duty' to the community, often to the detriment of personal pleasure. Inherent in the hedonistic view, however, is the clash between the pleasure of the individual, and personal sacrifices necessary for the good of society. This conflict is particularly pronounced when a philosopher of Locke's stature appears to contradict

his rule-driven concept of natural law with the processes of hedonistic assessment.

In his educational writing then, Locke's own mind was considering two somewhat contradictory concepts. In the next generation philosophers would take up these two different treatments of morality and develop them into incompatible educational doctrines, both of which laid claim to Locke's thought as a major element of their inspiration. These were the pedagogical treatises of Claude Adrien Helvétius and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his pursuit of the notion of moral conduct based on natural law, and his tentative venture into a hedonistic moral rationale, Locke provided the 'grist' for what I later discuss in terms of the 'critical' interface between these Enlightenment philosophers. It should be noted though, that Locke did not consciously establish a divergent philosophy. He saw natural law and utility as aspects of one morality, but failed to reconcile or unite the ideas in a complete sense.

Natural Law and the rights of the child

There is certainly a 'common thread' between Locke's notion of natural law, as presented in the Two Treatises of Government, and what he has to say in Some Thoughts Concerning Education. In the Two Treatises he set out the case for government, not as an historic right of privileged individuals, but as an arrangement which people enter into freely in order to benefit from the protection which a group is able to exercise more effectively than the individual. However, in principle, in order to understand this arrangement which the individual is entering

into, with fellow humans, it is necessary that each has some level of education; individuals cannot truly enter a mutually beneficial compact if each does not fully understand the terms. So, firmly embedded within Locke's view of the way people relate to others is the notion that they understand each other. Hence, an intrinsic part of the Two Treatises, beyond the appropriate way by which individuals are to co-exist, is the provision for the education of children,⁶⁶ because, as Locke was to articulate later,

...of all the Men we meet with, nine Parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their Education.⁶⁷

So, for better or worse, Locke put the case that education will be the determinant of the individual and, through his political works, the duty for teaching children rests with parents.

"Useful", in the last quotation, can be taken to denote both a personal and community facility. Bearing in mind that this quotation appears on the first page of his Education, it was obviously intended to establish the tone for Locke's ongoing discussion. Similarly, in the dedicatory letter to that text his comments, addressed to Edward Clark,

⁶⁶ John Locke, "The Second Treatise of Government" in Peter Laslett (ed.), Two Treatises of Government (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), (#67), p312, says, "The nourishment and education of children is a charge so incumbent on parents for their children's good that nothing can absolve them from taking care of it." Also, in "The First Treatise of Government" (#90) p208, Locke speaks of the continuous obligation of parents to their children, in that the benefit accrued to a child from its parents is passed on, in turn, to the next generation of children.

⁶⁷ John Locke, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" in J.L. Axtell, The Educational Writings of John Locke. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), (#1) p114.

include the following:-

The well Education of their Children is so much the Concern and Duty of Parents, and the Welfare and Prosperity of the Nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone lay it seriously to Heart;...⁶⁸

Supporting this view of Locke as presenting foundation work on the inter-connection of education to the wider needs of society, Peter Gay says,

The main reason for the immediate, and lasting, popularity of Locke's pedagogical writings was their intimate and obvious connection with his philosophy, a philosophy that came to dominate the eighteenth century... Locke developed his pedagogical program, not in isolation, but as part of a total view of the world.⁶⁹

Whereas the usefulness of education had been long known, it had previously been viewed as an appropriate personal attribute, without wider implication. That is, as in the case of Castiglione's courtier,⁷⁰ education would enable the individual to accomplish a particular vocational need. Now, however, Locke was looking at education as a social pre-requisite. Logically, if education is the determinant of the individual, then good education will yield good individuals who will ultimately benefit the good society.

Along with society's needs Locke was also concerned with the respect appropriate to individuals and, on that point, he is particularly notable for not being an age-discriminator. Thus, despite

⁶⁸ Ibid, p112.

⁶⁹ Peter Gay, John Locke on Education (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), p5.

⁷⁰ Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier (London: Penguin, 1976).

recognizing that children need to develop their own ability to 'reason' before attaining total freedom, Locke saw no case for treating them, in all other ways, as other than normal humans; a notion which was at variance with prevailing norms. It can be posited, as Yolton & Yolton do, that the "...child's transition from innocence to knowledge..." is analogous to the transition of humans towards a "...civil society."⁷¹ This notion is reinforced by consideration of Locke's vision of property as also existing in the person.⁷² Thus, the protection of property afforded to material things is extended equally, in the compact with others, to our human entity, and is thus not restricted to adults but extended to all. So, the respect due to the property of the adult human, in the body, is extended equally to the child, with the condition that such respect is mitigated by the obligations of the parent to raise the child to reason.⁷³ The child then, immediately owning property in itself, enters likewise "both a family and a nation" and,

...the family's duty being slowly to awaken the child to virtue. Each of these communities should be guided by moral laws, laws derived from the laws of nature which are God's

⁷¹ John W. Yolton & Jean S. Yolton, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p16.

⁷² Locke, "Second Treatise" (#173) p383. After a reference to the management of property, "(By property I must be understood here, as in other places, to mean that property which men have in their Persons as well as Goods)."

⁷³ Ibid, (#63) p309:
"...To turn him loose to an unrestrain'd Liberty, before he has Reason to guide him, is not the allowing him the privilege of his nature, to be free;... God hath made it their business to imploy his care in their Offspring, and hath placed in them suitable inclinations of Tenderness and Concern to temper his power, to apply it as his Wisdom designed it, to the Children's good, as long as they should need to be under it."

laws.⁷⁴

This gradual easing of parental authority can be seen in Education⁷⁵ in the way punishment is to be avoided, particularly after the early stages of development. The beating of children is unacceptable, and only favoured when the child is farthest from reason, and thereby farthest from partaking in its civic freedom.

This notion of beatings in the early stages of childhood has the appearance of being contrary to the general humanitarian stance which Locke took. What has to be considered here, however, is the notion, emanating from Aristotle,⁷⁶ of the blank state of the mind at birth, which is discussed in Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. As Voltaire summarizes it, the English author "...vient enfin à considérer l'entendue ou plutôt le néant des connoissances humaines."⁷⁷ In the Essay Locke spoke of the mind as "white Paper"⁷⁸ in describing the way it is laid open for experience to determine its characteristics.

⁷⁴ Yolton & Yolton, p20.

⁷⁵ Locke, Education (#78) p178:
"The pain of the Rod, the first Occasion that requires it, continu'd and increas'd, without leaving off till it has thoroughly prevail'd should first bend the Mind, and settle the Parent's Authority; and then Gravity, mix'd with Kindness, should for ever after keep it."

⁷⁶ Aristotle, "De Anima" (trans. J.A. Smith) in W.D. Ross (ed.), The Works of Aristotle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p429b - refers to the child's mind as "...a writing tablet on which as yet nothing actually stands written;..."

⁷⁷ Voltaire, Lettres Philosophiques (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1964), p170.

⁷⁸ Essay, II, i, #2, p104.

In earlier drafts though, he had used the term 'tabula rasa' by which the notion is commonly identified.⁷⁹ What was important then, for Locke, was that extreme care be taken to preclude the wrong characteristics from being established early. Thus, despite his abhorrence of beating in general, it can be over-ridden (for the benefit of the child) in order to ensure that the white paper is not sullied by improper experience. Such improper experience, for Locke, would be for the child to believe that a trait like stubbornness achieved success in its relationship with parents.

Despite Locke's great faith in education, it was merely a tool which would be as good, or as bad, as its handler. He was critical of prevailing schooling⁸⁰ and his efforts in writing the Education may be interpreted as offering suggestions for improvement. Locke's cautious approach to education is evident in his Essay, where failure to embrace "...the Evidence of reason, though laid before him as clear as Day-light." is noted as the fault of "Education and Prejudice..."⁸¹ This was not, however, a criticism of the capability of education to forward the cause of reason. It was quite the opposite: badly directed education was

⁷⁹ See the (so called by modern scholars) Drafts A and B of the Essay:

- Benjamin Rand (ed.), An Essay Concerning the Understanding, Knowledge, Opinion, and Assent (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p61.
- R.I. Aaron and Jocelyn Gibb (eds.) An Early Draft of Locke's Essay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p7.

⁸⁰ Education (#94) pp199-200 - see also James Axtell's supporting notes, p199(1).

⁸¹ Essay, II, xxxiii, p394.

thwarting intellectual progress. Ideas are impressed upon the mind by the senses; this was Locke's important maxim, and education is a facilitating tool. The proper flow of ideas requires a good tool, and depends upon the quality of the (raw) material concerned. So, if children were not immediately amenable then the 'rod' would be employed as an addendum to the learning process.

A very important aspect of discipline, for Locke, was that "...the shame of Beating, and not the Pain, should be the greatest part of the Punishment."⁸² The child should be shamed, and not beaten, into correct ways because fear of embarrassment among his peers is believed to have stronger influence on the young child. In his rejection of punishment, and in several important aspects of his pedagogy, Locke emulated the Roman theorist Quintilian. But, whereas Quintilian wrote "...that boys should suffer corporal punishment, though it be a received custom..., I by no means approve;..." he went on to caution against both the pain and shame of beatings.⁸³ Locke, however, looked for alternative sources of shame. Quintilian was an important source of educational ideas for Locke, and he is identified as recommended reading in a 1703 essay entitled "Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman",⁸⁴ but he did not pursue all aspects of the Roman scholar's views.

Locke analogized the rights of the child in the home to the rights

⁸² Education, (#78) p177.

⁸³ Quintilian; Rev. John Selby Watson (trans.) Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory; or, Education of an Orator (London: George Bell, 1899), p27.

⁸⁴ Axtell, The Educational Writings of John Locke, p399.

of the adult in society, but overlooked the fundamental precept that in his society rule is by consent, but in the home no such option is possible. He asserted, however, that no human has a hereditary right to rule,⁸⁵ but rules by the consent of the others; likewise parents have no right to rule their children, but undertake a sacred obligation to nurture and educate them until they are capable of enjoying the freedom which is theirs to claim. Locke said in the "First Treatise...",

...Children being by the Course of Nature, born weak, and unable to provide for themselves, they have by the appointment of God himself, who hath thus ordered the course of nature, a Right to be nourish'd and maintained by their Parents,...

and in the "Second Treatise",

...Adam and Eve, and after them all Parents were, by the Law of Nature, under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the Children they had begotten...

So, extending Peter Gay's observation that Locke saw the state as the "...agent rather than the master of the individual;..."⁸⁶ then the parent is likewise the agent of the child, with obligations to fulfil.

⁸⁵ Locke, "First Treatise", (#104) p216:
"...it is a truth undeniable, that there cannot be any Multitude of Men whatsoever, either great or small, tho' gathered from the several corners and remotest Regions of the world, but that in the same Multitude considered by its self, there is one man amongst them, that in Nature hath a Right to be King of all the rest, as being the next Heir to Adam, and all the other Subject to him, every Man by Nature is a King or a Subject."

⁸⁶ Ibid, (#89) p207.

⁸⁷ Locke, "Second Treatise", (#56) p305.

⁸⁸ Gay, John Locke on Education, p10.

Locke acknowledged that the child is "...Subject to him that begets him,..."⁸⁹ but he was concerned with the respect, rather than obedience, which the child owes its parents. He referred to the "...Honour ...vested in the Parents by Nature,..."⁹⁰ As Nathan Tarcov explains,

...parental "power" is, rather, a matter of children's rights - that it exists only for the children's good and must be directed toward their eventual freedom, equality, and friendship with their parents.⁹¹

The child, then, benefits from Locke's total view of the value of the individual.

He took it as obvious that rights which are fundamental in the state cannot be denied in the family, a notion echoed by Peter Gay,

Just as the individual exists, not for the state, but for himself, so the child is neither the slave nor the plaything of adults, but a human being with his own worth.⁹²

This concept is so revolutionary, and so much at variance with popular belief, that despite its reinforcement by other philosophers, again, notably by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, it was to take centuries to implement on a widespread basis. In fact, Helvétius' treatment of the child as a 'puppet' (to be overtly manipulated) was more in accord with prevailing practice.⁹³ At the heart of resistance to Locke's view of the child's

⁸⁹ Locke, "First Treatise", (#74) p196.

⁹⁰ Ibid, (#63) p186.

⁹¹ Nathan Tarcov, Locke's Education for Liberty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p209.

⁹² Gay, John Locke on Education, p10.

⁹³ De l'Homme, Intro., ii, p45.
Helvétius sought to give his philosophy scientific credence.

mind was perpetuation of the belief in humans as being born sinful,⁹⁴ a view which he did not accept.⁹⁵ Thus, in many spheres, the notion of beating the sin out of the child retained some philosophical justification. The schools of the last century, as in the case of Charles Dickens' depiction of Dotheboys Hall in Nicholas Nickleby, were in some cases little improved from those of Locke's day, reflecting the long period during which the child continued to suffer from lack of respect as a 'full' human.

Instead of taking materialism as a preferred alternative to the old spiritual explanations of human motivation he elaborated the full implications of his thesis. Thus, an assertion that the mind is devoid of spiritual stimulus leads logically to the theory that it will respond only to the environment which it encounters. So, education may be called upon to condition that environment in a form which cause the human mind to develop in a pre-determined manner. In our own century totalitarian regimes have acted effectively upon this idea and whole societies have been manipulated like puppets. Recognizing this facility was not a fault in Helvétius' philosophy - he was merely observing that a tool which had served religious bodies well over the centuries might also aid the process of enlightenment. Education is manipulation and Claude Adrien's pursuit of a full articulation of his ideas led him to a frankness which may appear *un-enlightened*.

⁹⁴ James Moore, "Theological Politics: A Study of the Reception of Locke's Two Treatises of Government in England and Scotland in the Early Eighteenth Century" in Martyn P. Thompson (ed.), John Locke and Immanuel Kant: Historical Reception and Contemporary Relevance (Berlin: Duncer & Humbolt, 1991), pp67/8, discusses religious reaction to Locke's theories on the precedent set when God created Adam, and the implications for the freedom of individuals, according to which, "Locke had failed to perceive the presence of original sin in wives and children which required husbands and fathers to have sovereign power over them."

⁹⁵ In "The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures" Locke condems the view that "...all Adam's posterity..." is "...doomed to eternal infinite punishment, for the transgressions of Adam,..." in that Adam could not have been acting on behalf of the whole of humanity; none of us approved such a mandate. I.T. Ramsay (ed.), The Reasonableness of Christianity (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), p25.

Unlike the dictatorial attitude of teachers like Wackford Squeers, Locke preferred the notion of guidance. The parent or tutor guides the child to maturity from whence appreciation of the law of nature will be his guide.⁹⁶ Although natural law is fundamental to Locke's major philosophical works, he did not present a full definition of what he meant by the term, but came close to doing so only in a series of essays written around 1660. These predated his major writings by at least ten years, and were not in fact published in his lifetime: they were published in 1955 by Wolfgang von Leyden. Being early works, however, they also predate the full refinement of Locke's thought. In Quentin Skinner's terminology, "Locke at thirty is evidently not yet 'Locke'..."⁹⁷ Not only was John Locke refining his thoughts, he was to come under the influence of the political situation in England, and of one significant politician in the Earl of Shaftesbury.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the 1660 natural law essays do indicate the length of time during which Locke considered the notion; they may be taken as his concept in embryo.

⁹⁶ Locke, "Second Treatise", (#59) p307, speaking of the child having attained maturity:
"When he has acquired that state, he is presumed to know how far that Law is to be his Guide, and how far he may make use of his Freedom, and so come to have it; till then, some Body else must guide him,..."

⁹⁷ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in James Tully (ed.) Meaning and Content: Quentin Skinner and his Critics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p41. Skinner uses the phrase in a contradiction of the notion of a fundamental Lockean philosophy to which all his works adhere. He is employing irony in order to imply that viewing an aspect of Locke's work must take due regard to its context; particularly the point in his writing career when it was prepared.

⁹⁸ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp27/8.

Von Leyden presents a brief explanation of the law, based on Locke's "Second Treatise", thus:

The law of nature is a declaration of God's will and a standard of right and wrong. It is a law that already governs the state of nature, i.e. a pre-social state in which all men are free and equal, and in which they live together in peace. If men make promises to one another in the state of nature, they must consider themselves bound by them, 'for truth and keeping faith belong to men as men, and not as members of society.'⁹⁹

Tully suggests that Locke was using an "argument from design"¹⁰⁰ - that through the laws of nature humans are able to comprehend why God made things the way they are, and we also come to understand our relationship with God. Natural laws are a function of God's design for humankind; each law can be examined to ascertain God's intentions.¹⁰¹

John Dunn stresses the 'theological' basis of the Laws of Nature,¹⁰² as Locke saw them. The 'natural' may take on anti-religious connotations, as it did in the hands of certain philosophers in the eighteenth-century, but in Locke's work no such case was made. Geraint Parry explains,

...duty is owed to God. It is demanded of man by the law of nature and it is through a knowledge of the law of nature that man can come to some understanding of what it is that

⁹⁹ W. von Leyden, "John Locke and Natural Law", Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, Vol. XXXI, No. 116, Jan. 1956, p25.

¹⁰⁰ James Tully, A Discourse on Property (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp38/9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p45.

¹⁰² Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp24/5.

God asks of him.¹⁰³

Parry notes that this is a "nominalist" view of natural law, and that the alternative was a "realist" view, by which the law comes to be known purely by reason. As such, natural law comes to "...be valid independently of its being promulgated by God."¹⁰⁴ One can see the short step from this realist view to one totally divorced from a religious basis of natural law. But, while later scholars may have employed Locke's rationale to reach a realist view, or beyond, Locke remained a nominalist, with natural law firmly based on theology. John Dunn explains it as a basis of human equality - all have a "...shared status as creatures of God without intrinsic authority over each other."¹⁰⁵

Despite a more lengthy explanation of the law of nature in the earlier essays, von Leyden speculates that Locke recognized "theoretical difficulties"¹⁰⁶ with this definition, which may explain why these eight earlier essays were not published by the author. For whatever reason, natural law was, for Locke, an unproven premise of "...several of his mature theories...", but which was not "...in detail reconsidered by him in his later writings,..."¹⁰⁷

An example of Locke's flimsiest arguments in these essays is his

¹⁰³ Geraint Parry, John Locke (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp28/9.

¹⁰⁵ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p106.

¹⁰⁶ von Leyden, "John Locke and Natural Law", p34.

¹⁰⁷ W. von Leyden (ed.), John Locke: Essays on the Laws of Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p82.

call on Aristotle's word as proof in the first essay, thus,

...Aristotle says 'A natural rule of justice is one which has the same validity everywhere'. Hence it is rightly concluded that there is a law of nature, since there is a law which obtains everywhere.¹⁰⁸

He seems to be saying, it must be so, because Aristotle says so! Also, further on in the first essay Locke argued that a "...fact..." which "...establishes the existence of the law more firmly..."¹⁰⁹ was that disputants did not deny the idea, merely the interpretation of it.

Nevertheless, earlier in the first essay Locke did present a brief overall description, that,

...this law of nature can be described as being the decree of the divine will discernible by the light of nature and indicating what is and what is not in conformity with rational nature, and for this nature commanding or prohibiting.¹¹⁰

So, despite the unrefined condition of the Essays on the Law of Nature it is clear that Locke saw these laws as being created by God. They are supposed to be the basis on which humans exist and inter-relate, and for that reason they are fundamental to the way people govern, or are governed. Government, in the state and in the home, is the most important function of social relationships, and the Two Treatises were Locke's interpretation of God's natural law: for the operation of society. At the 'macro' level he interpreted God's intentions for the state, and at the 'micro' level he examined rules and responsibilities

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p113.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p115.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p111.

in the home. In the process, he established a foundation of human education based on his interpretation of God's intentions for the familial and social role. Under natural law the child has full human rights, but requires the protection and assistance of parents in order to come to fully exercise them.

Locke's Psychology and its Implications

Wolfgang von Leyden discusses how Locke's humans come to a knowledge of natural law.¹¹¹ He interprets it as occurring on two levels, one mental and the other spiritual; the one which argues from known facts to those previously unknown, and the other a fixed set of moral truths which the mind comes to appreciate in the process of development. In his later work, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Locke's thoughts on the development of the mind are more refined. The notion of the 'idea' as "...an intermediary object between the perceiving mind and the ultimate object..."¹¹² is explored. There is great similarity in the way the human achieves knowledge, with the earlier discussion of how natural law is understood. Locke again posited two types of understanding.¹¹³ The first is that derived from the senses, as the immediate interpretation of experience, which is termed 'sensation'. The other type of knowledge goes a step beyond the reception of sensation

¹¹¹ von Leyden, "John Locke and Natural Law", p29.

¹¹² Bantock, Vol. I, p222.

¹¹³ Essay, pp121-143. In Book II, Chapters iii to viii Locke discussed his notions of "ideas of one sense" and "ideas of reflection".

and analyses activity which is beyond immediate perception, like thinking, reasoning, believing. These are mental mechanisms which cannot be immediately perceived, but which can be worked out as the mind comes to understand his experiences. This second type of understanding is termed by Locke 'reflection'. Essential then, to Locke's concept of understanding, is the fact that experience is the first step towards understanding. This led Locke to put great emphasis on experience in the process of education.

Locke's two step approach to psychological operations is not fully compatible with his 'tabula rasa' concept. If the mind comes into existence as a clean slate, then how does the part which operates the reflection come into existence? It was a rationale which Condillac, and consequently Helvétius, could not accept and it marks the departure of the latter philosophe from the more fundamentally Lockean path which Rousseau pursued. Ernst Cassirer discusses Locke's dilemma thus:

Without doubt Locke took an important step forward and first blazed the trail for empirical investigation. But he stopped half way and recoiled before the most difficult problem. For where the higher functions of the mind - those of comparing, distinguishing, judging, and willing - are concerned, Locke suddenly proves unfaithful to his genetic method... Locke successfully attacked innate ideas but he permitted the prejudice regarding innate operations of the mind to survive.¹¹⁴

Locke's mind then, while devoid of innate ideas, did retain an innate capability; no ideas are inscribed, but the ability to handle ideas coming from the senses is inherent. This led Locke to subscribe to the

¹¹⁴ Ernst Cassirer; F.C.A. Koelln & J.P. Pettegrove (trans.), The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp100/1.

notion that, although the child is born devoid of ideas, it will come endowed with 'natural' inclinations. This is why, in his Education, he cautioned the tutor to observe the "predominant Passions and prevailing Inclinations" of the child. Born without ideas, Locke's human emerges with "native Propensities,... Prevalencies of Constitution,..."¹¹⁵ which necessitate a conditioned learning environment. Helvétius, however, was faithful to Locke's "genetic method", and thus proved to be a revisionist with respect to the English philosopher's pedagogy. It was on this point that Helvétius' educational philosophy began to diverge from Locke's, and from the doctrine which Rousseau was to develop.

The apparent inconsistency was to divide those who pursued Locke's psychological scholarship in the following generations into two distinct camps. On the one hand there were those who pursued materialist views. The body is a machine with mechanical characteristics; nothing is innate and all capability comes from environmental assimilation. This became the thesis of La Mettrie's Man a Machine, and it was the basis of Condillac's project to complete Locke's work on human understanding. Condillac dismissed Locke's second level of mental operation, believing judgement to be only a function of memory.¹¹⁶ The materialists chose to ignore Locke's point with respect to native tendencies, believing as Cassirer notes, that Locke had not pursued his ideas far enough. Helvétius subscribed to the materialist doctrine, and based his

¹¹⁵ Education, (#102) pp206/7.

¹¹⁶ Condillac; R.G. Weyant (trans.), An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge (Gainsville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimilies & Reprints, 1971), p75.

philosophy on a purist approach to the 'tabula rasa' concept. This became the basis of his dispute with Rousseau, to the extent that the Genevan remained in the Lockean 'camp', accepting the notion of the child being born with particular propensities. For this reason, Rousseau's education assumed the child to have a 'natural' inclination towards goodness, while Helvétius saw the child's inclination towards good or evil as being the consequence only of education and environment.

Another implication for education can be found in John Locke's notion of how things exist. He saw objects as being characterized by their 'essence', in both a nominal and real sense. He described nominal essence by reference to a countryman's observation of the "...famous clock at *Strasburg*".¹¹⁷ This observer, having no intrinsic knowledge of clocks, will see the clock and all the ornate paraphernalia peculiar to it, but is limited in the way he describes (or knows) it, to observing it as a *Strasburg* type of clock. He is exposed only to the nominal essence of this object and does not have the experience to know it better. He is familiar with the category of objects which we call clocks, maybe sufficiently to go one step further and recognize its uniqueness, but not enough to truly know it. It can be posited, however, that a horologist will understand the internal mechanism of the clock,¹¹⁸ and will thus have access to its real essence, and accordingly it will set him apart from the rest of us who are 'gazing countrymen'

¹¹⁷ Essay, III, vi, #3, p440 and #9, p444.

¹¹⁸ R.S. Woolhouse, Locke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp96-103.

appreciating the outward appearance, or nominal essence. To the extent that he understands the way clocks work, the horologist's experience allows him to perceive the real essence of the Strasburg clock. Thus, while appreciation of nominal essence facilitates a general understanding, it is only by experience of the inner workings of an object that its real essence is known.

For education then, it is important to get beyond the nominal to the real essence of things. Book learning will yield nominal essence, but 'hands-on' experience will lead directly to knowledge of real essence, whether the object is a mechanism like a clock, or a substance viewed through a magnifying device. This treatment of the understanding is analogous to Locke's views on natural law. In order to know something he would point to its nature - that is, a close assessment of the way it performs its normal function. Whereas the real essence of the Strasburg clock lies in appreciation of its internal mechanism, a real understanding of the operations of society comes through a familiarity with natural law.

Natural law was Locke's term for those God-given rules of conduct which people come to recognize as a guide to individuals in their decent relations with others. They are founded on freedom and equality for all, and are only prejudiced by the entry of people into social groups. When they do so some rights have to be transferred to the group, like the punishment of crime. Thus the individual hands over some powers to the group, but in return receives the security which the group gives. In Locke's view, as explained by Maurice Cranston, loss of liberty to the

group is advantageous;

...Locke believed they had increased their liberty by providing a framework of security in which they were less likely to be frustrated in fulfilling their desires than they had been in the more hazardous conditions of primitive anarchy. Even if in a state of nature there had been more theoretical liberty, there had been less actual liberty.¹¹⁹

Presumably, his proof would be the tendency of people to prefer life in groups.

Entry into groups, however, does not prejudice equality for Locke. If group leadership is to be attributed to someone, it will not be because that individual entered with any personal superiority. As he says, the "...precepts of the law of nature... are binding on all men in the world equally, kings as well as subjects, noblemen as well as the common people, both parents and children,..."¹²⁰ There is thus no hereditary right to power over others in nature. This notion was new, especially in the connected concern that people have a right to depose monarchs who do not rule by the will of the people. "Locke teaches men what their rights are, but also that they must defend them."¹²¹ This view is somewhat tarnished by Locke's rationale of slavery, but that will not be analyzed here.¹²² The citizen's justification for defending his rights

¹¹⁹ Maurice Cranston, John Locke: A Biography (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), p210.

¹²⁰ Essays on the Law of Nature, p197.

¹²¹ Ruth W. Grant, "Locke's Political Anthropology and Lockean Individualism", The Journal of Politics, Vol. 50, No. 1, Feb. 1988, p57.

¹²² Locke describes slavery as appropriate when considered in connection with a 'state-of-war'; that is, when the individual accepts slavery instead of death ("Second Treatise", (#23) p284). This condition is discussed in depth in Gary D. Glenn, "Inalienable Rights and Locke's

ties in with Locke's views of the fundamental basis of society itself. For Locke, society is not a contract, but a trust.¹²³ As such, members are not contracted to obey in perpetuity. Instead, an unjust ruler who betrays the trust may be removed from office by the citizens.

The essays on natural law did not present a definition; but they permitted one to take a step closer to an understanding of what Locke meant by the term, despite the misgivings of von Leyden, Strauss, et al. As was noted in the earlier quotation from von Leyden, natural law is a "declaration of God's will" and it had no atheistic connotation for Locke. That is not to say, however, that these theories were embraced by the Church of England. Locke did not overtly distance himself from the established church, but interpretations of his major works did lead to controversy.

James Moore,¹²⁴ identifies several attacks which were made on John Locke, accusing him of Socinianism. The Socinians did not subscribe to the view of God as existing in the form of a Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Also, their view of original sin equates with Locke's belief that people are not accountable for the errors of their forebears. He says, "...no Body can be under a Law, which is not promulgated to him;..."¹²⁵ Locke might, in present terminology, be

Argument for Limited Government: Political Implications of a Right to Suicide", The Journal of Politics, Vol. 46, No. 1, Feb. 1984, pp80-105.

¹²³ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp162/3.

¹²⁴ Moore, "Theological Politics", pp63-5.

¹²⁵ Locke, "Second Treatise", (#57) p305.

referred to as a 'closet Socinian' - he read the major Socinian texts but (presumably for reasons of personal security) preferred to deny it.¹²⁶ His critics, however, noted his silence on fundamental elements of Christian doctrine. John Edwards complained, in 1695, that the 'author' of The Reasonableness of Christianity retained only the "simple article of faith: that Jesus was the Messiah,"¹²⁷ concluding that the writer was an adherent of Socinianism. The term 'author' is used because Locke published this work, and several others including the Two Treatises, anonymously, only formally declaring authorship in his will. James Tully points out that even with the passing of "The Toleration Act of 27 May 1689" freedom of worship was still denied to an "unorthodox Dissenter"¹²⁸ - toleration was a conditional state. John Locke's secrecy can be understood against the fact that 'unorthodox Dissenters' were those who denied the Trinity.

Locke's religious conviction then, despite lacking an open declaration, became Socinian, and it is reconciled with his notions of natural law in the Reasonableness of Christianity. In that document he presented two laws; a 'law of works', requiring complete obedience to God, and a 'law of faith' which appears to over-ride the severe requirements of the former.¹²⁹ He then connected the law of works with

¹²⁶ Moore, "Theological Politics", p64.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p63.

¹²⁸ James Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p60.

¹²⁹ Reasonableness of Christianity, (#22) p30.

the law of nature, claiming that in each case it is an obligation of man to "... obey every positive law of God."¹³⁰ Thus, while natural law is the perceivable way by which humans should inter-relate, this law is by no means a spontaneous existence. Instead, for Locke, it was God's design for people, given to them as a rational means by which they can amicably co-exist. God is the central feature of Locke's work, and, as John Dunn suggests, "From this one great fact all else follows."¹³¹

Dunn's emphasis on the important role of God in Locke's philosophy is presented in order to counter the view that his theology is a cover for covert atheism or agnosticism. Despite the fact that Locke never departed from his religious commitment in his written work, many of the eighteenth-century philosophes, who named him as mentor, did just that. Some recent scholars have seen fit to look for covert implications in his writing style.¹³² But, Locke's timid nature was not manifest in a form of 'double-speak'; he simply published anonymously those works which constituted a risk to his continued health. In those publications, however, was overtly presented his political thesis. As R.S. Peters explains, "...a loose-fitting cloak of garments, gathered from a variety

¹³⁰ Ibid, (#23) p31.

¹³¹ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p24. Dunn further suggests, at p263, that, "Theology was the key to a coherent understanding of human existence... a defensible theology is a necessary condition for the cogency of many of his arguments."

¹³² Leo Strauss is a notable author who searches for hidden meaning. He believes that Locke used "...cautious speech..." where "...unqualified frankness would hinder a noble work one is trying to achieve, or expose one to persecution..." Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp208/9.

of established sources, was woven round a set of political demands that were thrusting upwards to counter the autocratic tendencies of the Stuarts."¹³³ Locke's probable Socinianism, and undogmatic approach¹³⁴ appeared as challenges to the church. Likewise, his contention that rulers no more inherit their monarchial role than do the rest of us¹³⁵ also appeared to refute church authority, in its association with the notion of the 'divine right of kings.' If, however, he was refuting anything, it would be the church establishment, and not God, nor the role of God. The difficulty which some scholars have had with Locke's theology goes back a long way, and Peter Gay suggests that it is the reason why many in the eighteenth-century passed over the Reasonableness of Christianity without comment. As Gay suggests, both Locke's 'friends' and 'enemies' had difficulty with the book, and it "...did not please the pious,... it did not please the philosophes either..."¹³⁶

The Reasonableness of Christianity appears to have been presented by Locke as the clarification of principles which he had implied in his more major works; much the same as in the Education. Dunn, in fact, asserts that Locke had intended to discuss the law of nature as part of

¹³³ Richard Peters, "Locke" in Maurice Cranston (ed.), Western Political Philosophers (London: Bodley Head, 1964), p54.

¹³⁴ Raymond Polin says of Locke, "Il est difficile d'être à la fois plus religieux et moins dogmatique que Locke ne l'a été." La Politique Morale de John Locke (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), p3.

¹³⁵ See the earlier quotation from the "First Treatise", (#104) p216.

¹³⁶ Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Vol. I, "The Rise of Modern Paganism", p321.

his concluding section in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding but, failing in the attempt, overcame the shortcoming by presenting instead the Reasonableness of Christianity as an "...intellectual bequest to his contemporaries and to posterity."¹³⁷ Dunn goes on to suggest,

The Essay breaks off at the point at which Locke is confronted by his inability to present morality as a system of universally intelligible obligatory truths, and the Reasonableness of Christianity provides both a moral rationalization of human 'partiality' and moral incomprehension and a practical strategy for amending it.¹³⁸

Locke's theology then, far from being an attempt at covert atheism, or anything else, was the culmination of ideas which were not fully worked out in the Essay. He recognized that his ideas would need further work by his overly modest statement that he was merely "...an Under-Labourer in clearing the Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish that lies in the way of Knowledge;..."¹³⁹ Helvétius and Rousseau then, picked up Locke's philosophy, in its unrefined state, and, not surprisingly, recognized different implications, and embarked on divergent courses.

Some Thoughts Concerning Education

So, what does Locke's natural law theory have to offer for education, or education for natural law? Firstly, education will teach the child to reason and come to an understanding of natural law. Only then can participation in normal society begin. For this reason, both in

¹³⁷ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p187.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p192.

¹³⁹ Essay, "Epistle to the Reader", pp9/10.

the 1660 essays¹⁴⁰ and in the "Second Treatise of Government"¹⁴¹ Locke maintained the position that children are to be evaluated as idiots. In the cases of both children and idiots, the individual is not fully capable of reason, but whereas the former will attain it, and thereby attain freedom, the idiot is destined for the equivalent of parental care throughout life.

Education, then, will take the normal child from the state of the idiot, to that of the responsible adult. And, it is that process which is so important, not only for what Locke had to say about the learning activity, but for his work on government. If a principle of government is to have any utility it has to reflect (or be accompanied by) some indication of how society will embrace it. Thus, the Two Treatises explain the correct relationship of people with each other, and in the process they recognize that society needs to be educated to accept it. Also Locke's subscription to 'tabula rasa', in the Essay, renders education crucial¹⁴² to the extent that it is the determinant of the human. As is noted in an earlier quotation, people are what they are by their education¹⁴³ for they bring nothing into the world but their mechanical bodies - like computers without software.

Locke, however, did not have the confidence which Helvétius was later to exude. His pupils did have inherent aptitudes which, if not

¹⁴⁰ Essays on the Law of Nature, p203.

¹⁴¹ "Second Treatise", (#60) p308.

¹⁴² Bantock, Vol. I, p228.

¹⁴³ Education, (#1) p114.

properly attended to, might lead the child in an unfortunate direction. Locke's tutor is expected to condition his teaching to the character of its recipient. Practice became a prime concern. The child has to become so well practised in good manners (particularly in its relationships with others) that they will be natural for him. In any given situation he is to err (naturally) to the appropriate course, almost by instinct. Bantock likens this process to the establishment of a second nature. He explains that, by an artifice similar to Castiglione's 'sprezzatura', the child accomplishes a second nature which masks any other.¹⁴⁴ By this method the morally correct adult becomes such by losing any contrary notion. In Locke's education it is achieved by placing emphasis on practice and habit. Unlike Rousseau, then, who was to interpret human inclination as always erring to the good, if shielded from negative influence, Locke saw the habit of proper actions as ensuring that the human may be conditioned to always make the choice for goodness.

This mental conditioning of the child may be likened to Helvétius' analogy of the puppet. It demonstrates that although Rousseau generally retains the more fundamentally Lockean stance, a clear demarcation does not exist. Jean-Jacques rejected all forms of overt environmental conditioning, confident that such methods were redundant. In essence, his child would learn by discovery, and not by design, and consequently become a discerning and intelligent citizen. It was a notion which clearly took inspiration from the experiential ideas which Locke had proposed; but Rousseau was more confident of success. Locke's fall-back

¹⁴⁴ Bantock, Vol. I, pp230-2.

on habit-forming was analogous to buying insurance. In doing so he was not only self-contradictory, he was pointing the way to Helvétius' pedagogy of total environmental control.

What Locke recognized though, is that by adulthood humans have generally been influenced, beyond change, in the status quo. Their habits, whether good or bad, are firmly and unalterably established. This, as John Dunn explains, ties in (again) with the notion of the mind as white paper at birth; the defining criterion for whether education is good or bad is equally vested in experience. The paper cannot be returned to its original purity, but becomes "defaced"¹⁴⁵ with bad experiences or teaching. Only through a new education would a new society emerge, and children would learn, not on trust from tutors steeped in the ways of the past, but based on their own perception of the laws of nature from their experience of the present. Locke warned in the second of his 1660 essays that, "...if the law of nature could be learned from tradition, it would be a matter of trust rather than knowledge,..."¹⁴⁶ Also, in the fourth essay he explained,

...this light of nature is neither tradition nor some inward moral principle written in our minds by nature, there remains nothing by which it can be defined but reason and sense-perception. For only these two faculties appear to teach and educate the mind and to provide what is characteristic of the light of nature,...

The "light of nature" will be achieved by reasoning with experience.

¹⁴⁵ John Dunn, "Locke" in The British Empiricists (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p72.

¹⁴⁶ Essays on the Law of Nature, p131.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p147.

But, this will imply learning by imitation, and the consequent requirement to shepherd children towards the best examples. As Peter Gay explains, "Since children learn by imitation, they must be given experiences worth imitating."¹⁴⁸ This point is raised by Gay in discussion of Locke's warnings against allowing children to be exposed to servants: little gentlemen are not to be influenced by their inferiors or they will undoubtedly adopt their values.

Locke's Education deals as much with the practicalities as with the principles of pedagogy. Locke looked into all aspects of the child's physical and intellectual welfare in promoting a liberal education.¹⁴⁹ He explained his preference for a broad curriculum, in Of the Conduct of the Understanding, thus,

The business of education..., is not, as I think, to make them perfect in any one of the sciences, but to open and dispose their minds as may best make them capable of any, when they shall apply themselves to it. If men are for a long time accustomed only to one sort or method of thoughts, their minds grow stiff in it and do not readily turn to another.¹⁵⁰

In fact, it was this total regard for the child which was Locke's great innovation in education.¹⁵¹

Locke's book on education is intrinsically experiential and humanitarian. Children, he believed, would gravitate toward learning if

¹⁴⁸ Gay, John Locke on Education, p7.

¹⁴⁹ Axtell, p:58.

¹⁵⁰ Locke, in F.W. Garforth (ed.), John Locke's Of the Conduct of the Understanding (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1966), p73.

¹⁵¹ Gay, John Locke on Education, p4.

the right conditions were arranged for them. And, so long as they were directed correctly they would become morally and intellectually successful. From the premise that, "...the Minds of Children are easily turn'd this or that Way, as Water it self;..."¹⁵² he proceeded to design an education which ensured that only proper experiences are encountered. In the process Locke prescribed a certain degree of toughening for the child, and it appears to be this aspect which draws most criticism, except from those who favoured his practical form of exposure to nature, like Rousseau. This 'Spartan' approach is characterized by John Dunn as "...a notably unsentimental view of a child's psychological development,..."¹⁵³

These criticisms of Locke's education can be seen to have arisen soon after publication. Samuel Richardson's mid eighteenth-century publication of Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded took Locke's educational model as a theme in the dialogue. In this novel the 'heroine' set out, at the request of her husband, to examine the practical worth of Some Thoughts on Education. With the exception that little "...Billy has not yet been accustom'd to being wet-shod,..." , Pamela begins with optimism explaining that after a few years she expects,

...the little buds of their minds will begin to open, and their watchful mother will be employ'd, like a skilful gardener, in preserving from blights, and assisting and encouraging the charming flowers thro' its several stages to perfection, when it shall become one of the principle

¹⁵² Education, (#2) p115.

¹⁵³ Dunn, "Locke", p22.

ornaments of that delicate garden, your honour'd family.¹⁵⁴

In that optimism, however, can be seen the seeds of her error; Locke's education is not for the benefit of the parent, but of the child. As she proceeds her philosophical parting from Locke becomes clearer, particularly in the 'Spartan' aspects of education. She cannot accept inculcating notions of self-denial, has problems with identifying a fully compliant tutor and compromises by taking one tutor for a few children, instead of one per pupil.¹⁵⁵ She makes the interesting point, that if the child is to emulate best examples, then the tutor will not do. He will be of inferior rank to the gentleman being taught; hence, it is better for the child to be in a small school where he can emulate other children of similar rank. In her departure from Locke's call for education in isolation, Richardson's fictional character, Pamela, was subscribing to what would become Helvétius' departure from Locke's educational doctrine. Particularly pertinent is the fact that Richardson's heroine and Helvétius both reject the isolated education of the child by a personal tutor. Rousseau was more closely Lockean. Certainly, in his plea for isolation from other children, and even from the influence of servants,¹⁵⁶ Locke appears to have inspired Rousseau's concern to protect the child from outside influence. It is an aspect of Locke's Education which Helvétius chose to evade.

¹⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson, Pamela, Or, Virtue rewarded (London: J. Johnson et al, 1801 - reproduced, New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), p262.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p264, p269 and p274.

¹⁵⁶ Education (#68), p164.

Another surprising problem which Pamela has is with Locke's recommendation that lessons be presented as play, where possible. This our fictional heroine finds "...a very pretty method to cheat children,..."¹⁵⁷ Whether or not Richardson is reflecting an actual case the story has a realistic sound, reminiscent of Richard Edgeworth's later attempt to test, in practice, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Emile. In that case, while the philosophical principles were admirable, practical implementation was a disaster. The difference, of course, is that Rousseau claimed never to have intended his work for practice, whereas Locke's work was, in fact, derived from a collection of the various letters he had sent to Edward Clarke advising an educational scheme for his offspring.

Writing in 1902 the Reverend Quick identified Locke's problem, and believed that the author had also struggled with it. Children cannot realistically be shielded from untoward influence. At home they cannot but be influenced by servants, yet at school there are a host of unsavoury experiences to be had. Quick observes that Locke shows "...an uncomfortable consciousness that here is a rock on which the good ship will probably go to pieces."¹⁵⁸ The assertion, however, that Locke's education was in any way 'going aground' is quite inappropriate. It implies the failure of his educational philosophy because one aspect was untenable. But, when Locke identified the problem of untoward influences

¹⁵⁷ Pamela, p309.

¹⁵⁸ R.H. Quick, Locke on Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), pliv.

on children his requirement was not that the former be abolished, but that parents recognize the consequences of this exposure.

Quick's is a practical objection to a philosophical problem; a fate frequently visited by critics of Rousseau's Emile. There is, of course, the objection that Locke's 'education' was practical in intent, and as such it does fail. But, one has to consider in anything which John Locke wrote, that he was not merely exercising his brain on another subject. His educational writing was a consequential work. Education had distinct roles to play in the improvement of society, and whatever he wrote on the subject would be cognizant of his fundamental philosophy. Locke's concept of natural law, though growing and developing in accordance with the author's life experiences, maintained a continuity from the 1660 essays, through the Two Treatises, and into the Education. However, it is also possible to trace, in the educational treatise, the consequences of his epicureanism which were presented in the Essay.

Attributions of Hedonism and Utilitarianism

The Essay has a special significance among Locke's important works - it is the only one which was overtly presented to the world as his own. In his era criticism of authority, whether secular or religious, was not tolerated. Locke's views on how society should operate implied criticisms of the prevailing social order and most of his writings were only posthumously acknowledged. Even the Essay was not without risk, with its rejection of innate ideas running contrary to fundamental Christian thought. But, despite the fact that John Locke wrote it, and

it would undoubtedly carry his hallmark, the central theme of the Essay was not how society, politics, religion or any other human organization should work. Its thesis was psychological; it investigated the ways that knowledge is accumulated and used.

In his investigation of the understanding Locke necessarily visited his theme from other works; how people came to handle themselves in their contact with others, and particularly how they came to make morally correct judgements. His views on the laws of nature are not argued in the Essay. As John Dunn suggests, "...the Two Treatises are scarcely even compatible..." with the "...notion of tabula rasa..."¹⁵⁹ But, in the Essay Locke took the opportunity to pursue another viewpoint, which came to be labelled utilitarian. Unlike his thoughts on natural law, which date back to his early 1660 writings, Locke appears to have developed his hedonistic ideas only in the mid 1670's.¹⁶⁰ At that time Locke travelled in France, and it is believed that he came under the influence of the epicurean scholar Pierre Gassendi through François Bernier, the publisher of the late philosopher's works.¹⁶¹ Several of the ideas which Locke presented in the Essay may be traced to Bernier's Abregé de la Philosophie de Gassendi.

In the Abregé Bernier may be seen to present, in detail, Gassendi's elaboration of the philosophy of Epicurus. And, recognizing

¹⁵⁹ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp85/6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p195.

¹⁶¹ Cranston, John Locke, pp103, 169/70, 265.
Richard I. Aaron, John Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp32-5.

Locke's closeness to Bernier, it is certainly possible to observe explanations in the Frenchman's text which were reflected in the Essay. For instance, in Tome VI of the Abregé Bernier outlined the roles of pleasure, against discomfort, in human judgement, and focused on the way these conditions work on the mind in order to formulate a disposition towards pleasure.¹⁶² In consideration of Gassendi's thesis, however, Bernier outlined the possible conditions of moral choice as involving three situations. Instead of a stark polarization between pleasure and discomfort, a third choice of "cupidité"¹⁶³ is offered. Cupidité is the option of rejecting discomfort, but of opting only for those pleasures which will move the individual to an indolent state; it involves a rejection of the indulgent form of epicureanism which Gassendi had regarded as a distortion of the original philosophy of Epicurus.

Thus, for Gassendi, the three passions to which people are subjected are 'douleur', 'cupidité' and 'plaisir'. And, Bernier discussed Gassendi's ideas on the way one comes to favour the latter as a form of habit,¹⁶⁴ based on human instinct. He noted that a cold child is unhappy, but feels pleasure when covered; and, the unhappiness of a hungry child turns to pleasure at its mother's breast.¹⁶⁵ In Gassendi's work then, may be traced important aspects of Locke's thoughts. The

¹⁶² Bernier, Abregé de la Philosophie de Gassendi, Tome VI (Lyon: Anisson, Posuel & Rigaud, 1684), pp393/4 and p405.

¹⁶³ Ibid, VI, p395.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, VI, p406.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, VI, p396.

Englishman overtly acknowledged the motivating force of pleasure, but he does not reflect on 'cupidité' or the interpretations of human tranquillity in the notion of 'voluptas'. It is not surprising though, because if Dunn is correct in asserting that Locke wished to reconcile his ideas of natural law with those of hedonism, then 'cupidité' would have given him major difficulties. The incompatibility between the pursuit of a tranquil state, and Locke's endorsement of the accumulation of wealth, and his lifelong Calvinist creed of endeavour, is extreme. It is hard to imagine common ground between these concepts.

There is, though, a theological aspect to all of Locke's work and, whereas in the Two Treatises Locke pursued the basis of political society from God's intentions in natural law, in the Essay he remained faithful to his argument from design, to the extent that all things physical and mental have a theological basis. However, as John Dunn says, Locke's hedonism "...was not directly compatible with a rationalist theory of the nature of the Good..."¹⁶⁶ Dunn refers to a suppressed late chapter of the Essay in which the author had hoped to reconcile his views of morality based on the laws of nature with his hedonistic morality. This task required Locke to find a common denominator between duty to God's laws and the notion that whatever favoured human happiness was morally correct.

It presented Locke with a theological problem. This is God's earth and people, and the matter of how they should be properly handled was religious. Dunn suggests that because Locke could not establish

¹⁶⁶ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, pp18/9.

"...morality as a system of universally intelligible obligatory truths..."¹⁶⁷ he gave up the attempt, and preferred to explain "moral incomprehension" in his Reasonableness of Christianity. Consequently, the Essay precipitates the existence in Locke's works of two axioms of morality, both human duty to the laws of nature, and the notion that it is morally appropriate to pursue the path of greatest utility. The problem is not so much the two axioms, which may both be argued to be commendable in particular circumstances; it is the fact that as principles they are mutually incompatible. For instance, in an extreme example, the notions of duty in natural law may require individuals to risk death for their community, whereas the greater utility of cowardice would act decisively upon the utilitarian. It could, of course, be suggested that the individual's fear of being shot as a coward will lead the individual to find greater utility in 'doing the duty of the state' - ie. individual and communal utility will be served. This logic, however, is far from a natural process, and the pursuit of natural laws frequently clashes with notions of utility, which involve a weighing or calculating process. Natural law is subjective; choice is based on an internalised notion of the good or right action. Utility, however, is objective, with the focus of choice being based on external criteria. Bantock has characterised the "antagonistic solutions to the problem"¹⁶⁸ as centrifugal and centripetal, in order to explain the inward and outward dimensions of this psychological dilemma.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p192.

¹⁶⁸ Bantock, Vol. I, pp252/3.

The passage in Locke's Essay which later utilitarians were to refer back to as particularly enlightening is the following:

Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles, which (as practical Principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions without ceasing: These may be observ'd in all Persons and all Ages, steady and universal; but these are Inclinations of the Appetite to good, not Impressions of truth on the Understanding.¹⁶⁹

But, Locke did not resolve the contradictions which utilitarianism holds for natural law doctrines. His only gesture was to offer the suggestion that, seeing as God in fact sees and knows everything, and as everything comes from God, then utility and the law of nature are convergent in his word. Locke presented it thus,

I grant the existence of God is so many ways manifest, and the Obedience we owe him, so congruous to the Light of Reason, that a great part of Mankind give Testimony to the Law of Nature: But yet I think it must be allowed, That several Moral Rules, may receive, from Mankind, a very general Approbation, without either knowing, or admitting the true ground of Morality; which can only be the Will and Law of a God, who sees Men in the dark, has in his Hands Rewards and Punishments, and Power enough to call to account the Proudest Offender. For God having, by an inseparable connexion, joined *Virtue* and publick Happiness together; and made the Practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of Society and visibly *beneficial* to all,...¹⁷⁰

Locke appears to have been convinced of the validity of both the natural law and utilitarian morality, even though he recognized their incompatibility. In the Reasonableness of Christianity Locke gave the impression of being frustrated that the 'light of nature' was so

¹⁶⁹ Essay, I, iii, #3, p67.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, I, iii, #6, p69.

illusory to so many, whilst hedonism seemed to gain such wide attention.

He explained:

Experience shews that the knowledge of morality, by mere natural light (how agreeable soever it be to it), makes but a slow progress, and little advance in the world. And the reason of it is not hard to be found in men's necessities, passions, vices, and mistaken interests, which turn their thoughts another way.¹⁷¹

It gives the impression that, for Locke, natural law was the doctrine which he favoured, while hedonism was a real factor to be acknowledged. In failing to reconcile his moral dilemma Locke's legacy, to scholars of his work, is a contradiction. Two theories of social intercourse are proposed by him, but each negates the other. As Raymond Polin suggests, they are the cause of apparent incoherence in his doctrine.¹⁷² And, although most scholars handle Locke's interest chronologically, to the extent that his hedonistic observations post-dated his writings on the laws of nature, there are others who have handled the concepts in reverse order. R.H. Quick, at the end of the last century, asked, "Was Locke a utilitarian in education?", and, having answered in the affirmative, exclaimed,

...strange to say the supposed leader of the Utilitarians has actually propounded in so many words the doctrine of their opponents.¹⁷³

It is not surprising that Quick should have found some inconsistencies as he examined the whole spectrum of Locke's ideas, but it is surprising

¹⁷¹ Reasonableness of Christianity, (#241) p61.

¹⁷² Polin, La Politique Morale, p48.

¹⁷³ R.H. Quick, Essays on Educational Reformers (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), pp234-7.

that he should take as the baseline of his judgement his presumed role as "leader of the Utilitarians".

Tully identifies the period when Locke "...began to integrate his natural law voluntarism with the revival of Greek hedonism"¹⁷⁴ as occurring whilst he was in France in the late 1670's; at the time he visited Bernier. He goes on to explain the way synthesis was applied between the two doctrines thus,

Accepting the notion of pleasures and pains as the springs of human action, they added three Christian elements to Epicurus' theory: a providential god, the immortality of the soul, and heaven and hell as the reward and punishment for good and evil behaviour.

It is little wonder that Peter Gay came to speak of Locke as the last of the pagan Christians.¹⁷⁵ The following generation of thinkers would tend to either retain a form of Christianity, or reject it completely, but Locke's active mind was trying to graft epicureanism onto Christianity.

There is something uncharacteristically Lockean about taking two old authorities in this way. Locke was the great empiricist, the one who wanted nothing on trust, and to be able to test anything in a scientific manner. Perhaps this was where his confidence failed him and he gave up trying to complete the last chapter of the Essay. At least he did not try to pass off a poor rationale. As Tully suggests, "...one solution that Locke rejects," was the pseudo-scientific rationale:

Cumberland argued that god had attached to natural law punishments and rewards in this world. The hangover that follows from overdrinking, for example, is punishment god annexed to overdrinking because it is a sin. It follows that

¹⁷⁴ Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy, p206.

¹⁷⁵ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. I, p321.

one can work back from empirical observations of the pleasures and pains that result from human actions to hypotheses of what natural laws should be.¹⁷⁶

However, to the extent that for Locke natural law was "an axiom of theology,"¹⁷⁷ then the ultimate assessment of the greatest pleasure concerned the afterlife. Any moral decision, for a Christian, had to consider the potential pleasure or pain in heaven or hell. To that extent, God has the ultimate power of reward or punishment, and Geraint Parry suggests that wrong-doing, in fact, causes an uneasiness, analogous to pain.¹⁷⁸ So, one might say that weighing the utility of a decision will parallel natural law as the logical and fearful individual will err towards what God would want him to do, which is the same thing as pursuing natural law. In Locke's own words,

He has Goodness and Wisdom to direct our Actions to that which is best; and He has Power to enforce it by Rewards and Punishments, of infinite weight and duration, in another Life, for no body can take us out of his hands. This is the only true touchstone of *moral Rectitude*; and by comparing them to this Law, it is, that Men judge of the most considerable *Moral Good or Evil* of their Actions; that is, whether as *Duties, or Sins*, they are like to procure them happiness, or misery, from the hands of the ALMIGHTY.¹⁷⁹

So, as Parry says, "The prospect of pleasure and pain is thus the motive for men's conformity to natural law."¹⁸⁰

This is all too simple though. If the state of the individual's

¹⁷⁶ Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy, p213.

¹⁷⁷ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p103.

¹⁷⁸ Parry, p32.

¹⁷⁹ Essay, II, xxviii, #8, p352.

¹⁸⁰ Parry, p33.

afterlife were sufficient sanction to influence morality, then why were people not recognizing it naturally? An answer might be that they were not adequately educated to comprehend the implications. But, if that was the case in the past, when Christianity had greater control over human minds, it would hardly hold sway in the new era of scientific inquiry and experiment. And, hedonism does not conjure up images of people striving for long term benefit; it is the philosophy of immediate gratification which distinguishes epicurean hedonism from the stoics. So, why do so many tend to favour immediate pleasures which can result in long term pain? Tully explains Locke's belief that "...we misjudge the weight of future or consequential pleasures and pains relative to the present ones..." quoting Locke:

...because the abstinence from a present pleasure, that offers itself, is a Pain, nay, often times a great one, the desire being inflamed by a near and tempting object; 'tis no wonder that operates after the same manner a Pain does, and lessens in our Thoughts, what is Future; and forces us, as it were, blindfold into its embraces.¹⁸¹

One is left, in Locke, with a presentation of the case for what Bentham would call the 'greater happiness principle', but without a thorough explanation and rationale. Whereas the natural law principle was pursued throughout Locke's writings, his commitment to utility is less marked. He developed natural law principles as his own, but, in the case of utility, the concept is not fundamentally Lockean. John Dunn speaks about a "framework of beliefs" and "duties to God". These are fundamental to Locke, and are the core of what he was. Dunn goes on to

¹⁸¹ Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy, pp220/1. Essay, II, xxi, #64, p277.

say that without these aspects of Locke there would only be left the "...confusing abstractness of the utilitarian calculus"¹⁸² which leads Dunn to consider Locke's utilitarianism implausible.¹⁸³ Despite the multi-faceted nature of his writings, the John Locke of greatest stature is Locke the individualist; the apologist for the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Ironically, the real Locke is the writer of the covert Two Treatises, the book which he considered a risk for publication, and not the openly published Essay for which he became best known. As W.H. Burston explains the contradiction,

His individualism... led him to insist on certain inalienable rights of man. Such a theory is incompatible with Utilitarianism which asserts that no right of man is valid except if and in so far as it promotes the general happiness."¹⁸⁴

Without utility Locke would still be Locke, but without natural law we would not recognize him. In Locke's hands utility was a seed of an idea, something he recognized, perhaps from Gassendi, and felt worthy of discussion. That same seed was also addressed by David Hume, but the seeds which he and Locke sowed, saw fruition with Helvétius, Bentham and the Mills. Saint-Lambert gave credit to Locke for developing and demonstrating the ideas which had laid dormant since Aristotle and Epicurus. However, he recognized the way in which Helvétius had stepped beyond any considerations of Locke, in saying, "Cette maxime de Locke,

¹⁸² Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p266.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p250.

¹⁸⁴ W.H. Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education (London: The Athlone Press, 1973), p33.

que nous naissons les disciples des objets qui nous environnent, est mise dans tout son jour par Helvétius."¹⁸⁵

Whereas the essence of Locke's work remained his natural law doctrine, his presentation of hedonism in the Essay would be of sufficient merit for philosophers to pursue the issue further. Some aspects were also carried into his other work, notably Education. The Essay was particularly important to Locke - it was the most significant of his openly endorsed writings, and it was fundamentally a philosophical work. When his other unsigned works ultimately came to the public after his death, his reputation had already been established by the Essay. As Peter Laslett puts it, "Everything else which he wrote was important because he, Locke of the Human Understanding, had written it."¹⁸⁶

It is hardly surprising that scholars found Locke incoherent.¹⁸⁷ Two Treatises is a major milestone of 'western' political philosophy, and it establishes Locke as a defender of the rights of the individual. But, as has been seen from the observations of Dunn and Laslett, although the natural law doctrine of the Two Treatises is incompatible

¹⁸⁵ Saint-Lambert, Tome V, p262 - see also p259.

¹⁸⁶ Laslett, pp37/8.

¹⁸⁷ The coherence of Locke's works is an unresolved debate to our own times. Despite the English philosopher's inspiration of diverging doctrines (particularly with respect to education) he undoubtedly intended no such thing. In his Discourse on Property James Tully examines the 'context' of Locke's theories of property. In equating 'property rights' with 'rights in general' Tully notes the connections rather than the differences between the Essay and the Two Treatises. See, in particular, A Discourse on Property, pp5-8.

with the Essay, it was the Essay which established Locke's reputation as an author and philosopher. It is just this 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' view of Locke which led Helvétius and Rousseau to praise him equally as their mentor, while taking his doctrines as the basis of quite different educational ideas. Whereas both subscribed to the Essay's 'tabula rasa' discussion, Helvétius was to prefer an interpretation which developed the idea in a pure form, believing that everything is learned through education, and nothing, not even capability, is inherent. Rousseau, however, came to the educational debate through a thorough belief in the rights of the individual, commensurate with Locke's thesis of the Two Treatises. In his Emile Rousseau's regard for the child is commensurate with Locke's. That is to say, in Peter Gay's words, as "...a human being with his own worth."¹⁸⁸ Despite Rousseau's disagreement with aspects of Locke's Education, and in particular his rejection of corporal punishment, Rousseau did generally pursue Locke's pedagogy, but with the application of his own 'improvements'. Consequently, Rousseau is closest to Locke in his interpretation of inherent capability, but he made no attempt to reconcile this with utilitarian concepts. Rousseau recognized that his concerns for individual rights precluded the notions of utility. The Genevan's pedagogy remained close to Locke's as it concentrated on achieving social improvement through the development of intelligent, discerning citizens. Helvétius' citizens had no need of discernment. 'Government' would determine what was best for them and they would be conditioned to react accordingly. The diverse educational

¹⁸⁸ John Locke on Education, p10.

paths of Helvétius and Rousseau were to lead to two distinct schools; a pedagogical dilemma. In Rousseau's work education may be characterized as unimportant (let it happen naturally) and for Helvétius it became extremely important (absolute environmental control). Bantock, however, notes that Rousseau only wanted to give the impression of natural development. He suggests that the effect of Rousseau's education is "...to smuggle in prescription in the *guise* of 'natural' development."¹⁹⁹

The pedagogical aims of the Two Treatises are reflected in the Education, but, the educational discussion is consequential of all Locke's major writings. The notion of 'tabula rasa' was a central theme in the Education coming directly from the Essay and constituted the basic pedagogical concept which both Helvétius and Rousseau adopted from Locke. Another derivative of the Essay which became central to the Education, was the utilitarian notion of pleasure and pain, or the tools of that doctrine, rewards and punishment; the educational aspect of Locke's work which formed no part of Rousseau's elaboration, but which Helvétius found so important. It is the hedonistic inclination in Locke which makes his education most humanitarian. He saw that the pursuit of pleasure is an immediate impulse of the human, and so accomplishment of educational aims can be achieved by making the whole pedagogical experience pleasurable.

¹⁹⁹ Bantock, pp259/60.

It may be argued that a brutal regime would operate on the reverse principles, but with the same effect - education would be achieved by working hard to avoid pain. But, under the brutal régime, education would be associated with something done against one's will; to be ignored whenever the 'pressure was off'. When the child is induced to find pleasure in learning, however, the pleasing experience would be pursued throughout whatever time were available. As Locke wrote to the Earl of Peterborough:

...when a young gentleman has got a relish of knowledge, the love and credit of doing well spurs him on; he will, with or without teachers, make great advances in whatever he has a mind to. Mr. Newton learned his mathematics only of himself;...¹⁹⁰

The tool, to incline the child in a required direction, is the central notion of tabula rasa; the child is 'as easily turned as water'. The utilitarian aim of having the child incline towards taking education as a pleasurable experience ties in to Locke's fundamental thought on how knowledge is acquired.

Tully explains the proliferation of Locke's ideas of rewards and punishments through three of his later works:

The three techniques of punishments and rewards for forming virtuous habits are: the use of praise and blame of teachers or peers as rewards and punishments in the educational system of Some Thoughts Concerning Education; the use of the punishments and rewards of the workhouse system; and the use of fear of hell and the hope of heaven to instill basic Christian virtues, in the Reasonableness of Christianity...¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Axtell footnote to the Education, p198.

¹⁹¹ Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy, p67.

It may be suggested though, that Locke's proposals for the workhouses of England, referred to above, and outlined in The Report of the Board of Trade, are inconsistent with his Education because they are just as brutal as the worst kind of prevailing schools. A Lockean answer, however, would point to the age at which education is to begin. Locke's education was designed to take 'young gentlemen' from the earliest age. In other words, the 'tabula rasa' was to be addressed in its most unsullied condition. Candidates for the workhouse, however, already displayed the fact that their minds were quite sullied, merely by being considered for the institution.

In Locke's time, and particularly for those of his Protestant background, unemployment equated with laziness and implied criminality. Education had already missed its opportunity, so brutality would be the only means of effective control. In fact, although Locke suggested to the world a more humane method of teaching, he was a firm advocate of brutality. Punishment of children is only phased out as they 'see reason' and develop closer to their role of 'gentlemen', but for those who remained below 'genteel' ranks he freely accepted the use of brutal methods. But, Locke's proposal for the workhouses was only an aspect of his work, and it attempted to address what was seen as a very real problem of his age, in the form of a national policy on vagrancy. It was an extension of the use of habit training which was discussed earlier.

This unseemly interface between the philosophical Locke, of the Essay, and the practical Locke, of his official documents, is not to be found in the work of the philosophes. Voltaire, Diderot, d'Holbach,

d'Alembert, Condillac, Condorcet, Helvétius and Rousseau either inherited wealth, generated a sufficient income from their writings, or subsisted partly by the generosity of patrons. They were generally, in fact, so opposed to the 'establishment' that remuneration from the state may well have constituted a betrayal of their ideals. Locke, however, was not so fortunate as to have been a member of the type of artistic 'milieu' which existed in the France of the following generation, with its entourage of wealthy members and patrons. And, his Calvinism led him to a 'normal' route through education to remunerative employment. It is true that he did find a wealthy patron in the Earl of Shaftsbury, but that patronage brought with it demanding requirements of a type which rendered him more a paid employee than one who is funded to work on his own projects. For that reason Locke's political works bear a bias towards those for whom it was prepared, while the Essay appears to reflect his own ideas. And, The Report of the Board of Trade had little room for personal philosophy as it was an immediate, practical, document.

All too often philosophers find the realities of politics somewhat different from theory. Nevertheless though, observers should be cautious of taking the necessities of practise as in some way negating the philosophical. Locke is open to such a critique (as is Rousseau, in the case of his Polish treatise, which was written more than a decade after his major works¹⁹²) and may be considered to compromise his central

¹⁹² Rousseau, Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972).

philosophy. But, the value of consequential works, in the case of both Locke (and Rousseau), is that they permit the later observer to view the philosopher confronted, not by his fabrication of utopia, but by some aspect of the way the real world operates. So, when Richardson commented on Locke's 'education', in Pamela, it removed critique of the philosopher's thought from an academic to a very open public debate. There is a particular appropriateness about the way this occurred. As Dunn and Tully have discussed him, Locke has to be understood in the context of his era and his particular disposition. When he wrote he was in no way operating in an academic vacuum, but was formulating a philosophy (be it political, religious, economic or educational) dealing with aspects of his own society which he considered required clarification or change. Thus, while the Essay may have been totally dedicated to elaborating his philosophical views, aspects of those ideas pervaded his other works, to some degree.

John Locke wrote for change; wrote about real problems and hoped that his efforts would be rewarded by new attitudes in society. But, as he pursued changes in society he also had to deal with changes in himself. His writings reflect his views at a point-in-time, and a coherent examination of his thoughts must acknowledge that fact. So, as he tried to focus his thoughts on politics, religion, economics and the human assimilation of knowledge itself, his own philosophical foundation was moving. His views on natural law - never consolidated despite his early rendering in the 1660 essays - were impacted a decade and a half later by the influence of hedonistic ideas. But, in spite of the pagan

origins and implications of utilitarian thought, Locke was at heart a man of God, and a believer in God's (natural) laws. Instead of abandoning his earlier beliefs, he retained them, and merely attempted to integrate the new ones.

In his Education can be seen the consequences of all that John Locke was. It is coherent with his other writings, and contradicts none of his central themes. His religious commitment is firm and intact, and the relationship to his political thought is maintained directly from the Two Treatises to the Education. In that latter work, however, are also traceable the main tenets of Locke's views on the acquisition of knowledge. The 'tabula rasa' is fundamental to his educational doctrine, and there is an interesting inter-play between his natural law and utilitarian doctrines. The context of the two is that, for Locke they were the same thing; laws and impulses emanating from God. And, despite the fact that he could neither effectively prove (or reconcile) them, this was the context of his philosophy at the time he wrote Some Thoughts Concerning Education.

The Education was his legacy to the next generation of social philosophers, who recognized the importance of pedagogy; particularly to Helvétius and Rousseau. Both also considered his other writings, but each of these philosophes, in outlining their own pedagogical doctrines, took pains to correlate their own educational ideas with those which Locke established in the Education. These links are discussed further in Chapter 3, with respect to Rousseau, and Chapter 4 and 5 for Helvétius. And, the irony of Locke's role, as mentor to the divergent ideas of

these two philosophes, becomes evident. Each of them treated the English philosopher in praiseworthy manner, and, despite the criticisms which each had for the other (which is addressed in Chapter 6), both articulated concepts which may be conceptualised as branches of the same (Lockean) philosophical tree.

Helvétius' perspective is pertinent here. His thesis did not involve taking a balanced approach to Locke's pedagogical ideas. In fact, his affinity to Locke appears to have developed retrospectively as he pursued a rationale for his materialist ideas. Those ideas were not the legacy of one mentor, but the absorbed and calculated influences of many. However, in this dissertation, examination of Locke's work covers the wide spectrum of his educational ideas. In equally covering the concepts which Helvétius accepted, and rejected, an understanding has also been developed of those Lockean features which came to characterize Rousseau's pedagogical thinking.

3. Rousseau's lonely trek through the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment - what stimulated his pedagogical quest?

The previous chapter discussed the important trends in John Locke's educational philosophy because that was the intellectual 'store' from which Helvétius drew support. The French philosophe directly attributed the source of his ideas to Locke in a chapter of De l'Homme which was dedicated to that purpose. Locke was the philosopher whom Helvétius wished to be associated with, and the previous chapter of this dissertation visited the ideas of the English sage in order to identify the linkage. But, the posthumously published De l'Homme carries clear indication of the philosophy with which Helvétius wished to identify, it also denotes the chief source of ideas which he sought to contend and refute. Throughout the voluminous De l'Homme only Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work is singled out for detailed analysis, debate and refutation. Whereas Locke was to be clearly identified with Helvétius' ideas, Rousseau's views were to be clearly positioned as an opposing doctrine.

Helvétius and Rousseau were contemporaries. Their ages were similar, they both wrote works of educational philosophy and both suffered similar fates in their respective persecutions by civic and religious authorities. But, though they both pursued change, and social enlightenment, they did so for fundamentally different reasons. There was little common ground between Helvétius' materialist interpretations, and the emphasis which Rousseau placed on individuality. For that reason this dissertation, which focuses on the educational ideas of Helvétius, constantly encounters the alternative views which Rousseau elaborated.

As an aid to comprehending Helvétius, the intellectual alternative is also considered. The writing careers of these two philosophes developed quite differently. Helvétius was wealthy, and appears to have simply decided to adopt the role of philosophical author; launching himself into a huge tome in the form of De l'Esprit. Rousseau, on the other hand, while not destitute, had relatively modest financial resources. In his early days writing was Jean-Jacques' means of existence. Often he engaged in the mundane chores of a copyist, but it helped him to develop as a writer who was notable for the fine style of his work.

Rousseau, however, did not merely develop another line of thought on education. Inasmuch as Helvétius developed pedagogical ideas commensurate with the materialism which characterized the French Enlightenment, Rousseau's philosophy was the movement's internal backlash. Rousseau was of the Enlightenment, and by no means allied with the clerics, yet he came to oppose Helvétius and the encyclopèdistes with great intensity. His philosophy of education ran counter to prevailing materialist thought, yet it enjoyed a longevity which was denied his contemporary. The materialist pedagogy of Helvétius was submerged by Rousseau's eloquent opposition. So, pursuit of the causes of Helvétius' demise as an educational and social philosopher has, of necessity, to consider Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This is particularly so with respect to those features of the Genevan's background which led him to assail the materialist doctrine of his age, and the pedagogical interpretations which Helvétius articulated.

There are many facets of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy, but his central concern was with society. From the publication of his major works onwards, much of what emanated from his prolific pen was intended to defend, or expand, on his notions of how society was wrongly constituted. While lacking the 'means' of Helvétius or the Baron d'Holbach, he was well read. He also had the particular good fortune to be able to isolate himself from society for several years - in order to reflect on what he knew of society - and to organize his thoughts into substantial literary works. Rousseau, by that time, in the mid-1750's, was over forty years old and had travelled enough for his day to be a 'man-of-the-world'. The prerequisite of anyone who presumes to tell the world it is doing wrong is to have a firm education, and practical experience in worldly matters. Rousseau certainly had both; he was closely familiar with different but major contemporary societies of his day, in Paris and Geneva, and he had read extensively the important literature to his time.

It is always pertinent to ask what motivated a great person. In his modesty, Isaac Newton gave due credit to his intellectual forbears when he said, in a letter to Hooke, that he had benefitted from being able to stand on the "...shoulders of giants."¹⁹³ In asking what

¹⁹³ Isaac Newton, in a letter to Robert Hooke, 5 February 1675/6, in H.W. Turnbull (ed.), The Correspondence of Isaac Newton, Vol. I (1661-1675) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p416. Newton was giving credit to both Hooke and Descartes when he said, "What Des-Cartes did was a good step. You have added much in several ways, & especially in taking ye colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen further it is by standing on ye shoulders of Giants."

shoulders Rousseau might have acknowledge two candidates emerge above the many possibilities. The first is John Locke. Despite references in his works to many other scholars it is Locke that he was always conscious of. He echoed him often in his Emile as if Locke's were the standards against which he judged himself. He freely paralleled Locke's doctrines, and felt obliged to explain to the reader why and where he made his occasional departures from the ideas of the English sage.

The second shoulder Rousseau climbed was that of the City-state of Geneva, and it exerted more influence on him than anything. The philosophers provided great influence, and Jean-Jacques, by the time he was forty years old, had read and absorbed important lessons from them. Geneva though, despite being familiar to him since childhood, experienced political change during Rousseau's lifetime. On the one hand it was, for him, the best example in the world of the Platonic ideal of a republic, especially when viewed from the decadence of Paris. However, observed from the inside, or when closely compared to the ideal, Geneva exhibited the frustrations of a body which promised well, but failed to deliver - at least for Jean-Jacques. Without these influences, Jean-Jacques Rousseau would not have been known to us in the way he is today.

By the year 1740, Rousseau's 28th year, it is possible to note a transition from the wandering ways of the experience-gatherer towards a focus on philosophy and writing. In May of that year he was accepted as a tutor for the children of M. de Mably, a noted scholar with family and other connections in the French academia. This was a fortunate

occurrence, which Rousseau likely did not recognize at the time,¹⁹⁴ but it allowed him to take a first step into the philosophical movement which was later called the French Enlightenment. By that time the abbé de Condillac, a member of the family, was already a "keen student of Locke,..."¹⁹⁵ It was at Mably's residence that Rousseau began to try some serious writing, and his role as tutor prompted him to consolidate his pedagogical ideas in a "Project for Education" which he presented to his employer. In another work, a poem entitled "Le Verger des Charmettes", the author acknowledged some of his intellectual debts. A part of it reads,

Là, portant avec moi Montaigne ou La Bruyère,
Je ris tranquillement de l'humaine misère;
Ou bien, avec Socrate et le divin Platon,
Je m'exerce à marcher sur les pas de Caton.

Tantôt avec Leibnitz, Malebranche et Newton,
Je monte ma raison sur un sublime ton;
J'examine les lois des corps et des pensées;
Avec Locke je fais l'histoire des idées;
Avec Képler,....¹⁹⁶

"Avec Locke je fais l'histoire des idées...;" Rousseau was to appreciate the implications of the English philosopher's ideas (on sensory perception) for education and for society. According to Rousseau, children were born without inherent guilt, and would grow into fine citizens if appropriately shielded from the opinions of prevailing

¹⁹⁴ Maurice Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p143.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p142.

¹⁹⁶ William Boyd, The Educational Theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), p36.

society. Thus it was Locke who provided the philosophical basis by which Rousseau's children would come to participate in the just society.

John Locke: Rousseau's Intellectual Tutor

John Locke is seen throughout Rousseau's work as the social and pedagogical sage, to be pursued in all things political and educational, except where Jean-Jacques has some suggestion of his own to add. Their 'meeting of minds' may well have had something to do with the fact that both Locke and Rousseau were raised as Protestants. As John Dunn says of Locke,

...the Lockean social and political theory is to be seen as the elaboration of Calvinist social values,... The explanation of why it was Calvinist social values which Locke continues to expound is that he was brought up in a Calvinist family.¹⁹⁷

Locke's father had been an officer in Cromwell's army in the English Civil War and so he was raised in a firmly Puritan household. Consequently his (Protestant) mind-set would have been commensurate with Rousseau's, leading to a sympathetic reading by the Genevan. Locke forms

¹⁹⁷ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p259.

Use of the term 'Calvinist' to associate the religious backgrounds of Locke and Rousseau is questionable. Despite the association of English Puritans with Calvinists, during European exiles, the Puritan movement was a distinctly English phenomenon. They did exhibit many similarities with Calvinists, but their 'raison d'être' was the pursuit of 'pure' Protestantism, completely rejecting all traits of Catholicism. Puritanism thus developed its own course. Harold Grimm says of the Puritans,

"Opposed both to the all-inclusiveness of Anglicanism and the rigidity of Calvinism as being unscriptural, they proposed a church without ritual and a learned ministry."

The Reformation Era (London: Collier Macmillan, 1973, p393.

Thus, in this thesis the term Protestant is used to denote common ground between Locke and Rousseau in their early religious indoctrination.

the bedrock upon which Rousseau erects his edifice. In other words, Locke's work is not contested, but is taken as a point to progress from. It is quite conceivable that Rousseau would be content with the picture of himself on the shoulders of John Locke, seeing a little further. Locke's role for Rousseau, then, was as the early and continuous guide in his philosophical ventures. It will be seen that Helvétius used Locke differently - his respect for Locke appears to have grown as the Englishman's influence was sought, in support of the French philosophe's materialist ideas.

In the Emile there are plenty of references to Locke, and Rousseau's reverence for his work is explained in this quotation:

J'ai déjà suffisamment parlé de son importance, et comme on ne peut là-dessus donner de meilleures raisons ni des règles plus sensées que celles qu'on trouve dans le livre de Locke je me contenterai d'y renvoyer après avoir pris la liberté d'ajouter quelques observations aux siennes.¹⁹⁸

The book, of course, is Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education. These two works differ significantly in purpose. Although Locke's was written against the mental backdrop of all he had written on the mind and on government, it was a practical treatise, originating as a series of letters on how to educate an actual child.¹⁹⁹ Rousseau had no such venture in mind, probably looking back with distaste at his earlier experiences with M. de Mably's children. This lack of constraint may

¹⁹⁸ Emile, p371.

¹⁹⁹ Locke's "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" is a compilation of letters which were addressed to Edward Clarke of Chipley. His explanation of how they were compiled into a book is contained in a dedicatory letter to Mr. Clarke which is presented at the beginning of that text. Axtell, pp111-3.

explain why he felt free to pursue his essay beyond the marriage of Emile to Sophie.²⁰⁰ It reflects the philosophical difference between the two works, to the extent that Locke would see it as bad mannered interference to presume advice to one so old (whose reason was fully developed, permitting him to take his place as a fully functioning citizen). On the other hand, Rousseau was educating the perfect citizen, and the learning process for that role continues beyond the union of two adults, to show how the perfect child ultimately engages with society. Rousseau was not only raising the child to reason, he stayed around to ensure that reason is functioning properly.

In view of Rousseau's willingness to credit Locke's educational work as a foundational text for Emile, William Boyd is likely correct to assert that it was only after reading Locke that Rousseau came to recognize the need for change in prevailing educational processes.²⁰¹ The fundamental similarities in their pedagogical doctrines are obvious. Both are intrinsically humanitarian in the way they lobby their readers to treat the child with the same respect due to any other (adult) individual. Locke wanted to diminish corporal punishment, Rousseau wanted none at all. Both doctrines favour attention to physical as well as mental exercise and both look for their pupils to develop a capability in some aspect of manual craftsmanship. Although Rousseau did

²⁰⁰ In Emile, p692, Rousseau says, "Puisque nôtre jeune Gentilhomme, dit Locke, est prêt à se marier, il est tems de le laisser auprès de sa maitresse. Et là-dessus il finit son ouvrage. Pour moi qui n'ai pas l'honneur d'élever un Gentilhomme, je me garderai d'imiter Locke en cela."

²⁰¹ Boyd, The Educational Theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p308.

not accept all aspects of Locke's pedagogy, it is appropriate to assert that on most of the important points they did agree. Locke gave the Genevan a foundation on which to build, and it is argued later that, in similar fashion, Jean-Jacques refined his ideas on the contemporary 'sounding board' of Helvétius' concepts for educational reform. Rousseau had the good fortune to have Locke's work available for reference, and he was also able to consider the alternative elaboration of Locke's pedagogy in the form of Helvétius' (Enlightenment) treatise, De l'Esprit. Of Locke's Education Allan Bloom says that "...it is of capital importance to Rousseau's project,..." suggesting that,

Rousseau defines much of his position as over against that of Locke. A deep understanding of Emile presupposes a knowledge of Locke's teaching.²⁰²

So, despite the utopian context of Emile, Rousseau had some practical guidance, which was implicit in Locke's prescription for the son of his friend Edward Clarke. But, whereas Locke's Education was immediately tested, Rousseau's had no such facility.

Rousseau's project to test the outcome of his educational theories was by a philosophical extension of the events in Emile. Soon after the publication of Emile in 1762 he began a sequel which he titled "Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires," but it was unfinished, running to only thirty-two pages. He may have been coaxed into the work by the marquise de Crequi, who taunted Rousseau with a query about how the perfect

²⁰² Allan Bloom note in his trans. of Emile, (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p481.

couple could stand up to the rigours of real life problems.²⁰³ In effect, the marquise was asking Rousseau to take his prototype members of the just society and to plunge them into his prevailing world, and its particular morality. Rousseau appears to have relished the prospect of testing his protégé (and protégée) in this way. The thirty-two pages were considered suitable for a reading by the author to Baron Nicholas-Antoine de Kirchberger, on the 17th November 1762,²⁰⁴ only five months after the marquise had penned her taunt. However, this project appears to have fallen victim to the persecutions and flights of refuge which characterized the latter part of 1762 for Jean-Jacques. Rousseau had begun the sequel to Emile as the storm over his major educational tract had broken. Nevertheless, the short beginning of the sequel does provide a good indication of the author's intentions.

In "Emile et Sophie", the pain which Rousseau induced came through Emile's discovery that another man has defiled his bed, and Sophie's consequent pregnancy.²⁰⁵ Emile set off on a journey reminiscent of Voltaire's Candide, and at the point where Rousseau broke off writing, his adult pupil had become a slave of the Dey of Algiers. Rousseau had it in mind to complete the work, mentioning his intention to Du Peyrou

²⁰³ Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome XI, pp12/3.

²⁰⁴ A. Jullien (ed.), Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Genève: A. Jullien, 1923), Tome Quinzième, p139.

²⁰⁵ Rousseau, "Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires," Oeuvres Complètes de J.J. Rousseau, Tome III (Paris: Hachette, 1873), p7.

in 1768,²⁰⁶ and in his Confessions,²⁰⁷ but he failed to do so. His reason for not completing the project is a matter for speculation, but it may be that he had trouble fitting his model citizen into prevailing society. This is probably unduly pessimistic considering Rousseau's literary talent. Jean Starobinski is more optimistic, explaining that,

Emile will go back to Sophie and tell her that her sin was not her fault:...
The novel is unfinished but from the outset it heralds the rapture of return:...²⁰⁸

There are occasions when Rousseau was unfairly critical of Locke, from a biased reading of the English philosopher. In response to a passage where Locke suggested the manipulation of children's experiences, Rousseau countered,

Faites en sort, dit Locke, qu'ils soient convaincus par expérience que le plus libéral est toujours le mieux partagé. C'est là rendre un enfant libéral en apparence, et avare en effet. Il ajoute que les enfans contracteront ainsi l'habitude de la libéralité; oui d'une libéralité usurière, qui donne un oeuf pour avoir un boeuf. Mais quand il s'agira de donner tout de bon, adieu l'habitude;...²⁰⁹

Rousseau's own work was frequently paradoxical but he sometimes accused others of crimes of which he was the greater perpetrator. He is widely criticised for the intrigues he posits in Emile, whereby the child is

²⁰⁶ Rousseau; R.A. Leigh (ed.), Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tome XXXVI, (Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1966), pp8/9.

²⁰⁷ Rousseau; J.M. Cohen (ed.), The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p62.

²⁰⁸ Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p128.

²⁰⁹ Emile, p338.

duped into learning by experience. Rousseau was the great manipulator of children, conniving to have Emile feel he is making choices, whereas he is constantly influenced by his tutor to make the 'right' ones. A major contrast in the pedagogical ideas of Rousseau and Helvétius is in the former's pursuit of 'nature's way', and the latter's insistence on full environmental control. But, by his manipulation of the child Rousseau exercises full control of the child in a covert manner.

There are two distinctly different sides to Rousseau and the 'real-life' Jean-Jacques is hard to trace in his philosophy. In fact Rousseau, the notorious author of a (particularly humane) treatise on education, had dispatched all of his own five children to foundling hospitals. This left him open to reproach; a void which his arch-critic Voltaire did not leave wanting.²¹⁰

Rousseau also appears to have accused Locke without a full reading of the supposed offender, in the case where the English philosopher was taken to task for advocating reasoning in a child. Rousseau said,

Raisonner avec les enfans étoit la grande maxime de Locke; c'est la plus en vogue aujourd'hui; son succès ne me paroît pourtant pas fort propre à la mettre en crédit, et pour moi je ne vois rien de plus sot que ces enfans avec qui l'on a tant raisonné.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Voltaire wrote to d'Alembert on the 17th June 1762, shortly after the scandal over Emile became an uproar, "l'excès de l'orgueil et de l'envie a perdu Jean-Jacques, mon illustre philosophe. Ce monstre ose parler d'éducation! Lui qui n'a voulu élever aucun de ses fils, et qui les a mis tous aux Enfants-trouvés. Il a abandonné ses enfans et la gueuse à qui il les avait faits."
Voltaire, Correspondance: Edition Theadore Besterman, Tome VI (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p929.

²¹¹ Ibid, p317.

The passage which Jean-Jacques referred to is in "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" under the heading 'Reasoning'. It comes at a point where Locke is retreating from severe punishment of obstinacy once "Weight and Authority" have subdued the child. He proceeds,

...I would have the Father seldom interpose his Authority and Command in these Cases, or in any other, but such as have a Tendency to vicious Habits. I think there are better ways of prevailing with them: And a gentle Persuasion in Reasoning, (when the first point of submission to your Will is got) will most Times do much better.²¹²

It is an unfortunate point for Rousseau to take Locke to task about. Firstly because Locke presented it as a substitute for corporal punishment, a process which Jean-Jacques abhorred completely, and secondly because if Rousseau had passed over the next paragraph in Locke's book he would have found his own concerns outlined there:

But when I talk of Reasoning, I do not intend any other but such as is suited to the Child's Capacity and Apprehension. Nobody can think a child of three or seven years old should be argu'd with by a grown Man.²¹³

Rousseau gave the impression of having chosen to berate Locke because he raised the subject, or of having taken this aspect of Locke's work on education from memory, without recollecting the full discussion. Both authors took similar positions on punishment and reasoning. Rousseau wanted no punishment, and Locke wanted to do away with it quickly. Both were also suspicious of reasoning with children, and believed it should be measured commensurate with the child's capability to handle it appropriately.

²¹² Education, (#80) p180.

²¹³ Ibid, (#81) p181.

An important aspect of Locke's Education which Rousseau chose to emulate and expand, and which found no place in Helvétius' ideas, was the fear of outside influence. The rationale for protecting the boy, Emile, from the potentially damaging influences of prevailing society was presented to Rousseau in the Education. In that tract Locke required that,

A young man, before he leaves the shelter of his Father's house and the Guard of a Tutor, should be fortified with Resolution, and made acquainted with Men, to secure his Vertue; lest he should be led into some ruinous course, or fatal precipice, before he is sufficiently acquainted with the Dangers of Conversation, and has steadiness enough not to yield to every Temptation.²¹⁴

It is an aspect of their pedagogy which distinctly separates Rousseau's pedagogy from Helvétius'. And, it serves to identify Jean-Jacques as a perpetuator of Locke's (old) educational ideas, as opposed to the prevailing revisionist views of the Enlightenment.

Although Rousseau credited Locke as a source of his ideas, soon after arriving at the home of M. de Mably, it is likely that a significant deepening of that appreciation occurred as a consequence of his meeting the abbé de Condillac there, and subsequently. In Paris Rousseau became closely associated with Condillac at the same time as he befriended Denis Diderot, and the catalyst of that three-way friendship was intellectual exchange. Rousseau, then, could not fail to have recognized some of Condillac's views on Locke; the Englishman had been the subject of a deep study by the latter philosophe. Beyond sharing similar intellectual interests Condillac and Rousseau displayed a

²¹⁴ Ibid (#70), pp166/7.

spiritual similarity. As Maurice Cranston put it; like Condillac, Jean-Jacques "could not bring..." himself "...to share the prevailing anti-religious attitudes of the Enlightenment;..."²¹⁵

If Rousseau can be characterized as acknowledging two giants on whom to stand, Condillac had only one. Peter Gay quotes him as saying that, "Immediately after Aristotle comes Locke, for we should not count the other philosophers who have written on this subject." It leads Gay to characterize Condillac as a "professional Lockian" with his own "tabula rasa" view of history.²¹⁶ Rousseau, while an acknowledged student of Locke, and at least a confrère of Condillac, found that he needed to improve upon the way they thought of the operation of the mind. He accepted their notion of the mind as operating on two levels, the one being sense perception and the consequent operation they called reflection. Where he differed from them was at the point in time that these operations occur.

All three subscribed to the 'tabula rasa' notion of the child coming into the world with no innate ideas. With Locke, and subsequently Condillac, however, sensation and data are immediately available to the child's mind for reflection. But Rousseau contended that, as Jean Starobinski explains it, there can be a kind of memory that involves not reflection on an object perceived in the past but a resurgence of feeling in the present. Imagination, too, works without the aid of

²¹⁵ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, p219.

²¹⁶ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p178.

reflection.²¹⁷

In other words, Rousseau took a position between the atheists and the doctrines of the established church; a familiar place for him. He would not accept a fully functioning mind immediately at exit from the womb, but did not accept that the child is being sustained in those early times by any innate mental capability. So, he divided up the Lockian functions to say that the first, sensation, is active in the child, but the second, reflection, is in abeyance as yet. In place, is some form of memory interacting with passion. At a certain stage later, reflection will become operational. Starobinski goes on in the above discussion to examine this pre-reflective period which, for Rousseau, is the source of all morality. It is based on "pity" and is the source of mankind's tendency to be good if left to his own devices. This accounts for Jean-Jacques's belief that children need protection from the evils of the world, so that they will develop naturally good. It is the first stage of the child's development, immediately after birth, referred to as the, "pure movement of nature, prior to all reflection."²¹⁸ Throughout, Rousseau maintained the idea of the "divine instinct"²¹⁹ - something apart from sensation and reflection, which takes humans closer to nature and the natural. It links with what he believed about the way the mind works (and its educational implications) and with the notion

²¹⁷ Starobinski, Transparency & Obstruction, p209 & p292.

²¹⁸ Rousseau; Maurice Cranston (ed.), Discourse on Inequality (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p100.

²¹⁹ Asher Horowitz, Rousseau, Nature, and History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p43.

that people co-exist in accordance with a social compact; a guideline for living in accordance with nature.

The notion of a social compact acknowledging freedom and equality for all originated, for Rousseau, with Locke.²²⁰ Again, in the case of Locke's work, it had direct practical implications which Rousseau's did not. Locke was justifying the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688, essentially providing the rationale for a people deposing an unworthy sovereign. The English had deposed James II, the last of the Stuart monarchs, who were notable for their claim to a 'divine right of kings'. Rousseau's social contract, though accepted as guidance after-the-fact by certain revolutionary thinkers, had no such application in the mind of its author. Morley says of the comparison,

There was the important difference that Locke's essay on Civil government was the justification in theory of a Revolution that had already been accomplished in practice, while the Social Contract, tinged as it was by silent reference in the mind of the writer to Geneva, was yet a speculation in the air.²²¹

Rousseau and Geneva: 'The Prodigal Son who never returned to the fold'

The Rousseau family were of French Huguenot descent, having settled in Geneva in 1549. The timing of Didier Rousseau's arrival could

²²⁰ Morley is one of many to credit Locke with being the originator of these ideas in Rousseau. He says,

"It was Locke, whose Essay on Civil Government haunts us throughout the Social Contract, who had taught him that men are born free, equal and independent."

John Viscount Morley, Rousseau and his Era (London: Macmillan, 1923), Vol. II, p176.

²²¹ Ibid, Vol. II, p195.

not have been better, as Calvin was consolidating his power base by enrolling newcomers to his cause by the lure of citizenship. He found these people most adaptable to his new ideas. Thus, in only six years, Didier saw elevation to the dignified position of burgess, and, consequently all of his offsprings were automatically born citizens.²²² The Rousseaus, while maintaining a respectable living, did not rise to the upper levels of Genevan society. Jean-Jacques' father's income came largely from the trade of watchmaking, despite something of a wild and wayward instinct for a man of his trade. His wayward nature, though, brought him into contact with a similarly wayward lady named Suzanne Bernard, who was, in fact, from the upper town, and they engaged in a marriage which each family probably criticised for being beyond their 'station', in their opposite directions.

The Bernards were relatively wealthy, and quite cultured. Jean-Jacques's maternal great-grandfather, in fact, established a valuable library, and his house is said to have been a place where scholars met: one of whom was Jean le Clerc, a friend of the English philosopher John Locke.²²³ Fortunately for Jean-Jacques, his mother Suzanne brought significant wealth to the family, along with a good house in the Grand rue, complete with her grandfather's library. So, the young Jean-Jacques was raised by his father in a financial situation which was not sufficiently comfortable for the elder Rousseau to leave his trade, but which was adequately affluent to allow the boy time for education,

²²² Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, p17.

²²³ Ibid, p19.

partly by his father, and later by his own interest in reading. The tools of a classical education were at hand, as were works of more recent writers (as the poem quoted earlier attests). Rousseau was to speak in glowing terms about his home-based education.²²⁴ That such people were so educated, even if by themselves, was a feature of Geneva's Calvinism.

Calvin had created a model society which had escaped Catholicism, but at the same time established its own brand of Protestantism. From the principle that work was not a penance to be served to God, but that its exercise was a free demonstration of devotion, like prayer,²²⁵ a whole new society emerged. Calvin had introduced education for the lower classes,²²⁶ and so, along with a strong work ethic went a propensity for learning. Although this sounds progressive, it has to be noted that it was tyrannical. As Luthy says, Geneva became,

...an enormous monastery, which embraced the whole city and imposed its rigorous discipline on all the inhabitants.²²⁷

²²⁴ Rousseau said of his education, in a letter dated the 26th November 1758, to docteur Théodore Tronchin,

"J'y ai reçu cette éducation publique, non pas une institution formelle, mais par des traditions et des maximes qui, se transmettant d'âge en âge, donnoient de bonne heure à la jeunesse les lumières qui lui conviennent, et les sentimens qu'elle doit avoir. A douse ans, j'étois un Romain, à vingt, j'avois couru le monde..."

Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome V, p242.

²²⁵ Herbert Lüthy, From Calvin to Rousseau: Tradition and Modernity in Socio-Political Thought from the Reformation to the French Revolution (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p60.

²²⁶ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, p15.

²²⁷ Luthy, p60.

For one who was raised there this environment was normal, and the work-ethic had its benefits, in that doing work, or providing employment, was seen as meritorious. The city was thus "...best prepared for the rigors of the capitalist organization of the economy."²²⁸ As a consequence of that, and the historical acceptance by religious authorities of the function of 'money lending', Geneva was well placed to prosper. Thus began Genevan banking, a prosperous trade to this day, which ironically gained its original impetus when the Catholic King Louis XIV of France, borrowed money from the Protestant Huguenots of Geneva, in order to pursue his persecution of Protestant Huguenots who had remained in France. With moral blinkers Genevans became rich, and it filtered to all levels of their society.

Rousseau recognized that citizenship of Geneva was a privilege in the eighteenth-century. Consequently he revered its form of government, and Calvin the "law-giver,"²²⁹ and, as a reader of the classics of literature, could not have failed to equate his homeland with that utopian design which Plato had put into his Republic. He must have seen the irony of the less sophisticated government of France underwriting this test case of democratic government. His pride showed when he took it upon himself to defend his fatherland against what M. d'Alembert had said of it in the Encyclopédie:

It seems to me that every foreigner, on his first entrance into Geneva, must be greatly struck with that air of life and activity, which appears throughout the whole city. Every body is employed; all are in motion; all busied in their

²²⁸ Ibid, p15.

²²⁹ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, p15.

several occupations.²³⁰

However, Rousseau could be less compromising than even Calvin,²³¹ and his faith in Geneva was not to weather his great works.

Through to the mid 1750's his pride saw no break. In 1754 he was taken back as a citizen with some enthusiasm by the Genevans, after travelling abroad and converting to Catholicism; and he continued to write of the city in complimentary tones. He wrote to M. Tronchin, in the same letter mentioned earlier, that,

Un horloger de Geneve est un homme à présenter par tout; un horloger de Paris n'est bon qu'à parler de montres.²³²

Rousseau retained a view of the purity of his city-state, which had impregnated his whole being. He believed firmly in the way Calvin had organized the populace, and in effect, he epitomized the old ways; the old Geneva. For him, as Lüthy says,

The general will of the assembled people, the physical and moral identity of the government and of the governed, was the burghership of Geneva gathered in general council in the Church of St. Peter, or the assembly of the citizens of the valley cantons of the Swiss mountains...²³³

In his enthusiasm Jean-Jacques assumed that Geneva held him in like esteem. His A Discourse on Inequality was dedicated to the city's

²³⁰ Rousseau, "An Epistle from J.J. Rousseau to d'Alembert" in The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. J.J. Rousseau, Vol. III, p133.

²³¹ Cobban, Rousseau and the Modern State, p130, Rousseau, "...condemns finance and commerce wholeheartedly, regards the rentier as little better than a brigand, would abolish money, return to a system of barter..."

²³² Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome V, p241.

²³³ Lüthy, p264.

leaders, and he proclaimed in the book,

Long may a republic so wisely and happily constituted
endure, both for the felicity of its own citizens and as an
example to other peoples!

and

Perhaps it falls to the city of Geneva alone to offer the
inspiring example of a perfect union between a society of
theologians and men of letters.²³⁴

Even before publication of his major works Rousseau presumed to speak to the leaders of his state as at least an equal,²³⁵ if not in the guise of an intellectual superior. But, the leadership of Geneva did not appreciate it. He upset the 'city fathers' by dedicating his A Discourse on Inequality to them without prior consultation. Genevans admire quiet manners, as Jean Starobinski observes,²³⁶ and this grand assumption of advisor to the state's rulers was taken as being in bad taste. Rousseau commented on Geneva's response, in the Confessions:

...that dedication, which had been inspired by the purest patriotism, brought me nothing but enemies on the Council and the jealousy of some citizens.²³⁷

²³⁴ Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, p62 and pp64/5.

²³⁵ Michel Launay, Rousseau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), pp55 & 57, says,

"Rousseau pensait-il avoir l'âme assez grande pour prouver qu'il avait, en Europe, mission de législateur?"

and

"...s'il faut parler d'un point d'application, par lui-même, des principes de sa politique, c'est à Genève qu'on doit songer."

²³⁶ Starobinski, Transparency and Obstruction, p287.

²³⁷ Rousseau, Confessions, p368.

Perhaps courtesy, in the way of asking in advance that he make the dedication, would have ranked with Jean-Jacques as one of those effeminate gestures of the Parisians. What is notable is the way Rousseau misjudged the officials of his own city-state. He would have known how the well-mannered should approach city officials. His overconfident attitude echoes the wayward natures of both of his parents, who were prone to give the city's laws and customs scant respect.

By this time Rousseau was thoroughly familiar with Paris, at all levels of its society, and he compared it unfavourably with his home state. And, of course, he made his views public knowledge. In Paris he encountered the fondness for leisure, in the higher classes (and those with ambitions in that direction), which the Sun King (Louis XIV) had fostered as a matter of policy, to disarm the nobility. For Rousseau this was the height of decadence and compared unfavourably with the work-ethic of Geneva. Paris did have a role though, in the way Jean-Jacques examined himself. There he could feel qualified to criticize prevailing corruption²³⁹ in a way which would be nothing short of rank hypocrisy if he had tried it in Geneva. Unfortunately, if he personally could not live up to his own high standards, likewise, in his utopian view of the republic, even Geneva could not cope. Starobinski characterizes the problem:

As a critic of Parisian society, he formulated requirements so stringent that the real Geneva could hardly live up to them. Hence he was doubly a rebel: the myth of Geneva with which he attacked France became a reason for dissatisfaction

²³⁹ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, pp348/9.

with Genevan reality.²³⁹

Rousseau was promising more of his fatherland than it could deliver.

It should not be assumed, though, that Rousseau's was a lonely voice in Geneva at the time. As his Letter to d'Alembert suggests he stood for the old Geneva, not only against the depravity of Paris itself, but against local incursions of that Parisian way of life. There was a movement which supported him in this. In the 1760's Geneva remained a safe haven, particularly for Frenchmen who found their homeland risky for one reason or other. Because they tended to be allied with the upper classes, who were reaping their wealth from the French upper classes, they settled easily, but brought with them the characteristics (and morality) of their social station. Rousseau became the figurehead for the reaction of old Geneva against this wave of newcomers. The error of viewing him as a lone voice is demonstrated by (of all people) Voltaire, in describing the response to the suppression of Emile in Geneva. In a letter to the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha dated 19th July 1763 he reported that;

Deux cents citoyens ont réclamé contre l'arrêt du petit Conseil de Genève, mais bien moins par amitié pour Jean-Jacques que par haine contre les magistrats.²⁴⁰

It can be read between the lines that this is probably a begrudging acknowledgement of the fact that there existed real support for Rousseau. Either the protest swelled somewhat, or Voltaire had been down-playing it, because by the following month Jean-Jacques's support

²³⁹ Starobinski, Transparency and Obstruction, p337.

²⁴⁰ Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome VII, p307.

had tripled, even at the levels Voltaire cared to speak of. In a letter to Helvétius of the 25th August 1763 he explained,

...figurez-vous que lorsque le magistrat de Genève n'a pas pu se dispenser de condamner le roman de M. Jean-Jacques Rousseau intitulé *Emile*, six cents citoyens sont venus par trois fois protester au Conseil de Genève, qu'ils ne souffriraient pas que l'on condamnât sans l'entendre, un citoyen, qui avait écrit à la vérité contre la religion chrétienne, mais qu'il pouvait avoir ses raisons, qu'il fallait les entendre, qu'un citoyen de Genève peut écrire ce qu'il veut, pourvu qu'il donne de bonnes explications.²⁴¹

Rousseau, then, whilst praising the constitution of Geneva, wanted both to improve it, and to protect it from degeneration. It was a constant background theme to his writings. As has been mentioned, it had a role in the Discourse on Inequality, and when he came to write the Social Contract there was no mistaking the connection, however covertly it may have been presented. Peter Gay observes that,

...while his *Contrat Social* reads like an exercise in abstract reasoning, the Attorney General of Geneva condemned the book as seditious less for its theoretical formulations than for its all-too-specific criticisms that echoed the language and reflected the program of the middle-class reformers who had been active in the Republic for half a century.²⁴²

Despite the support he received there, Rousseau was never to break the resolve of those in power. In the end he fell between the two centres. He outlawed himself from the decadence of Paris, but then renounced his citizenship of Geneva, because the city-state would not respect his ideals, even though he would never feel anything but a Genevan. As Lüthy puts it,

²⁴¹ Ibid, p353.

²⁴² Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, pp56/7.

...Rousseau was a citizen of Geneva to the marrow of his bones, in all his instincts and in all his passions, precisely because he was the Prodigal Son who never found his way back to the fold, but who, in compensation, embodied with the most passionate intensity the revolt of the old Genevan against the temptations and corruptions of the century of which he had become a victim.²⁴³

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was not one to creep away into obscurity. Instead he would tell Geneva what was wrong with the city, its government, and particularly, where it had erred in its treatment of one of its own.

In his "Letters Written from the Mountains" Jean-Jacques was so complete in presenting his case, that it extends to fill a regular sized book. He went to great lengths to review Geneva's practice of government. He pointed accusingly where current fact failed to live up to the lofty ideas of prior generations of legislators, and was not shy to indicate where his own social compact might prove a better way. A great concern was the emergence of a ruling elite, which subverted any vestige of the democracy which should have been exercised. The city rulers were told:

Your laws have no authority but what depends on yourselves: you acknowledge only those of your own making: you pay no taxes but of your own imposing; you make choice of your own chiefs, who have no right to govern but according to forms prescribed by yourselves. In general Council, you are Legislators and Sovereigns, independent of any power upon earth;...²⁴⁴

In an historical reflection Rousseau criticized the irony of the way the families who were persecuted on their arrival happily reverted to the role of persecutors of their followers. In a further look at the

²⁴³ Lüthy, p265.

²⁴⁴ Rousseau, "Letters Written from the Mountains," p210.

original intentions of the Calvinist society, Rousseau regretted that their current practise of "...infringement on evangei'cal liberty,..." was in fact "...a renunciation of the principles of the reformation and a violation of the laws of the state." And, knowing no modesty, Rousseau explained that when the city-state was attacked by the pen of d'Alembert it was he, Jean-Jacques, who did more service to Geneva than anything which was written by city officials.²⁴⁵

It is worth the diversion to look at just what it was about Parisian society that Rousseau found so worrying, and which must be kept out of Geneva at all cost. A theatre may have been the issue around which much debate and penmanship originated, but that alone was not the issue. For Rousseau the greatest danger was the erosion of manhood. Geneva was a manly society which respected work and rugged enterprise. Paris epitomized another extreme, where women wielded power over men and had a feminizing influence over them. This point is made clearly in two passages in Rousseau's response to d'Alembert's Geneva article in the Encyclopédie. In one he warned,

...for the weaker sex being incapable of conforming to our manner of life, which would be too laborious for them; we are obliged to take up with theirs, which is as much too indolent and effeminate for us: and as they will not afterwards admit of a separation, and want power to become men, they degrade us into women.²⁴⁶

While most would read this passage as absurd it needs to be viewed against Rousseau's mind-set. His philosophy of life was stoic, with

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p45, p47 and p187.

²⁴⁶ Rousseau, "Epistle to d'Alembert," pp144/5.

moral responsibility vested in the individual; very much a Roman inspired ideal. Thus, despite his words in favour of Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws²⁴⁷ he cautioned against the legislation of virtue. He wanted the goodness of the government to incline citizens to just action, rather than have the law compel them to do so.²⁴⁸ The ideal platform for Rousseau's virtuous society was his own fatherland.

His basis of the good society was Geneva; strong in all the male virtues, and somewhat analogous to his Platonic ideal (neglecting the female guardians). The obvious surface difference between Parisian and Genevan society was a marked tendency to effeminacy in the former, and Rousseau saw it as a symptom of the greater problem, as if somehow the problems of aristocratic rule were connected. With the old king's preference, followed by his successors, for keeping his courtiers engaged in frivolity at Versailles, the connection is not so obscure. One can imagine the form that the first signs of denigration would take in Rousseau's eyes. In another passage from Rousseau's 'response' to d'Alembert he noted that,

When i was last in Geneva, I saw several of these young ladies in breeches, with white teeth, soft hands, shrill voices, and pretty green umbrellos in their hands, aukwardly affecting the character of men. When I was a boy, we were more gross and indelicate: educated in a rustic manner,..."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Montesquieu describes the essential role of virtue in the government of a republic in Book III, Ch. 3. Virtue is to be the factor which prevents corruption caused by ambition. The Spirit of the Laws (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp117-9.

²⁴⁸ Emile, p851.

²⁴⁹ Rousseau, "Epistle to d'Alembert, p161.

In this epistle Peter Gay sees Rousseau as being at his "most Platonic, most Genevan."²⁵⁰

The contrast between the old middle class and the new emigré rich of Geneva was no more sharply felt than in the confrontation between Rousseau and Voltaire. The former took the presence of Voltaire in 'his' Geneva as a personal affront. Starobinski puts it very well, including quotations from Rousseau's letters,

Just as the wigmaker Vintzenried had replaced him in the bed of Mme. de Warens, so had "that punchinello Voltaire" settled in Geneva. Someone else had robbed him of his celebration. The very words in his complaint: "If J.-J. had not come from Geneva, Voltaire would have been less celebrated there." (letter to Moulou, 25 April 1762)²⁵¹

These two philosophes made no secret of their feeling of animosity for each other, with Voltaire referring to Jean-Jacques as an "archifou" in a letter to d'Alembert on the 19th March 1761.²⁵² Rousseau was, however, inclined to think of Voltaire as perhaps closer to the seats of power than the older philosophe really cared to be. In the "Letters from the Mountains" Jean-Jacques enquired,

These gentlemen see M. Voltaire very frequently. I wonder he had not inspired them with a little of that spirit of toleration he continually preaches, and which is sometimes necessary to himself.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p258.

"...art should inculcate virtue and discourage vice - but since this has become impossible in corrupt modern civilization, there should be no theatre, at least in Geneva."

²⁵¹ Starobinski, Transparency and Obstruction, p132.

²⁵² Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome VI, p308.

²⁵³ Rousseau, "Letters Written from the Mountains," p183.

Much as Rousseau liked to focus the blame for the Parisian influence over Geneva onto the head of Voltaire, the latter obviously saw his Ferney estate as merely a pleasant place to live, and certainly appears to have had no high regard for Genevans, beyond a small elite (who were likely all emigrés), if the following quotation, from a 20th January 1761 letter to the Marquis d'Argens, can be accepted as typical:

Je n'aime point ces maudits huguenots. Nous avons eu depuis peu un cocu à Genève. Ce cocu, comme vous savez, tira un coup de pistolet à l'amant de sa femme; la petite église de Calvin, qui fait consister la vertu dans l'usure, et dans l'austérité des moeurs, s'est imaginé qu'il n'y avait de cocus sans le monde, que parce qu'on jouait la comédie...

Vous voyez, Monsieur, qu'on est aussi sot à Genève, qu'on est fou à Paris. Mais je pardonne à ces barbares, parce qu'il y'a chez eux dix ou douze personnes de mérite. Dieu n'en trouva pas cinq dans Sodome. Je ne suis pas assez puissant pour faire pleuvoir le feu du ciel sur Genève; je le suis du moins assez pour avoir beaucoup de plaisir chez moi, au nez de tous ces cagots.²⁵⁴

Voltaire though, did not get his good name as perhaps the best known, if not the greatest, of the philosophes, by taking a position and entrenching himself too deeply. Ironically, from the times when the above comments were made, Voltaire moved politically to the left. From the early 1760's he became sympathetic with the Rousseauist bourgeois party, but never with Rousseau personally, and by 1765, with Rousseau out of the picture, he had become their spokesperson. Peter Gay observes that "...by 1766, Voltaire had moved to the left of Rousseau."²⁵⁵

"The Letters Written from the Mountains" did not bring any improvement in Rousseau's relationship with his homeland. The Social

²⁵⁴ Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome VI, pp223/4.

²⁵⁵ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, pp463-5.

Contract had formulated his ideal of socio-political organization, and the "Letters" explained Jean-Jacques's disappointment with the extent to which Geneva was unable to live up to his earlier tome. Undoubtedly, one cannot write about what formed Rousseau's ideas without including his homeland. He went to Locke for guidance, but Geneva pressed in on him from all sides. He needed no library, merely a willingness in his early days to participate in what went on around him. Locke was a sort of library based academic absorption for him; the theoretical side of what he believed. Geneva, on the other hand, was his practical model which he had absorbed as the first, and most impressionable, socio-political experience.

Of all the influences on him, it was Geneva which would not recede. As Lord Morley eloquently explains,

It happened in later years that he repudiated his allegiance to her, but however bitterly a man may quarrel with a parent, he cannot change blood, and Rousseau ever remained a true son of the city of Calvin.²⁵⁶

His attention was there to his last works. Jean Starobinski notes that Rousseau's last promenade, his last written work, is concerned with the first walk he made from Geneva.²⁵⁷ At that time he retreated from the closed city gates, to take the road, ultimately, to spend his time with Mme de Warens. Of that time he said, "I have spent seventy years on earth and lived seven of them."²⁵⁸ Rousseau looked back fondly at the

²⁵⁶ Morley, Rousseau and his Era, Vol. I, p183.

²⁵⁷ Starobinski, Transparency and Obstruction, p363.

²⁵⁸ Rousseau; C.E. Butterworth (ed.), The Reveries of the Solitary Walker (New York: Harper Colophon, 1982), p141.

times he spent with Françoise-Louise de Warens after their initial encounter, in 1729. Jean-Jacques, at sixteen years of age, found the twenty-nine year old beauty fulfilled both his awakening sexual desires, and his need for a maternal influence.²⁵⁹ This was particularly acute in him, as he had never known his mother, but had heard his father's fond reminiscences. These evoked a feeling of longing, and of guilt, knowing as he did that his mother died nine days after his birth, as a consequence of it. As he left his home, Rousseau found something his home had not provided. Geneva had a role in his most intimate recollections; and at the close of his life it was a part of his reflections. In his second-last promenade, number nine, the exiled Genevan was still comparing favourably the way Genevans enjoyed themselves, over the ways of the French.²⁶⁰ Even Rousseau's epitaphs took him back to his role as a Genevan. Lüthy says of the impact Jean-Jacques had on the next generation,

Rousseau's triumph in France, and over France, in a strange way was the vengeance of the republic of Calvin over its corruptors.²⁶¹

This discussion of two important influences on Rousseau's intellectual development focuses on the course of his opposition to

²⁵⁹ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life, p47, refers to the fact that the feeling was reciprocated when he speaks of them as "the motherless child and the childless mother."

²⁶⁰ Rousseau, Reveries of the Solitary Walker, p363.

²⁶¹ Lüthy, p269.

Helvétius and the materialists. Rousseau's Genevan upbringing conditioned him to appreciate the natural law aspects of John Locke's writings. Calvin's political legacy for eighteenth-century Geneva was a state which respected the rights of individuals and John Locke's philosophy built on respect for individual rights. So, both in the influences which surrounded his own development, and in the philosophy which he came to adopt, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's own ideas focused on the individual. He sought to identify a new society through the natural development of its individual components. And, opposition to his views, in an educational context, was articulated by Claude Adrien Helvétius.

Materialism challenged Rousseau's ideas for natural education before he had fully articulated them. In Helvétius' De l'Esprit, environment is regarded as a hazard to the child's education. Children's minds are mere material, to be influenced to good or evil by their experiences. Helvétius' formula for creating the good society then, was through strict control of education. The good society would be achieved by ensuring that all received a 'good' education. For Rousseau, however, such ideas were quite wrong. He wanted children to develop naturally into free, discerning citizens. He coupled materialism with the hedonism of prevailing Parisian society and he wanted none of it. His objections to Helvétius' education were extensions of his distaste for Parisian society and his yearning for the principles which Calvin had established within Genevan society. Thus, the basis of Rousseau's pedagogy was *negative education*, a design aimed at shielding the child from prevailing social influence until mature enough to withstand it.

Rousseau did subscribe to the *tabula rasa* concept which Locke had articulated. Thus, he also shared Locke's view of the criticality of early childhood education. Hence, between the ages of five and twelve years the child receives a negative education.²⁶² In infancy the child is prepared for negative education, and from boyhood onwards (twelve years and up), he reaps the benefits of it. Emile Durkheim's lecture notes provide a brief description,

How is this education to be described? It is positive if sentiments and ideas are transmitted. In this case none. Tutor remains aloof. At a distance. Offers no information. Thus negative.

Term negative accurate in a sense. For something has been eliminated, excluded; man. Society. No imparting of information. Opinions eliminated.²⁶³

The pupil is conditioned to explore and find things out for himself. As Allan Bloom says, the senses are to "...develop in relation to their proper objects;..."²⁶⁴ and through the senses Emile is steered towards some preliminary practical scientific learning. He goes on to reason negative education,

All animals go through a similar apprenticeship to life. But with man something intervenes which impedes or distorts nature's progress, and therefore a specifically negative education, a human effort, is required. This new factor is the growth of the passions, particularly fear of death and amour-propre, ... The negative education means specifically the tutor's artifice invented to prevent the emergence of

²⁶² Emile, p323, "La première éducation doit donc être purement négative."

²⁶³ Emile Durkheim; W.S.F. Pickering (ed.) & H.L. Sutcliffe (trans.), Durkheim: Essays on Morals and Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p186.

²⁶⁴ Allan Bloom, "The Education of Democratic Man: Emile", Daedalus, Summer 1978, Vol. 107, p140.

these two passions which attach men to one another and to opinions.

And, R.S. Peters recognizes Rousseau's disdain of prevailing society when he says that,

The negative education of Emile is an attempt to sketch how a man might be educated so as to resist corruption as he could no longer be a 'natural' man.²⁶⁵

Negative education then, is to be his armour when the pupil finally emerges into society.

Rousseau's negative education²⁶⁶ targeted a particular condition in the developing individual. He feared that natural self love, or amour propre, should be prevented from degenerating into pride, or amour propre. It will be seen that Helvétius focused on this same pride as a necessary feature of a successful individual. Rousseau however, had explained these two conditions in the Discourse on Inequality, thus:

One must not confuse pride (amour-propre) and self-love (amour de soi), two passions very different in their nature and in their effects. Self-love is a natural sentiment which prompts every animal to watch over its own conservation and which, directed in man by reason and modified by pity,

²⁶⁵ R.S. Peters, Essays on Educators (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p31.

²⁶⁶ Rousseau identified four stages of a child's education which W.H.G. Armytage presents in brief form:

"Having acquired the age of two, the capacity to eat, walk and talk, the child then goes on to acquire the mastery of the five senses up to the age of twelve. At twelve the child becomes a virtual Robinson Crusoe, discovering physics, geography, astronomy, whilst at the same time discovering himself. The self discovery is enhanced, at fifteen by his sexual development, his relations to others. When mature he leaves the village to find a mate."

W.H.G. Armytage, The French Influence on English Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p27.

It is in the second stage that Rousseau applies his *negative* strategy.

produces humanity and virtue. Pride is only a relative, artificial sentiment born in society, a sentiment which prompts each individual to attach more importance to himself than to anyone else, which inspires all the injuries men do to themselves and others, and which is the true source of honour.

....in the true state of nature, pride does not exist;...²⁶⁷

Amour propre cannot be totally excluded from an individual. Rousseau's scheme for Emile is to prevent its development long enough for him to be able to handle it. Maurice Cranston refers to Emile's attaining the age of fifteen years as critical because it marks his transition from boyhood towards manhood, and also, where "... 'amour de soi' changes into 'amour propre'..."²⁶⁸

In order to prevent the onset of amour propre Rousseau analyses the reasons a baby cries. At first, crying is a natural method of attracting attention for a very young child, having no other way of doing so. However, the responses which an adult makes to the child can result, ultimately, in the child taking some level of control over the encounter. It is common to see a child throw a tantrum, or drop some object on the floor, merely to attract attention. At this early stage, children are developing an ability to control others; according to Rousseau's doctrine they are already beginning to drift from nature. He advises thus advises that,

Les premières pleurs des enfans sont des prières: si on n'y prend garde elles deviennent bientôt des ordres; ils commencent par se faire assister, ils finissent par se faire servir. Ainsi de leur propre foiblesse d'où vient d'abord le sentiment de leur dépendance, nait ensuite l'idée

²⁶⁷ Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, p167.

²⁶⁸ Maurice Cranston, The Noble Savage:...., p182.

de l'empire et de la domination...²⁶⁹

In Allan Bloom's words, "In these first seeds of amour-propre as seen in tears, one can recognize the source of the human problem."²⁷⁰ The presented solution is to quickly accustom children to rely on things and not people, in such a way that they can feel that they are finding out about things for themselves, from nature, rather than having them presented by people.

The concept of education by 'things' is a temporary concept. Rousseau wants Emile to avoid concepts he is not yet ready for. 'Things' can be touched, played with and easily understood. Book learning is unacceptable until late in Emile's education as it involves the acceptance of remote facts which the child may not be capable of envisioning. Jean-Jacques also maintains a consistency between what is natural and good, and what is societal and bad, in his attraction to things. He says,

Il y a deux sortes de dépendance. Celle des choses qui est de la nature; celles des hommes qui est de la société. La dépendance des choses n'ayant aucune moralité ne nuit point à la liberté et n'engendre point de vices. La dépendance des hommes étant desordonnée le engendre tous...²⁷¹

The notion of education only by things, and punishment only as a natural consequence of things, ran contrary to prevailing educational methods. It bears with it an attractive aspect of social justice towards the child in general. Emile Durkheim's lecture notes, prepared in 1904,

²⁶⁹ Emile, p287.

²⁷⁰ Allan Bloom, p142.

²⁷¹ Emile, p311.

indicate his grasp on the consequences of Rousseau's belief in education by 'things',

A great innovation. Hitherto education of man by man. Nature excluded. The material and the spiritual.

The principle reversed. Things. Still retain their earlier form, in a sense. Not themselves the domain of morality. But they lay the foundations of moral education. An essential preparatory part of education. It is from them that the sentiment of absolute necessity comes (discipline, moderation). It will have to be modified; take on a new form. But first must exist if it is to be transformed. Can only be educated by things as his teachers.

Why? Social man in the image of natural man.

No orders. No commands. No obedience. ... In general terms, no verbal lessons. Things speak, ...

Consequently, no punishment as such. What punishment is. No place for it. (1) No orders. (2) No morality. Latter replaced by the natural consequences of the act.²⁷²

Rousseau then, by allowing the child to learn by interaction with 'things' was directly opposing Helvétius' doctrine of absolute control of the educational process. Jean-Jacques, however, was not thoroughly faithful to his creed. While he favoured educating the child by allowing free interaction with 'things', he did tend to ensure that Emile encountered just those things which will facilitate his tutor's current requirements.

Rousseau's tutor manipulates his pupil, and it brings out some of the worst criticisms of the author. The difficulty for Rousseau is that, while practical learning will be absorbed better than second hand data, random experiences will not necessarily provide the variety and type of encounters one would deem necessary for development. The tutor,

²⁷² Emile Durkheim, Durkheim: Essays on Morals and Education (ed. & intro. W.S.F. Pickering, trans. H.L. Sutcliffe) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p182 & p183.

therefore, needs to orchestrate events, while at the same time giving the boy the feeling that his encounters are natural, or undevise. Someone has to exercise authority, if not by directly ordering the pupil, then, by some form of covert coaxing. R.S. Peters is of this opinion, saying of Rousseau,

Although opposed to authoritarianism and the imposition of orders on the child, he appreciated that a learning situation must involve authority of some sort.²⁷³

Allan Bloom is also sympathetic to Rousseau's method, believing that,

He presents natural necessity in palpable form to the child so that the child lives according to nature prior to understanding it.²⁷⁴

The alternative is truly random learning.

Rousseau has the tutor going to a lot of trouble to stage manage events, as in the case of the encounter with the gardener²⁷⁵. The boy learns the importance of respect for property, and labour, by an artifice which sees him planting beans whilst destroying the gardener's melons. It is a feasible way in which the pupil can encounter a learning experience in things rather than in opinion-laden books. Rousseau's manipulation is on a minor scale when compared with Helvétius. The latter philosophe looked for total control while Jean-Jacques wanted as little as he could get away with while pursuing his informal curriculum. The intended consequence was that the child would self-educate by his interaction with a natural environment. Instead of growing in accordance

²⁷³ R.S. Peters, p30.

²⁷⁴ Allan Bloom, p144.

²⁷⁵ Emile, pp331-3.

with an accumulation of ancient 'knowledge', or by assimilation with the prevalent materialism and hedonism of his era, he would take on no bias. His education would be naturally acquired, making Emile an ideal component of Rousseau's new society.

Between 1754 and 1762 Jean-Jacques Rousseau's life was focused on presenting the world with a new interpretation of society and social justice. This was the really creative period of his life. It is true to say that he wrote as much, if not more, outside this period, but it can equally be said that everything prior was developmental. Rousseau had not found his niche, and was searching for it. After, almost everything was reactionary or reflective, except perhaps the political works for Corsica and Poland. What influenced Rousseau, or what giants he stood on, is particularly pertinent for his most productive eight years. That was the period when he found isolation, and could truly allow his mind to wrestle with his thesis. In the output of that era can be clearly read the modern ideas of John Locke and a government in Geneva which, although short of perfect, was one of the finest test-beds of democracy in the modern world.

This discourse on Rousseau's philosophical mentors is important as a contrast with Helvétius. These two authors shared common ground as 'philosophes', and in occasional social encounters, but their similarity ended there. They were two ambitious men on long philosophical journeys, who occasionally shared the same conveyance. The evidence suggests, however, that Rousseau's philosophical journey began before he realized;

those experiences which were so valuable to the formulation of his ideas were a part of his life's encounters. Helvétius, however, was less fortunate in this respect, though in other ways he was considerably more fortunate than the Genevan. In the next chapter Helvétius' personal experiences, and his theoretical background, are also considered, so that in Chapter 5 the critical interface between the pedagogical concepts of these two philosophes can be examined against their different formative environments.

4. Helvétius: His Work and His Mentors

The central concerns of this chapter are Helvétius' major writings; De l'Esprit and De l'Homme. They constitute the significant body of evidence of ideas which the author believed to be of the utmost importance to society in general. Towards the end of the chapter the evident influences on the author are also discussed in order to situate Helvétius' ideas in historical context. This chapter concentrates on Helvétius' ideas; their roots, their presentation, and the influences which they reflect.

Tabula Rasa and Sensory Perception

Fundamental to the discrete doctrines of Rousseau and Helvétius were their differing views on the state of the mind, and the implications of these views for education. Both philosophes subscribed to the view that the child's mind is devoid of innate ideas at birth. This notion of a mental void originated with Aristotle's 'tabula rasa' concept²⁷⁶ and was revived by John Locke's use of the 'white paper' analogy.²⁷⁷ But, why did Locke subscribe to 'tabula rasa'? After all, it was an old concept in his day. What was common to all of Locke's works was a rejection of past authorities, particularly those which bore the hallmark of human opinion. His personal quest was to take knowledge back to first principles, by-passing the centuries of accumulated opinion which weighed down on social institutions. In politics and religion he

²⁷⁶ Aristotle, "De Anima", p429b.

²⁷⁷ Essay, II, i, #2, p104.

looked at figures in authority and questioned the rights by which they exercised control over the lives of others. Consequently, perpetuation of the process of assimilation of old (often unsupported) opinions was considered a retrograde action - not commensurate with modern notions of scientific inquiry. This was not to say that Locke rejected all previous learning, just that its worth should be tested prior to acceptance.

The specific target which Locke was considering when he contemplated human understanding in the Essay were the rationalist views of knowledge, and the scholastic educational method. In the case of Descartes' rationalist system, Locke found aspects with which he was sympathetic, to the extent that both he and Descartes rejected opinion laden methods of acquiring knowledge. However, rationalism carried with it a certainty, a necessary structure of knowledge - *a priori* - which was not compatible with Locke's conditions for verification of knowledge. For him, the only way to ensure that an element of knowledge was understood was for the recipient to test it.

The notion of 'tabula rasa', then, tied in with Locke's complete philosophy; that the mind brings nothing into the world but potential, and that everything which becomes knowledge does so by the action of the individual. Innate knowledge would immediately invalidate his empiricism; it would imply the pre-existence of ideas. It was all too easy to apply the term innate to that knowledge which people could not rationalize as coming from experience. Because no memory of the origins of particular ideas exists, it was a seemingly logical step to claim

that they were inherent in the mind.²⁷⁸ Locke was critical of such assumptions, saying in the Essay:

When Men have found some general Proposition that could not be doubted of, as soon as understood, it was, I know, a *short and easy way to conclude them innate*. This being once received, it eased the lazy from the pains of search, and stop'd the enquiry of the doubtful, from all that was once stiled innate;...²⁷⁹

Acceptance of authority, or dogma, equated with laziness. Locke was critical of this 'easy way out' of accepting so-called knowledge without investigation. He was dissatisfied with the "Scholastic account of knowledge."²⁸⁰ Tabula rasa, despite his own less than complete acceptance of it, provided him with a philosophical basis for rejection of the prevailing methods of knowledge assimilation.

Despite Locke's use of tabula rasa as a tool it has to be considered in the context of his total venture. His writings have a religious bias, and his concern is with the way humans respond to God's intentions for them. John Dunn asserts that the Essay is a study of "...the morals of thinking... the duty of regulating one's assent."²⁸¹ His empirical approach was not presented merely for the benefit of mankind, in some utilitarian way. Dunn supports his view of Locke's empiricism, in its religious context, with the following quotation from Chapter IV of the Essay:

He that believes, without having any Reason for believing,

²⁷⁸ Woolhouse, p30.

²⁷⁹ Essay, I, iv, #24, p101.

²⁸⁰ Woolhouse, p42.

²⁸¹ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p191.

may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Error.²⁸²

Locke extended his view of knowledge coming from experience by encouraging the individual to search out experience as his duty to God; a close analogy with the doctrine of Calvin. The logical consequence of a tabula rasa mind, however, is that education becomes paramount in the development of the person. If nothing is inherent then all attributes have to be acquired from outside. Locke set the tone for the importance of education with his statement that, "...of all the Men we meet with, nine Parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their Education."²⁸³ Rousseau presented a similar case, thus,

Nous naissons foibles, nous avons besoin de forces; nous naissons dépourvus de tout, nous avons besoin d'assistance; nous naissons stupides, nous avons besoin de jugement. Tout ce que nous n'avons pas à nôtre naissance et dont nous avons besoin étant grands nous est donné par l'éducation.²⁸⁴

And, Helvétius subscribed to the consequences of a lack of innate ideas by asserting that,

L'homme naît sans idées, sans passions; il naît imitateur; il est docile à l'exemple: c'est par conséquent à l'instruction qu'il doit ses habitudes et son caractere.²⁸⁵

However, the blank mind for Helvétius implied a particular characteristic - it is structured for all people in such a way that a

²⁸² Essay, IV, xvii, #24, pp687/8.

²⁸³ Education, p114.

²⁸⁴ Emile, p247.

²⁸⁵ De l'Homme, IV, iii, p334.

uniformity of capability exists.²⁸⁶ Differences in mental ability are only a result of the differing exposure individuals have to 'chance' experience and education. So, not only do people attain their characteristics by their education, but, in controlled conditions a uniformity of output could be expected.

Helvétius' and Rousseau's presentation of pedagogical treatises based on Locke's tabula rasa concept may deceive the observer. The agreement of both philosophes on the absence of innate ideas in the newborn child cloaks the fact that in this aspect of their divergent doctrines lies their point of departure from each other. As Lester Crocker says, it is on this point that they "stand radically opposed."²⁸⁷ At the heart of the contrast are the different notions of how moral decisions are made, and consequently how individuals are to interact with their society.

For Rousseau, as for Locke, God retains a role in the process of how an individual determines right actions from wrong. It is far removed from any concurrence with conventional theological doctrine, but Rousseau has a role for conscience, which is not present in the new child, but which is not taught either; it self-generates as the child comes to reason. The responsibility for such a process rests with God, and is quite alien to Helvétius' belief that everything emanates

²⁸⁶ In his claims to uniformity of mental ability, Helvétius may be accused of taking Locke's principles and exaggerating them. This was Suard's observation - p168.

²⁸⁷ Lester G. Crocker, Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p27.

externally, from the environment to which the child is subjected.²⁸⁸

Sensory perception was paramount to Helvétius - he saw the mind as essentially passive, with sensation as its only faculty.²⁸⁹ Despite the fact that the author himself referred initially to two faculties, in De l'Esprit, he went on to clarify the matter, saying that,

...la sensibilité phisique et la mémoire, ou, pour parler plus exactement, que la sensibilité seule produit toutes nos idées. En effet, la mémoire ne peut être qu'un des organes de la sensibilité phisique:...

For Helvétius then, the mind is a passive recipient of information and has no active component, as Rousseau conceived it. Diderot gave another interpretation of the way that the mind works, and yet another view of its implication for education. Whilst Diderot in no way accepted the spiritual²⁹¹ aspect of the child's potentiality, he denied Helvétius' insistence upon formation. He joined Rousseau and Helvétius in accepting the essential characteristics of the tabula rasa, but believed in mental tendencies²⁹² which pre-disposed the child to excel in certain pursuits. In Diderot this belief was particularly connected to his interest in the aesthetic. He could not accept the assertion that an accomplished artist was anything but gifted, or naturally talented. Helvétius would attribute artistic skill, as any other capability, to chance and

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p30.

²⁸⁹ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p180.

²⁹⁰ De l'Esprit, I,i, p15 and pp19/20.

²⁹¹ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p180.

²⁹² Grossman, pp147 & 150.

environment, whereas Diderot was closer to Locke and Rousseau, believing that good education would aid the development of talent - though not create it.

We have seen that Locke's view of the mind was based upon the tabula rasa concept but he did believe that the mind had innate inclinations²⁹³ - that "internal sense" which is the basis of reflection.²⁹⁴ The consequence of Locke's view is that if the mind is initially blank, then all knowledge comes through the senses; his doctrine is fundamentally sensationalist.²⁹⁵ In the half century or so from Locke's 1689 first publication of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, his sensationalist doctrine became a philosophical basis of the new generation of French (Enlightenment) scholars. Locke was accepted as a guiding light, but not until the Abbé de Condillac did any one of the philosophes closely reassess his ideas on the mind.

Condillac's fundamental change to Locke's sensationalism was to dispense with the retention of inclinations in the original mind. For him, the tabula rasa took a pure form - he conceived of it as totally clear of anything. Thus, if inclination, or talent, would not distinguish the intelligent from the docile, the strong from the weak, then the difference would be a function of the passions.²⁹⁶ Locke looked

²⁹³ Essay, I, iii, #3, p67, "Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles,..."

²⁹⁴ Ibid, II, i, #4, p105.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, II, i, #2 & #3, pp104/5.

²⁹⁶ Condillac, p98.

on sensation and reflection as the two mechanisms by which the mind receives ideas and Condillac retained only the first. As Robert Weyant explains it in the introduction to his publication of Condillac's An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge,

...Locke may be accused of throwing innate ideas out of the front door while admitting innate processes at the rear, Condillac may be accused of stretching the idea of sensory processes out of all recognizable shape.²⁹⁷

Condillac gave no credit to reasoning, seeing ideas as being stored by memory, often imperceptibly, for recall as necessary.²⁹⁸ His answer to the problem of ideas which emanate from the interaction of ideas in the memory was that this was all a function of memory alone. Imagination, in fact, is merely a function of reviving ideas which we had held, and forgotten. The next logical step in Condillac's scheme for the operation of the mind was that,

From the operation of judging arises that of reasoning. Reasoning is only a concatenation of the judgements depending one upon the other.²⁹⁹

Helvétius adopted this principle. He also wholeheartedly endorsed another consequence of Condillac's doctrine, that,

The organs are perfected by very slow degrees, reason advances still more slowly, and we fill our heads with such ideas and maxims as chance and education offer.³⁰⁰

Chance and education: two aspects of Helvétius' thought which appear to

²⁹⁷ Robert G. Weyand, in the intro to Condillac, An Essay on the Origin of Human Understanding, pxi.

²⁹⁸ Condillac, p35.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, pp58/9 and p75.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p301.

have come directly from Condillac.

Locke's child was to be determined by what he received through the senses; he was also to be guided from undesirable inclination. This is why the 'rod' was an acceptable remedy for stubbornness and obstinate disobedience. Locke's educational scheme was quite humanitarian, but he did favour limited use of the rod in the early years because these inclinations to misbehaviour must be remedied quickly, and the importance of doing so warranted overriding his own preference to avoid severity.³⁰¹ The implication of Condillac's views however, is that inclinations do not exist; neither good nor bad ones. This means that the child is even more in need of guidance, since he will become nothing more, or less, than what he is led to be. The child will develop only through experience and educational environment; it will be the basis of everything that goes on to constitute the mature human. And, despite the fact that both Helvétius and Rousseau claimed to be founding their ideas on Locke's, it was only true in Jean-Jacques' case. Although Rousseau saw inclinations as only being naturally to the good, he did subscribe to the basic mechanics of Locke's psychology. Helvétius, however, based his ideas of the operations of the mind, not directly on Locke, but on Condillac's development of the Englishman's work. The materialist views of Helvétius, and Condillac, may be traced directly to the Essay, whereas Rousseau's educational concepts are rooted in the individualism of the Two Treatises. D.W. Smith speculates that Helvétius preferred not

³⁰¹ Education, (#78) p177.

to credit Condillac because it would provide support to a rival,³⁰² but the connections appear beyond doubt. As Grimm said of Helvétius, his was a venture of self-glorification ("de s'immortaliser"³⁰³) and he was hardly going to help his own case by assisting another along the same route. Also, Locke's stature as the originator of many Enlightenment ideals carried much more weight with his targeted readership than did Condillac.

What is notable in the way Rousseau and Helvétius took their ideas from Locke, is that the Genevan's sensationalism was conventional; he remained closer to Locke's original concept. Helvétius was of the more modern genre, on this point, as his was very much part of a recent interpretation. Smith speculates that it was Helvétius' belief that his were the current ideas, and Rousseau's an outdated statement, that led to a condescending attitude³⁰⁴ on the part of the author of De l'Homme. However, Rousseau's rejection of Condillac's version of sensationalism, which Helvétius adopted, was an element of his 'counter-revolution' which brought the whole Enlightenment scheme into question. Rousseau's rejections of these changes to sensationalism, in fact, fed Kant's later

³⁰² D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p109. [Reflecting on this assertion, Smith suggests an alternative rationale (in a private note) that, "As he was giving a materialist slant to C(ondillac)'s thought, he may have wanted to spare C(ondillac) embarrassment..."]

³⁰³ Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Tome II (1812), p142. Grimm was remarking on the fact that Helvétius changed many facets of his life immediately after reading Montesquieu's l'Esprit des Lois, implying that he was driven more by glory than by academic inclination, or by any concern for his subject matter.

³⁰⁴ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p184.

rejection of the whole doctrine.³⁰⁵

De l'Esprit

In De l'Esprit Helvétius exhibited all that he was, and all that he aspired to be. It was an extensive work, evidence of his industriousness; and it bears witness to his fine education in its copious references to the great scholars of ancient and (his) recent times. Most of all, it was the articulation of those ideas which (he believed) would ensure him of enhanced stature among the great philosophes of his era - Montesquieu, Hume and Voltaire. A contemporary believed that Helvétius was laying out all of the evidence of his ideas, in De l'Esprit, in order that his observers could readily accept his logic, or combat it on the basis of a clear appreciation.³⁰⁶

In early 1758 Helvétius had every reason to anticipate great fame and a developing literary and philosophical reputation. He had pursued materialist thought to its logical conclusions, articulating the ideas of his era. Authors of social commentary are rarely unique but tend to reflect a current of ideas (see discussion of John Locke early in Chapter 2). And, De l'Esprit was not solely a work of psychological, social and educational analysis, by one person, but the articulation, and extension, of a trend of ideas which existed among 'enlightened' thinkers in eighteenth-century France, and beyond.

The approach which Helvétius took in De l'Esprit was essentially

³⁰⁵ Ibid, p184.

³⁰⁶ Suard, p241.

scientific; it was Locke's rejection of opinion in calling for all ideas to be tested and proven. His overriding philosophy was empiricist - for any claim to have credibility it had to be worthy of demonstration. So, throughout the book the author presents proofs which are supported by examples at all social levels. He constantly sought to 'prove' his claims, and frequently alluded to the scientific nature of topics under review. The structure of De l'Esprit follows a logical pattern. First Helvétius set out his views of the human mental faculty; the foundation of his theory of the human entity. Having demonstrated the way that the mind works, he proceeded, in the second of four discourses, to investigate the implications for social relationships. Here he argued the important role of the legislator, as the facilitator of the good society. The science of legislation, as a tool to regulate morality through education and punishment, is also introduced.³⁰⁷

In the third discourse Helvétius carried the implications of his theories of the human mind to their logical, and perhaps extreme, conclusions. It was in this discourse that he argued, in depth, the concepts which would be recognized as the important characteristics of his philosophy. The heading asks if genius is a gift of nature, or the effect of education. In elaborating his arguments in this discourse Helvétius presented his most notable 'proofs'; that education is the only determinant of genius, that greatness is attributable to passions and not to natural ability, and that pleasure and pain are the critical stimuli in determining all human actions. The fourth, and last,

³⁰⁷ De l'Esprit, II, xxii, p203.

discourse, reads somewhat like a recap of the important 'proofs' and assertions of the earlier parts of the text.

Apart from his empiricism, and the extreme elaborations of his concepts, one is struck by the confidence which Helvétius exuded throughout De l'Esprit. It is clear that the author was convinced of the validity of his ideas. D.W. Smith says of him,

He fancied himself as a modern Messiah, a secular saviour come to show the men of the Brave New World the true path to virtue.³⁰⁸

Smith's characterization is well chosen, because at the root of Helvétius' tome was consideration of what his new ideas were to replace. The enemy of the eighteenth-century *lumières* was the Church. Religious authorities were seen as repressive - a force to be overcome in the pursuit of a more just society - and there is little doubt that Helvétius realised that he was directly contending conventional 'Western' theology.

The philosophes, as a whole, diverted attention from themselves, as they attacked Church and state, by either publishing anonymously, or by purporting to address another society, whilst covertly criticizing their own.³⁰⁹ Helvétius subscribed to some degree of the latter practice, but did openly publish in his own name. However, as D.W. Smith suggests "...Helvétius followed the usual practice of disavowing what he was about to say..."³¹⁰ On the first page of the Préface to De l'Esprit the

³⁰⁸ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p116.

³⁰⁹ e.g. Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes.

³¹⁰ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p99.

author suggested that it "...nécessairement conforme à la Morale de la Religion,..." and followed on the next page with a plea for the purity of his intentions.³¹¹ He appears to have hoped that he could mask his theological impropriety with an all-encompassing qualification.³¹²

In writing De l'Esprit however, Helvétius was pleading for a new social order. His theory of how the mind works, by implication, contested the basic tenets of his own society. The blank mind carried none of the characteristics of original sin upon which conventional theology built its theories. Helvétius rejected innate inequalities and thus parted company with Locke's subscription to a belief in innate capabilities, or capacities. Thus, if all were equally endowed at birth, then the foundations of monarchy and aristocracy were similarly eroded - none were born to lead. The implications were clear - Helvétius' societal improvements would have to be achieved at the expense of the prevailing social structure. Those with something to gain from his ideas were the disadvantaged, and those who could only lose by a changed arrangement were the privileged officers of government and religion.

Particularly unfortunate for Helvétius was the timing of his great philosophical rendition. France, in this period, was undergoing religious turmoil as Jesuits and Jansenists played out their ecclesiastically based conflict at the highest political levels.

³¹¹ De l'Esprit, Préface, p9 & 10.

³¹² D.W. Smith notes:

"By instilling into his reader his preoccupation with philosophy, not theology, Helvétius hoped he had made himself immune from theological censure."

A Study of Persecution, p99.

Sensitivity to matters of Christian dogma was acute, and any publication which touched on the subject was destined for the greatest scrutiny by both parties.³¹³ Helvétius obviously hoped that a mere statement of faith would deflect potential criticism. As D.W. Smith notes,

Helvétius was careful to admit the subservience of reason to revelation, but his real views were more apparent than he believed.³¹⁴

An undercurrent of De l'Esprit then, is the fact that its author was trying to present a new basis for the structure of society without overtly denying the one which existed in his own time.³¹⁵ And, as events were to prove, he failed. That, in fact, is why his later (posthumously published) work, De l'Homme, was less guarded, and consequently a clearer rendition of his ideas.³¹⁶ Albert Keim says of Helvétius' first

³¹³ Saint-Lambert reflected on the importance which both Jesuits and Jansenists had placed on persecution of De l'Esprit. "Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages d'Helvétius", pp255/6.

³¹⁴ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p111.

³¹⁵ In the first chapter of Discours I of De l'Esprit Helvétius presented a further appeal, to the clerics, for an open-minded appraisal (in regard to his ideas of the operation, and utility, of sensibility and memory), when he suggested:

"Avant d'entrer à ce sujet dans aucun examen, peut-être me demandera-t'on si ces deux facultés sont des modifications d'une substance spirituelle ou matérielle. Cette question autrefois agitée par les Philosophes, <débattue par les anciens péres> et renouvelée de nos jours, n'entre pas nécessairement dans le plan de mon Ouvrage. Ce que j'ai à dire de l'Esprit, s'accorde également bien avec l'une et l'autre de ces hypothèses."

De l'Esprit, I, i, p18 - words in < > brackets were deleted from further publications by censorship emanating from condemnation by the Parlement de Paris, 6th February 1759.

³¹⁶ D.W. Smith refers to the contrast of De l'Esprit with the "...outspoken clarity of De l'Homme,..." A Study in Persecution, p111.

major work,

..., le livre de l'Esprit est bien, avant tout, un long et formidable réquisitoire contre le despotisme, contre la cour et le funeste esprit de cour, contre les crimes et les abus engendrés par l'absolutisme politique ou religieux.³¹⁷

Notable materialists like La Mettrie, d'Holbach and Diderot attracted the keen scrutiny of the clerics and, as the self-chosen spokesperson for the educational implications of the doctrine, Helvétius could expect no other consequence.

Crocker notes that both d'Alembert and Condillac also pursued a "materialist psychology" similar to that which Helvétius adopted, but stopped short of his "extreme ethical conclusions". Speaking of Helvétius, Crocker notes that "he accepted the challenge"³¹⁸ inherent in his further elaboration of materialist ideas. Crocker goes on to focus on the foundation of Helvétius' thought in his explanation that:

...Helvétius erects his system of radical monism. Our psychic life rests entirely on a mass of sensations; all intellectual activity is reduced to judgement, which is merely a perception of similarities and differences between sense qualities: "to judge is simply to perceive,"...

In doing so, Crocker echoes others, like Rousseau and Diderot (discussed later), in recognizing the root of Helvétius' philosophy and the basis of De l'Esprit.

Before launching into the great work of De l'Esprit Helvétius dedicated the relatively short first discourse (35 pages of 555) to establishing his fundamental premise. He did so by stating what it was -

³¹⁷ Albert Keim, Helvétius: sa vie et son oeuvre (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), pp232/3.

³¹⁸ Crocker, An Age of Crisis, p269.

that the mind operates on a single, purely mechanical, principle. Then he completed this foundation upon which he would build by explaining to his readership the errors which not only lead to contradictory ideas, but which, prior to his own work, had frustrated others in their quest for 'truth'. Discours I then, was no mere introduction to the ensuing dialogue of De l'Esprit; it was the author's claim to originality, and his rationale for it. Everything else in De l'Esprit, and consequently De l'Homme - particularly Helvétius' pedagogical ideas - emanated directly from what was established here.

This first of four discourses proclaimed his principles, for later elaboration. On the first page of his work he immediately asserted his fundamental ideas thus:

Nous avons en nous deux facultés...

L'une est la faculté de recevoir les impressions différentes que sont sur nous les objets extérieurs; on la nomme *sensibilité physique*.

L'autre est la faculté de conserver l'impression que ces objets ont faite sur nous; on l'appelle *Mémoire*: et la mémoire n'est autre chose qu'une sensation continuée, mais affoiblie.³¹⁹

And, later in the chapter he went on to conclude that "...la sensibilité seule produit toutes nos idées."³²⁰ proceeding to equate judgement with feeling.³²¹ Helvétius' belief, that judgement and feeling were the same thing, not only aroused the criticism of Rousseau, it also set him apart

³¹⁹ De l'Esprit. I, i, p15.

³²⁰ Ibid, I, i, pp19/20.

³²¹ Ibid, I, i, p22.

from Hume (both situations are discussed later). It will be seen that Hume's retention of 'feeling', in the assessment of morality, caused Bentham to opt for the purely mechanical assessment recommended by Helvétius. These contrasting views hinge on the particular view of nature which Helvétius maintained. His belief in *tabula rasa*, in its purest form, leads to a concept of the human as a predictable entity. Helvétius' natural human, then, is in stark contrast to Locke's, Hume's, Diderot's and Rousseau's. These latter all retain a distinct role for 'feeling', or innate 'inclinations' which frustrate human predictability.

In this short opening chapter of the first discourse of De l'Esprit one may ascertain just what it was that Helvétius was arguing against; the fundamental error which he sought to redress. De l'Esprit postulated a completely materialist explanation of mental faculties; repudiating Locke and accentuating Helvétius' contrast with 'foes' and 'friends', equally. Thus, Helvétius could not countenance a dual function of the mind. He rejected the implicit contradiction of coupling *tabula rasa* with a theory of innate inclinations, from whatever source.²² So, the first chapter of Discours I established his premise; judgement and feeling are the same thing, as are memory and sensibility. Any less of a view would open the door to unscientific explanations of

²² The assertion that "...la sensibilité seule produit toutes nos idées." is quoted above. Helvétius proceeded with an explanation that the human mind only considers those objects which are directly presented by nature. It is able to ascend only to this level of understanding, and no further (Ibid, I, i, p21). 'Further', for Helvétius, would be to the spiritual, or to considerations of innate understanding.

the mind.²²³

The problem which Helvétius needed to address, however, beyond his hypothesis that the mind functions in a purely mechanical way, was sources of error. If the mind is so perfect - so mechanical - what causes it to malfunction? If inclinations to evil, or to goodness, could not be invoked to explain human characteristics, then what could?

Helvétius addressed the problem in concluding his first chapter, thus:

...je dis qu'il n'est point de faux jugement qui ne soit un effet ou de nos passions ou de notre ignorance.²²⁴

And, in the following three chapters of Discours I the author went on to elaborate his answers to these questions.

The nature of passions, which Helvétius addressed in the first discourse, might well be taken as a contradiction of the great faith which he attributed to them later in De l'Esprit. For much of the text passions are seen as the great motivator of mankind, but, in the second chapter of the first discourse, they were presented as a source of error. In fact, what Helvétius explains here is that passions are the great activator of humans; they constitute a force which will entice us to effort in some direction, but, the usefulness of our exertions will be conditioned by our appreciation of the evidence which stimulates us.

²²³ Helvétius laid out the empirical nature of his endeavour in the third paragraph of the Préface of De l'Esprit:

"Les Principes que j'établis sur cette Matière, sont, je pense, conformes à l'intérêt général et à l'expérience. C'est par les faits que j'ai remonté aux Causes. J'ai cru qu'on devoit traiter la Morale comme toutes les autres Sciences, et faire une Morale comme une Physique expérimentale." (Ibid, Préface, p9)

²²⁴ Ibid, I, i, p25.

Thus, passions themselves are not responsible for the fact that some will exert themselves in erroneous endeavours.

In a tale somewhat reminiscent of Locke's discussion of the appreciation of essences, by reference to the Strasbourg clock (see Chapter 2), Helvétius tells of the observations of a "Curé" and a "Dame galante". What the latter takes to be two shadows, the former observes as the two bell-towers of a cathedral.²⁵ Passion, may well drive an individual to act on insufficient evidence, and Helvétius tried to demonstrate that we are all susceptible to mistaken identification. Thus, Helvétius' regard for the passions as a source of error in no way invalidated his great confidence in them as a force for good, which is discussed later.

The next chapter of De l'Esprit approaches the roots of error. If the passions are merely a motivator, then what leads the mind to error? If the mind is not inclined this way or that, then only ignorance can cause error. If the mind merely regurgitates information from the memory, then ignorance, or the fact that an idea was never in the memory, can be the only cause of erroneous activity.

Helvétius chose the concept of luxury as a means by which to explain that the mind relies totally upon the nature of stored evidence. In the eighteenth century luxury was the cause of some intellectual consternation. For more than a millennium the church had perpetuated the New Testament correlation of poverty with goodness, and consequently,

²⁵ Ibid, I, ii, p27.

wealth with evil.³²⁶ More recently philosophers had come to rationalize the just society.³²⁷ One way, of course, was to seek economic justification, as Bayle did,³²⁸ in recognizing that by their indulgence in luxury, the wealthy benefitted the poor. Rousseau,³²⁹ Hume³³⁰ and Voltaire³³¹ each presented their particular views on luxury. Helvétius, however, was by no means presenting a case either for, or against, luxury, at this point in De l'Esprit. In De l'Homme he returned to the subject, again balancing the inequality which luxury implies against the potential which it has for increasing the general wealth of the

³²⁶ "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." St. Matthew's Gospel, XIX, 24.

³²⁷ Joseph J. Spengler, in French Predecessors to Malthus: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Wage and Population Theory (New York: Octagon, 1980), notes prevailing initiatives in the economic theory of luxury, in a chapter entitled "Cantillon and the Theory of Luxury", pp110-169.

³²⁸ In a letter to the Abbé du Bos, dated 3rd January 1697, Bayle noted the way that the "grandes bûveuses" of Holland and England facilitated the proper payment of French state taxes by the wine makers of that country. Pierre Bayle, Oeuvres Diverses, Vol. IV (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), pp726-7.

³²⁹ For Rousseau, luxury was evidence of society's demise. He implied, in his first Discourse, that no advancement in learning was worth the damaging influence of luxury, when he said,

"Toute l'éloquence de Démosthène ne put jamais ranimer un corps que le luxe et les arts avaient énervé."

Rousseau, in Gérald Allard, Rousseau sur les sciences et les arts (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Le Griffon d'argile, 1993), p13.

³³⁰ David Hume, Political Discourses, Disc. II (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray and Cochran, 1754), pp20-35.

³³¹ Voltaire; Theodore Besterman (ed.), Philosophical Dictionary (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp290-2.

nation."³²² He acknowledged that he had read Hume's discussion of the subject.³²³ Hume had written that "luxury is a word of very uncertain signification, and may be taken in a good as well as a bad sense..."³²⁴ However, the Scottish philosopher did proceed to assess both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of luxury. As he proclaimed early in the discourse,

We shall here endeavour to correct these extremes, by proving *first* that the ages of refinement and luxury are both the happiest and most virtuous; *secondly*, that wherever luxury ceases to be innocent, it also ceases to be beneficial;...³²⁵

In De l'Esprit though, its author chose not to pursue the justification of luxury, as Hume had done.

In the process of investigating luxury, Helvétius presented both views of the concept. He recognized that luxury may well be viewed as harmless to the poor; merely existing as an indicator of their lowly condition.³²⁶ However, he also recognized that the pursuit of luxury may well separate the rich from the consequences of their acquisition of wealth. This in turn often led the poor to become more so.³²⁷ At the end of this third chapter of De l'Esprit Helvétius did not attempt to resolve the dilemma of luxury; it had not been his intention to do so.

³²² De l'Homme, VI, iii, iv, & v. Also, see Spengler, 245-9.

³²³ De l'Esprit, I, iii, p35.

³²⁴ Hume, Political Discourses, p20.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, p21.

³²⁶ De l'Esprit, I, iii, p31.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, I, iii, pp32-4.

Instead, he explained that it had been his example of the way that well informed people still may arrive at contradictory conclusions, because,

...ils n'ont pas dans la mémoire tous les objets de la comparaison desquels doit resulter la vérité qu'ils cherchent.³³⁸

He went on to note that, "...je ne prétends point décider si le luxe est réellement nuisible ou utile..." The chapter was intended to stress the point that, "...le côté qu'on voit dans un objet est tout ce qu'il y à voir dans ce même objet." The passions then, though formidable as a force for social improvement, will only be as good as the individual's appreciation of the evidence which prompts action.

In the fourth, and last, chapter of Discours I Helvétius addressed another cause of error; again for the purpose of dismissing the possibility that it be a function of natural human inclination. This source of error, he noted, was the different way that individuals interpret words. If, for example, two people have a different view of what the word 'liberty' means, it is not that they have an innately different view of what liberty is, but merely that their personal experiences have led them to a particular interpretation. Helvétius referred to Malebranche's deliberations over liberty. Is liberty merely freedom from involuntary confinement? Or, is liberty the ability to choose to be whatever one wants; to fly like an eagle, to swim like a whale, or to become King, Pope or Emperor?³³⁹ Liberty has its limitations; it fails to exactly deliver the message of its user, and is

³³⁸ Ibid, I, iii, p41.

³³⁹ Ibid, I, iv, p46.

thus a source of error. And, for Helvétius it is evidence of the fact that words, and language itself, are potentially erroneous as means of communicating information.

In quoting Malebranche, Helvétius betrayed an aspect of his scholarship. Malebranche had also seen the need to address sources of error as an aid to describing his own philosophy. Helvétius would not have concurred with all of the priest's views; particularly the suggestion that the mind must be subordinated to faith.³⁴⁰ Also, the author of De l'Esprit would have had difficulty with the notion that, "...our inclinations and passions... dazzle our minds with false light."³⁴¹ That, however, did not deter Helvétius from subscribing to Malebranche's method.

In Discours I Helvétius outlined the extent to which he was willing to carry his sensationalist (and materialist) ideas. Information comes only through the senses, for storage by the memory. Nothing original is articulated by the mind, and there is no provision for particular (innate) capability - like talent. So, the ground rules of De l'Esprit are established early. The individual will be totally conditioned by environment and education, as only these forces act upon the senses.

The second discourse, entitled "De l'Esprit par Rapport à la Societe", pursues his concepts of mental faculty into societal

³⁴⁰ Nicholas Malebranche, The Search After Truth in Thomas M. Lennon & Paul J. Olscamp (ed. & trans.), Nicholas Malebranche: The Search After Truth (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), pp203-6.

³⁴¹ Ibid, p17.

consequences. He consciously progressed through the different levels of social magnitude, which were identified as:-

1. The individual,
2. A small social grouping,
3. A Nation,
4. Different periods and different countries,
5. The world at large.³⁴²

Throughout this discourse self-love is traced as the prime motivating force.³⁴³ Individuals are presented as pursuing those courses which best promote their own interests, and social groupings are portrayed in the same guise. It is a view of 'self-love' which contrasts with Rousseau's articulation (see the discussion in Chapter 3), and is closer to the social philosophy of Hobbes and Locke.³⁴⁴

When individuals act in the public interest, and contrary to their own, Helvétius provided an explanation of the fact that they merely appear to lay down their personal interest, yet their real motive is the gratification which they receive in the pride of their public spirited actions.³⁴⁵ In his quest for examples to support his ideas Helvétius

³⁴² Ibid, p566-9.

³⁴³ Ibid, II, xxiv, p211:-

"...le sentiment de l'amour de soi est la seule base sur laquelle on puisse jeter les fondamens d'une Morale utile."

³⁴⁴ See the discussion of the different approaches, which Locke and Rousseau take to individualism, in Chapter 6, and the link which Guyau notes between Helvétius and Hobbes which is discussed in Chapter 4. See also Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp167-170.

³⁴⁵ De l'Esprit, II, v, p77.

frequently stepped beyond the bounds of the true empiricist. In one example he claimed that native Canadians preferred the French due to a similarity of manner³⁴⁶ - an assertion he could not possibly support from his own experience, nor from any other truly objective assessment.

Helvétius defied the notion of a pre-established ethic. He was sympathetic neither to the rule-bound morality of the Christian church, nor to the 'natural' empathy of the stoics. The second discourse of De l'Esprit was Helvétius' attempt to develop the case for interest as the basis of all moral judgement. He began, in the first chapter, by declaring that "...c'est l'intérêt personnel qui dicte le jugement des Particuliers,..."³⁴⁷ And, as he built his case, Helvétius presented moral judgements which appear to have logical foundations in human nature as, in fact, merely elaborations in favour of an individual or group. Thus, in Chapter iii of Discours II Helvétius discussed the "conformity of ideas"³⁴⁸ as the way people accept or reject a particular viewpoint the more, or less, that it conforms with their own interest. Thus morality is not abstract, it aligns directly with interest - with the way that a decision will impact on the decision maker(s).

In making such a claim Helvétius needed to address two particular conditions. The first is, how can the quest for personal interest be

³⁴⁶ Ibid, II, iii, pp64/5.

"Si le Sauvage du Canada nous préfère aux autres Peuples de l'Europe, c'est que nous prêtons davantage à ses mœurs, à son genre de vie;..."

³⁴⁷ De l'Esprit, II, i, p54.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, II, iii, p62.

reconciled with the fact that individuals have (throughout history) demonstrated lack of regard for their own interest by means of personal sacrifice? And secondly, how can one rationalize the interest of the individual with the group interests of society?

Claude Adrien's answer to the first case is to look for an aspect of personal interest behind every example of seeming sacrifice. Thus when Brutus sacrificed his son for the common good of his Roman society he is characterized as having weighed the options solely on the basis of personal interest.³⁴⁹ Brutus is said to have loved country more than kin, and therefore his interest was better served by saving the former.

While beginning his explanation of interest in terms of the individual it is merely an introduction to Helvétius' explanation that a society will order itself in terms of its own interests. And, in exercising its judgement, a society may have to overrule personal interest in favour of communal interest. Such a condition has always had common examples, an instance of which is the individual who steals food to stave off starvation. The thief's personal interest is overruled in favour of social well-being. Helvétius emphasized his case by reference to the small society of a sailing vessel isolated at sea for lack of winds. With all members of this society in acute peril he justifies opposing an individual's interest in favour of the group by acknowledging that one will have to be sacrificed in order for the

³⁴⁹ Ibid, II, v, pp77/8.

remainder to survive.³⁵⁰ One will be lost in order for the remainder to live. This however, is merely an analogy of the suffering which some of society's individuals have to endure for the welfare of the greater number.

Throughout Discours II Helvétius investigated the role of legislation and morality. He argued that improved understanding of the human mind implies social change. The engine of that change would be a new understanding of morality. Instead of subservience to religious dogma, and to the God-given superiority of monarchs and aristocrats, would be substituted a morality based on sense experience. What the senses found pleasing would be encouraged. Helvétius emphasized the role which legislation would have in implementing his ideas. Morality was to be regarded as a science, to be analyzed and improved against the 'sounding-board' of general interest; and to be reflected in legislation.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Ibid, II, vi, p84, "...tout devient légitime et même vertueux pour le salut public."

³⁵¹ The scientific treatment of morality was fundamental to Helvétius' De l'Esprit, and it was the aspect of the French philosophe's work which was to attract the attention of Jeremy Bentham. On the first page of the Préface to De l'Esprit, Helvétius explained,

"J'ai cru qu'on devoit traiter la Morale comme toutes les autres Sciences, et faire une Morale comme une Physique expérimentale." - Ibid, Préface, p9

D.W. Smith aptly notes that through his discovery of a scientific format Helvétius hoped to become the Isaac Newton of moral science. - A Study in Persecution, p116.

Douglas Long also suggests that Jeremy Bentham "...conceded the Newtonian role to Helvétius. Long notes however, that in his own writings Bentham took a step backwards, leaving the possibility open that he be tagged the Newton of the moral sciences, when he said:

"What Bacon was to the physical world, Helvétius was to the moral: the moral world has therefore had its Bacon, but its Newton is yet to come."

In his treatment of morality Helvétius adopted an optimistic attitude; he was certainly not rigorous in rationalising his utilitarian model. In fact, Helvétius displayed a particular tendency towards the role of 'simplificateur'. Instead of seeking to find support for his ideas through careful analysis and logical progression, he believed that he was uncovering something which was obvious to all. But, what had obscured his great social tool from the view of his literary forebears? What made Helvétius feel that he had succeeded in finding an answer to such an important problem; which philosophers of the past had overlooked? As D.W. Smith asks, "...why had not the system of *De l'esprit* emerged automatically?"³⁵² The answer is laid at the feet of religious and secular rulers. Helvétius was not operating in scholarly isolation. His discovery that morality could be addressed as merely another branch of science was in accord with the general progress of enlightenment. The very notion that morality could be discussed outside of the boundaries of Church influence was relatively new in his era. To Helvétius there would have been clear reasons why such ideas would have been subdued before his time; and why his recognition of a latent utilitarian morality was particularly timely.

Helvétius may well have considered his as the appropriate point in history for the elaboration of a morality based on utility. The morality

Quotation in Douglas Long, "Censorial Jurisprudence and Political Radicalism: A Reconsideration of the Early Bentham" The Bentham Newsletter, No. 12, June 1988, p8 - from the Bentham Manuscripts UC clvii.32.

³⁵² A Study in Persecution, p119.

itself though, is problematic in its simplicity. The idea that pursuit of one's own happiness is a suitable basis for morally appropriate conduct sounds attractive, but may be viewed as overly optimistic or unrealistic.

G.E. Moore looked closely at Helvétius' 'greater happiness principle' (in the guise articulated by Bentham). Moore wrote that,

...the statement that 'general happiness is the right end of human action' is not an ethical principle at all, but either..., a proposition about the meaning of words, or else a proposition about the *nature* of general happiness, not about its rightness or goodness.³⁵³

The problem centres around definitions of 'happiness' and 'right' and the associations both words have with 'good' or 'goodness'. Moore referred to the 'greater happiness principle' as a fallacy, inasmuch as it may well be interpreted as asserting merely that good is good, yet in no way saying anything about the meaning of good itself.

Another approach to the morality inherent in the 'greater happiness principle' is to examine its basis in self-love. Attention to personal satisfaction, as a basis for moral judgement, is a central feature of Helvétius' philosophical writings. But, morality may be viewed as characteristic of the social rather than the individual; to the extent that it is concerned with the conduct of people in a social context. The pursuit of happiness is thus not in the domain of morality. Thomas Jefferson put forward this socially-based morality when he explained Helvétius' ideas to Thomas Law, thus:

I consider our relations with others as constituting the

³⁵³ G.E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp17-20.

boundaries or morality. With ourselves we stand on the ground of identity, not of relation, which last, requiring two subjects, excludes self-love confined to a single one. To ourselves, in strict language, we can owe no duties, obligation requiring also two parties. Self-love, therefore, is no part of morality. Indeed it is exactly its counterpart. It is the sole antagonist of virtue, leading us constantly by our propensities to self-gratification in violation of our moral duties to others.³⁵⁴

It was Jefferson's view, then, that the concept of utilitarianism, based as it was on Helvétius ideas, was not valid as a theoretical foundation of morality.

Moore and Jefferson each sought to refute (Bentham and) Helvétius by recourse to definitions. But Helvétius was a simplificateur - he was not a David Hume; nor was Bentham - and his ideas were presented as principles. Alasdair MacIntyre wrote of John Stuart Mill,

Mill's basic principle is a moral affirmation independent of the facts:...

...since Mill's basic principle in ethics is a moral principle, but Hume's is a definition of morality, they demand different types of defense³⁵⁵

MacIntyre's is an apt comment, whether addressed to Mill, Bentham or Helvétius, to the extent that none of them were rigorous philosophers of the calibre of Hume. That though, should not be seen as in some way demeaning what they did. The Helvetian ideas which Bentham moulded into the greater happiness principle were energetically employed by the British Utilitarians in the pursuit of social justice. These were not

³⁵⁴ Jefferson letter to Thomas Law, 13th June 1814 in Adrienne Koch and William Peden (eds.) The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), p585.

³⁵⁵ A.C. MacIntyre, "Hume on "is" and "ought"", The Philosophical Review, Vol. LXVIII, 1959, p458 and p459.

merely the ideas of an unrefined philosophe, but ideas - formulated as a principle - which led to solid social and political achievements.³⁵⁶

Having established his principles, and evaluated them against the 'macro' organisms of the various levels of society Helvétius returned, in the third discourse, to deal in depth with individual motivational issues which were raised by his ideas. The title of Discours III is "Si l'Esprit doit être considéré comme un don de la nature, ou comme un effet de l'éducation." Here the author traces and emphasizes the fact that, if all are born with equal mental capacity, and ideas originate only in the senses, then success is a consequence only of education, and environment. To facilitate this further elaboration of his principles, in describing the fourth chapter Helvétius claimed:

On prouve, dans ce Chapitre, que la Nature a doué tous les hommes, communément bien organisés, du degré d'attention nécessaire pour s'élever aux plus hautes idées:...³⁵⁷

So, if all are capable of the same achievements, then what accounts for the great differences between people? Talent cannot be the answer, as Helvétius recognized no innate distinctions between humans. The question was answered late in this same fourth chapter, to the extent that unequal desire for instruction leads to the unequal mental capability of people.³⁵⁸ And, in his explanation of unequal desire, Helvétius focused on what he considered to be the great motivational principle - the

³⁵⁶ David Hume's moral philosophy is addressed later, in Chapter 5, under the sub-heading "The Germ of Utilitarianism in David Hume."

³⁵⁷ De l'Esprit, p570.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, III, iv, p261.

passions.

The passions, for Helvétius, differentiate the great from the ordinary. It is not capability, but passion, which will motivate individuals to success in whatsoever are their chosen pursuits. Hannibal's victories over the Romans have no military, economic or social justification - they are presented as directly attributable to his passion for glory.³⁵⁹ So, for Helvétius, passions are harnessed as the alternative to talent. He believed that he had 'proved' that all ideas come through the senses, so a force had to be identified which would distinguish the successful from others. The role of passion appeared almost self-explanatory in his era of relative sexual freedom. Successful men were preferred by women, so consequently a passion for women drives men to great accomplishments.³⁶⁰ He saw it at work around him; at the Court of Versailles and in the salon society of Paris.

The passions explained prevailing inequality - they were of immense importance in linking Helvétius' theory of the mind with his proposals for societal improvement. His theory of equal capability would have floundered without an explanation of prevailing inequality. It is this fact which has led scholars of Helvétius' work to note the passions as an essential theme of his doctrine.³⁶¹ Having argued their role in depth he is able to pass on to the important conclusions of his

³⁵⁹ Ibid, III, p272.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, III, xii, pp305/6 - see also discussion of the role of the passions in Chapter 5.

³⁶¹ Keim, p242.
Grossman, p87.

philosophy, because there was an overall objective in his endeavours. His ideas of how the mind operates, and how people are motivated, were intended to lead to conclusions of how society should be improved. At the heart of Helvétius' ideas is the notion of progress - society was destined to improve itself, and De l'Esprit would identify why and how this should occur. If stimulation of the passions, and exposure to education, could render anyone successful, then legislators had the power to improve whole societies. They, along with educators, could condition the possibility of 'chance'. Chance and education, for Helvétius, provide the evidence which stimulates the passions to action. All knowledge comes through these two activities. Thus, if the uncertainties of chance can be eliminated by legislation and education, then the human condition may be generally improved.³⁶²

Helvétius summarized the third discourse with a plea to the legislators, thus,

L'inégalité d'esprit qu'on remarque entre les hommes, dépend... du gouvernement sous lequel ils vivent,...

proceeding with the statement that,

L'homme de génie n'est donc que le produit des circonstances dans lesquelles cet homme s'est trouvé. Aussi tout l'art de l'éducation consiste à placer les jeunes gens dans un concours de circonstances propres à développer en eux le germe de l'esprit et de la vertu.

And, supporters of the notion of natural talent are addressed thus,

...la persuasion où l'on est que le génie et la vertu sont de purs dons de la nature, s'opposoit aux progrès de la science de l'éducation, et favorisoit, à cet égard, la

³⁶² See extended discussion of chance and passions in Chapter 5.

paresse et la négligence.³⁶³

Helvétius then, did not really offer up his ideas for debate. He was confident that he had articulated the concepts upon which a new society should be established, and those who would not accept them were in fact obstructing the progress of humanity to a higher order.

Although Cumming considers Discours IV to be the most ingenious,³⁶⁴ it was somewhat of a recap. Helvétius completed De l'Esprit with a return to mental theory in a long review of the mind's various attributes, and the way that his theories impacted on prevailing views. He visited such terms as genius (ch. i), wit (ch. iii) and good sense (ch. xii). Helvétius' object in Discours IV of De l'Esprit was to address terms which might compromise the way that he had explained his ideas. In discussing passions Helvétius considered it important to review sources of error - that passions may equally be beneficial or detrimental. Similarly, the author of De l'Esprit was unwilling to merely address the benefits of his ideas, he also wanted to look at the ways in which he might be misunderstood. Thus, in the chapters noted above, he chose to review the meaning of certain words in order to indicate relations to his philosophy. In fact, the title for Discours IV, "Des Différens noms donnés à l'Esprit", implies an attempt to clear up misconceptions.

The first example, Genius, might conceivably be considered inherent to the human, as might talent. Helvétius however, corrected

³⁶³ De l'Esprit, III, xxx, pp417/8.

³⁶⁴ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place..., p78.

such an argument with the following statements, which take as their logical base what he had already articulated with respect to chance and passions.

Quelque rôle que je fasse jouer au hazard, quelque part qu'il ait à la réputation des grands hommes, le hazard cependant ne fait rien qu'en faveur de ceux qu'anime le desir vif de la gloire.

Ce desir, comme je l'ai déjà dit, fait supporter sans peine la fatigue de l'étude et de la méditation...

C'est ce desir seul qui, dans les Sciences ou les Arts, nous élève à des vérités nouvelles, ou nous procure des amusemens nouveaux. Ce desir enfin est l'ame de l'homme de génie:...³⁶⁵

Thus, the desire for glory, identified as the (beneficial form of) passions in action, also creates genius. But, passions will not work in isolation. Passions are the force, but that force requires stimulus, which will only come by chance. Thus,

L'homme de génie est donc, en partie, l'oeuvre du hazard; c'est l'hazard qui, toujours en action, prépare les découvertes...³⁶⁶

Genius then, is not a personal attribute, for Helvétius, but the consequence of favourable circumstances.

Helvétius also considered wit (l'esprit) and good sense, and took it upon himself to juxtaposition the two. Of wit, he claimed that it "...n'est autre chose qu'un assemblage d'idées et de combinaisons nouvelles."³⁶⁷ But,

La différence de l'esprit d'avec le bon sens est dans la cause différente qui les produit. L'un est l'effet des passions fortes, et l'autre de l'absence de ces mêmes

³⁶⁵ De l'Esprit, IV, i, p423.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, IV, i, p426.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, IV, iii, p442.

passions. L'homme de bon sens ne tombe donc communément dans aucune de ces erreurs où nous entraînent les passions; mais aussi ne reçoit-il aucun de ces coups de lumière qu'on ne doit qu'aux passions vives.³⁶⁶

Good sense then, for Helvétius, is a neutral state wherein one avoids the effect of passions completely. However, it is a humble state which offers neither failure nor success, and Helvétius suggested that "...le bon sens finit que l'esprit commence." One might suppose that Helvétius was intending to ridicule those who take none of life's risks by putting them into the derogatory category of 'sensible'. This was not the case though. He appears to have merely identified a neutral state between the good and bad consequences of pursuit of the passions, noting that, "Les hommes sans passions sont rares."

The very last chapter of the book is entitled "De l'éducation". In less than ten pages the author attempted to present the highlights of what was wrong with prevailing educational method, and laid out some of the useful consequences of his ideas. He was to rectify the abbreviated discussion by his articulation of De l'Homme, but by that time he was pre-occupied with refuting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Emile. In De l'Esprit education was an important consequence of its author's ideas on mental faculty, and a facilitator of social improvement. Its importance was greater than the allocated space might imply. It was one of Helvétius' defining principles, but at the time was considered to require little definition in itself; a matter which he later rectified.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, IV, xii, p510 (including the following two quotations).

Despite its brevity, the last chapter of De l'Esprit is an important culmination of its author's ideas. Through education society might be changed, and for education to exercise such power, then the legislators would need to apply his ideas. Keim explains,

De l'Education, tel est donc bien le titre logique et nécessaire du dernier chapitre de l'Esprit.

Ce dernier chapitre doit être analysé avec soin. Il nous donne, en somme, la pensée maitresse du philosophe. Législation, éducation. Nécessité de transformer l'humanité par des lois et des principes conformes à la nature humaine. Tout Helvétius est là.³⁶⁹

"Tout Helvétius est là" - the essence of what the French philosophe hoped to achieve is contained in the last chapter. And, in the final paragraphs he returned to the themes for a new society. These were, to develop a good educational process, to inflame citizens with a passion for glory and public esteem, and to reflect these facts in legislation.³⁷⁰

The senses would determine the morality of an action, and would err in favour of pleasure over pain. Favour of pleasure alone however, would not propel the citizenry towards a better society; only a passion for esteem would do that.³⁷¹ Hence, legislators would need to address

³⁶⁹ Keim, p311.

³⁷⁰ De l'Esprit, IV, xvii, pp562/3.

³⁷¹ Adam Smith also acknowledged the positive social value of self-interested desire for esteem. He juxtaposed the idea against the conventional view that virtue may only accrue from acts intended for the common good; that seeking personal gain, in whatever form, was not commensurate with virtue. Smith however, saw the possibility of virtue in certain acts of self-interest, but falls short of the enthusiastic proclamations which Helvétius offered.

Adam Smith; D.D. Raphael & A.L. Macfie (eds.), The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp302-6.

that motivational force. And, that done, then all that was necessary was to put people into an appropriate environment, and to deliver an education designed for success. Education appears as a principle throughout De l'Esprit, as the determinant of the human, but with little to indicate how it should be applied. In the final stages some important points were discussed but the function of education remained, at that time, a matter which did not warrant extensive review. Circumstances, and Rousseau's anti-materialist elaborations, would prompt Helvétius to redress his shortcomings in his other major work, De l'Homme; de Ses Facultes Intellectuelles, et de son Education.

De l'Homme: What Helvétius Feared to Say in De l'Esprit

In December 1773 Octavie Guichard wrote to François Antoine Devaux,

Avés-vous pû avoir l'ouvrage posthume de feu M. Helvetius,... Il est intitulé *L'Homme, &c.* Ce livre est encore plus hardi que *L'Esprit*. Il est tres difficile à trouver. La police la guette avec une vigueur incroyable, mais elle n'étend pas ses bras jusqu'en province. Lisés-le et mandés-moi ce que vous en pensés. Vous y reconnoitrés bien l'humanité generalisée, et la philosophie courageuse de son regretable auteur.³⁷²

It had been only fifteen years since the 'Affair' surrounding the publication of De l'Esprit, and French society appears to have been eager to read the sequel. Perhaps Parisian society relished the idea of another scandal at Helvétius' expense. If so they were disappointed because, as Suard observed, "...De l'Homme..., ne pouvait ni produire le

³⁷² Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, pp460/1.

même scandale, ni obtenir le même succès."³⁷³ Helvétius had died in late 1771. De l'Esprit suffered from official censure, public ridicule and the open and covert critiques of the intellectuals of his age. Helvétius did not reply - he was shocked as the extent of his possible persecution dawned on him, and he would not tempt fate any further. That did not mean, however, that he would merely sit back and accept the criticisms and insults.

Helvétius was quite convinced that in De l'Esprit he had articulated a doctrine which, if properly adopted, held the promise of a more equitable, and therefore happier, society. That was too great a potential to be merely laid aside. After all, those in opposition were the people whom he identified as the greatest obstacles to progress - the rulers and the priests. So, fearing persecution³⁷⁴ he proceeded to develop a full elaboration of his ideas for publication only after his death. Saint-Lambert, who was acquainted with Helvétius, explained his fellow philosophe's actions thus:

Helvétius, dans sa retraite de Voré, s'occupait à développer, à prouver les principes du livre de *l'Esprit*, mais il ne voulait plus rien donner au public. Il voyait la philosophie persécutée par des cabales puissantes, se former peu de disciples et aucuns protecteurs. Il en était affligé; mais il n'en était pas étonné.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Suard, p. ix.

³⁷⁴ The second paragraph of the Préface reads,
"Mes intentions ne peuvent être suspectes. Si j'eusse donné ce livre de mon vivant, je me serois exposé à la persécution et n'aurois accumulé sur moi, ni richesse, ni dignités nouvelles." De l'Homme, p. 9.

³⁷⁵ Saint-Lambert, p. 277.

One might say that the effects of the 'Affair' over De l'Esprit had left him 'down but not out' in current sporting parlance. This time, however, there would be no need for religious or secular acknowledgement and he was able to openly elaborate the full implications of his ideas.³⁶ Since the publication of De l'Esprit Rousseau had elaborated his unique, yet counter-materialist, pedagogy, and that could be clearly refuted.

The author had a great deal of leisure time to work on De l'Homme, and his only significant journeys, to England and Prussia, widened his appreciation of alternative political systems and social norms. The important remaining concern was to ensure that the book did achieve issue. This in fact occurred as a consequence both of foreign publication, and of the book's 'sponsor'. De l'Homme's dedication to the Empress Catherine II of Russia lent not only authority to the work, but practical means in its distribution to notable people. The Russian minister in Holland, prince Golitsyne, distributed a large number of copies, and he took it upon himself to present the French ambassador there with a copy.³⁷

Helvétius' posthumous work is structurally and textually similar to the earlier rendition which he had hoped would elevate him to a leading role among the philosophes of his time. However, the view of De l'Homme, as articulated by Plekhanov, that it is merely "...an extended

³⁶ Skinner, pp31/2.

commentary..."³⁷⁸ of De l'Esprit, is too simplistic. While it does elaborate the same principles as the earlier text, De l'Homme is much more than that. Two particular points demonstrate that fact. Firstly, he overtly discussed society without religion and, in the process, found that not all of the Church's methods were negative; and he turned one to his own purposes. He devised a catechism, replacing the customary role of religion in moral guidance with a secular alternative based on Christian methods. This aspect of De l'Homme could not have been a part of De l'Esprit because throughout that work the author took pains to align himself with prevailing theology. The concept of a society without religious influence, and its implications, were denied him.

The second point which gives De l'Homme merit as more than merely a continuation of the dialogue of De l'Esprit is the role of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In De l'Esprit Helvétius had argued what he considered to be the logical implications of his materialist ideas. He had hoped that governments would come to recognize that society could be generally improved through enhanced legislation and education which would reflect the equal ability of all. He aligned his ideas with those great thinkers of the past who lent credence to his ideas, most particularly with John Locke. In his own time, though, De l'Esprit stood alone as an articulation of the implications of enlightened thinking for pedagogy. There was no other important position to take account of - despite the fact that most of the philosophes believed that education needed severe renovation.

³⁷⁸ Plekhanov, p161.

Since the publication of De l'Esprit however, Rousseau's Emile had focused considerable attention onto the philosophy of education. De l'Esprit had looked at the mental faculty and the implications of new concepts for society, and education was identified as a tool for improvement. Rousseau, however, had gone one step further than Helvétius, by making education the focus of a major work, and himself the spokesman for enlightened pedagogy. So Helvétius had been both persecuted and upstaged, and De l'Homme was a response to both facts - not merely the work of a writer who realised he had more to say on a subject. As Momdjian observes,

...Helvétius, dans son deuxième grand ouvrage *De l'Homme* se dresse résolument contre le déisme et l'idéalisme de Rousseau.³⁷⁹

De l'Homme is an educational tract; intended to fully articulate Helvétius' pedagogy, and to confront Rousseau's ideas which had leaned so heavily on countering the materialism implicit in De l'Esprit.

De l'Homme is another extensive text, running through ten Sections, in two volumes, over nine hundred and seventy pages in the Fayard version. Although it no longer exudes the optimism of one who believed himself destined for a position of high rank among the philosophes of his age it is, nevertheless, not the work of an apologist. The over-riding tone is of an author who has been misunderstood by some, and deliberately slandered by others, for lack of the facility to fully articulate his ideas. De l'Homme was the full articulation of those ideas - unrestrained by the fear of persecution or

³⁷⁹ Momdjian, p113.

ridicule. As the full title - De l'Homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles, et de son éducation - suggests, Helvétius focused on intellect and education. His thesis may be found in one of three short introductory chapters in which he states:

Si je démontrerois que l'homme n'est vraiment que le produit de son éducation, j'aurois sans doute révélé une grande vérité aux nations... pour être heureuses et puissantes, il ne s'agit que de perfectionner la science de l'éducation.³⁸⁰

Education then, is the primary focus of De l'Homme.

In the first section of the text, Helvétius began with a re-statement of the materialist principles of his pedagogy. He was at pains to disprove the notion of talent as his educational theory assumed all to be capable of equal success, provided their exposure to education and environment is similar. Hence, his heading to Section I proclaimed that.

L'éducation nécessairement différente des différens hommes, est peut-être la cause de cette inégalité des esprits jusqu'à présent attribuée à l'inégale perfection des organes.³⁸¹

It proceeded from the view that if people could be equally educated then they would become equally capable, to suggest that the prevalent inequality of education was itself responsible for unequal capability.

The first section, however, does not argue aptitude as the heading might suggest. Instead that matter is held over for the next section while the author proceeded with his discussion of education. Whereas in De l'Esprit Helvétius had built up his theories on the mind, and ended

³⁸⁰ De l'Homme, Intro, ii, p45.

³⁸¹ Ibid, I, i, p55.

with education (essentially as a consequence), this time he immediately focused his readers onto educational matters. The first chapter of Section I is entitled "Nul ne reçoit la même éducation" and concentrated throughout the section on arguing that the various forms of instruction resulted in inconsistency. In this discussion the role of chance plays a major part. Chance would elevate one to great achievements, but it is a fickle facility which may well cause the similarly educated to experience different results.³⁸² However, discussion of prevailing problems in educational practice lead, in later chapters of this first section, to a critique of the Roman Catholic Church. The drift from educational analysis to religious criticism is marked by the note that,

Il faudrait éclairer les hommes: le prêtre s'y oppose. La vérité luit-elle un moment sur eux? il en absorbe les rayons dans les ténèbres de sa scholastique.³⁸³

Criticism of religious influence on education becomes criticism of the religious body and the papacy. It was religious influence which had precipitated the 'Affair' over De l'Esprit and Helvétius bitterly resented the affront to himself, to his ideas, and to the social improvements which he envisaged.³⁸⁴ In the following section, however, Helvétius returned to the foundation of his ideas of the understanding. He discussed his theory of how the mind operates, the phenomena of

³⁸² It is in this chapter that Helvétius proclaimed Vaucanson, Milton, Shakespeare, Molière, Corneille and even Jean-Jacques Rousseau as important examples of the beneficial influence of chance. Ibid, I, viii, pp73/7.

³⁸³ Ibid, I, x, p90.

³⁸⁴ Keim, p568.

sensations, and the roles of judgement and passions. And, in one chapter he sought to redress what he perceived to be misunderstandings of his theories as outlined in De l'Esprit (Sec. II, ch. ix).

Helvétius had identified sexual desire as the great motivator of men. They would be driven to succeed in their chosen endeavour because so doing would endear them to a potential mate. In fact, Helvétius suggested that greater success makes the male more desirable to the female, and thus gives him the greater choice of partners. As detractors to such a theory Helvétius identified the "Théologiens". They are said to have accused him of being a "corrupteur des mœurs" for his claim, in De l'Esprit, that "...l'amour des femmes avoit quelquefois excité les hommes à la vertu."³⁸⁵ For Helvétius, desire was a necessary prompt to action and no form of desire was more compelling than sexual pleasure. And, a man without desire, without ambition, is unwilling to pursue his own interest. Such a person will not excel in any aspect of life. He, "...n'est bon à rien et n'a d'esprit en rien."³⁸⁶ This chapter (De l'Homme, II, ix) is one of many examples in De l'Homme, of Helvétius' attempts to reiterate or further elaborate ideas which had already been presented in De l'Esprit. But, this time he made no attempt to endear himself to religious authorities. Instead, as in this chapter, he noted that failure to comprehend the wisdom of his ideas was rooted in the 'austere moralism' of the clerics.

In the heading for Section II the author of De l'Homme restated

³⁸⁵ De l'Homme, II, ix, p187.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, II, ix, p189.

his important maxim that all men have an equal aptitude for understanding. And, while he argued this fact from the basis of the tabula rasa concept, his major problem (again) was not only to prove the matter, but to explain prevailing inequalities which are clearly visible to all. Thus much of Sections II, III and IV are dedicated to addressing, in detail, the causes of human inequalities. In each case Helvétius examined a certain aspect of (perceived) inequality against his theory that all are born with equal propensity. And, in each case he demonstrated that, in those normally endowed, particular capabilities are the cause of some factor other than birthright. In every case, Helvétius aimed to show that the greatest successes and the most abject failures result from environment and (the form of) education - that chance, passions, interest and desire uniquely affect individuals.

So, in De l'Homme one sees Helvétius returning to the method employed in De l'Esprit, of contrasting instances which appears to refute his arguments. De l'Homme contains many examples, including the following:

Sec. II, Ch. xi	De l'inégale étendue de la mémoire
xii	De l'Inégale perfection des organes des Sens
Sec. III, Ch. iv	De la seconde course de l'inégalité des Esprits

And, much attention is given over to articulation of those matters which distinguish people from each other, and give the appearance of inequality. See, for instance,

Sec. IV, Ch. iii	Des changemens survenus dans le caractère des particuliers.
iv	De l'amour de soi
xxii	Généologie des passions

In Section IV Helvétius also chose to address religious intolerance. This discussion followed earlier investigations into civil intolerance, but for the Church he reserved his greatest condemnation. Of "l'Intolérance Religieuse" he said,

Cette espece d'Intolérance est la plus dangereuse. L'amour du pouvoir en est le motif, et la Religion le prétexte. Que punit-on dans l'hérétique ou l'impie? l'Homme assez audacieux pour penser d'après lui, pour croire plus à sa raison qu'à celle des Prêtres, et pour se déclarer leur égal.³⁸⁷

Helvétius proceeded from this quotation to suggest that all it needed to turn the fairy-tale 'Mother Goose' into a religion was to have a sufficient number of people maintain that it is so. Claude Adrien shared the general distaste of the French philosophes for religious intolerance and consequent persecution. He particularly identified the Catholic Church for condemnation, citing as reasons its propensity for torture and execution, and the atrocities of the "Auto-da-fé".³⁸⁸

But, is not the priest pursuing his own interest? Helvétius answered in the affirmative, and proceeded to explain that, "Les hommes sont de leur nature intolérans."³⁸⁹ Humans will pursue their own interest, but it is the interest of the community which must prevail. General interest is to be served through the medium of the law. Thus, Helvétius went on from the last quotation to state that, "Les bonnes

³⁸⁷ Ibid, IV, xviii, p393.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, IV, xx, p404.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, IV, xxi, p407.

Loix également contenir le Dévot furieux et le Prêtre perfide." Education and legislation are the author's two tools for social improvement. Education will give all the opportunity to excel and legislation can not only facilitate education, but it can control the quest for personal power which may proceed from advanced knowledge.

In Section V Helvétius sought to regain his lost reputation by discrediting the man who had usurped the high philosophical position which he had once aspired to. As Albert Keim explained, "L'auteur de *l'Esprit* va donc répondre dans *l'Homme* à son plus illustre contradicteur."³⁹⁰ Jean-Jacques had become the educational philosopher of his age by covertly attacking *De l'Esprit*; so Helvétius would respond, but in an overt manner. In *De l'Homme* Rousseau's statements are quoted verbatim, and refuted for their perceived errors and contradictions. It is a well-mannered critique, but firmly delivered. The author of *De l'Homme* sought to contest all of their significant philosophical differences, and in some cases directly countered items in Rousseau's work which had covertly, but recognizably, aimed at aspects of *De l'Esprit*. Helvétius aimed particular criticism at Rousseau's stated belief that humans will always err towards goodness if they can be (somehow) shielded from exposure to bad influences. Claude Adrien looked to the law for his response. Firstly, if men were really born good then how did we ever come to need laws at all. And, recognizing that man is susceptible to good or bad influences he returned to his theme of education and legislation to direct appropriate human development.

³⁹⁰ Keim, p544.

Helvétius said,

En vain M. Rousseau répète-t-il sans cess que tous les hommes sont bons et tous les premiers mouvemens de la nature droits. La nécessité des Loix est la preuve du contraire. Que suppose cette nécessité? que ce sont les divers intérêts de l'homme qui le rendent méchant ou bon...

and

...les hommes ne naissent point compatissant, mais, que tous peuvent le devenir, et le seront lorsque les Loix, la forme du Gouvernement et l'éducation les rendent tels.³⁹¹

Helvétius' direct attacks on aspects of Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile are further discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

The following four Sections (VI to IX) are broken into numerous chapters dealing with many issues. They constitute another forum for the author to exercise his ideas in the context of contemporary issues. Claude Adrien obviously wanted to anticipate all of the arguments which would follow publication of De l'Homme. Knowing that critical appraisal would come after his death he was quite exhaustive in his quest to cover all possible questions. And, he found himself returning to issues which he had already addressed in De l'Esprit. One such issue was luxury. Eighteenth-century philosophers found the morality of luxury an intriguing problem. It appears to be a manifestation of the worst aspects of social demarcation. How could the preachers of (enlightened) social justice indulge themselves (in good conscience) in the luxurious society of bourgeois Paris? This issue must have troubled Helvétius in particular - he was no mere intellectual on the fringes of high society;

³⁹¹ De l'Homme, V, iii, pp470 & 471.

he was wealthy and consequently a social leader.

Helvétius extended his latest discussion on luxury through assertions that, in fact, luxury is merely relative. He suggested that the well-fed, well-clothed English peasant was in a state of luxury when set alongside his French counterpart. And, both of these so-called peasant classes enjoyed luxurious lifestyles in comparison with the savage tribes of other continents.³⁹² Nevertheless Helvétius noted that luxury does divide society into two orders; those with access and those without. And, Helvétius again follows his lead in De l'Esprit by not taking a firm position on the issue. His discussion outlined the alternative positions but favoured neither, although he did venture the suggestion that luxury itself is not nearly so sinister as the power which it represents.³⁹³

These many chapters are connected by an overriding concern for human happiness. Helvétius believed firmly in the morality of the pursuit of happiness which Jeremy Bentham and others would adopt and adapt. So, Claude Adrien tried to deal with issues concerning happiness. The chapters on luxury were doing just that - investigating the juxtaposition of luxury in the happiness of an elite few. Other chapters deal with such issues as, the unequal distribution of national wealth (VI, ix), whether men can all be equally happy (VIII, i), the causes of unhappiness (VIII, iii), and, the impact of government on pleasure (VIII, ix). These chapters were intended to lay the groundwork for

³⁹² Ibid, VI, iii, p535.

³⁹³ Ibid, VI, iii, iv & v, pp535-43.

Helvétius' important arguments with respect to legislation and education, the subjects of Sections IX and X. Section VIII ends with the suggestion that the following Section will offer "...le germe d'une législation neuve et plus conforme au bonheur de l'humanité."⁹⁴

Section IX addresses the notion of the general happiness in legislation, and anticipates the work of the later utilitarians in asking for legislation to take as its cause the happiness of all citizens. Laws had for so long been based on religious doctrine and monarchical control. With respect to the former Helvétius offered no compromise. There are, however, several more chapters dealing with the evils of religious intolerance, and one (IX, xxxi) suggesting means of restraining ecclesiastical ambition. To the monarchs though, Helvétius did plead his case. In the tenth chapter he suggested that the happiness of a ruler should not be connected with the misery of the citizenry. Claude Adrien was looking for the general happiness of society to be the guiding principle of legislation. He asserted thus:

...la Loi qui déclare le bien public la premiere des Loix, est une loi sacrée, invariable... toutes les autres Loix ne sont que les divers moyens d'assurer l'exécution de la premiere...⁹⁵

And, in the following chapters he pleaded for truth to be guaranteed to all, and for freedom of the press.

The last section of De l'Homme is Helvétius' most powerful rendition of his case for the efficacy of education. It begins, in the

⁹⁴ Ibid, VIII, xxvi, p734.

⁹⁵ Ibid, IX, x, p792.

title of the first chapter, with the statement that "L'éducation peut tout"³⁹⁶ - a pronouncement which became the watchword of Helvétius' pedagogy. The author went on to note that "L'éducation nous fait ce que nous sommes"³⁹⁷ - if communities turn out similarly endowed individuals, like the Savoyards, it is the result of uniformity of instruction. Likewise, if one develops unique traits it will be because some aspect of his instruction, or environment, affected him differently.

In this Section (Ch. iii & iv) Helvétius made his plea for public schooling. Unlike Rousseau, who wanted to isolate the child from society, Helvétius wanted children to grow and learn in a social setting. If the child was to learn from things around him, then the home could not provide the diversity of experience necessary for success. Also, Helvétius favoured the rigid schedule which a school should employ to the extent that he preferred to keep children at their studies instead of wasting time with vacations.³⁹⁸

Chapter vii addresses the moral education of man through the use of a secular catechism. Helvétius said of the method, by way of yet another insult to religion,

...si l'on grave dans la mémoire d'un enfant, les préceptes de la croyance souvent la plus ridicule, l'on peut à l'aide d'un catéchisme moral y graver par conséquent les préceptes et les principes d'une équité dont l'expérience journalière lui prouveroit à la fois l'utilité et la vérité.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Ibid, X, i, p879.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, X, i, p881.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, X, iii & iv, pp889-895.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, X, vii, p903.

The catechism is not only an adaptation of religious method, however, it also constitutes a summary of Helvétius' principles concerning the utility of human happiness. As Keim explains,

...ce catéchisme de probité... C'est, par excellence, son testament philosophique, le résumé sous une forme brève, concise, nette, souvent saisissante, de sa doctrine.⁴⁰⁰

Helvétius began the catechism with his utilitarian principles:

Qu'est-ce que l'homme?

R. Un animal, dit-on, raisonnable, mais certainement sensible, foible et propre à se multiplier.

D. En qualité de sensible que doit faire l'homme?

R. Fuir la douleur, chercher le plaisir. C'est à cette recherche, c'est à cette fuite constante qu'on donne le nom d'amour de soi.⁴⁰¹

It proceeds through approximately eight pages to outline Helvétius' notions of social justice. And, despite the author's use of concluding chapters under the title "Récapitulation", Section X is the formal completion of Helvétius'.

The Récapitulation is composed of four short chapters, and directs the reader to important aspects of his writings. The mandatory role of education, in progress to an improved society, is the thesis of De l'Homme, but the author appears to have been concerned that some matters not be overlooked. As Saint-Lambert noted (see earlier quotation), Helvétius was aware that he had gathered neither disciples nor protectors. Thus, the first recapitulation chapter was intended to stress his connections to John Locke's ideas. Locke is linked to Helvétius' ideas with the statement that,

⁴⁰⁰ Keim, p572.

⁴⁰¹ De l'Homme, X, vii, p903.

Les principes de Locke... prouvent que l'éducation nous faites ce que nous sommes: que les hommes ont entr'eux d'autant plus de ressemblance que leurs instructions sont plus les mêmes...⁴⁰²

It was a plea for recognition of what he was - one of the mainstream of Enlightenment theorists, who all claimed allegiance to the English sage.

The second recapitulation chapter is an extension of his connection to Locke - it returns to the principle of sensory perception. His readers are reminded of the important role of the senses, and of the fact that by this means humanity exercises morality through the evaluation of pleasures and pains. Helvétius summarized what would come to be known as utilitarian views thus:

Qu'ils soient heureux; voilà peut-être le seul voeu de la Nature et le seul vrai principe de la Morale...

Douleur et plaisir sont les liens par lesquels on peut toujours unir l'intérêt personel à l'intérêt national. L'une et l'autre prennent leur source dans la sensibilité physique.⁴⁰³

And, in the remaining chapters Helvétius returned to the objections which the Church has displayed to his ideas, and his anticipation of a renewed criticism upon publication of this full rendition of his ideas, in De l'Homme.

De l'Homme is a clandestine text. It was prepared 'in hiding' at the Helvétius country estate of Voré and emerged for circulation only when its perpetrator was safely beyond the reach of official retribution. The tone of the whole work reflects both his safe distance from detractors, and Helvétius' personal bitterness at his treatment

⁴⁰² Ibid, Récap., i, p948.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, Récap, ii, pp950/1.

over De l'Esprit. The author is unrepentant. In the earlier work he had respected the sensitivities of Church and State, yet they had publicly humiliated him. Now, he would go back to that same public and present his case in its pure form, with a full elaboration of his ideas. He was so convinced of the logic and social benefit of his ideas that he may well have seen it as a duty. He had certainly worked hard at transforming those epicurean and materialist ideas of his immediate intellectual forebears into an 'enlightened' philosophy. No one, with the ambitious intensity of Helvétius, would want to have left as his only legacy, the cause of the scandal of his era. De l'Homme would set the record straight. It also served to consolidate his position in the flow of epicurean to utilitarian ideas - from Gassendi and Locke to the Mills.

Acknowledged Influences: Citations in De l'Esprit and De l'Homme

The reconstruction and weighting of influences on any particular historical figure is always fraught with dangers. Quentin Skinner has written at length on this problem in his Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas, warning, amongst other things, of the expectations and pre-conceptions which a researcher brings to bear on the subject. He is also concerned about the perils of putting too significant an interpretation on similar comments by two writers, and the extent of linkage implied.⁴⁰⁴ Hence it is with some trepidation that the task of ascribing formative intellectual influences to Helvétius is approached.

⁴⁰⁴ Skinner, pp31/2.

Several methods may be employed in attempting to identify a 'critical path' of influences leading to Helvétius, to use current networking jargon. The term 'critical path' does not imply that it is the only route to some objective, merely the most efficient one, and in a sense, the most important one. Thus, in observing the influences on Helvétius, it is unlikely that any one writer can be shown to have been the sole influence, but that one will have been more important than an array of others.

One way to examine Helvétius' intellectual debt is to place his concepts in the spectrum of the development of the history of ideas. The benefit of this method is that it plots the development of ideas with time, and fits Helvétius into it. The snag with such a method though, is that it involves a linear mode of thinking, with a pre-determined beginning and end, and no alternative position for our subject author than on this line. In other words the mode of investigation pre-supposes the solution. One has to avoid what Skinner refers to as a sense that an author has a full conceptualization of the doctrine to which he is contributing.⁴⁰⁵

Another approach to the problem is to embark on a review of the opinions and arguments of a variety of scholars who have taken Helvétius as their subject. This method is useful, because it approaches a consensus of current scholarship on the subject, but at best it can be only a reiteration of ideas. Alternatively, in the worst case, it can involve the perpetuation of error.

⁴⁰⁵ See Skinner's "mythology of doctrines," Ibid, pp32-4.

The most obvious and direct way to find out who were the important influences on a particular writer is to address the question directly. It is Collingwood's call for the historian to closely identify with the subject.⁴⁰⁶ And, lacking a living author, then questions may be addressed to his works in order to close with the context of what he was doing. In the case of Helvétius, his works bear witness to his learning; they are garnished freely with references to those he finds commendable as examples to support his ideas. They may be figures from antiquity, or from recent and contemporary European literature. With the significant exception of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the term garnish is used advisedly to imply that Helvétius cites the names of eminent philosophical and literary figures in order to enhance the credibility of his own ideas. Of course, even such a direct assessment of influences on Helvétius may be defective. In a later section the fact of Helvétius' limitation of references to David Hume is discussed. Despite the questionable validity of that example, there exists the possibility that any particular writer may be under-represented due to censorship activities, or simple public disfavour.

In order to make an assessment of the 'critical path' of influence on Helvétius' philosophy all three of the aforementioned methods are visited here, to some extent. His ideas are viewed in the context of initiatives in epicurean and materialist thinking before his time, against the attributions of current scholars. However, greater emphasis

⁴⁰⁶ R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p283.

and validity is given to the ideas which the author sees fit to use, in support of his own concepts in De l'Esprit and De l'Homme. Helvétius subscribed to the epicurean and materialist ideas which were widely accepted amongst the philosophes of eighteenth-century France.

Epicurus appears to have been a suitable candidate for acknowledgement as the most misunderstood philosopher in history. His concept of happiness, as the driving force and moral arbiter of human activity, was adopted in Renaissance Europe by those who chose to interpret it as a licence for unbridled indulgence.⁴⁰⁷ Epicurus, however, intended no such interpretation, seeing 'voluptas' as a state of mental tranquillity and bodily health which was the consequence of a quite frugal life-style.

In seventeenth-century France, the writer who reminded his contemporaries of the true nature of epicureanism was Pierre Gassendi. His Syntagma Philosophicum, and the Philosophiae Syntagma examined the philosophy of Epicurus, and its implications, with a thoroughness which brought him to the threshold of conflict with religious authorities. This quotation from the Syntagma Philosophicum demonstrates why it could be taken as an influence on John Locke soon after Gassendi's own time, and later on the eighteenth-century philosophes:

Part I, Canon ii,
Every idea which is held in the mind takes its origins from
the senses.

Part IV, Canon iv,

⁴⁰⁷ The rise of 'indulgent' Epicureans in the Renaissance by no means displaced those of a closer adherence to the ancient philosopher. Examples are Erasmus, who was labelled as an Epicurean by Martin Luther, and Lorenzo Valla, who presented a form of 'Christian Epicureanism'. See Howard Jones, The Epicurean Tradition (London: Routledge, 1989), pp145-8 and pp163-5.

...we must refer... to the senses and rely upon the evidence which they supply... When the question concerns a matter which can be resolved by the understanding alone, then we are required to refer to reason, which has the power to infer from something perceived in the senses.⁴⁰⁸

Gassendi goes on to demonstrate his case by reference to sweat imperceptibly exiting the body through pores in the skin, as an example which had been used by Epicurus. Thus, Gassendi came to be labelled, in Diderot's Encyclopédie as "...le restaurateur de la philosophie d'Epicure...",⁴⁰⁹ and by Leibniz as being agreeable to John Locke.⁴¹⁰

Gassendi was conscious though, that he was not merely perpetuating the tradition of epicureanism; he was attempting to correct its drift to unseemly interpretations. He is recorded by Bernier as having noted that, because Epicurus had given the name "Voluptas" to the favour of "Indolence" of body, and "Tranquillité" of mind, then "...les Debauchez, & les Voluptueux..."⁴¹¹ had taken it as a pretext to misuse the term.

Gassendi, through Bernier, spoke against excess in the following terms:

...ce n'est point le boire et le manger continuel, ni le plaisir de l'amour, ne celui des mets exquis, et délicats des grandes tables qui fait une vie agreable, mais une raison accompagnée Sobrieté,...⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ Pierre Gassendi, Syntagma Philosophicum "Institution of Logic" in Howard Jones (ed.) Pierre Gassendi's Institutio Logica (1658) (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), pp84 & 160.

⁴⁰⁹ Diderot, Encyclopédie III (Paris: Hermann, 1976), p285.

⁴¹⁰ G.W. Leibniz, P. Remnant & J. Bennet (trans. & ed.) New Essays on Human Understanding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p70.

⁴¹¹ Bernier, VII, p73.

⁴¹² Ibid, VII, p69.

The case is made, in fact, for the onerous consequences of misuse of Voluptas. It is explained in Bernier's Abregé that "Gourmandise", the excessive consumption of wine and meat, and the excesses of "L'Amour", in fact achieve pains in the illnesses which are induced; that through the pursuit of an overly indulgent form of pleasure, just the opposite effect is achieved.⁴³ It was a plea for moderation; a return to the original philosophy of Epicurus.

Interestingly, however, Gassendi did not mark a return to the original concept of epicureanism for all of his followers. Although Locke was able to take an analytical approach to the concept, and by no means embraced the indulgence of former times, many French philosophes pursued doctrines hardly distinguishable from the views which Gassendi was attempting to correct. It is tempting then, at this juncture, to place Helvétius into the camp of those influenced by the French pseudo-disciples of Gassendi, as his epicureanism was of the distinctly indulgent variety, which James Moore refers to as the "...frivolous popular tradition"⁴⁴ - contrasting with the austere Calvinistic mode of living which Locke maintained throughout his life. But, Helvétius may also be observed to have become much less indulgent, in the form of his epicureanism, when he gave up the role of fermier générale and took up his philosophic pursuits. His most indulgent period, in his late youth and early manhood, occurred when his exposure to French authors was at

⁴³ Ibid, VII, p125.

⁴⁴ James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson" in M.A. Stewart and John Wright (eds.), (Edinburgh: [in publication], 1994), p27. Also, the two distinct traditions of Epicureanism are discussed in Chapter 5.

its strongest, and may well have been prior to a full appreciation of Locke.

In current parlance epicureanism and stoicism are distinct moral alternatives. Alasdair MacIntyre presents them in simplistic terms when he says that,

Moral advice will most naturally be either of the "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" kind or of the "Do what is right regardless of the consequences" kind... They rise to the level of universal codes in Stoicism and Epicureanism.

Stoics accept the notion of laws and consciously accept that adherence to them is virtuous, and dissent is vice.⁴¹⁵ Stoicism takes no regard of pleasure or pain in its deliberations; the phenomena are merely incidental. For Epicurus, however, morality is directly affected by the pursuit of pleasure:

...pleasure ...is the beginning and the end, of the blessed life..., because our pursuit of pleasure governs and unifies all of our rational choices and gives a structure to our lives as a whole.⁴¹⁶

The doctrine of epicureanism, however, has been subjected to interpretation, particularly on the basis of just what constitutes pleasure.

Epicurus did not conceive of a doctrine which was so far away from stoicism as it was later presented by his interpreters. For Epicurus living happily, or the pursuit of pleasure, was concerned with contentment. Eating adequately, for instance, was of greater consequence

⁴¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1966, p104 and p105.

⁴¹⁶ Phillip Mitsis, Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1988), p15.

than considerations of the content or quantity of a meal. Epicurus, unlike his 'modern' followers who give 'lip service' to virtue, found it an important element of his morality. He linked pleasure and virtue, believing that pleasure itself could only be achieved through virtuous behaviour.⁴¹⁷ Phillip Mitsis attributes modern epicureanism to the empiricists. They devised the "hedonic calculus"⁴¹⁸ which formulated a method of measurement for pleasures and pains, as Jeremy Bentham did,⁴¹⁹ implying that the epicurean ideal was served by indulging in more and greater pleasures; a far reach from the view of pleasure in contentment which Epicurus espoused. In fact, it is quite inappropriate to characterize Rousseau and Helvétius as attempting to pursue stoicism and epicureanism respectively. Rather, these two authors pursued moral doctrines which their own particular upbringing conditioned them towards. The labels of stoicism and epicureanism are merely a 'best fit', indicating only the place where observers located them on a moral spectrum. And, of course, not all social thinkers fit easily into a

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, pp47-51, p60 and p61.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p23.

⁴¹⁹ Bentham, The Principles of Morals and Legislation (New York: Hafner, 1948), pp29-32) - reprint of the author's 1823 version, containing final corrections.

particular category, as was the case with James Mill.⁴²⁰ In the case of Helvétius, however, his own philosophy, and particularly his influence on Bentham, led to the label of epicurean being attributed to a morality which differed from its original form; having common ground with the indulgent interpretations of the philosophy which Pierre Gassendi had sought to refute. Thus, by the work of eighteenth-century theorists the gulf between stoicism and epicureanism, which MacIntyre refers to as "practically narrow"⁴²¹ in its original form, widened considerably.

If the gap between stoicism and epicureanism widened in the eighteenth-century, then the gap between the two schools of epicurean thought was quite as divergent. The quantitative assessment of pleasure, or hedonic calculus, put primary emphasis on pleasure. It was an aspect of Helvétius' doctrine which Bentham pursued to the logical conclusion of putting comparative value to pleasures. This matter is addressed again, with particular respect to John Stuart Mill's redirection of utilitarianism. That redirection was only one of many occasions in the tradition of epicurean thought where a particular theorist has deemed it appropriate to refer back to Epicurus himself in order to emphasize the

⁴²⁰ John Stuart Mill said of his father,
"In his personal qualities the Stoic predominated. His standard of morals was Epicurean, inasmuch as it was utilitarian, taking as the exclusive test of right and wrong, the tendency of actions to produce pleasure and pain."

J.S. Mill, Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), pp33/4.

⁴²¹ MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p107.

essential differences between what may be called "genuine"⁴²² epicureanism and the indulgent connotation of the doctrine. It was the main feature of Gassendi's work. And, in his article on Guyau's "immoralism", Geoffrey Fidler notes "Guyau's 'renewal' of Epicurus in the context of the "...long tradition of Epicurean rehabilitation."⁴²³ In fact, in what Fidler refers to as John Stuart Mill's "infidelity to Bentham"⁴²⁴ the later utilitarian was retreating from the extreme implications of epicureanism, and in the process contributing (inadvertently) to Guyau's 'renewal'.

When Bertrand Russell describes stoicism in general terms, one can easily reconcile this philosophy with Rousseau's. He explains that Zeno, the founder of stoicism, believed "...there is no such thing as chance ...the course of nature is rigidly determined by natural laws." Further, virtue "...alone is truly good,..." and "...rests entirely with the individual." Also, the thesis of Rousseau's Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité can be identified in the stoic notion that "Men look to the past for what was best,..."⁴²⁵ Stoics believe in moral perfection, internalized by the individual. This, in fact, is the essence of

⁴²² Thomas Jefferson used the term "genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus" in taking a Mr. Short to task for his misuse of the term: H.A. Washington (ed.) The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. VII (New York: H.W. Derby, 1861), p138-141 - letter to Mr. Short dated 31st October 1819.

⁴²³ Geoffrey C. Fidler, "On Jean-Marie Guyau, Immoraliste," Journal of the History of Ideas, 1994, p84.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p85.

⁴²⁵ Bertrand Russell, "The Utilitarians" in A History of Western Philosophy (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990), p261, p262 and p269.

Rousseau's Emile. The child is to naturally develop an understanding of moral correctness. The consequences for society are described by Kennedy Roche in the assertion that,

It is not difficult, then, to see that a community of Emiles would realize the anarchist dream of a free society of perfect men - a stateless and classless society of Stoics.⁴²⁶

When, however, Cumming notes that Helvétius subscribed to "...the epicurean gratification of the passions,..."⁴²⁷ he is referring to the particularly indulgent form of the philosophy. During his early adult life Helvétius was a 'thorough-going' epicurean. His enthusiasm for masonic endeavours, at that time, would have involved him in frequent and heavy indulgences.⁴²⁸ And, of his sexual appetite, Grimm explained that,

La passion dominante de M. Helvétius était celle des femmes: il s'y livra à l'excès dans sa jeunesse. Je lui ai oui dire que ça été pendant longues années régulièrement la première et la dernière occupation de sa journée, sans préjudice des occasions qui s'offraient dans l'intervalle. Le matin, lorsqu'il était jour chez Monsieur, le valet de chambre faisait d'abord entrer la fille qui était de service, ensuite il servait le déjeuner; le reste de la journée était pour les femmes du monde.

Grimm went on to make reference to "notre philosophe épicurean", and to the "code Helvétius"⁴²⁹ as equally excusing the exploitation of society ladies, and women without morals and scruples, on the basis that

⁴²⁶ Kennedy F. Roche, Rousseau: Stoic & Romantic (London: Methuen, 1974), p51.

⁴²⁷ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p186.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p118.

⁴²⁹ Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Tome II (1812), p140 and p141.

gratification of the senses was an appropriate goal of all actions. However, in his philosophical period, in the 1750's and 60's, Helvétius is said to have "...corrected the irregularities of his youth..."⁴³⁰ Be that as it may, his theory remained with the epicurean pursuit of pleasure,⁴³¹ if his practice became somewhat moderated. So, in all his pedagogical considerations Helvétius assumed that the child is predisposed to pursue its own pleasure, or the amelioration of pain.

In order to situate Helvétius' philosophy in the history of ideas, and particularly to assert his status as most representative of Enlightenment pedagogy, it is appropriate to 'visit' those writers whom he acknowledged in De l'Esprit and De l'Homme. And, although situating his ideas has involved recognition of the tradition of epicureanism, a deeper discussion of Helvétius' own epicureanism, and consequent materialism, is a major concern of the next chapter. But, as this chapter is primarily concerned with the texts of De l'Esprit and De l'Homme, it is pertinent to examine the citations which the author presented as evidence in support of his ideas. Those writers who are cited most frequently are not necessarily the ones who exerted most influence on his views. Helvétius may well have believed that his extensive references to earlier writers merely did credit to his broad scholarship. However, they do betray the fact that the greater number of

⁴³⁰ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p126.

⁴³¹ As D.W. Smith comments in A Study in Persecution, p209, "...man's behaviour was entirely governed by sensibilité physique, his pleasures were entirely physical. And since the greatest physical pleasure was sexual intercourse, this was the ultimate aim of all human action."

the most meaningful citations (excepting those aimed exclusively at refuting Rousseau) are from French writers who may be characterised as consciously pursuing Epicurean principles.

The chain of influence is easily traced, through French authors, from Gassendi to Helvétius. J.S. Spink sees La Rochefoucauld as approving of Gassendi's "...severely virtuous portrait of Epicurus"⁴³², and Diderot's Encyclopédie identifies the duke as a second generation disciple of the epicurean revivalist.⁴³³ And, the continuity of ideas from Gassendi to Helvétius may be implied in Guyau's observation that,

...on retrouve en germe dans La Rochefoucauld une idée qui jouera plus tard un grand rôle dans les systèmes sociaux d'Helvétius et d'Owen, celle de l'heureuse influence exercée sur l'homme par le désir de la louange.⁴³⁴

This interplay of vanity with virtue leads Guyau to make a strong connection between the works of La Rochefoucauld and Helvétius. He refers to,

...le livre qui est comme la continuation et l'application sociale des Maximes, le livre de l'esprit. Si cet ouvrage eut un succès énorme, s'il fonda d'une manière assez durable en France la doctrine de l'utilitarisme, c'est que la lecture universelle de La Rochefoucauld avait préparé tout le monde à la lecture d'Helvétius...⁴³⁵

But, Guyau's use of the word germ is appropriate - Helvétius raised his own unique philosophy from the ideas of others. Momdjian notes,

⁴³² J.S. Spink, French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire (London: Athlone Press, 1960), pp139/40.

⁴³³ Encyclopédie III, p286.

⁴³⁴ J-M. Guyau, La Morale d'Epicure (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière, 1886), p218.

⁴³⁵ Ibid, p225.

Contrairement à La Rochefoucauld, Helvétius, dès le début de sa carrière, considère l'amour de soi non seulement comme une cause du mal, aussi comme une source de vertu.⁴³⁶

Thus, unlike Rousseau, who saw 'amour de soi' as only good in itself if preserved from developing into 'amour propre', Helvetius saw it as a motivating force for good or evil.

Guyau suggests that the great influences on Helvétius were in fact La Rochefoucauld, in combination with Locke, Hobbes and Spinoza, referring, in the latter case, to the fatality of the passions which is so important to Helvétius.⁴³⁷ Hobbes shared Gassendi's epicureanism, and Guyau writes of him as both a friend and disciple of the French philosopher. And, he also points out that almost all of Hobbes' principles are discernible in Helvétius' writings.⁴³⁸ Virgil Topazio says of the connection between Hobbes and Helvétius, "The psychology of self-interest, first incorporated into a philosophy by Hobbes, found its greatest champion in Helvétius."⁴³⁹ But, while one cannot deny that Helvétius may well have learned of Locke and Hobbes through Fontenelle,

⁴³⁶ Momdjian, p62.

⁴³⁷ Guyau, La Morale d'Epicure, pp238/9 and p243. Guyau's inclusion of Spinoza in the list of influences on Helvétius is the most difficult to support. He is not cited by Helvétius in the way that La Rochefoucauld, Hobbes and Locke are; this despite Spinoza's extensive discussion of the passions. And, Spinoza's awareness of the "...pervasiveness of the desire for glory..." was something which he shared with both Helvétius and Hobbes. See R.J. Delahunty, Spinoza (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p224.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, p195 and p205.

⁴³⁹ Virgil P. Topazio, D'Holbach's Moral Philosophy: its background and development (Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1956), p85.

as Saint-Lambert asserted,⁴⁰ it is obvious, from his direct citations of both authors, that Helvétius had a personal familiarity with their writings.

Along with Fontenelle, who is noted as the "...foremost man of letters in France,..."⁴¹ Ian Cumming notes that Pierre Bayle's views of the worth of education were repeated by Helvétius.⁴² Bayle was noted by Marx as having prepared France for the admission of materialist thought.⁴³ Fontenelle, on the other hand, was noted as one of the disciples of epicureanism in direct lineage from Gassendi to Voltaire, in Diderot's Encyclopédie.⁴⁴

Two outstanding literary figures who have been linked to epicurianism, and to Pierre Gassendi, are the dramatist Molière, and the poet and fabulist La Fontaine. Georges Dumesnil aptly characterises Gassendi's influence by analogy to plants, in explaining that the ideas of the latter-day epicurean came to flower with Molière, and bore fruit in the eighteenth-century.⁴⁵ Spink explains the probability that Molière

⁴⁰ Saint-Lambert, V, p221.

⁴¹ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p22.

⁴² To the extent that they were repeated, it was by implication only, as Bayle is cited by Helvétius more as an example of a man who is exiled for his ideas, than as a direct influence on his own philosophy.

⁴³ Momdjian, p25.
Karl Marx, "The Holy Family" in Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (trans. & ed.) Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society (New York: Anchor, 1967), p390.

⁴⁴ Encyclopédie III, p286.

⁴⁵ Buisson, Dictionnaire de Pédagogie, Tome I, p1146.

was exposed at first hand to Gassendi, in his youth, but proceeds to explain, however, that his epicureanism remained undogmatic. Spink also links La Fontaine to Gassendi, claiming that "His morality was consciously Epicurean..."⁴⁶ whereas P. Félix Thomas goes further, in viewing La Fontaine as an overt exponent of Gassendi's ideas. In a footnote he says, "La Fontaine dans sa fable: Un animal dans la lune, n'a fait que mettre en beaux vers l'argumentation de Gassendi."⁴⁷ The cream, then, of France's authors and philosophers, in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, owed some degree of debt to Pierre Gassendi, and their own writings were current and common literature for the generation of the youthful Helvétius, in the early 1730's.

A list of all those eminent literary figures who were called upon by Helvétius for support would be quite extensive. It includes all of those noted so far in this section, plus Corneille, Milton, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Newton and more. It is possible, though, to segregate effective references from those which are mere embellishments. Isaac Newton's name, for example, appears throughout De l'Esprit and the first volume of De l'Homme, but never by way of a contribution to the discussion of ideas; only in a 'cosmetic' mode. Also, notable for the scarcity of references to them are Gassendi and Bayle; somewhat surprisingly considering their places in the progression of French

⁴⁶ Spink, pp147-9 and pp162/3.

⁴⁷ P. Félix Thomas, La philosophie de Gassendi (Paris: 1889 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), p130.

epicureanism.

In an actual count of number of times particular writers are noted by Helvétius in De l'Esprit and De l'Homme, by far the greater number, by more than twice the nearest figure, goes to Rousseau. But, as all but a small number are highlighted for refutation, and most of those in the second volume of De l'Homme, he does not qualify for a place as a formative intellectual influence on Helvétius. This fact is, however, an indication of just how important it was for the author of De l'Homme to refute his philosophical rival. Only Rousseau's ideas, in La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile, were subjected to detailed analysis and refutation. Other authors, like Montesquieu and Montaigne, were regarded on occasion as more misguided in their views than challengers to Helvétius' philosophy. Also, the extensive and detailed refutation of Rousseau's pedagogy contrasts with the way Helvétius treats another French educational work of their era; La Chalotais' 1763 publication of De l'Education Publique. Despite a noted affinity to Locke's tabula rasa principles (and their implications for education) and his similarity in attitude to Rousseau with respect to the progress of educational assimilation,⁴⁸ La Chalotais was not overtly identified for detailed refutation. Boyd goes so far as to suggest that De l'Homme "followed" La Chalotais' advocacy of state education,⁴⁹ but in Helvétius' lack of acknowledgement one may only consider "followed" in its chronological

⁴⁸ William Boyd, The History of Western Education (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), p303.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p312.

sense.

Helvétius treated Montaigne and Montesquieu much as established authorities to be respected, but, with whom he wished to compete and overcome in philosophical excellence. Damiron observes that tendency in Helvétius, with respect to Montesquieu, when he suggests his intention,

...pour l'imiter à la fois, et le surpasser peut être... il serait venu pour élargir les voies ouvertes par Montesquieu, pour être le philosophe de tout point de la chose, dont Montesquieu n'aurait été le philosophe qu'en un point...⁴⁵⁰

Montaigne and Montesquieu may well have been Helvétius' standards of excellence in his chosen endeavour. When he came to list examples of individuals who combined prowess in the art of writing with superior skills in the art of thinking, he identified only Plato, Montaigne, Bacon and Montesquieu.⁴⁵¹ He claimed to be omitting his own contemporaries in deference to their modesty, but one suspects that it was more a consideration of his personal ambition.

In the case of Montaigne, Helvétius recognized his status in the tradition of educational ideas. He did not analyze any particular concept, but he did acknowledge the progressive articulation of concepts which had, for him, contributed to the clarity of Locke's theories.⁴⁵² However, he was not consistent in his treatment of the development of intellectual concepts; he identified Locke as a genius, and his predecessors, who include Aristotle and Gassendi, as confused.

⁴⁵⁰ Damiron, pp44/5.

⁴⁵¹ De l'Esprit, IV, vi, p471.

⁴⁵² Ibid, IV, i, p423.

And, although he obviously read Montaigne extensively, Helvétius used him not so much to demonstrate a thought process, as to provide evidence of something which Claude Adrien has already established as fact. Such appears to be the case when Helvétius looked to Montaigne to support his view that memory takes an important role in education.⁴⁵³ In fact Montaigne's claim to have a poor memory⁴⁵⁴ is more an expression of his deliberate artifice, and hardly appropriate evidence that such a condition is desirable.⁴⁵⁵

Helvétius' use of Montesquieu's works, however, was objective. He may have wished to eclipse the older philosophe, but the author of De l'Esprit by no means intended to cover all aspects of l'Esprit des Lois. Hence, Montesquieu's ideas are frequently presented as suitable support to an argument. An example is Helvétius' endorsement of Montesquieu's suggestion that destroying a tyrant does not necessarily destroy the

⁴⁵³ Ibid, III, iii, p238.

⁴⁵⁴ In his essay "De l'Institution Des Enfants," Montaigne describes his own powers of retention (or lack thereof) thus,
"Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, Sinon Plutarque et Seneque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse. J'en attache quelque chose à ce papier; à moy, si peu que rien."
Montaigne, Essais, Tome I (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p155.

⁴⁵⁵ G.H. Bantock views Montaigne's deliberate artifice as a conscious elaboration of "artificial natural naturalness" (Bantock, p115). Montaigne used deceit in support of his educational ideas, and his feigned lack of memory backs up his views on the usefulness of books, and not the importance of memory. For discussion of Montaigne's educational ideas, and the role of artifice, see Bantock, pp115-130.

Also, see Margaret M. McGowan's chapter entitled "Montaigne's Modesty" in Montaigne's Deceits: The Act of Persuasion in the Essais (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974).

tyranny.⁴⁵⁶ Also, on a matter which would become more dear to Helvétius when the 'Affair' troubled him so, he quoted and supported a theory of Lord Chesterfield's that Montesquieu's views would have been clearer (and perhaps more sensational) had he been publishing his works for a relatively uncensored English audience.⁴⁵⁷ In fact, Saint-Lambert saw De l'Esprit as elaborating some of the ideas which Montesquieu had failed to pursue far enough. He explained,

La chaîne des idées échappe dans Montesquieu, parce-qu'il est obligé d'omettre souvent les idées intermédiaires; mais cette chaîne n'existe pas moins. Elle échappe dans Helvétius, parce que les idées intermédiaires étant ou très-neuves ou très importantes, il les développe, il les étend, il les embellit.⁴⁵⁸

However, considering the consternation which the publication of De l'Esprit brought down on Helvétius, he might have been better served by observing the prudence of Montesquieu.

In summarizing Montesquieu's great work, Cassirer says that, "The kind of education and justice,... depend in a certain way on the form of the state;..."⁴⁵⁹ It is a view commensurate with Helvétius' linkage of education and legislation. But, despite Helvétius' personal admiration for Montesquieu; the ideas of these two philosophes were quite different, even considering the possibility that exposure to l'Esprit

⁴⁵⁶ De l'Esprit, III, vii, p343.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, IV, iv, p456.

⁴⁵⁸ Saint-Lambert, V, p260.

⁴⁵⁹ Ernst Cassirer; C.A. Koelln & James P. Pettigrove (trans.), The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p212.

des Lois prompted his own pursuit of philosophy. Montesquieu's work may be characterized as more subtle; he displayed none of the exuberant rhetoric which Helvétius preferred. Montesquieu, as his title suggests, wanted to discover the 'esprit général' of nations, and the way it reflects in the laws.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, in Montesquieu there is not to be found Helvétius' reliance on great men. Instead he looked at what caused great nations. Helvétius looked, however, for communal improvement through the ambitions of individuals for greatness.

Despite the lasting reputation of l'Esprit des Lois, its author sought to observe and rationalize; it was a work of historical appreciation. Helvétius was more progressive. He used historical citations merely as evidence for future benefit. His was not a passive observance, but an active pursuit of social improvement based on what he believed to be the utility of his ideas. Montesquieu's work was merely evidence of the progress of ideas to his own time.

After Rousseau, the writers cited most often by Helvétius were Corneille, Fontenelle and Locke, and to a lesser extent Descartes, Montesquieu, Newton and Voltaire. This pure count of the number of times particular writers are cited gives a deceptive impression. It implies that Helvétius was constantly comparing his ideas with the broad spectrum of the philosophers of his age. But, when all of the cosmetic citations are eliminated a different picture of Helvétius' intellectual debt emerges. Interestingly, when citations are retained only where they

⁴⁶⁰ Montesquieu; David Wallace Carrithers (ed. & intro.) The Spirit of the Laws (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), Ch. XIX, pp287-97 and introductory discussion, pp23-30.

constitute a direct role in the discussion of a particular idea, then only two authors retain an important position. Fontenelle emerges as the most prominent author overall, but his contribution is limited, essentially, to Helvétius's first major work, De l'Esprit. Locke, the second prominent author, was cited equally frequently in both major works, but enters the detailed discussion almost exclusively in De l'Homme. Other contributions, of a nature suitable to be considered as assisting in a substantial way, to the discussion of ideas, come only in De l'Esprit, from La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld and, as already noted, Montesquieu.

In De l'Esprit Fontenelle was taken by Helvétius as an example of wisdom. Even in the brief Preface he is cited in order to excuse the author for any errors which may have been presented.⁴⁶¹ Fontenelle was at "...la tête de l'empire des lettres" when Helvétius became his disciple. From Fontenelle he learned how to articulate his ideas in writing, and it was with Fontenelle that he refined his understanding of John Locke's works.⁴⁶² It was also in the reiteration of a story by Fontenelle,⁴⁶³ about the appropriateness of an adulterer lying to the husband of his lover, that Rousseau criticised Helvétius in one of the margin notes to De l'Esprit (discussed later). Fontenelle's influence on Helvétius was not only as a personal mentor, and eminent writer, but as an educational theorist, and this was described in the following way:

⁴⁶¹ De l'Esprit, Préface, p10.

⁴⁶² Saint-Lambert, V, p220/1.

⁴⁶³ De l'Esprit, II, vi, p83n.

M. de Fontenelle... fut un des premiers qui,... établit un pont de communication entre la science et l'ignorance. Il s'aperçut que l'ignorant même pouvoit recevoir les semences de toutes les vérités: mais que, pour cet effet, il falloit, avec adresse, y préparer son esprit;..."⁴⁴

So why, when Helvétius had made him his most important reference point in De l'Esprit, should Fontenelle be relegated to a minor supporting role in the later work, De l'Homme? In fact, it may not be too much to assert that in his earlier work Helvétius was still most greatly influenced by his French mentors, as La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld and Montaigne are also prominent there. In the following decade, as he prepared De l'Homme, he may well have consciously recognized the need to treat Locke's philosophy to more overt handling, raising the English philosopher's ideas from a mere embellishment to an element of the central argument.

De l'Homme was Helvétius' defence against the many critics of De l'Esprit; both covert, like Rousseau, and overt, like the civil and religious authorities. The role of De l'Homme as defender of De l'Esprit was made obvious by such statements as this, made in support of his views on corporeal sensibility:

En conservant mon opinion sur ce point je crois devoir défendre le livre De l'Esprit contre les imputations odieuses du cagotisme et de l'ignorance."⁴⁵

He may well have recognized that the defence of his ideas, particularly on education, would require a firmer philosophical foundation. For this reason his call on Locke for support went so far as the inclusion of a

⁴⁴ Ibid, IV, v, pp459/60.

⁴⁵ De l'Homme, II, viii, p186.

chapter entitled "Of the Analogy of my Principles with those of Locke". He was leaving nothing to doubt here; Locke's reputation, as well as his ideas, were to support the task of enhancing Helvétius' credibility.

In De l'Homme Helvétius made it clear that his ideas were aligned with Locke's. Despite explaining, as noted above, that Locke had cleared up the confusions of Aristotle, Gassendi and Montaigne, it is only in the later work that Locke's writing becomes something of an oracle. He is used by Helvétius to position himself historically, when he said,

Quintilian, Locke et moi disons;
L'inégalité des Esprits est l'effet d'une cause connue
et cette cause est la différence de l'éducation.⁴⁶⁶

In a way accorded to no other writer of the era immediately prior to his own, Helvétius firmly aligned his pedagogical thoughts with those of John Locke. This is not to say that he accepted all that Locke had to contribute, but he was a sufficiently substantial figure to warrant explanation of deviations. In discussion of Locke's great maxim that nine of ten people are what they are by their education, Helvétius pointed out that they differ only over the remaining ten percent.⁴⁶⁷ And, late in the second volume of De l'Homme, by way of a summary statement, Helvétius returned the reader to the same point to reassure them, and perhaps himself, that:

Les principes de Locke,... prouvent que l'éducation nous fait ce que nous sommes: que les hommes ont entr'eux d'autant plus de ressemblance que leurs instructions sont plus les mêmes;... l'analogie de mes principes avec ceux de

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, I, i, p141.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, I, p95.

Locke m'assure de leur vérité.⁴⁶⁸

That point, late in De l'Homme, is one of the "recapitulation" chapters which Helvétius employed, to quote Damiron, "...pour prouver qu'il était le disciple de Locke."⁴⁶⁹ The fact that Helvétius was able to identify the location of Locke's maxim within Some Thoughts Concerning Education⁴⁷⁰ confirms that he had first hand knowledge of it, even if via Pierre Coste's popular French translation.⁴⁷¹

The assessment of influences on Helvétius then, has to be cognisant of timeframe. As with most people, Helvétius' state of mind would have changed with time. When he was writing De l'Esprit he was greatly under the influence of his French literary forebears. He recognized the importance of Newton, Hobbes, Milton and Locke, and, although he may have retained their works, his own philosophy may well have developed based on a second-hand understanding of their ideas. By the time De l'Homme came together Helvétius had grown intellectually and he was somewhat awakened to the consequences of his own actions. Instead of hoping to take full credit for concepts which originated elsewhere it may well have appeared more prudent to outline his sources in order to

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, Récap., i, p948.

⁴⁶⁹ Damiron, p180.

⁴⁷⁰ De l'Homme, II, i, p141. Helvétius cites from the second page of Locke's Education.

⁴⁷¹ Coste's translation of the Education into French was first published in 1695. The accuracy of his work is evident from Locke's enthusiasm to work directly with Pierre Coste on the much longer, and more complex Essay, which he did over the three years from 1697. Axtell, pp89-92.

enhance their credibility and to share the blame. He had extended his horizons by travelling to England and Prussia, and the attacks on De l'Esprit had forced him to deeper reflection on how he would support his concepts. This led him to consolidate his foundations on Locke's work, and for this reason the English sage emerged from a lesser support role in De l'Esprit to become the most important supporter of Helvétius' ideas in De l'Homme. Locke's works were always a significant aspect of Helvétius' intellectual development. Saint-Lambert credited him as, "...le premier moraliste qui ait fait usage des principes de Locke,..."⁴⁷² He noted that in his youth ("au college") Helvétius had read the Essay and been so impressed that it caused a revolution in his ideas, and he became "...un zélé disciple de Locke..." Perhaps, in the euphoria of developing his important life's work, in De l'Esprit, Helvétius had been comfortable merely to present the ideas which he had elaborated from Locke's. However, when he came to defend himself in De l'Homme, he needed influential support, and none had greater credibility than the English sage; even among Helvétius' persecutors.

⁴⁷² Saint-Lambert, I, p35, and V, pp217/8.

5. Helvétius' Unique Position in the Intellectual Milieu of Eighteenth-Century France

This chapter expands upon the dialogue of the previous one. In Chapter 4 Helvétius' written works are examined. They lay out his essential ideas of sensory perception, and the consequences for social progress. The mind is seen devoid of any spiritual entity, but as material, responding, as all other types of matter, to the physical forces of nature. It was also seen that a mind without innate inclinations will need to rely on other forces in order to formulate that human uniqueness which we all treasure.

Discussion now moves beyond what Helvétius had to say in De l'Esprit and De l'Homme, to a deeper assessment of his materialist views and his belief in the important roles of chance and the passions. Helvétius' uniqueness is observed by comparison of his ideas with those of his contemporaries. The materialism of Helvétius did not align with the similarly labelled views of Diderot and d'Holbach. Also, despite Jeremy Bentham's acknowledgement that he built his principle of utility on what he read of both Hume's and Helvétius' work, these two philosophers were not in agreement on the usefulness of the pleasure/pain concept. Discussion of Helvétius' ideas also has to consider Rousseau's physical and philosophical departure from the Parisian philosophes. Jean-Jacques found his own social philosophy diverging from mainstream Enlightenment views. In his desire to address the educational implications of his ideas it was inevitable that he would clash with Helvétius, who presented a pedagogy commensurate with the materialist views of the Enlightenment. Thus, as this chapter

completes its discussion of Helvétius' ideas, and their implications, it returns to Rousseau. In so doing it prepares the way for the ongoing assessment of the critical differences in their ideas, and their actual literary conflict; the focus of the following chapter.

Helvétius as Materialist and as Educational Spokesman for 'Mainstream' Enlightenment Educational Thought

The Enlightenment, or to the French the 'siècle des lumières,' was an important milestone along the road to widespread social justice, centred in Europe. One may well argue, along with John Ralston Saul, that what became known as the Enlightenment was merely another phase of several centuries of Humanism.⁴⁷³ Whatever the case, however, it was the period in which the roles of people, church and state came under the most overtly severe scrutiny. Until that time the status quo was hardly questioned. A social structure in which the relationship of ruled and rulers had no flexibility and in which the church enjoyed a powerful veto in spiritual (and many secular) matters had prohibited intellectual inquiry for more than a millennium. But, with the beginnings of (relatively) free intellectual investigation, by the likes of Bacon, Newton and Locke in England, there followed a flood-tide of analysis, in all avenues of learning, nowhere more prolific than in eighteenth-century France.⁴⁷⁴ And, the focus of attention was nowhere more important

⁴⁷³ John Ralston Saul, Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West (Toronto: Penguin, 1993), p40.

⁴⁷⁴ The Enlightenment is commonly considered to have reached its "climax" in mid eighteenth-century Paris (and Scotland). Pappe, Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Vol. II, p89.

than on the philosophy and application of knowledge and education. As Hellmut Pappe notes, "Whatever their weaknesses, the thinkers of the Enlightenment pondered the problems of knowledge more seriously than the thinkers of possibly any other period."⁴⁷⁵ Not only was the idea of education to be reviewed, in itself it would be the engine of the changes which were consequent to the enlightened ideas of the age.

The "ideal of the Enlightenment," as Bantock suggests, is the notion of the "perfectibility of man" achieved by "ideas of gradual moral improvement such as education could provide."⁴⁷⁶ And, materialism was a 'mainstream' concept amongst the eighteenth-century philosophes. La Mettrie had declared that the human body was but a watch, and that the brain was merely the mainspring of the mechanism,⁴⁷⁷ and his text had become fundamental reading for those aspiring philosophes, like Helvétius, who came after. In La Mettrie's suggestion, that nature has made us solely to be happy,⁴⁷⁸ one may observe the embryonic form of Helvétius' pedagogical theory. Pursuit of happiness is the basis of what came to be known as Utilitarianism,⁴⁷⁹ and the essence of his teaching

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, p96.

⁴⁷⁶ Bantock, Vol. I, p258.

⁴⁷⁷ La Mettrie; G.C. Bussey (ed.), Man a Machine (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1912), pp135/6.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p121.

⁴⁷⁹ It was concentration on the hedonistic predisposition which people have to pursue pleasure which characterizes the ideas of Helvétius and Bentham. They both saw the inclination to pursue pleasure as both a basis for social improvement, and a means of control. It was in John Stuart Mill's denial of the quantitative assessment of happiness that the focus of Utilitarianism tended to the qualitative, and came to

(continued...)

method is that a good education does not come of its own accord, as Rousseau suggests, but by imposition. This is not to say that La Mettrie had the great faith in education which Helvétius was to develop, merely that in Man a Machine were contained ideas which Helvétius accepted, and developed.⁴⁰⁰

Materialism is the foundation upon which Helvétius argued his thesis, calling for the absolute supremacy of education in human development. Through the early part of De l'Homme he built his case, which is traced here through a series of short quotations. In response to his own rhetorical question he established his thesis thus:

Si dans chaque Individu les talens et les vertus sont l'effet de son organisation ou de l'instruction qu'on lui donne. Je suis de cette dernière opinion,...

Si je démontrerois que l'homme n'est vraiment que le produit de son éducation, j'aurois sans doute révélé une grande vérité aux nations.⁴⁰¹

Then, through the following steps Helvétius developed his materialist-based concept of the power of education, suggesting that, "Dans l'homme tout est sensation physique."⁴⁰² which has been translated to, "All the sensations of man are material."⁴⁰³ Fully clarifying his views, Helvétius went on to assert that,

⁴⁰⁰(...continued)
be more closely identified with 'utility,' as the word would be understood today.

⁴⁰⁰ Grossman, p68.

⁴⁰¹ De l'Homme, Intro., ii, p45.

⁴⁰² Ibid, II, i, p141.

⁴⁰³ Helvétius, W. Hooper (trans.), A Treatise on Man (London: 1810 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), II, i, p96.

...toutes les opérations de l'esprit se réduisent à des pures sensations.⁴⁸⁴

The essential feature of material which was particularly relevant to Helvétius' thesis, is that it is controllable. The 'switch' by which it is exercised is the very basis of what became Utilitarianism, thus,

...j'en conclurai que la douleur et le plaisir physique est le principe ignoré de toutes les actions des hommes.⁴⁸⁵

and

L'homme... pour les mêmes récompenses... fera en tous temps à peu près les mêmes actions.⁴⁸⁶

And, the attraction of his theory for the national leadership is presented in the utility of his ideas, thus,

Plaisir et douleur physique, voilà les seules et vrais ressorts de tout Gouvernement.⁴⁸⁷

So, in summarizing the trail of thought along which Helvétius sought to lead his reader, he asked, and answered,

Que me suis-je proposé? de faire voir que tous les hommes communément bien organisés, ont une égale aptitude à l'esprit.

This leads back to La Mettrie's (very) assertion that "L'Homme est une machine", adding the qualification that it is "...mise en mouvement par la sensibilité physique..."⁴⁸⁸

Helvétius was caught up in the optimistic outlook of the

⁴⁸⁴ De l'Homme, II, iv, p159.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, II, vi, p170.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, II, vii, p179.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, II, x, p193.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, II, x, p194.

philosophes. He was totally convinced of the value of his ideas for those implicated. If governments would only see the benefits to be achieved, then he was sure that improvement would be realised on a national scale.⁴⁸⁹ Materialism was the basis of his association with the philosophes and the ideas which he developed. He did benefit from the intercourse of ideas, in the Paris salons, yet his materialism was not that of any other, but became uniquely his own. D'Holbach and Diderot held strong materialist views, but neither carried the implications as far as Helvétius. In fact, it has been suggested, by D.W. Smith, that it was when Diderot realised the full implications of materialism, on reading De l'Homme, that he recoiled from the doctrine.⁴⁹⁰ Karl Marx went so far as to put Helvétius at the forefront of the materialist coterie, believing that only in his work did materialism become "really French."⁴⁹¹ He cites as the reason for so exalting the author of De l'Esprit the notion of "natural equality of human intelligence" and the "omnipotence of education." What Marx saw in Helvétius was not so much an original thinker, on the notions of materialism (or even utility), but the original concept of equal human intelligence. If all could be assumed equally capable of benefitting from education then real social progress was possible. Marx had studied Epicurus in great depth, for his doctoral dissertation, and was conversant with Gassendi's rejuvenation

⁴⁸⁹ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p217.

⁴⁹⁰ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p207.

⁴⁹¹ Marx, "The Materialist Conception of History", p153.

of the ancient Greek philosopher's ideas.⁴⁹²

In Helvétius' ideas, Marx saw useful background to his own theories. A pedagogy based on the natural selection process, inherent in the educational schemes of Rousseau, Diderot, or Condorcet, would hardly accord with the equalizing ideals of communism. Marx strove to develop a doctrine of social equality, and in the process he de-emphasized those factors which set individuals apart, and emphasized those which favour commonality. And so, he came to endorse Helvétius as having presented a pedagogy commensurate with his own vision of the development of modern society.

It was in a recollection of the development of materialism that Marx gave the high credit to Helvétius which is noted above. He acknowledged the way that the focus of the materialist tradition moved between England and France. He identified Bacon, Hobbes and Locke as having contributed aspects of materialist thought. Condillac is discussed, in his role as eminent Lockean, but to Helvétius, Marx attributed the central role as the French materialist. It is a far different view of him than is gained from other observations noted earlier. Instead of Helvétius as just another member of d'Holbach's materialist coterie, acknowledged more for his wealth than for his ideas, he is noted as the central focus. It does, however, confirm the suggestion, which is articulated earlier, that in his unwillingness to

⁴⁹² Karl Marx, doctoral dissertation written in 1840/1, "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature" in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp25-105.

compromise his materialism by acknowledging innate 'inclinations,' Helvétius was taking a more purely materialist position than d'Holbach and Diderot. Helvétius' educational ideas were very much in the 'mainstream' of Enlightenment thought, as he remained closer to the principal tenets of the philosophy of his era.

Marx went on from positioning Helvétius at the forefront of French materialism, to identify the shift of focus from France back to England. This is not to say that the 'tradition' was not maintained in both countries, and elsewhere; merely that critical thought and important initiatives now emanated from Bentham and his followers. So, eighteenth-century French thinkers developed theories from seventeenth-century British ideas, and, in what they developed, left a legacy for the British Utilitarians of the nineteenth-century, as well as for Robert Owen's socialism, and Karl Marx's communism.

Diderot's Pedagogical Utilitarianism: A Materialist of a Different Kind

Education is necessarily related to notions of morality and society; it will develop citizens, and citizens are society. In exercising their social roles, for any sense of peace and equilibrium, citizens need to do so in accordance with moral norms which are generally acceptable. Ernst Cassirer contrasts the differing bases of moral and social assumptions between Diderot, Helvétius and Rousseau in The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁴⁹³ Diderot's children are born

⁴⁹³ Ernst Cassirer; Peter Gay (ed. & trans.), The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp100/1.

with particular aptitudes, with the individuals in his society tending to enter communities as a natural predisposition; their morality is based on sympathy for others. Helvétius reads only personal benefit tending towards a communal benefit. Morality springs only from the individual and is hard to equate to society. Rousseau's morality also has a powerful individual aspect, but it comes with an innate sympathy for others. Thus, while Rousseau's original society is individualistic, these individuals are sufficiently empathetic to others to be able to enter into social arrangements.⁴⁴ This occurs, however, solely for the convenience of individuals; essentially for personal security, and not because there is any sense of communal destiny.

These three doctrines are such that each has points of sympathy, and of antagonism, to each of the others; they overlap in places and stand apart in others. These positions are further conditioned by Rousseau's unfriendliness to his contemporaries, and the fact that Diderot and Helvétius each subscribed to forms of materialist philosophy. In other ways though, Diderot's and Rousseau's ideas appear close, as in their emphasis and concern for nature and the natural. Paul Hazard presents this view by reference to Gustave Lanson's statement:

...Diderot the Nature-worshipper, the sensation-monger, the well-spring of enthusiasm. Roughly speaking, we should say that he was a sort of understudy to Rousseau, playing his part, and often indistinguishable from him.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See discussion in Chapter 3 and reference to A Discourse on Inequality, p100.

⁴⁵ Paul Hazard; J. Lewis May (trans.) European Thought in the 18th Century (London: Hollis & Carter, 1954), p378 - quotation from Gustave Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française.

Diderot and Helvétius are frequently characterized as friendly to each other both in terms of personality and philosophy. On the latter aspect, however, it will be seen that Gerhardt Stenger argues effectively that their interpretations of materialism were incompatible. And, despite Avédik Mesrobian's description of Diderot and Helvétius as being "...uni par un lien d'amitié très sincère", Grimm noted in 1759 that the two men had hardly any liaison, and met no more than two times in a year.⁴⁹⁶ In fact, the editors of Helvétius' correspondence note the rarity of either Diderot or Helvétius mentioning the other in their respective letter writing, noting that they have "...peu d'affinités personnelles l'un pour l'autre,..."⁴⁹⁷ Beyond the rough treatment which Diderot gave to De l'Homme, in personal correspondence several years before writing his Réfutation he also spoke of Helvétius' ideas in quite a derogatory manner. He wrote Sophie Volland, on the 4th October 1767, that,

Helvétius, la tête enfoncée dans son bonnet, decompose des phrases et s'occupe à sa terre à prouver que son valet de chiens auroit tout aussi bien fait le livre De l'Esprit que lui.⁴⁹⁸

Helvétius' "phrases" were presumably directly or indirectly destined for De l'Homme and Diderot may have been reacting to the further elaboration of De l'Esprit long before he could have had any idea of its content. In fact another letter two years later, in the summer of 1769, sees him

⁴⁹⁶ Avédik Mesrobian, Les Conceptions pédagogiques de Diderot (New York: Burt Franklin, 1913 - reprinted 1972), pp32/3.

Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Tome II (1812), p285.

⁴⁹⁷ Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, Intro, pxiii.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, Vol. III, p288.

complaining of the supposed impact of something Helvétius had said of Diderot's own credibility.

In his book, D'Holbach's Coterie, Alan Kors chooses to criticise D.W. Smith for asserting that Diderot had probably not met Helvétius before 1759.⁴⁹⁹ However, at the location of Kors' citation⁵⁰⁰ Smith presents quite a different case, believing that Helvétius and Diderot must have met in 1752, suggesting that "...it is impossible to believe that Helvétius could avoid contact with the editor of the Encyclopédie...⁵⁰¹ Kors takes as evidence of their early relationship a letter of the 10th August 1749 in which the imprisoned Diderot cites Helvétius along with several other eminent people as character references.⁵⁰² This was not so much a list of friends, however, as of people most likely to impress the reader, A.M. Berryer, Lieutenant-général de Police, and it is not convincing proof of an encounter. Circumstantial evidence, however, does suggest that they likely attended some of the same functions. But, in a social milieu which so favoured letter writing, their lack of correspondence indicates that there was no particular friendship between Diderot and Helvétius. There is then, general indication that these two philosophes were associated only by their scholarship and the occasional social encounter.

⁴⁹⁹ Alan Charles Kors, D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p31.

⁵⁰⁰ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, pp158-9.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p159.

⁵⁰² Diderot, Correspondance, Tome I (1713-1757) (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955), p87.

Their supposed closeness is seen by some as Diderot's motivation in refuting Helvétius' work. Peter Gay observes that Diderot was "...seeking to rescue Helvétius' principles from the exuberance of their author",⁵⁰³ and Jean-Marie Dolle sees Diderot as fixing the limits on Helvétius' philosophy.⁵⁰⁴ Guy Besse agrees that "Diderot combat les excès théoriques d'Helvétius." but he advises that Diderot's criticism is only "...une querelle de famille."⁵⁰⁵ An example of where Diderot believed Helvétius has carried his theories too far is in the fundamental issue of utility, or of all moral actions being based on the pleasure/pain consequence. Diderot told Helvétius that he agreed that pleasure and pain are "...toujours les seuls principes des actions des hommes" but went on to qualify his approval, saying:

J'en conviens; et cet ouvrage est rempli d'une infinité de maximes et d'observations auxquelles je dirais également, j'en conviens, mais ajouterai-je, je nie la conséquence.⁵⁰⁶

The different educational views of these philosophes was highlighted when Helvétius' view that "L'éducation fait tout" was modified by Diderot to, "L'éducation fait beaucoup."⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p516.

⁵⁰⁴ Jean-Marie Dolle, Politique et Pédagogie: Diderot et les problèmes de l'éducation (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1973), p140.

⁵⁰⁵ Guy Besse, "Observations sur la Réfutation d'Helvétius par Diderot", Diderot Studies, Vol. VI, 1964, p39 and p29.

⁵⁰⁶ Diderot, "Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé l'Homme", Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, Tome II (Paris: Garnier, 1875), p310.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, p356.

In his alienation from Rousseau, Diderot found it appropriate to refute him in a sort of passing support for Helvétius, as when he stated,

Rousseau s' imagine que tout est au mieux dans les forêts et tout au plus mal dans les villes: vous pensez que tout est assez mal dans les villes, mais que tout est au pis dans les forêts.⁵⁰⁸

However, some of the points made by Diderot are almost a paraphrase of what Rousseau set down in his margin notes to De l'Esprit. Particularly similar is this comment of Diderot's:

L'auteur de l'Esprit réduit toutes les fonctions intellectuelles à la sensibilité. Apercevoir ou sentir, c'est la même chose selon lui. Juger ou sentir, c'est la même chose... Il ne reconnaît de différence entre l'homme et la bête que celle de l'organisation.⁵⁰⁹

It is interesting to note, though, that Diderot's first reading of Helvétius' concept that "Juger ou sentir, c'est la même chose" did not alarm him, and he may be viewed as "lukewarm"⁵¹⁰ to the idea. In fact, Diderot was so satisfied with his reading of De l'Esprit that he completed his Réflexions with the approving comment that "...il sera pourtant compté parmi les grands livres du siècle."⁵¹¹ Diderot was less comfortable, however, with De l'Homme, finding many aspects which he could not (now) accept. For instance, in his Réfutation Diderot

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, p317.

⁵⁰⁹ Diderot, Réflexions sur le Livre De l'Esprit par M. Helvétius, Oeuvres Complètes, Tome III (Paris: Le Club Français du Livre, 1970), p240.

⁵¹⁰ Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis, p123.

⁵¹¹ Diderot, Réflexions, p247.

observed:

Sentir c'est juger.
Cette assertion, comme elle est énoncée, ne me paroît pas rigoureusement vraie. Le stupide sent, mais peut-être ne juge-t-il pas. L'être totalement privé de mémoire sent, mais il ne juge pas...⁵¹²

Diderot had come to a more severe objection to Helvétius' ideas than was the case in his discussion of De l'Esprit.

It may appear that Diderot had come to see the full implications of Helvétius' ideas, as is discussed in an earlier section, and has been investigated by D.W. Smith in his article "The "Useful Lie" in Helvétius and Diderot". But, the objection which Diderot made was by no means a re-alignment of his ideas with Rousseau's. Jean-Jacques' was a complete objection to the materialist principles - he was intent on demonstrating what Momdjian refers to as "...une certain faculté absolument indépendante de la sensibilité phisique,..."⁵¹³ Behind Helvétius' combination of feeling and judgement was the elaboration of a different understanding of materialism. It characterized a division between the materialism of Helvétius, and the materialist interpretations of Diderot and d'Holbach.

Gerhardt Stenger's article, "Diderot lecteur de L'Homme: une nouvelle approche de la Réfutation d'Helvétius", looks at Diderot's objections to De l'Homme in terms of the different materialist views of these two philosophes. Furbank refers to the "...loose orthodoxy or consensus of opinion among 'subversive' writers", of whom he quotes

⁵¹² Diderot, Réfutation, p300.

⁵¹³ Momdjian, p142.

Helvétius, d'Holbach and Diderot.⁵¹⁴ Stenger suggests that De l'Homme was written "Pas seulement contre Rousseau,..."⁵¹⁵ Helvétius' concept, of the equal capability of all, ran contrary to Rousseau's ideas on individuality, but neither did it fully align with the ideas of other prominent (so-called) materialists among the Parisian philosophes. So, whereas Rousseau would interpret talent and virtue as functions of his active principle, the belief in talents and virtue could have another, materialist, connotation. Helvétius' interpretation of the material system of humanity involved the notion that all people begin with similar original attributes, but there were others, particularly Diderot and d'Holbach, who drew quite different conclusions. They made no connection between assumptions of material qualities in the human 'system' and equality of capability, and in fact saw human inequalities as fundamental. Hence, for deeply differing reasons, Diderot and d'Holbach found themselves believing, as Rousseau did, in the existence of natural talents and virtues.

Summarizing the difference in philosophy of Helvétius and d'Holbach, Stenger explains:

Le point capital de la divergence de pensée entre d'Holbach et Helvétius est que le premier est un champion intraitable de l'inégalité naturelle, tandis que le second se prononce fermement pour l'égalité naturelle de tous les hommes.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ P.N. Furbank, Diderot: A Critical Bibliography (London: Minerva, 1993), p24.

⁵¹⁵ Gerhardt Stenger, "Diderot lecteur de L'Homme: Une Nouvelle Approche de la Réfutation d'Helvétius." Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 1984, p277.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, p278.

D'Holbach then, and Diderot, subscribed to a less powerful role for education. Whereas Helvétius believed that all could be educated to any capability, these other two philosophes believed in personal talents which could only be aided by education. Thus, for Diderot in particular, the artist must be born, not made. As Stenger notes, "...ce fut au dix-huitième siècle précisément la thèse des 'fatalistes', de ces matérialistes qui professaient une foi inébranlable dans la chaîne des événements..."⁵¹⁷

In refuting De l'Homme Diderot did not approach Helvétius' work in the tone of one philosopher critiquing another. No longer did he hold regard for his former colleague as one who presented a work which was one of the "grands livres du siècle", but he appeared intent on ridicule. As Stenger notes, Helvétius was characterized as "un grand simplificateur... un matérialist vulgaire," suggesting that he had the ill-luck to have Diderot as his commentator. Diderot's stature is said to have been sufficient to have "...fermé les portes à une meilleure compréhension de son oeuvre."⁵¹⁸ The contrast between their ideas is obvious, but the force of Diderot's Réfutation is surprising. De l'Homme contains little in its main theses which was not in De l'Esprit. The most significant difference in situation was that the author was deceased at the time Diderot came to pen his critique. And, although he may have come to a realization of the consequences of Helvétius' ideas, which D.W. Smith suggests, one cannot help wondering if it is not the

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, p277.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, p268 and p269.

author's absence from the scene which prompted Diderot to attempt to silence his contemporary's 'pure' materialist doctrine.

Naturally, Diderot's belief in innate talent conditioned his view of the role of education. Stenger asks, "Diderot est-il fataliste à la manière de Jacques?"⁵¹⁹ In fact, he was by no means the fatalist of his character Jacques le fataliste, because if he had been, then the formative nature would have been redundant; everything could be left for fate to deal with, much in the way of Rousseau's Emile. However, Diderot was fatalistic to the extent that he believed children to be fated, based on their personal talent, to encounter different levels of success in their educational pursuits. The inequality of their innate mental capability would render some children more capable than others. In designing an educational program, as Stenger says, "Le problème qu'il convient de résoudre est de délimiter la part de l'éducation pour atténuer cette inégalité originelle."⁵²⁰

Another way of looking at Diderot's fatalistic education, especially when compared with Helvétius' assumption that all are capable of success, is to see him as assuming that most are destined to fail. His "Plan d'une université pour le Gouvernement de Russie" (similar to Condorcet's later scheme, for France) relied on the fact that the greater number of children will not proceed far in their schooling. Diderot, of course, would not have given his scheme such a pessimistic characterization. He was satisfied, as was Condorcet, that the scheme at

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, p283.

⁵²⁰ Ibid, p289.

least offered some education to all children. It has been referred to as Diderot's "principle of utility"⁵²¹ and the corner stone of his 'université'. Diderot explained the importance of his natural selection process thus:

Qu'en arrivera-t-il? C'est que celui qui n'aura pas eu la force ou le courage de suivre la carrière de l'université jusqu'à la fin, plus tôt il l'abandonnera, et moins les connaissances qu'il l'aissera en arrière, plus celles qu'il emportera, lui étaient nécessaires.

J'insiste sur ce principe, il sera la pierre angulaire de l'édifice.⁵²²

Diderot's pedagogical utilitarianism would apportion to each individual just the amount of education for which the pupil was mentally predisposed. So, children would be taught a measure of knowledge which would supposedly equate to their capability, and all children would receive at least some fundamental level of educational enhancement. But, Gabriel Compayré is concerned that Diderot's emphasis on utility in education ignores more important factors,⁵²³ like the natural abilities and progress⁵²⁴ of the child. Diderot's pedagogy, then, is more of structure than substance, and he does not adequately address the

⁵²¹ Kathryn Aschheim, "Belles-Lettres and the University: Diderot's Plan d'une université ou d'une éducation publique dans toutes les sciences" Yale French Studies, #77, 1990, p65.

⁵²² Diderot, "Plan d'une université pour le Gouvernement de Russie", Oeuvres Complètes de Diderot (Paris: Garnier, 1875), pp42/3.

⁵²³ Gabriel Compayré, W.H. Payne (trans.) The History of Pedagogy (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1886), p323.

⁵²⁴ Compayré wrote in Buisson's Dictionnaire de Pédagogie, Premier Partie, Tome I (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1882), p707, criticizing Diderot's lack of understanding of just what the child is able to accomplish. He is criticized specifically for expecting children in elementary classes to understand the reasonings of algebra and geometry.

changing needs of a developing child, as Rousseau does in the Emile. Diderot gives the impression that the development of the child is not a matter for consideration; if it has the ability it will cope, and if not it will become a sort of natural wastage of the system. Compayré is particularly concerned that Diderot gives too much attention to the sciences, and too little to literature and the humanities. Diderot is referred to as an "ungrateful humanist" who praises the humanities whilst annihilating them in his educational scheme.⁵²⁵

Compayré is disappointed that one who presented such a powerful criticism of Helvétius' ideas should not have made a better job of his own scheme.⁵²⁶ Jean-Marie Dolle also believed that Diderot's educational scheme was a failure. His concern was not so much with the pedagogy itself, but with the ability of Russia to accept it, at that point in history. He sees Diderot's Russian university as being naive in requiring the nation to convert to a meritocracy; he claims that Diderot was putting nothing less than dynamite into the hands of Catherine the Second.⁵²⁷ Not surprisingly Catherine recognized the implications and did not light the fuse. But, while the Russians conveyed Diderot's pedagogical tract to the archives, Dolle has an interesting point concerning Diderot as educationalist. He rates Diderot as an outstanding educator, not for anything he did for the young, but for his efforts on behalf of society as a whole. Dolle sees Diderot as a pedagogue of a

⁵²⁵ Compayré, The History of Pedagogy, p324.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, p322.

⁵²⁷ Dolle, p187.

type not normally identified by the term, for his efforts with the Encyclopédie to educate his contemporaries.⁵²⁸

The comment, noted earlier from Diderot, which distinguished feeling and judgement, leads Smith to couple him with Rousseau in observing that they both "...placed the needs of the individual above those of organized society,..."⁵²⁹ This point marks a significant dividing line between Helvétius and Rousseau. The latter's improved society would occur as a consequence of developing better individuals. For Helvétius, however, if all are born equally endowed, and if all will respond in like manner to the same educational stimuli, then society as a whole can be subjected to the same improving doctrine. His is the proclamation that, "L'éducation nous fait ce que nous sommes."⁵³⁰ under the chapter heading:

"L'éducation peut tout"

Many have had faith in social improvement through education, but few with such exuberance. As Judith Shklar comments, "It was not Rousseau's view. Education might do much to avert our present miseries, but it was infinitely difficult and far from omnipotent."⁵³¹ She might well have added Diderot's name. Both Diderot and Rousseau were educational

⁵²⁸ Ibid, pp58/9.

⁵²⁹ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p197.

⁵³⁰ Helvétius, De l'Homme: de ses facultés intellectuelles, et de son éducation (London: Société Typographiques, 1773 - reprinted Paris: Fayard, 1989), X, i, p881.

⁵³¹ Judith Shklar, Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p45.

reformers, but they were less optimistic than Helvétius; his ideas offered widespread benefit, while the other two offered little to the vast majority.

The 'Germ' of Utilitarianism in David Hume

The work of the Scottish philosopher David Hume was highly respected by the French philosophes. By the late 1750's the tracts which established his eminent stature as a philosopher were in print, and he was working on his major undertaking, The History of England. Hume, who had written his Treatise on Human Nature in France, in the 1730's, enjoyed the respect, and sometimes adulation, of his Gallic contemporaries two decades later. Hume's manner was, perhaps, more sedate than some of his Continental associates,⁵²² but nonetheless they obviously appreciated both his company, and the output of his considerable intellect. He spent a good deal of time in Paris, and was an active participant in the intellectual intercourse which characterized the French Enlightenment. In his correspondence there are frequent notes of his encounters with one or other of the philosophes, and he was comfortable enough to recommend friends to the care of his

⁵²² In comparing Hume with Diderot, Grimm explained, on the 15th January 1759:

"...Hume ...n'a pas le coloris, ni peut-être la profondeur de génie de M. Diderot. Le philosophe français a l'air d'un homme inspiré:... M. Hume est comparable à un ruisseau clair et limpide qui coule toujours également et paisiblement, et M. Diderot à un torrent dont l'effort impétueux et rapide renverse tout ce qu'on voudrait opposer à son passage."

Grimm, Correspondance littéraire, Philosophique et Critique, Tome IV (Paris: Garnier, 1878), pp69-70.

associates.⁵³³

His closeness to the philosophes may also be observed in the way that the group gathered around him to warn of the difficulty he would encounter in executing his generous protection of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. On the evening before Hume's departure for England, with Rousseau, he dined with Morellet and Helvétius, and at nine in the evening went to the baron d'Holbach's residence. There the baron is said to have warned Hume that "...vous allez réchauffer un serpent dans votre sein" and others at the gathering, noted as including Grimm, Diderot, Saint-Lambert and Helvétius, are said to have supported the warning.⁵³⁴ Hume came to recognize the wisdom of their entreaties, and found that he was no mere bystander in the conflict between Rousseau and the 'mainstream' French Enlightenment thinkers.

Helvétius' respect for Hume is noted right in De l'Esprit where he is described as "...cet illustre Philosophe..."⁵³⁵ In fact, Helvétius explained to Hume that, "Votre nom honore mon livre, et je l'aurois cité plus souvent, si la sévérité du censeur me l'eût permis."⁵³⁶ One may

⁵³³ In a letter to Suard in February 1773 Hume gives a referral to George Jardine, who he has already referred to d'Alembert. He explains in the letter that he hopes Suard will introduce Jardine to baron d'Holbach's company, because it is not a place d'Alembert frequents, but there he "...would have access to the best company." The Letters of David Hume, Vol. II, p275.

⁵³⁴ Morellet, pp105/6.

⁵³⁵ De l'Esprit, II, iii, p62n.

⁵³⁶ John Hill Burton (ed.), Letters of Eminent Persons Addressed to David Hume (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1849), p7. Letter from Helvétius to Hume, 1 April 1759.

assert that Helvétius was thoroughly familiar with Hume's philosophy, and the use of the epithet 'illustrious' implies that Helvétius was proud to draw support from his association with Hume's work. There is an alternative viewpoint however, in Helvétius' claims to a preference for a wider recognition of Hume than actually transpired. As the biographer of Helvétius wrote in the 1810 English translation of De l'Esprit,

It is difficult to conceive that the name of an individual should be proscribed in a country where his works are publicly sold... I must here suspect the sincerity of the Frenchman, who probably wished to compliment at the expence of truth.⁵³⁷

This assertion, however, warrants further review.

The English biographer, from his vantage point in 1810, does not appear to have fully appreciated the status of censorship activities in France, with respect to Hume's works, at the time of publication of De l'Esprit in 1758. In his article entitled "David Hume and the Official Censorship of the 'Ancien Régime'" Laurence Bongie traced the most notable events in the course of Hume's attempts to have his works published in France. While the translation of Political Discourses was freely available from 1754, Hume had correctly assumed that the Essays concerning human understanding would fail to receive approval.⁵³⁸ However, a German translation was openly published in Prussia in 1755,

⁵³⁷ Helvétius, De l'Esprit or Essays on the Mind and its several faculties (London, 1810 - reprinted, New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), pxiv.

⁵³⁸ Information in this paragraph on Hume's experiences with the 'official censorship' in France are taken from Laurence L. Bongie, "David Hume and the Official Censorship of the 'Ancien Régime'," French Studies, Vol. XII, 1958, pp234-246.

and a French translation of it appeared at about the same time. Thus, at the time De l'Esprit went to press, Political Discourses was openly available, but the Essays were still prohibited, yet, clandestine copies were 'on the streets' in Paris, and may well have been available to Helvétius. Bongie notes the confiscation of two copies of Hume's Essais philosophiques, in Paris, on the 8th August 1758, two days prior to the revocation of the 'privilege' for De l'Esprit (not that this implies any direct connection, merely that this work was available, in French, during that period). So, we have to take Helvétius' word on the matter. Hume's political work was openly available in French, but the Essays were not. And, while it is recognized that Helvétius did not have a good command of the English language,⁵³⁹ he may well have had access to a clandestine copy of the Essays. And, reflections from that work would undoubtedly have attracted the censure of Malesherbes' 'book police'.

If Helvétius held Hume's work in high regard, the feeling was not mutual, though it is likely that the Scottish philosopher led the Frenchman to believe that his work was held in high esteem.⁵⁴⁰ Hume did write Helvétius to object to the faith he displayed in the notion of interest. The letter, in which Helvétius had noted Hume's role in De l'Esprit, was primarily a defence against the Scottish philosopher's objection, in which the Frenchman claimed that, "Le plaisir et la

⁵³⁹ Helvétius noted, in the letter to Hume dated 1st April 1759 (cited above), that his other preoccupations "...m'avoient distrait de l'étude de la langue Anglois;..." p9.

⁵⁴⁰ Saint-Lambert probably echoed Helvétius' understanding when he said, "En Écosse Hume et Robertson en parlerent comme d'un ouvrage supérieur." Saint-Lambert, IV, p264.

de douleur, et par conséquent l'intérêt, doivent donc être les inventeurs de toutes nos idées,..."⁵⁴¹ Hume is also believed to have influenced, or written, an article in the December 1758 issue of The Critical Review.⁵⁴²

It summarizes De l'Esprit, and its author, in the following manner:

...M. Helvétius a writer of the first rank. Upon the whole, however, we are of the opinion, that he is rather an author of great reading than of deep judgement, of lively sensations, and quick apprehension, than of reflection, less a philosopher than a fine, elegant and polite writer.

David Raynor notes the similarity of this critique of Helvétius⁵⁴³ with a note contained in a letter to Adam Smith, in which Hume said,

I believe I have mentioned to you already Helvétius's book De l'Esprit. It is worth your reading, not for its philosophy, which I do not highly value, but for its agreeable composition.⁵⁴⁴

Hume's critique, in effect, down-grades Helvétius' work. The Frenchman's central ambition was to be recognized as an author of the stature of Montesquieu, and one of the greatest philosophers of his (or any) age, yet from Hume he received a failing grade. Is that enough to condemn Helvétius' ideas, or is it appropriate to look for a cause of Hume's rejection?

⁵⁴¹ Helvétius letter to Hume, 1st April 1759, p8.

⁵⁴² David Raynor, "Hume's critique of Helvétius's De l'Esprit" in Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 215 (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1982), p225 and p227. (The December 1758 review is quoted in full with this article)

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p224.

⁵⁴⁴ Letters of David Hume, Vol. I, p304. Letter to Adam Smith, 12 April 1759.

At the core of De l'Esprit was Helvétius' hedonistic morality which asserted that people will always err to decisions which favour happiness or alleviate sadness. Two decades before reading De l'Esprit Hume had visited the same concept. It led him to write, in a tone which would be quite familiar to La Mettrie, that, "The chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain;..." leading him to explain that,

...whatever mental quality in ourselves or in others gives us satisfaction, by the survey or reflexion, is of course virtuous; as everything of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious.⁵⁴⁵

It is this argument which leads some scholars, like John Plamenatz, to view David Hume as the "founder of utilitarianism."⁵⁴⁶

When Jeremy Bentham came to acknowledge the originator of the concept of utility it was to David Hume that he directed his readers. In the Fragment on Government he explained,

Under the name of the principle of utility, (for that was the name adopted from David Hume), the Fragment set up, as above, the greatest happiness principle in the character of the standard of right and wrong in the field of morality in general, and of Government in particular.⁵⁴⁷

Hume's faith in the analysis of morality by the pleasure/pain assessment, however, was not all-encompassing, to the extent that he saw

⁵⁴⁵ David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (London: Thomas Longman, 1740), reprinted L.A. Selby Bigge (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp574/5.

⁵⁴⁶ John Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p22.

⁵⁴⁷ Jeremy Bentham, "A Fragment on Government" in J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (ed.'s), A Comment on the Commentaries and a Fragment on Government (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), pp508/9.

limits to its usefulness. He said that "...there are other virtues and vices besides those which have this tendency to the public advantage and loss."⁵⁴⁸ In other words, Hume endorsed the concept of virtue based on utility, but declined to pursue it to its ultimate conclusion.⁵⁴⁹ He may have stimulated Bentham's thinking on his greater happiness concept, but he was by no means a thorough utilitarian; he did not have complete faith in utility to the extent which Helvétius and Bentham had.⁵⁵⁰

One must take care, however, not to view Hume as in some way inconsistent in not pursuing 'utility' to the ultimate conclusions of Helvétius and Bentham. In the case of Helvétius (to be followed by Bentham) he began with the premise that all moral judgement may be based upon an assessment of the potential balance of pleasure and pain consequent upon a decision. From that point he went on to develop his utilitarian thesis and, from that, his pedagogy.

David Hume, however, came to approach the notion of 'utility' from a different direction. In discussion of Francis Hutcheson's contribution to Hume's philosophy, James Moore paraphrases Kemp Smith's assertion

⁵⁴⁸ Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, pp578/9.

⁵⁴⁹ Elie Halévy also notes the 'dualism' in Hume; a mutual incompatibility between his rationalistic viewpoint and his scepticism. The rational theory of 'utility' hardly blends with Hume's requirement to question causes. Halévy; Mary Morris (trans.), The Growth of Philosophic Rationalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p10.

⁵⁵⁰ It was what Albert Keim has called the "...petit différend entre Hume et Helvétius,..." Helvétius; sa vie et son oeuvre, p224. James E. Crimmins notes Bentham's critique of Hume's ideas of utility as "...'altogether vague' and consequently of little practical use' Secular Utilitarianism: Social Science and the Critique of Religion in the Thought of Jeremy Bentham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p75.

that Hume was in fact pursuing the thesis that:

...virtue and vice are perceived not by reason but by feeling or sentiment, that moral judgements are made by the instinctive, not the cognitive, or rational parts of our nature.⁵⁵¹

The notion of pursuing pleasurable, as opposed to painful, options is a rational process; conflicting in principle with the instinctive. Hume argued that such a system "...is not consistent with experience."⁵⁵² Experience would have us pursue some courses for non-utilitarian reasons, i.e. for reasons not rationally based.⁵⁵³ But Moore notes, "Hume would insist that moral ideas must be based upon experience."⁵⁵⁴ So, when Hume made the distinction, which is noted above, that "there are virtues and vices besides those which have this tendency to the public advantage..." he was asserting that the utilitarian calculation has limited validity, and goes only so far in explaining the nature of moral judgements.

This is not to say that Hume's rejection of the rational assessment of morality, which Bentham would develop into his calculus, rendered his ideas as somewhat unscientific. Moore notes that Hume derived his "...topics and themes..." of morality from the ancient and modern Epicureans. And, whereas the notion of justice may be termed instinctive, it is likewise utilitarian. As Moore quotes Epicurus,

⁵⁵¹ Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson", p23.

⁵⁵² Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, p578.

⁵⁵³ See Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson", pp49/50.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, p26.

"Justice is nothing in itself... Mankind, united in Society, discovered the Utility and Advantage of agreeing among themselves."⁵⁵⁵ So, Hume's utilitarianism is not deficient - it merely refuses to place everything on the scales of induced pleasure and pain. Instead it asserts that the utility of justice is recognizable in the social harmony which it offers. Hume was thus able to proceed to explain his 'experimental method in morals' in a complete sense; an attempt to handle moral philosophy according to the rules of science. Helvétius would later claim the same motive for De l'Esprit.

The contrast between Hume and Helvétius may be observed in the 'temperament' of their works. It has been noted that Helvétius takes the tone of one who is disclosing to a friend a monumental discovery; he is exuberant with his assertions. Hume, on the other hand, displays in his work the character which Grimm described as being like 'a clear and limpid stream'. So, in discussing the basis of moral choice Helvétius was enthusiastic in the pursuit of pleasure as the arbiter for all situations. Hume was much more cautious, as may be noted by reference to the final paragraph of the introductory section of Book III of A Treatise of Human Nature, "Of Morals".

Hume titled his first section, "Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason"; just the opposite of Helvétius' claim to use pleasure and pain as the basis of reasoning an appropriate moral choice. Thus, instead of a straightforward method of handling moral choice, Hume emphasized caution, saying,

⁵⁵⁵ See Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson", pp27/9.

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason.⁵⁵⁶

That "is" does not lead to "ought" displays none of the simplicity of Helvétius' ideas.

In fact, that paragraph, placed to set the tone for the whole of Book III, and its subject "Of Morals", remains a subject of scholarly debate.⁵⁵⁷ MacIntyre suggests that,

...if the current interpretation of Hume's views on "is" and "ought" is correct, then the first breach of Hume's law was committed by Hume.⁵⁵⁸

Hume clearly affirms that the justification of the rules of

⁵⁵⁶ Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, pp469/70.

⁵⁵⁷ A.C. MacIntyre's "Hume on "is" and "ought"" in The Philosophical Review, 1959, pp451-460, has drawn considerable critical comment including, R.F. Atkinson, "Hume on "is" and "ought": A Reply to Mr. MacIntyre" (pp231-8) and M.J. Scott-Taggart, "MacIntyre's Hume" (pp239-44), both in The Philosophical Review, 1961; R. David Broiles, The Moral Philosophy of David Hume (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp85-94; Nicholas Capaldi, Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp55-95.

⁵⁵⁸ MacIntyre, "Hume on "is" and "ought"", p452.

justice lies in the fact that their observance is to everyone's long term interest; that we ought to obey the rules because there is no one who does not gain more than he loses by such obedience. But this is to derive an "ought" from an "is." ...Hume is contravening his own prohibition.⁵⁵⁹

MacIntyre also suggests that the "...vulgar systems of morality..." which Hume critiqued was a reference to conventional religious morality in the eighteenth century.⁵⁶⁰ But, Atkinson suggests that Hume was not aiming his criticism at the Church, but at "...the "vulgar dispute" concerning the benevolence of self-love in human nature..."⁵⁶¹ On Hume's warning to beware of coupling the facts of an "is" situation with the vagaries of an "ought", interpretations are too complex to warrant analysis here. Suffice it to take this as an example of a most sophisticated philosopher failing to fully articulate his meaning.

Despite ongoing debates on certain points of Hume's moral philosophy, his juxtaposition with respect to the utilitarianism of Helvétius (--> Bentham, --> the Mills) is clear. Self-love fails to account for all moral considerations. Hume's utilitarianism focused upon the pleasure-pain assessment, but asserted that some aspects of morality could not be dealt with there.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p457.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, p464.

⁵⁶¹ Atkinson, p236 - Capaldi, however, agrees with MacIntyre on this point, p75.

⁵⁶² David Fate Norton explains,
"Hume shows that the selfish theory cannot be correct because it cannot account for the crucial aspects of our experience. The selfish theory cannot account for our competent use of moral language or the fact that we give our approbation to actions remote from us or clearly contrary to our interests."
(continued...)

Hume cannot be acknowledged as having exercised so great an influence on the thought of Jeremy Bentham as did Helvétius. The French educational philosopher's thesis was adopted in totality by the founder of what became known as the Utilitarians, but Hume's was a positive, yet not exclusive, influence. Hence, Hume's conditional support of the principle of utility gave Bentham some concern, and despite reference to the Scottish philosopher's work as "...that celebrated book;..." he did not see, "...any more than Helvétius saw, what need there was for exceptions."⁵⁶³ In other words, Bentham looked for an unconditional utilitarianism, and he found it in the more complete materialist articulation of Helvétius.

Bentham, as F.C. Montague put it in 1891, was looking for a test of the "worth of every particular law."⁵⁶⁴ So, rather than attempting to delve into the mysteries of any particular branch of philosophy, Bentham was a man of practical purpose, a technician, working with 'utility' as a tool. Writing in 1900, Leslie Stephen also accentuated the practicality of Bentham, saying:

Bentham founded not a doctrine but a method... the doctrine which came to him simply as a general principle was in his hands a potent instrument applied with most fruitful results

⁵⁶²(...continued)

Utility pleases us because, finally, we are to some degree other-regarding beings, and utility contributes to the good of others.

The Cambridge Companion to Hume (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p173.

⁵⁶³ Bentham, "A Fragment on Government," p440.

⁵⁶⁴ F.C. Montague in the intro to Bentham, A Fragment on Government (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p5.

to questions of immediate practical interest.⁵⁶⁵

And, John Stuart Mill clearly noted the fact that Bentham was in no way picking up Hume's torch when he said:

If Bentham had merely continued the work of Hume, he would scarcely have been heard of in philosophy; for he was far inferior to Hume in Hume's qualities, and was in no respect fitted to excel as a metaphysician.⁵⁶⁶

In a letter to his brother Sam, written in 1777, Bentham referred to a short book which had recently been published on Hume, as doing "...service to the cause."⁵⁶⁷ In fact, that was Hume's role for Bentham; he was useful to the cause. He was not, however, a central focus of 'the cause.'

In a 1776 letter to Voltaire, however, Bentham wrote, "I have built solely on the foundation of utility, laid as it is by Helvétius."⁵⁶⁸ It was for Claude Adrien Helvétius that Bentham reserved his greatest compliments as the source of his inspiration; despite the fact that, according to John Stuart Mill, "Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds."⁵⁶⁹ With respect to Helvétius just the contrary appears true, with Bentham's correspondence indicating an attitude of

⁵⁶⁵ Leslie Stephen, The English Utilitarians, Vol. I (London: Duckworth, 1900), p236.

⁵⁶⁶ John Stuart Mill, "Bentham" in Alan Ryan (ed.), J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham, Utilitarianism and Other Essays, (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p135.

⁵⁶⁷ Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Vol II, p38. Bentham wrote, "There is a very short life of D. Hume come out, written by himself. I have just been reading it: it will do service to the cause."

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, Vol. I, p367.

⁵⁶⁹ "Bentham", p146.

nothing less than adoration for the French philosophe. He is referred to as "le divin Helvétius," and in 1778 Bentham told d'Alembert that his (utilitarian) system was "...fondée... sur les idées de M. Helvétius." Also, to Jean de Chastellux he exclaimed, "...Helvétius a été mon oracle."⁵⁷⁰ And, the Rev. John Foster was told of the inspiration which Bentham derived from Helvétius in the following terms:

...from Helvétius... I got a standard to measure the relative importance of the several pursuits a man might be engaged in: and the result of it was that the way of all others in which a man might be of most service to his fellow creatures was by making improvement in the science which I had been encouraged to study by profession. ...from him I learnt to look upon the tendency of any institution or pursuit to promote the happiness of society as the sole test and measure of its merit; and to... regard the principle of utility as an oracle which if properly consulted would afford the only true solution that could be given to every question of right or wrong.⁵⁷¹

From Helvétius then, Bentham believed he had gained a solution to every question; he had a thorough and in no way conditional tool, and he received it not from the great philosopher but from the pretender to the title.

If the generalization can be excused, Helvétius appears to have had more trouble with his friends than with his enemies. That is to say, his enemies, in church and state, actually did him no serious material harm, and after the initial furore of 1758 into 1759 the possibility of prosecution diminished quickly. And, despite his acute discomfort at the time, Helvétius may well have come to realize that the 'Affair'

⁵⁷⁰ Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. I, p261 (letter to Sam Bentham dated 25/6th September 1775), and Vol. II, p117 and p121.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, Vol. II, p99.

ultimately did more to enhance his reputation than to hinder it. Unfortunately, however, it was not the type of reputation which he was seeking. The reputations of eminent philosophers are not enhanced by the type of increased readership which pursues a scandalous work. In an analogy to current conditions, one might say he found his fame in the 'tabloids' while seeking it in the educational and literary supplements.

Helvétius worked hard at his chosen project. For a man raised to value leisure over labour he demonstrated single-mindedness and industry. Despite the characterizations of Grimm and others, Helvétius was not a fickle character. Jules Barni aligned himself in opposition to the philosophy of Helvétius, but in summarizing his character, felt obliged to go further than Grimm, in his assessment that:

Il fut plus qu'un galant homme: il eut la passion de la bienfaisance, et pour lui l'humanité ne fut pas seulement une affaire d'esprit, mais de coeur.⁵⁷²

Also, Saint-Lambert's personal experience of Helvétius led him to describe his fellow philosophe as a man who took firm action when he encountered examples of social injustice.⁵⁷³ His pursuit was not driven by personal ambition alone then, it also bears the hallmark of one who holds a deep concern for the welfare of humanity. In his prior education, coupled with his research upon adopting his philosophical project, Helvétius became familiar with the course of epicurean thought to his own time. Consequently, in the Enlightenment concept of

⁵⁷² Jules Barni, Les Moralistes Français au Dix-Huitième Siècle (Paris: 1873 - reprinted, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), p136.

⁵⁷³ Saint-Lambert, V, pp226-8, pp267-70.

materialism he chose to frame a philosophy of education. Helvétius defined his educational philosophy around the tenets of materialism. Hence, his pedagogy was aligned with the prevailing flow of enlightened ideas in his era. Rousseau's education however, was a central aspect of his counter-Enlightenment philosophy, and Diderot's (and later, Condorcet's) pedagogical scheme was so structured to identify and reward the 'talented' that it betrayed the first principles of materialism. But Helvétius was unswerving in his determination to apply materialist principles to the benefit of society through the complementary reforms of education and legislation.

In his quest for lasting fame Helvétius appears to have had few sincere friends. His wealth and generosity gained him 'fair-weather' friends but most were not ready to give him clear, overt, support, and several were covertly critical. Even at his death Grimm was more concerned to discuss Helvétius' youthful extravagances than to pursue any aspect of his ideas. David Hume, who Claude Adrien considered a good friend, was critical of his 'philosophy' in correspondence with others, and Denis Diderot took the opportunity of the posthumous publication of De l'Homme to detonate a veritable explosion of criticism which must have been pent up within him for all of the decade-and-a-half since he had seen the same ideas in De l'Esprit.

At least in Jean-Jacques Rousseau Helvétius recognized his detractor, and could react accordingly. For that reason the (critical) interface between them was clear; in each case there exists documentation outlining the reasoned rejection of the other's

principles. And, assessment of that interface is the task of the next chapter. This chapter, however, proceeds from contrasting Helvétius with others who might have been portrayed as holding like views, to a deeper discussion of the roles of chance and the passions. It then links these concepts with Helvétius' affiliation to the more 'frivolous' epicureanism of his era.

Chance, Passions, and Environment in Helvétius

Without an active component in the mind, what differentiates one brain from another? If all are equally receptive, then the differentiating components must lie outside the mind. Helvétius does subscribe to outside actions as important forces in determining what the child will become, in the way of chance and education. He also retains great faith in the passions; an internal force which will be exercised differently between individuals. In De l'Esprit he noted the relationship of these three forces, thus:

Les objets que le hazard et l'éducation placent dans notre mémoire, sont à la vérité la matière premier de l'esprit; mais cette matière y reste morte et sans action, jusqu'au moment où les passions les mettent en fermentation.⁵⁷⁴

'Chance' and 'passions' are the forces which determine the difference between the ordinary, and the great.

Because he believed all people to be endowed with similar mental capability, except those who are born in some way incapacitated, Helvétius needed to rationalize the differences evident in reality. If

⁵⁷⁴ De l'Esprit, IV, xvi, p546.

we all begin at the same starting point, and receive the same education, will we not all become equally endowed? Helvétius answers yes, and no. Yes, if an equal education were possible, but no, because the most minor chance encounter could sufficiently adjust an individual's development to render it unique.

In De l'Esprit the author explained the effect of chance by analogy with the growth of trees:

...qui peut assurer que la différence de l'éducation ne produise la différence qu'on remarque entre les esprits? Que les hommes ne soient semblables à ces arbres de la même epece, dont le germe, indestructible et absolument même, n'étant jamais semé exactement dans la même terre, ni précisément exposé aux même vents, au même soleil, aux mêmes pluies, doit, en se développant, prendre nécessairement une infinité de formes différentes.⁵⁷⁵

Thus, no two samples can suffer identical experiences, and chance will be an important cause of what the individual becomes. To Helvétius, success and failure in life may be attributed directly to chance.⁵⁷⁶ Helvétius takes the point much further in De l'Homme, providing examples of those he believed achieved greatness based on chance experience or encounters. Interestingly for this discussion, Helvétius quoted Rousseau as a "chef d'oeuvre du hasard"⁵⁷⁷ (or chance) for his good fortune in

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, III, i, p233.

⁵⁷⁶ Helvétius explains that, "l'inégalité des Esprits" is the consequence of only two possible causes:

"...l'enchaînement différent des événemens des circonstances et des positions où se trouvent les divers hommes (enchaînement auquel je donne le nom de hazard).

L'autre est le desir plus ou moins vif qu'ils ont de s'instruire." De l'Homme, III, i, p309.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, I, viii, p77.

choosing to take a negative stance in the submission of his Discours sur les sciences et les arts to the Dijon Academy in 1750. For Helvétius, because Rousseau's fame began with his winning that important prize, it was to chance that Rousseau owed his fame, and his literary skill, and the weight of his ideas, have no credit. William Shakespeare is presented⁵⁷⁸ as a further example, with chance seen as the cause of his greatness, propelling the playwright from the family wool business to become a fugitive from the law in London. That chance relocation to the English capital is seen as the cause of Shakespeare's greatness, and not the talent which set him apart from all those other vagrants who went to the great city seeking fortune, or hiding from their past.

There is a converse argument to be made with respect to Helvétius' concept of the role of chance. If chance makes the difference between the ordinary and the great, are not the mass of us ordinary people only held in our current lowly state for the lack of being touched by the magical wand of chance? The author of De l'Homme makes such a claim, prompting Peter Gay to observe caustically that, "In the light of such coarseness, the only thing that surprises us is the esteem in which Helvétius was held by Diderot."⁵⁷⁹ But, as Stenger notes, Diderot's own treatment of Helvétius could be quite as coarse.⁵⁸⁰ As is often the case with Helvétius, he merely carries a good point to the ultimate extent of logical elaboration. Chance is a product of environment, and Helvétius

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, I,viii, p74.

⁵⁷⁹ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p514.

⁵⁸⁰ Stenger, p269.

is very much an environmentalist. The environment in which a child is raised will influence what he becomes, and will condition chance encounters. To the extent that chance has such a determining influence on the child's prospects, it is important that only good chance encounters are allowed. Thus the child, who can be moulded to anything, must be raised in a carefully controlled environment.

The role of chance in determining the success or failure of the individual likely emanated for Helvétius, as Cumming suggests⁵⁸¹, from La Rochefoucauld. There are direct similarities in tone to the effects he attributes to 'fortune' and those Helvétius attributes to 'chance'. La Rochefoucauld suggested that "La fortune fait paraître nos vertus et nos vices, comme la lumière fait paraître les objets" and, "Quelques grands avantages que la nature donne, ce n'est pas elle seule, mais la fortune avec elle qui fait les héros."⁵⁸² However, despite the particular similarity of this second quotation to a theme in Helvétius, La Rochefoucauld's influence on him is limited; he would by no means fully comply with his protégé. An aspect of La Rochefoucauld's 'fortune' which is necessarily absent from Helvétius' ideas is fatalism; it would imply some inclination of bias, or a pre-existing force operating on the individual. It has been seen that fatalism differentiates Diderot's materialism from Helvétius'. For Claude Adrien all are capable of educational success, but for Diderot that privilege is reserved for only

⁵⁸¹ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p69.

⁵⁸² La Rochefoucauld, Maximes 380 and 53, Oeuvres complètes de La Rochefoucauld (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1957), p414 and p457.

a few. Chance, for Helvétius, is a purely random occurrence, and he would not have accepted La Rochefoucauld's assertion that,

Il semble que la nature ait prescrit à chaque homme dès sa naissance des bornes pour les vertus et les vices.⁵⁸³

Helvétius' chance will occur to its beneficiary, or victim, by something akin to luck.

In his view of fortune (or chance) as carrying both a positive and a negative connotation La Rochefoucauld echoed the philosophy of Epicurus. Epicurus feared chance. It may be a force for good, but as DeWitt notes, "The attitude recommended toward her by Epicurus was defiance."⁵⁸⁴ So, instead of emphasizing chance as a means of social enhancement - as Helvétius proclaimed it - Epicurus thwarted chance by the exercise of a simple lifestyle. The lower one's aspirations to luxury and happiness, then the less one is susceptible to chance disappointments. Only the man of wealth fears its loss. In chance then, as in other aspects of 'epicureanism', Helvétius favoured the modern indulgent interpretation of the ancient Greek philosopher's concepts.⁵⁸⁵

Chance, however, is not the only route which Helvétius' child can take to attain greatness. If chance will not touch the child with its

⁵⁸³ Ibid, Maxime 189, p432.

⁵⁸⁴ Norman Wentworth DeWitt, Epicurus and his Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p177.

⁵⁸⁵ For a discussion of 'chance' in Epicurus' works, and correlation with his theory of the movement of atoms, see:

- Ibid, pp172/7.
- J.M. Rist, Epicurus: An Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp46-52.
- Guyau, La Morale d'Epicure, pp88/91.

magic wand, then maybe the passions will do it. In fact chance and passions have an inter-connected relationship, which Helvétius explained thus:

Les semences des découvertes présentés à tous pour le hazard, sont stériles, si l'attention ne les féconde. La rareté de l'attention produit celles des génies. Mais que faire pour forcer les hommes à l'application? Allumer en eux les passions d'émulation, de la gloire et de la vérité. C'est la force inégale de ces passions, qu'on doit regarder en eux comme la cause de la grand inégalité de leurs esprits.⁵⁸⁶

Passions feed ambition, envy, and all of those attributes which induce a lust for glory in certain people, and destine them for advancement beyond their fellows. Horowitz explains the Helvetian notion of passions as "...every person's desire for self-expression", and beyond being the "...desire to achieve recognition, power and happiness..." they constitute the "...initial psychological step in bringing these goals about."⁵⁸⁷ Even the passions which drive men to militarily heroic actions are stimulated by the expectation that with success will come some happier circumstance.

Helvétius was exuberant in his claims for the passions. Locke, as noted earlier, saw the proper acquisition of knowledge as the appropriate way to use our God given faculties; a duty to our maker. But, for Helvétius Locke's ideas were too close to a morality which saw virtue in the subjective notion of duty. Morality was objective for Helvétius and "...l'activité de l'esprit dépend de l'activité des

⁵⁸⁶ De l'Homme, III, iii, p317.

⁵⁸⁷ I.L. Horowitz, Claude Helvétius: Philosopher of Democracy and Enlightenment (New York: Paine-Whitman, 1954), p160.

passions."⁵⁸⁸ As to the origins of passions, however, Helvétius appeared uncertain. On the one hand he did not believe them to be innate, but in the following passage he appears to contradict himself, attributing the origins of these driving forces to be in "latent seeds". He said,

...passions ne nous sont donc pas immédiatement données par la nature; mais leur existence, qui suppose celle des sociétés, suppose encore en nous le germe caché de ces mêmes passions. C'est pourquoi, si la nature ne nous donne, en naissant, que des besoins, c'est dans nos besoins et nos premiers desirs qu'il faut chercher l'origine de ces passions factices, qui ne peuvent jamais être qu'un développement de la faculté de sentir.⁵⁸⁹

Are "latent seeds" any more than the talents which Diderot would see the artist as fated to develop? The author leaves the reader to take a preferred answer.

Helvétius used the term passion in the fullness of its meaning. He likewise meant the passion which will drive men to feats of valour, the passion which will drive people to dedicate themselves to a cause, and most of all, the passion which drives men in their pursuit of women; an activity which saw most open expression in the fashionable society of the French ancien régime. If excitement of the passions stimulates men to greatness, the motive force of that excitement is amorous ambition. In De l'Esprit the author explained, speaking only to men, that "...l'amour des femmes est, chez les Nations policées, le ressort presque unique qui les meut."⁵⁹⁰ He explained this assertion in a

⁵⁸⁸ De l'Esprit, III, viii, p286.

⁵⁸⁹ De l'Esprit, III, ix, p289.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, III, xii, p305.

footnote, thus,

...parmi ces plaisirs, je suis sans doute, en droit de choisir celui des femmes, comme le plus vif et le plus puissant de tous. Une preuve qu'en effet ce sont les plaisirs de cette epece qui nous animent, c'est que l'on n'est susceptible de l'acquisition des grands talens et capable de ces résolutions désespérées, nécessaires quelquefois pour monter aux premiers postes, que dans la premiere jeunesse,... Mais, dira-t-on, que de vieillards montent avec plaisir aux grandes places? Oui: ils les acceptent, ils les desirent même: mais ce desir ne mérite pas le nom de passion, puisqu'ils ne sont plus alors capable de ces entreprises hardies et de ces efforts prodigieux d'esprit qui caractérisent la passion.

Greatness then, is achieved by the appropriate excitement of the passions, in youth. The passions which will stimulate sexual drive will likewise be the cause of all success. The conquest of women, conquest of armies, conquest of one's working contemporaries; all are gauges of success, and all attain a peak of accomplishment, for Helvétius, in the newly matured human male. Through this notion the 'love of glory' may be harnessed, by education, to success in a chosen endeavour. As Helvétius asserted,

...j'en conclus que la passion de la gloire est commune à tous les hommes qui se distinguent en quelque genre que se soit; puisqu'elle seule, comme je l'ai prouvé, peut nous faire supporter le fatigue de penser.⁵⁹¹

The claim of a 'proof' is a little too strong, and it would have been better claimed as a demonstration. This type of claim is indicative of Helvétius' belief that he was treating his investigation of the mind in a scientific manner.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, IV, xiv, p524.

The attributes which Helvétius gave to passions directly contradicted conventional Christian beliefs. Striving for something better, particularly in the hope that it will lead to some coarse sexual benefit, would be considered evil, and Guy Besse recognizes the religious implications of Helvétius' position when he says,

Qu'est-ce que l'homme social? C'est la passion civilisée...
Il veut finir avec l'antique malédiction qui donne aux
passions le visage de Satan. Les passions tiennent à
l'essence de l'humanité...⁵⁹²

Passions then, are important, but not only do they lead to greatness, they can be the cause of problems. In 1910 Albert Keim, looking at this matter from the opposite viewpoint, noted the importance of recognizing the dual function of the passions:

Helvétius a démontré que les passions nous trompent. Mais il annonce aussitôt, et ce point est capital, que ces même passions, germe d'une infinité d'erreurs, sont aussi la source de nos lumières. Ce thème est essentiel.⁵⁹³

Passions, like chance, are both the way to greatness and the route to obscurity. It was an aspect of human nature which Gassendi had noted,⁵⁹⁴ and which many of the philosophes recognized as a condition requiring explanation.

Rousseau also recognized the role of passions, and the notion of a

⁵⁹² Guy Besse in the intro. to De l'Esprit (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1968), p40.

⁵⁹³ Keim, p242.

⁵⁹⁴ Bernier, VI, p390.

"Passion... n'est autre chose qu'une commotion ou agitation de l'Âme dans la poitrine... excitée par l'Opinion, ou par le Sentiment du bien ou du mal."

And, passion is a source of moral sentiment - moral sentiment is both creative and destructive.

'latent seed' would not be alien to his view of human capability and development. But interestingly, as Crocker notes,

Helvétius, a writer whose work is that of a cold rationalist, praises the passions; while Rousseau, a passionate sentimentalist, emphasizes their danger.⁵⁹⁵

But, Jean-Jacques' rhetoric was far less exuberant than was Helvétius. He saw passion as an essential pre-requisite of the good citizen. Ian Cumming observes that Rousseau presented a discussion of passions directly reminiscent of Helvétius' rendition in De l'Esprit. He quotes (from La Nouvelle Héloïse⁵⁹⁶) St. Preux as saying that "...all men are by their nature susceptible of passions strong enough to confer on them the degree of attention needed for superiority of the mind." However, while Rousseau's obvious reading of De l'Esprit prior to writing La Nouvelle Héloïse permitted him to play with some of Helvétius' concepts in the mouths of his characters, not all the views expressed in the later of these two works emanated from the first. As Rousseau read De l'Esprit for La Nouvelle Héloïse, likewise (as Cumming also notes) Helvétius also read Rousseau's Encyclopédie article on "Political Economy".⁵⁹⁷ In that work Jean-Jacques explained his faith in the role of the passions, in the development of the citizen, thus,

⁵⁹⁵ Crocker, An Age of Crisis, p254.

⁵⁹⁶ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p188; Rousseau, "La Nouvelle Héloïse" in Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Pléiade, 1964), Tome II, p564.

⁵⁹⁷ Cumming, Helvetius: His Life and Place, p170, notes the similarity between Rousseau's suggestion in the earlier work, that the great nations be divided into smaller manageable states, with Helvétius' suggestion in De l'Esprit that France be divided into thirty self-governing provinces.

We ought not to exterminate the passions of mankind; and that such an attempt is no more desirable than it is possible. I will agree, farther than all this, that a man without passions would certainly make a very bad citizen;...⁵⁹⁸

Rousseau then, recognized the important motivational function of the passions, which were subscribed to by Helvétius, Condillac⁵⁹⁹ and others of the philosophes but tempers his rhetoric, and the extent of his expectations for this motivational force.

It was the control of passions which led Rousseau to his concept of negative education. Protection from society will impede the transformation of natural 'amour de soi', or self love, into the pride and selfishness of 'amour propre'. As Jean Bloch explains, this distinction is peculiar to Rousseau, and Helvétius has no comprehension of the distinction.⁶⁰⁰ The very characteristic which Helvétius would harness as the driving force of his education (amour de soi)⁶⁰¹ is to be

⁵⁹⁸ Rousseau, "A Dissertation on Political Economy" in The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. J.J. Rousseau, Vol. II, p29.

⁵⁹⁹ Condillac, p98.

⁶⁰⁰ Jean H. Bloch, "Rousseau and Helvétius on Innate and Acquired Traits: The Final Stages of the Rousseau-Helvétius Controversy" Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. XL, No. 1, Jan-Mar 1979, p34.

⁶⁰¹ Helvétius sometimes appears to merge the concepts of 'amour de soi' and 'amour propre', which Rousseau finds so important to distinguish, one from the other. One such case is where Helvétius says, "L'amour de nous-mêmes nous faites en entier ce que nous sommes... L'amour de la puissance et des moyens de l'acquérir est donc nécessairement lié dans l'homme à l'amour de lui-même." De l'Homme, IV, iv, p337.

Thomas Jefferson rejected the notion that self-love could in any way be a basis of morality. Jefferson noted that morality addresses relationships with others, and, despite acknowledging Helvétius as "...one of the best men on earth..." he went on to refute his "interest"

(continued...)

denied to Rousseau's children.⁶⁰² It is Jean-Jacques' method of allowing the citizen to develop discernment, without having succumbed to the corruptions of contemporary society.⁶⁰³ This is Rousseau's scheme for preventing man from becoming "de-natured"⁶⁰⁴ by society; a means by which the natural man can remain such, and retain his true self for his encounter with society. Instead of exercising those dangerous passions at too early an age, Rousseau has his pupil perfecting his senses,⁶⁰⁵ testing his natural abilities so that when the time comes for use they will be adaptable to all encounters. Rousseau, then, wanted to use the freedom of his 'negative' education' in order to 'rein in' the passions. Conversely, Helvétius invoked a 'positive' controlled education, but extolled the virtues of giving 'free rein' to the passions to see the child pursue his personal ambitions. The different possibilities for the way that the 'enlightened' individual will take his place in modern society may be observed in the stark contrast of these authors' interpretations of the role and utility of the passions.

Despite the personal discomfort which (the scandal over) the

⁶⁰¹(...continued)
bound moral ideas. - Letter to Thomas Law, 13th June 1814, The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, pp583/4.

⁶⁰² Guy Besse discusses the different interpretations which Rousseau and Helvétius put on 'amour-de-soi' in his article "D'un vieux problème: Helvétius et Rousseau", Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1972, pp136-8.

⁶⁰³ Bantock, Vol. I, p278.

⁶⁰⁴ Maurice Cranston, The Noble Savage; Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1754-1762 (London: Allen Lane, 1991), p307.

⁶⁰⁵ Crocker, Nature and Culture, p24.

publication of De l'Esprit caused Helvétius, it undoubtedly gave him notoriety as an author of consequence. He had interpreted prevailing materialist ideas into his principles of education, and rough handling by church and state did not detract from the authority of his work. In contrast, Rousseau had already chosen to contest the basis of Enlightenment thought in materialist/epicureanism. He was already in his retreat from society, working towards that period in 1761/2 when he would release three of the great works of his career; La Nouvelle Héloïse, Emile and the Contrat Social. At the heart of the first two of these books was education. A new society would be founded upon a revised concept of education. It was a notion which Locke had recognized and Helvétius was first to fully articulate the materialist implications for education. Rousseau's role in the evolution of educational philosophy would have been far less important had De l'Esprit not been published right in the middle of his period of deliberation.

Jean-Jacques resented fashionable Parisian society, and hailed his ideal of the city-state of Geneva. The contrast between idealised Geneva, and actual Paris, was the stoicism of Calvinist Geneva against the indulgent epicureanism of Paris. It was duty to pursue (God's) natural laws against the materialist pursuit of happiness. Rousseau's message could be most clearly articulated in direct opposition to the cult of happiness - by a demonstration of the folly of ideas based on hedonistic concepts.

Rousseau's views were so close to Locke's, on education, that he may be aptly characterised as doing for pedagogy what Condillac did for

the understanding. They were in fact both latter-day Lockeans. The epicurean trend in Parisian society, which was given voice and rationale by certain of the philosophes, took an important role in Rousseau's philosophical quest. It was his vision of Sodom - whose depravity was self-evident - to be opposed with utmost vigour. And, for Rousseau's purposes, De l'Esprit was Sodom articulated. It became well known and well read in influential circles - and it was materialist in the extreme. Rousseau would not have to warn of the implications of materialism, he could rely on his readership understanding them in the real articulations of De l'Esprit.

Materialism then, as implied in the prevailing hedonist society in mid eighteenth-century Paris, was the object of Rousseau's attack, and De l'Esprit constituted prime evidence. The mind receives and stores information until the passions are excited in such a way as to generate activity. There is a lack of spontaneity in the operation of the mind, as Helvétius sees it.⁶⁰⁶ This lack of spontaneity corresponds with this author's approach to ethics. In the view of Helvétius, human action is predestined by the tendency always to choose pleasure over pain, to the extent that it is "...psychologically impossible for them to choose pain rather than pleasure."⁶⁰⁷ This notion appears throughout De l'Esprit and it is a major thesis of his work. Early in the book the case is presented that,

...quelque parti qu'il prenne, le désir de son bonheur lui

⁶⁰⁶ That lack of spontaneity originates in the materialism which Helvétius pursued, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰⁷ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p179.

fera toujours <le forcera toujours de> choisir le parti qui lui paroîtra le plus convenables à ses intérêts, ses goûts, ses passions, et enfin à ce qu'il regarde comme son bonheur.⁶⁰⁸

These interpretations, which endeared him to utilitarians, may be seen in the author's proclamations that, "Un homme est juste lorsque toutes ses actions tendent au bien public." and "...l'utilité est le principe de toutes les vertus humaines,..."⁶⁰⁹ Unfortunately Helvétius does not shy away from carrying his ethics to their logical and brutal conclusion. He says,

Il est peu d'hommes, s'ils en avoient le pouvoir, qui n'employassent les tourmens pour faire généralement adopter leurs opinions.⁶¹⁰

Ian Cumming seems to excuse the outrageous implications of what Helvétius said. His comment, however, is more by explanation than in support:

Men were not cruel and perfidious, but they were carried away by their own interest... Men's interest, founded on the love of pleasure and on the fear of pain or sadness, was the sole motive of their judgements and actions.⁶¹¹

So, for Helvétius, humans face a simple rule when they encounter moral decisions, insofar as that they will naturally want to pursue the course which enhances their own pleasure, or, which lessens personal pain.

But, this doctrine can lead to a strange morality. As D.W. Smith

⁶⁰⁸ De l'Esprit, I, iv, p47. [Words in < > were suppressed after the 'Affair' of 1758 in order to achieve censor approval for ongoing publication]

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, II, vi, p81 and p83.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, II, iii, p63 (note).

⁶¹¹ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p75.

puts it, the next logical step in Helvétius' pursuit of personal interest is that, "If it were in a man's interest to lie, he would be quite unable to tell the truth."⁶¹² He certainly said as much, in his statement in De l'Homme that,

...l'amour du vrai est toujours en lui subordonné à l'amour de son bonheur: il ne peut aimer dans le vrai que le moyen d'accroître sa félicité.⁶¹³

Helvetius' absolute faith in utility, or the pursuit of greater happiness, cut right across conventional morality. Correct or incorrect actions were conventionally governed, be they based on religious text or Locke's God-given natural laws, by a set of guidelines which quite conceivably could involve erring to the choice of lesser happiness. A child who stole apples will weigh lying as the happiest action, particularly if the owner/interrogator is ready to punish the offender. 'Conventional' morality would encourage admitting the crime and accepting punishment; the logical corollary to the Helvetian doctrine, however, is that he should lie to avoid the misery of the potential pain which would accompany honesty.

Exploring the "Useful Lie" in Helvétius and Diderot, Smith examines how far these two philosophes carry this aspect of their utilitarianism. Smith suggests that they pulled back from fully condoning the 'useful lie', not so much because it clashed with conventional morality, but because there were consequences of such a

⁶¹² D.W. Smith, "The "Useful Lie" in Helvétius and Diderot", Diderot Studies, Vol. XIV, 1971, p187.

⁶¹³ De l'Homme, IV, vi, p348.

notion which stood to compromise Enlightenment reforms.⁶¹⁴ If the 'useful lie' is good for the individual, then could it not be equally appropriate to those villains of the social conscience, the monarchs and the priests? Had they not kept the people in intellectual darkness for all these centuries, for their own good? In their hands the legitimated 'useful lie' would have been a potent weapon of suppression, to be wielded against the cause which was so dear to Helvétius, Diderot, and their companions.

The writings of Helvétius, in particular, lead one along the path towards the 'useful lie'. The implication remains, in the example quoted, that pursuit of utility, as explained by Helvétius, would indicate that the boy should lie. This is, in fact, an 'immoralism' posing as moralism. In his discussion of this point Smith refers to Diderot's "...immoralisme..." as "...closely parallel with that of Helvétius"⁶¹⁵ but Diderot is said to have pulled back in disgust as he recognized its implications on reading De l'Homme. However, Helvétius, who realized that no moral code could embrace lying as good, employed another twist of logic, believing that an 'ideal society' would be constituted such that it would be in the interests of citizens to tell the truth. Thus, as Smith explains it, utilitarianism takes Helvétius (and Diderot) to the brink of the useful lie,⁶¹⁶ but he stops short. Yet, a doctrine which points in a particular direction and then stops short

⁶¹⁴ D.W. Smith, "The "Useful Lie"", p189.

⁶¹⁵ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p207.

⁶¹⁶ D.W. Smith, "The "Useful Lie"", p194 and p195.

is fraught with problems. It is incomplete, leaving followers with the 'broad-brush' claims of utility, but failing to pursue these claims to an ultimate conclusion. What happens when the happiness of one conflicts with that of another, like the boy who stole the apples against the proprietor who lost them? Helvétius has no answer. Albert Keim recognized the problem, seeing conflicting interest as keeping matters in turmoil. He observed that, "En effet, l'opposition des intérêts des peuples les met dans un état de guerre perpétuelle;..."⁶¹⁷ Not a situation likely, in reality, to lead to general happiness.

Although Helvétius did not have anything to offer in resolving the conflict between personal manifestations of self-love, he did address the interface of personal with public interest. He recognized that the legislator cannot effectively serve both his own, and the public's, interest. Hence he suggested that the only effective legislator is one who has substituted the public interest in place of his own. Through education the legislator comes to adopt the national interest; displacing his own.⁶¹⁸

For Helvétius, happiness and goodness are analogous; they spring from the core of his morality. Emulating Locke, he attributed the foundations of his philosophy to God. He claimed that, "La volonté d'un

⁶¹⁷ Keim, p268.

⁶¹⁸ Helvétius wrote:

"C'est donc par un détachement absolu de ses intérêts personnels, par une étude profonde de la Science de la législation, qu'un Moraliste peut se rendre utile à sa Patrie." - De l'Esprit, II, xvi, p154.

Dieu juste et bon, c'est que les fils de la terre soient heureux,..."⁶¹⁹

This sounds almost an obvious trait of a benevolent God, but from the pen of Helvétius these words have formative meaning; goodness and happiness are inextricably linked and form the basis of his notion of utility. It is good to be happy, and morally appropriate to pursue such a state.

The pursuit of happiness for Helvétius, is the basis of society. People came together only because in doing so it served their 'interest', meaning that it rendered their situation more conducive to happiness. In De l'Esprit he suggested that,

...sans intérêt personnel, ils ne se fussent point rassemblés en société, n'eussent point fait entr'eux de conventions, qu'il n'y eût point eu d'intérêt général, par conséquent point d'actions justes ou injustes; et qu'ainsi la sensibilité physique et l'intérêt personnel ont été les auteurs de toute justice.⁶²⁰

Interest is not only linked to justice, and happiness to goodness, it is the foundation of the concept of utility. Religious dogma induced a feeling of guilt in connection with happiness, the notion that we should accept duty and misery alike as burdens in this life, purchasing happiness in another. However, the Helvetian doctrine discards that in favour of the pursuit of happiness, now and always, as good and right.

In the way he attributed primary motivation to the passions, Helvétius was expressing a hedonistic viewpoint. Hedonism was recognized by John Locke as a form of moral determination, from the late 1670's

⁶¹⁹ De l'Homme, I, xiii, p102.

⁶²⁰ De l'Esprit, III, iv, pp250/1.

on.⁶²¹ It saw expression in the Essay; particularly in the passage quoted earlier where the "...desire of Happiness, and... aversion of Misery..." are presented as "...innate practical Principles."⁶²² For Helvétius, however, hedonism was central to his philosophy. Good and pleasure are analogous, and the implications fundamentally condition the way one thinks of oneself, and of others. In De l'Homme Helvétius said,

L'unique sentiment qu'elle ait dès l'enfance gravé dans nos coeurs, est l'amour de nous-mêmes. Cet amour fondé sur la sensibilité physique, est commun à tous les hommes. Aussi quelque différente que soit leur éducation, ce sentiment est-il toujours le même en eux:...

Consequently, it is appropriate for man to absorb himself in all the pleasurable pursuits which life offers. Helvétius provided a brief description of the primary objectives of the individual as being,

C'est pour vêtir, pour parer sa maîtresse ou sa femme, leur procurer des amusemens, nourrir soi et sa famille, et jouir enfin du plaisir attaché à la satisfaction des besoins physique, que l'Artisan et le Paysan pensent, imaginent et travaillent. La sensibilité physique est donc l'unique moteur de l'homme...

He went on to explain that, "Ce qu'on cherche dans la richesse et la puissance, c'est la moyen de soustraire à des peines, et de se procurer des plaisirs physiques."⁶²⁴ Much of his hedonistic rhetoric was exuberant yet Helvétius did condition his words with the requirement that the

⁶²¹ Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke, p188.
Also, see the discussion of Locke's 'hedonism' in Chapter 2.

⁶²² Essay, I, iii, #3, p67.

⁶²³ De l'Homme, IV, i, pp324/5.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, II, vii, p171 and p179.

enjoyment of pleasures had to be compatible with public welfare.⁶²⁵

Hedonism even corresponds with Helvetius' belief in the benefits of punishment. In school it is the love of pleasure and the aversion to pain which persuades children to work harder. Locke, however, recommended that physical punishment be quickly diminished, except in the case of obstinacy.⁶²⁶ So, despite the French philosophe's assertion that "...l'analogie de mes principes avec ceux de Locke m'assure de leur vérité,"⁶²⁷ his hedonism was pursued beyond his mentor's. Smith describes their differences thus,

For Locke, the Puritan by temperament and upbringing, virtue was a personal matter: for Helvétius, the hedonist in principle and in practice, it was primarily the concern of the state. For Locke virtue involved self-denial: for Helvétius, who believed self-denial a physical impossibility, virtue was related not to motives but to the result of actions.⁶²⁸

Rousseau, however, with his Calvinistic upbringing, was more firmly coupled with Locke.

From the beginning Rousseau recognized the fundamental values of his homeland, with an emphasis on personal virtue, and a belief in industriousness and education. Herbert Lüthy claims that Rousseau "...is not comprehensible outside his Genevan context."⁶²⁹ It is a short step to equate Calvinism with Geneva. Not only did Rousseau absorb the Calvinism

⁶²⁵ Ibid, I, xiii, p102.

⁶²⁶ Education, pp62/3.

⁶²⁷ De l'Homme, Recap., i, p948.

⁶²⁸ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, pp196/7.

⁶²⁹ Lüthy, p215.

of his homeland, he became a latter day focus for the religiously based doctrine, against the forces of change in his city-state. Luthy suggests that,

"...through Rousseau's work, two centuries after the revolutionary impetus given by the Genevan reformers themselves, the Puritan Calvinist democracy shook the world for a second time."⁶³⁰

Rousseau shared common ground with Locke in a way which was quite incompatible with that experienced by Helvétius - the Jesuit-educated, affluent tax-farmer with a position at the Court of Versailles. The morality of fashionable eighteenth-century French society was diametrically opposed to the firm régimes of Puritans and Calvinists. For Jean-Jacques, virtue is an attribute and not the subject of a calculation based on circumstance. Discussions in chapters to this point have prepared the ground for the ongoing dialogue dealing with the philosophical clash between Rousseau and Helvétius. Their fundamentally different visions for societal improvement through educational initiatives have been addressed, but in the following chapter they are compared directly. Both philosophes were too important for the other to ignore, and the next chapter examines the way that each dealt with the problems of the other's dissenting ideas.

⁶³⁰ Ibid, p266.

6. Helvétius' Role in the Development of Rousseau's Educational Ideas

Helvétius and Rousseau are notable for the contrast of their ideas despite the similarity of their intellectual environment. Each put great emphasis on discovering the way the human mind functions, and consequently on establishing a scheme whereby education might be exercised to best advantage. Both authors also have the dubious similarity of seeing their major works immediately suppressed by the same parlement de Paris; a consequence of religious intolerance in both cases. With Helvétius it happened on the publication of De l'Esprit in 1758, and Rousseau shared his fate when Emile was published in 1762. The latter's work, however, has come to be viewed as a turning point in educational thought, whereas Helvétius' work, after a strong earlier following, does not share the same esteem in the eyes of current scholars. But, despite the fact that Rousseau's educational theory is 'of the enlightenment,'⁶³¹ a much stronger claim may be made on behalf of his rival. In educational theory Helvétius truly represents the eighteenth-century French philosophes, and Rousseau's pedagogy was an aspect of his counter-revolution against Enlightenment views. Jean-Jacques' lasting success has been due, in great measure, to the fact that Helvétius provided a full presentation of the Enlightenment position against which Rousseau could articulate both his opposition,

⁶³¹ Peter Gay notes that, "Rousseau was not wholly in the Enlightenment, but he was of it," The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p529; and, Ernst Cassirer explains that "Rousseau is a true son of the Enlightenment, even when he attacks and triumphs over it," The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, p273.

and his own conception of education.

The philosophies of these two men are so different that later generations of educational thinkers would consider pedagogical schemes, and individual doctrines, as either Helvetian or Rousseauist: labels of their distinctiveness. When social reformers looked for ways to educate their newly industrialized communities, they took guidance from these philosophes. In 1783, when William Godwin put together his first, and only, scheme to run a school, his 'advertising' pamphlet clearly established its Rousseauist influence.⁶³² Similarly, in 1827 when a plan⁶³³ was presented for instruction based on the scheme employed at the well known Hazelwood experimental school in the English Midlands, the author(s) felt it appropriate, in many places, to compare recommendations with those provided in Rousseau's Emile. But, when John Stuart Mill wrote about Jeremy Bentham, he described the great utilitarian reformer as having derived his most fundamental ideas from Helvétius. In fact, neither Rousseau, nor Helvétius, presented a suitable teaching method, but both presented detailed arguments on how social improvement could be achieved through the medium of education, and in each case their thoughts were based on a variation of John

⁶³² Godwin, An Account of the Seminary.
On page 4 Godwin explained,

"Of the writers upon this interesting subject, he perhaps that has produced the most interesting treatise is Rousseau. ...I have borrowed so many of my ideas from this admirable writer, that I thought it necessary to make this acknowledgement in the outset."

⁶³³ Anon., Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers; as practised at Hazelwood School (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1827).

Locke's theory of how the child's mind should be addressed. Their works may be characterized as constituting the different extremes of a spectrum of possible educational doctrines. Mordecai Grossman, in his 1926 work on Helvétius, saw these two philosophers as presenting "...the limited alternatives of significant educational choices..."⁶³⁴ This is not to say that they were operating with different motives; they may both be said to pursue a 'naturalistic' intent, or program, but with different consequences. Rousseau believed his education was in accordance with nature and Helvétius considered the pursuit of happiness as the natural inclination of all humans. Ongoing interpretation has treated these differences as stark and distinct, and it is commonplace for the utilitarianism (as his ideas for the pursuit of happiness came to be labelled by later adherents) of Helvétius to be contrasted with the naturalism of Rousseau. These aspects of the two philosophes correspond with their differing views on how the child should be addressed. Rousseau is generally viewed as empathetic towards the child, permitting 'nature' to take its course without parental or teacher-imposed impediments. Helvétius however, presented a thoroughly authoritarian régime. He was quite convinced that the only appropriate way to educate a child is by establishing a particular pedagogical program, and ensuring that it is followed without deviation.

As major figures in the French Enlightenment, Rousseau and Helvétius were thoroughly familiar with both old, and contemporary, educational ideas. Each was conversant with the works of ancient Greece

⁶³⁴ Grossman, p146.

and Rome, and with Montaigne, Bacon, Locke and Montesquieu, and, both authors, at least for a certain period, had freely exchanged ideas within the milieu of the French philosophe group. In each case the strongest literary support is taken from the English philosopher Locke, with due consideration being given to La Mettrie and Condillac. These latter two were of more interest to the materialist leanings of Helvétius, although, in the early days of Rousseau's writing career, he, Condillac and Diderot had a close (philosophical) relationship. Also, in the same period Rousseau is noted as having kept company with Helvétius, and both may be said to have freely associated, and been significant figures in the philosophe movement in mid eighteenth-century France. Rousseau is recorded as having attended Baron d'Holbach's residence in September 1750 in the company of Grimm, Diderot and Helvétius.⁶³⁵ There is also evidence that Helvétius once commissioned Rousseau to do some work for him, at a very generous rate.⁶³⁶

Rousseau's Break with the Philosophes

The change of direction which separated Rousseau, physically and philosophically, from Helvétius was entirely an action of Jean-Jacques'.

⁶³⁵ Louis J. Courtois, Annales de la société Jean Jacques Rousseau, tome quinzisième, 1922, reprinted, Chronologie Critique de la vie et des oeuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau (New York: Burt Franklin, 1973), p59.

⁶³⁶ This transaction is noted in an article by Martin Lefebvre de La Roche, which notes that Rousseau received 50 l^r is for preparing a hand-written copy of the "Lettre de Thrasibule à Leucippe". This matter is the subject of discussion in D.W. Smith's article "Helvétius, Rousseau, Franklin and two new manuscripts of Fréret's Lettre de Thrasibule à Leucippe" in Enlightenment Essays in memory of Robert Shackleton (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1988), pp277-282.

In 1756 he left Paris for isolation at the Hermitage; a country cottage provided for his use by Madame d'Épinay. Despite some return trips to the French capital, and the occasional visits of friends to his new rural abode, Rousseau became truly the man of nature, separated from the salons of Paris and his former associates, and usually preoccupied with his writings or with his enthusiasm for wild-flowers. The philosophes were perturbed by his move, often fearing its implications. Diderot wrote to Sophie Volland, on the 18th July 1762,

Non, mon amie, l'affaire de Rousseau ne se suivra pas. Il a pour lui les devots. Il doit l'intérêt qu'ils prennent à lui au mal qu'il a dit des philosophes. Comme ils nous haïssent mille fois plus qu'ils n'aiment leur dieu, peu leur importe qu'il ait traîné le Christ dans la boue, pourvu qu'il ne soit pas des nôtres! Ils espèrent toujours qu'il se convertira. Ils ne doutent point qu'un transfuge de notre camp ne doivent tôt ou tard passer dans le leur;...⁶³⁷

Diderot was concerned at the impact of the campaign of persecution which was raging against the author of Emile, and the possible implications for the philosophes generally. Earlier, before his rift with Rousseau had become so complete, his friendship with Jean-Jacques led him to believe, along with Grimm and d'Holbach, that the Genevan's temperament was not suited to solitude.⁶³⁸ All three close associates were alienated by Rousseau's actions. Also, in his writing against d'Alembert's contribution to the Encyclopédie, with particular respect to the theatre for Geneva, Rousseau had succeeded both in losing that author's friendship, and in deepening his personal rivalry with the doyen of the

⁶³⁷ Diderot, Lettres à Sophie Volland, Tome I (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p245.

⁶³⁸ Cranston, The Noble Savage, p19.

philosophes, Voltaire, who came to refer to him as "...ce judas de la troupe sacrée..."⁶³⁹

When, in fact, Rousseau chose to leave the supposed decadence of Paris, for an environment more conducive to his preferred 'natural' lifestyle, he claimed that it was Voltaire's location near Geneva which persuaded him not to return 'home'. In the Confessions (written a decade later) he said of his deliberation:

One circumstance which greatly contributed to my decision was Voltaire's settling close to Geneva. I realized that he would work a revolution in the city, and that if I returned I should find in my native land the tone, the airs, and the customs which were driving me from Paris; that I should have to maintain a constant struggle, and that I should have no other alternative but to behave like an insufferable pedant, or like a coward and bad citizen. The letter which Voltaire wrote me on the subject of my last work gave me the chance of hinting at my fears in reply; the effect it produced confirmed them. From that moment I gave Geneva up for lost,...

So, Rousseau's most obvious route of retreat, to his Calvinist homeland in Geneva, was blocked by the probability that it would cause Jean-Jacques to divert energy from his literary pursuits. But, the presence of Voltaire was likely an excuse. Rousseau remained aloof from what he saw as the immorality of his Parisian contemporaries but he was in no way so pure as to impress his Genevan kin. As Cranston says, "In Paris he could feel entitled to castigate the corruption of the modern world," but, "In Geneva, already purged and purified by Calvin, there was no

⁶³⁹ Letter from Voltaire to Helvétius, 27th October 1766, Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, pp264/5.

⁶⁴⁰ Rousseau, Confessions, pp369/70.

such adversary role for him to perform."⁶¹ Rousseau, then, had to opt for isolation from both Paris and Geneva. Only by pursuing that (third) option could he be at peace from his real, or perceived, adversaries.

This was not, however, merely an anti-social fit on Rousseau's part - alienation from a group of former friends. It was a deep rent in the philosophy which he was developing, from the core of ideas of the philosophe movement. The philosophes looked upon their ideas as progressive, and their own society as the best yet achieved (despite its need for improvement) yet Rousseau failed to embrace their enthusiasm. On the contrary, he saw prevailing society as degenerate, and gradually drifting away from an ideal condition. But, despite his personal revolt, Rousseau could not have attained his status as a philosopher without the Enlightenment. He became skilled at the literary art as one of its leading proponents, but then took its output much as a scientist or mathematician takes some constant feature, as a basis against which to measure change. Rousseau the revolutionary could not have articulated his revolt without the work of those former comrades whom he came to despise so much.⁶² In the case of Helvétius, Rousseau's opposition to his ideas polarized the stark contrast between the pedagogy of Enlightenment, and its possibility for widespread progress towards human equivalence, and Rousseau's dreams of social improvement through

⁶¹ Cranston, Jean-Jacques: The Early Life. pp348/9.

⁶² Rousseau's greatest contribution to the history of ideas has been his reaction to, and repudiation of, the tenets of Enlightenment. As Bantock explains it, "...Rousseau as much as anyone poses the problem of what man, in his new-found emancipation, is to become;..." Bantock, Vol. I, p266.

attention to the virtues of individuality.

What was most alarming about Rousseau's ideas, for his former close associates, was that he appeared to dampen their enthusiasm at their time of great achievement. As they brought down the barriers of church and state, proliferating their enlightened views throughout western society, here was one of their own, proclaiming to the world that their great achievements and intentions were merely manifestations of a society in decline. A century later John Stuart Mill explained the impact of Rousseau's movement away from his former fellow philosophes thus:

...in the eighteenth century, when nearly all the instructed, and all those of the uninstructed who were led by them, were lost in admiration of what is called civilisation, and of the marvels of modern science, literature, and philosophy,... with what a salutary shock did the paradoxes of Rousseau explode like bombshells in their midst,...⁶⁴³

Rousseau's retreat then, was not merely from the decadence of Paris to a supposedly idyllic rural environment; it was from the 'new view of society,' to coin Robert Owen's phrase, to an alternative version of social improvement.

The publication of De l'Esprit was to cause Helvétius much tribulation, as 'the Affair' upset the monarchical, parliamentary and ecclesiastical authorities. But the philosophes were generally (at least overtly) sympathetic towards him; his tract was firmly embedded within the core of lumière thought. Helvétius was presenting a materialist view

⁶⁴³ John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" in John Gray (ed.) John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p53.

of education, embedded within the mainstream of Enlightenment initiatives. As Grossman said, "What was a tendency with most of the eighteenth century French thinkers was fully explicit in Helvétius. To him philosophy is a theory of education." And,

Most of the ideas of Helvétius are those of Diderot, D'Alembert, d'Holbach, la Mettrie, and Voltaire. It is only the emphasis that varies.⁶⁴⁴

But, although Helvétius may be viewed as representing the Enlightenment view on education, and Rousseau the anti-, their opposition to each other had the effect of forcing each of them to extremes.⁶⁴⁵ By doing so it motivated each of them to firm up their views as they consolidated their opposing stances in defending them against the actual or potential attacks from the other. Both benefited to some degree from the competition of the other, but from a current perspective Rousseau gained most from the exchange. His work still forms part of current social, political, and educational debate, yet Helvétius has been largely confined to the sidelines.

Critical Interface: Helvétius versus Rousseau

Rousseau and Helvétius were keenly aware of, and reflected on, each other's works. Helvétius may have derived some of his ideas for De l'Esprit from a reading of Rousseau's contribution (on political economy) to the Encyclopédie.⁶⁴⁶ An example of a notion in "Political

⁶⁴⁴ Grossman, p3 and p7.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, p163.

⁶⁴⁶ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p163.

Economy" which became a central idea in De l'Esprit is the link between education and legislation, which Rousseau related as,

A public education, therefore, under proper regulations prescribed by the government..., is one of the fundamental maxims of popular or lawful government.⁶⁴⁷

Rousseau then, despite the publication of Emile after De l'Esprit, was doing more than merely reacting to Helvétius' work, and may be seen as having shared some concepts.⁶⁴⁸ But, Rousseau read De l'Esprit, noted his criticisms of it, and responded to some aspects (covertly) in La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile. Helvétius, in turn, read Emile and La Nouvelle Héloïse and responded against points which concerned him directly, in De l'Homme.

The clearest presentation of one writer's opinions of the other is, in fact, given by Helvétius in De l'Homme. In that extensive work numerous quotations from Emile and La Nouvelle Héloïse are identified and refuted. Rousseau did not issue a formal response to De l'Homme, perhaps because it was published posthumously, and perhaps because he was also ageing, but likely because he saw nothing new in De l'Homme. De l'Esprit, however, was published in 1758 as Rousseau was formulating his

⁶⁴⁷ Rousseau, "A Dissertation on Political Economy", Vol. II, p31.

⁶⁴⁸ This comment is not intended to imply that Helvétius took his important concepts directly relating to education and legislation from Rousseau. The idea existed in Rousseau's pre-Emile writings, and in the work of other philosophes. With respect to the co-ordination of education and legislation, Helvétius' importance was not for first recognizing the truth of the notion, but in being the first to attribute primary importance to it.

It is also important to recognize the context of Rousseau's developing educational philosophy. At the time of "Political Economy" Rousseau's reference to public education was prior to, and superseded by, the considerable effort which he dedicated to Emile.

own ideas on education. At that time another contentious tract on this subject, which was so close to Rousseau's central philosophical concern, warranted close assessment and response. By the time De l'Homme was published, in 1773, Rousseau had not only consolidated his doctrine but he had defended it extensively.

In 1758 Jean-Jacques had prepared a response to De l'Esprit, but destroyed it when persecution of the author appeared immanent.⁶⁴⁹ In his "Letters Written from the Mountain" Rousseau said that,

On the first appearance of a celebrated performance, some years ago, I resolved to attack the principles contained in it, because I thought them dangerous to the community. I had just finished my remarks when I learned that the author was under legal prosecution; on which I threw my performance into the fire, concluding that no moral obligation could justify the meanness of joining the cry of the multitude to oppress a man of probity. When the storm was blown over, however, I took an opportunity of publishing my sentiments on the same subject, in other writings: but I have done this without mentioning either the author or his book.⁶⁵⁰

Despite the lack of a direct formal response, two sources do exist of Rousseau's views on De l'Esprit. The first is a clear, overt, critique in Rousseau's 1758 copy of that work, which contains handwritten marginal notes, and the second is covert - it consists of the allusions to Helvétius' views which are reflected in La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile. One of Rousseau's objectives in the formulation of Emile was to refute aspects of De l'Esprit. He told the pasteur Montmoullin:

...s'élever non pas précisément, directement, mais assez clairement contre l'ouvrage infernal de l'Esprit qui, suivant le principe détestable de son auteur, prétend que sentir et juger sont une seule même chose, ce qui est,

⁶⁴⁹ Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p103.

⁶⁵⁰ Rousseau, "Letters Written from the Mountain," p11.

évidemment, établir le matérialisme.⁶⁵¹

Jean-Jacques' objections were to the materialism which he found clearly evident in De l'Esprit. However Helvétius was not specifically mentioned by Rousseau in Emile, the Contrat Social or in La Nouvelle Héloïse.

It is worthy of note though, that counter-criticisms of Rousseau and Helvétius were characteristically on a scholarly plane, and did not fall to the depths of Rousseau's notable literary feud with Voltaire. This, despite the fact that Rousseau, in some quarters, is regarded as "...le plus vigoureux contradicteur d'Helvétius au XVIIIe siècle."⁶⁵² Each retained a good regard for the other. Helvétius, for instance, in the introduction to the second volume of De l'Homme, said of Rousseau:

Mon objet en réfutant quelques-unes de ses idées, n'est point la critique de l'Emile. Cet ouvrage est à la fois digne de son auteur et de l'estime publique.⁶⁵³

Such remarks contrast with Voltaire's reference to Rousseau as a stark madman, or "archifou", claiming to consider him as "...comme le chien de Diogène, ou plutôt que comme un chien descendu d'un bâtard de ce chien."⁶⁵⁴ Rousseau's own language with respect to Voltaire was more restrained, but he did not hide his resentment for the older

⁶⁵¹ Keim, p456.

⁶⁵² Barni, p162. Rousseau's critique may have been vigorous, but Diderot's attack on Helvétius was more virulent.

⁶⁵³ De l'Homme, V, intro., p453.

⁶⁵⁴ Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome VI, p308 and p929; letters to d'Alembert, 19th March 1761 and 17th June 1762.

philosophe.⁶⁵⁵ To Jean-Jacques, Voltaire's wealth and social status made him the epitome of all that had gone wrong with the Enlightenment. Rousseau's rejection of the salons of Paris was no more important to him than his abhorrence of those philosophers of social improvement who were so isolated from reality as not to recognize a good society from a bad one. But, with the notable exception of Voltaire, Rousseau's antipathy towards his former colleagues was generally more professional than personal. Thus, Damiron appropriately asserts that, "Rousseau était également dans les sentiments très-favourables à Helvétius, mais non à sa philosophie,..."⁶⁵⁶

Rousseau attacked the philosophes as a whole in his notorious section of Emile entitled the "Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard". It was primarily an attack on the established religious order, and on De l'Esprit. Rousseau took a short paragraph, by way of an aside, to make the point that while the church was unable to provide him with what he was looking for, neither could his former close associates. He explained:

Je consultai les philosophes, je feuilletai leurs livres, j'examinai leurs diverses opinions. Je les trouvai tous fiers, affirmatifs, dogmatiques, même dans leur scepticisme prétendu, n'ignorent rien, ne prouvant rien, se moquant les uns des autres, et ce point, commun à tous, me parut le seul sur lequel ils ont tous raison. Triomphants quand ils attaquent, ils sont sans vigueur en se défendant. Si vous pesez les raisons, ils n'en ont que pour détruire; si vous comptez les voix, chacun est réduit à la sienne; ils

⁶⁵⁵ Rousseau noted in his response to Voltaire, 17th June 1760, "Je ne vous aime point, Monsieur;...", going on to repeat the stronger statement that, Je vous hais..." Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome VII, p136.

⁶⁵⁶ Damiron, p36.

ne s'accordent que pour disputer. Les écouter n'étoit pas le moyen de sortir de mon incertitude.⁶⁵⁷

And, the philosophers read it as a final confirmation of the renegade's desertion from their cause.

One aspect of common ground between Rousseau and Helvétius was the fact that both authors openly acknowledged their own works. They knew the possibility of persecution⁶⁵⁸ for the type of material which they produced. Both Diderot and Voltaire had spent time in the Bastille for their crimes,⁶⁵⁹ and consequently most of the philosophes took the precaution of publishing their works anonymously. Peter Gay says of the philosophes, "They lied freely, with abandon, and often, I think, with pleasure." He goes on to note, however, that "Rousseau, the solitary exception, only confirmed the use of mendacity: Rousseau, who signed all he wrote, spent much of his life wandering from refuge to refuge."⁶⁶⁰ Even Rousseau, perhaps more stubborn than brave, was no fool, and he was known to have endeavoured to accommodate his writings (obviously without complete success) in discussion with the director of the book trade,

⁶⁵⁷ Emile, p568.

⁶⁵⁸ 17% of those imprisoned in the Bastille between 1659 and 1789 were there as a consequence of participation in the "book Business", and such incarcerations were at a peak in the middle years of the eighteenth-century". Daniel Roche, "Censorship in the Publishing Industry" in Robert Darnton & Daniel Roche (eds.) Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p23.

⁶⁵⁹ And so, likely, would Rousseau have been, if the "huissiers" charged with his arrest, on the 9th June 1762, had exercised their mandate. The Chronologie Critique de Jean-Jacques Rousseau notes his encounter with the "huissiers" at p129.

⁶⁶⁰ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p78.

Malesherbes.⁶⁶¹ But, while Rousseau attempted to ameliorate his exposure to prosecution, Helvétius, after his experience of the 'Affair' over De l'Esprit, preferred, instead of anonymity, to reserve publication of De l'Homme until after his death. This, however, was not so much a noble gesture, as recognition by the author that, signed or not, De l'Homme was quite unmistakably the sequel to De l'Esprit, as its raison d'être was to reinforce the doctrine of the earlier tract.

Rousseau was not severely critical of Helvétius, and if, as Norman Hampson suggests, "Helvétius was one of the raisonneurs who most irritated him,"⁶⁶² then Jean-Jacques was uncharacteristically restrained in dealing with his former associate. Apart from the fact that he was obviously one of the group alluded to in the above remarks, Rousseau normally treated this philosophe with courtesy.

In 1758 Helvétius found himself descending from the high point of publication of his great philosophical work, to the fear and insecurity of public ridicule. From the receipt of a clear 'privilege' to publish De l'Esprit on the 12th May, and distribution of copies to his friends in June, his authority was revoked on the 10th August. Helvétius so troubled the church and civic authorities that not only was he at risk of persecution, but the censor who issued the 'privilege' was dismissed from his position. Tercier, not a theologian, was unable to recognize

⁶⁶¹ Roche, p11.

⁶⁶² Norman Hampson, The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p200.

the implications of De l'Esprit.⁶⁶³ Peter Gay says of Helvétius, "He was not the most famous of the philosophes; he was only the most notorious."⁶⁶⁴ By the end of August 1758 Helvétius had issued retractions of the most sensitive aspects of his book. Throughout the autumn he lived in fear of further consequences which, fortunately for him, were no worse than formal condemnation by the parlement de Paris on the 23rd January 1759. But, Helvétius was keenly aware that he lived in an era when executions for blasphemy were not unknown.

In the circumstances of Helvétius' troubles, Rousseau found himself acting the role of his apologist. In October 1758 he wrote,

Il est vrai, M. Helvétius a fait un livre dangereux et des rétractions humiliantes. Mais il a quitté la place de fermier général, il a fait la fortune d'une honnête fille, il s'attache à la rendre heureuse, il a dans plus d'une occasion soulagé les malheureux: ses actions valent mieux que ses écrits.⁶⁶⁵

Helvétius, though, did not share Rousseau's sympathy for a contemporary in adversity. When Horace Walpole prepared a mock letter to Jean-Jacques, purporting to come from Frederick the Great of Prussia, it was Helvétius, and the Duc de Nivernois, who participated in the conspiracy⁶⁶⁶ by correcting the English gentleman's French spelling and grammar. Rousseau was greatly distressed by the 'prank' which came at a

⁶⁶³ Roche, p11.

⁶⁶⁴ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. II, p513.

⁶⁶⁵ Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome V, p160, letter to Alexandre Deleyre, 5 October 1758.

⁶⁶⁶ Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, p248, letter 12 January 1766 from Horace Walpole to Henry Seymour Conway.

time of great sensitivity for him, as he was about to leave on what became his stormy sojourn as the guest of David Hume. By his collaboration with Walpole, Helvétius helped to sour Rousseau's relationship with Hume. And, these circumstances lend credence to Bertrand de Jouvenal's assertion that there was a conspiracy of the philosophes against Jean-Jacques.⁶⁷ The fact that the letter was printed in the public press exposed Jean-Jacques to (actual or perceived) ridicule by the English⁶⁸ and led him to suspect the direct involvement of Hume in the plot, as the Scottish philosopher was on friendly terms with (Helvétius and) Walpole. Had Helvétius shown the sensitivity which Rousseau displayed, in throwing his early critique of De l'Esprit in the fire, it may be speculated that the unseemly dispute between Hume and Rousseau could have been avoided. But, returning to Helvétius' tribulations - while it was admirable of Jean-Jacques to separate his adversary's personal traits from his doctrine, in October 1758 he had not yet read De l'Esprit. Late in the month he noted this fact in a letter to Jacob Vernes, when he again pointed out his liking and personal esteem for Helvétius.⁶⁹ However, their recorded disputes concerned the differences in their philosophical views, leading to their

⁶⁷ Bertrand de Jouvenal, "Rousseau" in Maurice Cranston (ed.), Western Political Philosophers, p66. "However much he exaggerated it, the evidence seems to me convincing that there was a continuing systematic attempt on the part of the philosophes to discredit him."

⁶⁸ Letters of David Hume, noted in Rousseau's long accusatory letter to Hume, 10th July 1766, pp393/4.

⁶⁹ Rousseau, Correspondance complète, Tome V, p185, letter to "ministre Jacob Vernes", 22 October 1758.

incompatible ideas for education.

The discussion so far, in this section, has dealt with the formal interface between Helvétius and Rousseau; their points of literary contact and the stands each made with respect to the other, and their conscious divergence of ideas. There is though, a 'critical' interface between them, an underlying difference in philosophy which pervades all their thought, and constitutes a barrier between them; an area upon which there is no common ground. This interface exists in the different ways each views the notion of individuality, which, as a complete concept, is not something which either writer fully articulates as a discrete subject. But, in all they write it is clear that Helvétius and Rousseau subscribed to different versions of individuality. That belief of Rousseau's in the sanctity of the individual is at greatest risk when set against Helvétius' belief in the greater good of the state. Against Rousseau's consideration, in "Political Economy", that the greatest tyranny invented is to sacrifice "an innocent man for the good of the multitude" is Helvétius' call for humankind to enjoy every pleasure compatible with the public welfare.⁶⁷⁰ And ironically, Rousseau tends to share more common ground with Locke than does Helvétius on this matter - it is the Genevan who stands alone.

Allan Bloom highlights the fundamental difference between Rousseau's and Locke's concepts of personal morality, or individuality, and one might substitute Helvétius for the latter. Rousseau is quoted

⁶⁷⁰ Rousseau, "Political Economy", p25.
Helvétius, De l'Homme, I, xiii, p102.
Cobban, Rousseau and the Modern State, p70.

from Emile as saying,

He who in the civil order wants to preserve the sentiments of nature does not know what he wants. Always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either man or citizen. He will be good neither for himself nor for others. He will be one of these men of our days: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a bourgeois. He will be nothing.⁶⁷¹

Bloom proceeds with his own point that,

It was Locke who wanted to preserve the primacy of the sentiments of nature in the civil order, and the result of his mistake is the bourgeois... So persuasive was Rousseau that he destroyed the self-confidence of the Enlightenment at its moment of triumph... He disagrees with Locke that self-interest, however understood, is in any automatic harmony with what civil society needs and demands. If Rousseau is right, man's reason, calculating his best interest, will not lead him to wish to be a good citizen, a law-abiding citizen. He will either be himself, or he will be a citizen, or he will try to be both and be neither. In other words, enlightenment is not enough to establish society, and even tends to dissolve it.⁶⁷²

Locke's individualism, his desire for protection of the individual from the state, and his concern for property rights in the self as well as in negotiable chattels, gives primary attention to self-interest - the same self-interest which is the spring-board of Helvétius' utilitarianism. This may account for Plekhanov's arguable assertion that Helvétius was "...the most consistent of Locke's pupils."⁶⁷³ Rousseau's individuality is intrinsically linked to his vision of the oneness of the social unit and its constituent individuals; which has no need to give rights 'over' others, but respects the others and the one as a unity of being. The

⁶⁷¹ From Bloom's translation of Emile, pp39/40.

⁶⁷² Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind, p168.

⁶⁷³ Plekhanov, p146.

Helvetian view of society has each person pursuing an individual assessment of right and wrong; a myriad of views which could never coincide in the way Rousseau's 'general will' was designed to do. As David Gauthier explains Rousseau's philosophy, "Man must achieve a second nature, a sense of self-identity which ties him inseparably to his community."⁶⁷⁴ They are opposing views of the relationship between the individual and the state, which prompt Robert Derathé to suggest that "L'opposition entre les deux doctrines est donc aussi complète que possible."⁶⁷⁵ Derathé is speaking of Locke here, but the comment stands for the Helvétius - Rousseau interface. It is an aspect on which they are irreconcilable, and it is the critical interface which conditions all of their ideas.

Naturally, the two philosophers' views of the individual conditioned their pedagogical thought. Rousseau's child was not to be moulded to some pre-determined form; education would be a spontaneous development which the child would encounter more than receive. He characterized it as 'negative education'; a descriptive title for a teaching method which, in its child-centredness (to use current terminology), moved the focus from the preceptor and the curriculum, to the child. If however, this movement of responsibility is considered as negative, the concentration of emphasis on the teacher and the curriculum is normal, or positive, education. Mordecai Grossman has

⁶⁷⁴ David Gauthier, "The Politics of Redemption" in Trent Rousseau Papers (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1980), p87.

⁶⁷⁵ Robert Derathé, Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Science Politique de son Temps (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970), p119.

explained the contrasting traits of the two pedagogical models thus,

Positive education, as against negative education, education as external shaping as against education as inner growth, extreme individualization as against extreme socialization, education as present life as against education as preparation for future utility, are amongst the violent contrasts one gets in comparing the educational thoughts of Rousseau and Helvétius.⁶⁷⁶

So, whereas Rousseau is ready to begin treating the child as an individual, with rights effective in the present, Helvétius concentrates on the potential for what the child could become.

The great contrast between Rousseau's education, and that presented by Helvétius, often emerged in the humanitarianism of the former philosophe. The value which Rousseau puts on the individual shows itself in his method. Where Rousseau wants the child to be left free to (believe himself) randomly choosing his topics of investigation, Helvétius would channel the child's lessons so that the only things learned are those which are considered suitable - those of utility. Against Rousseau's call for the child to 'do nothing,'⁶⁷⁷ Helvétius suggested that, "...une curiosité indiscrete, attient rarement à la gloire." and, "...pour valoir tout ce qu'on peut valoir, on ne dût faire

⁶⁷⁶ Grossman, p117.

⁶⁷⁷ Emile, p323.

"La première éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le coeur du vice et l'esprit de l'erreur. Si vous pouviez ne rien faire et ne rien laissez faire; si vous pouviez amener votre élève sain et robuste à l'âge de douze and sans qu'il sut distinguer sa main droite de sa main gauche, dès vos premières leçons les yeux de son entendement s'ouvriroient à la raison;..."

de son tems la meilleure distribution possible."⁶⁷⁸ However, in his enthusiasm only to teach children what is of advantage, or utility, Helvétius did step beyond the bounds of his doctrine. In De l'Esprit he suggested,

...à ne point éparpiller leur attention sur une infinité d'objets divers; mais à la rassembler toute entière sur les idées et les objets relatifs au genre dans lequel ils veulent exceller.⁶⁷⁹

Determining the "genre" in which they would excel appears to imply a search for talent and aptitude, as Locke suggested in his Education. It could, of course, also be read as indicating the "genre" in which it has been decided that the child will excel. Helvétius presented his case for the power of education with sufficient conviction that a single contradiction might be dismissed as a paradox.

In fact, between Rousseau and Helvétius there were some 'grey' areas, and all matters were not handled as opposites. In education itself they shared a common faith, as Helvétius explained,

...en s'opposant en général à toute instruction, l'objet de M. Rousseau est simplement de soustraire la jeunesse au danger d'une mauvaise éducation. Sur ce point tout le monde est de son avis et convient que, mieux vaut refuser toute éducation aux Enfants que de leur en donner une mauvaise.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ De l'Esprit, IV, xvi and xvii, p551 and pp553/4.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid, IV, xvi, p551.

⁶⁸⁰ De l'Homme, V, v, p479.

For Helvétius, as for Rousseau, bad education was contemporary education. If they differed on how it should be done, they were in agreement that education in France, in their era, was in need of reform. And, in order for reform to be effective both authors shared in the Enlightenment concept that the infrastructure of learning needed renewal. Thus they both shared a distaste for the literature of their time. Existing, and old, literature would perpetuate existing and old ideas, and as Helvétius warned, "...l'instruction a it entassé en nous erreurs sur erreurs: il faut par des lectures multipliées avoir multiplié ses préjugés."⁶⁰¹ But, on the location of the place of learning their different pedagogical concepts maintain them in opposition. Rousseau's tutor teaches the child at home, secure from the influence of others, whereas Helvétius wants to impose a custom designed 'mass-production' environment, and consequently he rightly explained that, "Le possible dans une maison publique d'instruction cesse de l'être dans la maison paternelle."⁶⁰² Thus, from a similarity in their rejection of current educational practice, almost all aspects of their method were incompatible, because they were aspects of the home versus school confrontation.

Rousseau's Rejection of Helvétius' Ideas, and the Margin Notes

Jean-Jacques Rousseau came to view the mind from the same 'tabula rasa' premise as Helvétius' but he took a different view of mental

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, Introduction, iii, p49.

⁶⁰² Ibid, V, vi, p484.

mechanics to an opposing ethical position. His version of the child's blank mind has an "active co-ordinating principle."⁶⁸³ By it he saw the mind as quite empty of things, or ideas, but with a predisposition to activity. It is a position presented in Emile, in the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard", contending the single faculty view of the mind which Helvétius had presented in De l'Esprit.⁶⁸⁴ This is generally interpreted as the place where Rousseau makes his stand against the materialism of Helvétius.⁶⁸⁵ The materialist concept, that "...consciousness and will are wholly due to the operation of materialistic agencies,"⁶⁸⁶ corresponds with the passive view which Helvétius had of the mind. It is through the active component that Rousseau felt able to assert that man will err on the side of goodness.

⁶⁸³ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p177.

⁶⁸⁴ Albert Schinz presented the results of his research into the extent to which Rousseau replied to Helvétius in Emile in his paper, "La Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard et le livre De l'Esprit", Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, Vol. XVII, 1910, pp225-261. He quotes, at p239, "le pasteur de Montmollin" as reporting a conversation with Rousseau, in a letter dated 25th September 1762, the year of publication of Emile, in which the author is said to have given his second reason for presenting the work as,

"...de s'élever, non pas précisément directement, mais pourtant assez clairement contre l'ouvrage infernal de l'Esprit, qui suivant le principe détestable de son auteur que juger et sentir sont une seule même chose, ce qui est évidemment établir le matérialisme..."

The identical focus of concern, in the same terms, is seen in Rousseau's marginal notes to De l'Esprit.

⁶⁸⁵ Cranston, The Noble Savage, p193

F.C. Green, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Critical Study of his Life and Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p170.

⁶⁸⁶ The Oxford Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Vol IX, p466.

Jean-Jacques subscribed to the notion that man is capable of self-sacrifice. In stoic fashion he believed man capable of the ultimate sacrifice, of giving his own life for what he believes in. This concept is totally alien to Helvétius who looked for some tangible inducement to sacrifice. In rationalizing the motivating forces which cause someone to be willing to lay down his life, Helvétius found even this extreme action has a basis in the pursuit of happiness. He explained:

Or, si l'amour de notre être est fondé sur la crainte de la douleur et l'amour du plaisir, le desir d'être heureux est donc en nous plus puissant que le desir d'être. Pour obtenir l'objet à la possession duquel on attache son bonheur, chacun est donc capable de s'exposer à des dangers plus ou moins grands, mais toujours proportionnés au desir plus ou moins vif qu'il a de posséder cet objet. Pour être absolument sans courage, il faudroit être absolument sans desir.⁶⁸⁷

Bravery then, takes no cognisance of duty, but takes regard only to happiness; it is a function of desire. The anticipation of an improved situation will induce the wartime soldier, but he could never enter a situation where he knew he would die, because there could not possibly be any resultant happiness for him. He must always assume survival, and the beneficial consequences of his efforts. As he footnoted to the last quotation, Claude Adrien suggested that the "most courageous nation is... that where valour is best rewarded." Goodness for Helvétius is a calculation of benefit, and not a characteristic innate to the human.

A completely blank mind would err in no particular direction, but Rousseau's active component provided the basis on which to formulate bias. At birth Rousseau's child has the same mental state as Helvétius'

⁶⁸⁷ De l'Esprit, III, xxviii, p394.

- the difference is in what Locke called the innate practical principles,⁶⁸⁸ or inclinations. The Genevan's child is inclined to follow the path of goodness and can only acquire evil ways through his education, which is to say, through bad experiences. Thus, if the child can somehow be shielded from such untoward experience, he will develop a tendency to be good. For Helvétius, this notion was nonsense. In De l'Homme he responded to Rousseau's view as follows:

...il croit (et je le crois comme lui) qu'on naît sans vices, parce qu'on naît sans idées: mais par la même raison, on naît aussi sans vertu. Si le vice est étranger à la nature de l'homme, la vertu lui doit être pareillement étrangère.

He went on to summarize his views on what uncontrolled 'nature' gives to the human, in the statement:

Que nous présente le spectacle de la Nature? une multitude d'êtres destinés à s'entre-dévorer.⁶⁸⁹

In other words, there is no precedent in nature to suppose that the human has any bias to goodness. In fact, the nearer people are to nature, in primitive groupings, the more savage, and anti-social, their ways are.

Rousseau's active component in the mind led him to a completely different view of mental development. However, this view was by no means revolutionary as it leaned heavily on John Locke's explanation of the mind as functioning on two levels, involving the activities of both a

⁶⁸⁸ Essay, I, iii, #3, p67.

⁶⁸⁹ De l'Homme, V, i and iv, p456 and p473.

sensory and a reflective faculty.⁶⁹⁰ It was, as D.W. Smith put it, Rousseau who was clinging to old ideas and Helvétius who could be condescending, viewing his contemporary's position as somewhat retrograde.⁶⁹¹ Without acknowledgement of such, Rousseau presented a Lockean doctrine in the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard":

...je réfléchis sur les objets de mes sensations, et trouvant en moi la faculté de les comparer, je me sens doué d'une force active que je ne savois pas avoir auparavant.
Appercevoir, c'est sentir; comparer, c'est juger:
juger et sentir ne sont par la même chose. Par la sensation, les objets s'offrent à moi séparés, isolés, tels qu'ils sont dans la nature;...⁶⁹²

This differentiation between judging and sensing is fundamental to Rousseau. Judgement needs more than the senses, it involves reflection. This is the objection made in his margin notes to De l'Esprit, and it is the correction Diderot also pointed out to Helvétius (These two matters are discussed later). Rousseau argued clearly against the views expressed by Helvétius that,

...si nous étions purement passifs dans l'usage de nos sens, il n'y auroit entre eux aucune communication; il nous seroit impossible de connoître que le corps que nous touchons et l'objet que nous voyons sont le même.⁶⁹³

Without naming the author of De l'Esprit then, Rousseau presented his (Lockean) interpretation of the way the mind works.

The very fact, however, that Helvétius adopted Condillac's single

⁶⁹⁰ Essay, II, iii to viii, pp121-143 - Locke discussed his notions of "ideas of one sense" and "ideas of reflection".

⁶⁹¹ D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p184.

⁶⁹² Emile, p571.

⁶⁹³ Ibid, p573.

faculty interpretation of the mind was fortunate for Rousseau. It gave greater impact to the content of his Emile than would have been the case if De l'Esprit had not been written. Without Helvétius' work Rousseau would have been merely presenting an update of Locke's education, half a century on, which would have had nothing like the impact of his counter-revolution against the great Enlightenment movement. The Emile, and particularly the infamous dialogue of the Savoyard Vicar, owe generous thanks to Helvétius for the quality of the arguments presented there.

Despite the fact that only margin notes exist to identify Rousseau's direct refutation of De l'Esprit the difference in views is clear. For instance, in that work Helvétius presented an example of his utilitarian ethics, by reference to a story from Fontenelle, in explaining the case of an adulterous man who meets the husband of his mistress upon leaving her bedroom. Helvétius explained this to his reader as an obvious case that the individual would always naturally take the course of least pain, and present some fictitious explanation. Rousseau, however, mocked the ethics of his one-time fellow philosophe who was not only without scruples about sleeping with the wives of others, but recommended doubling the iniquity by becoming a liar as well. Jean-Jacques piously proclaimed in his marginal note, "...mais

l'homme de bien ne veut être ni menteur ni adultère."⁶⁹⁴

This story serves to demonstrate how far Helvétius' philosophy was distanced from the doctrine of Epicurus. In his efforts to explain the true meaning of the term epicurean - against those who subscribe to the indulgent and frivolous interpretations of the doctrine - Gassendi had analyzed the notion of Voluptas, in the context of adultery. Adultery may well be engaged in on the pretext that it is an appropriate pursuit of the epicurean notion of Voluptas. If it is natural to seek pleasure, then adultery achieves just that. Gassendi argued, however, that there may be Voluptas in the physical act, but not in those other attributes of the encounter.⁶⁹⁵ There is an intrinsic dishonesty to spouses which makes this an uncomfortable encounter, because despite the experience of Voluptas in the physical act, the participants, in their deception and lying, also have some exposure to quite the opposite sensation. Also, the similarity of stance taken by both Gassendi the epicurean, and Rousseau the stoic, serves as a demonstration of the closeness of these two doctrines, in their pure form, which was noted earlier.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁴ Rousseau, marginal notes in his copy of De l'Esprit (Paris: Durand, 1758), p79. This copy is available for review in the Réserve des livres rares et précieux at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Page numbers for marginal notes refer to pages in that original text.

A transcript of Rousseau's comments, and the 'offending' words from De l'Esprit is also contained in Pierre-Maurice Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius", Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, Vol. XVIII, 1911.

⁶⁹⁵ Bernier, VII, p126.

⁶⁹⁶ MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p107.

At several points in the marginal notes Rousseau took exception to the way Helvétius insisted upon his single faculty view of the mind. To the assertion in De l'Esprit that, "...toutes les opérations de l'esprit se réduisent à juger" Rousseau responded, "...appercevoir les objets c'est sentir; appercevoir les rapports c'est juger."⁶⁹⁷ In fact, in several places, Rousseau contested the way Helvétius used the terms feeling (sentir) and judgement (juger), accusing him of "reuniting under a common word two essentially different meanings."⁶⁹⁸ He also suggested that Helvétius used "un étrange dictionnaire,"⁶⁹⁹ presumably intended more as an insult than as a query of the philosophes command of language.

Rousseau's longest comment was reserved, predictably, for the treatment of education in De l'Esprit. In it he noted the passive nature of the mind as presented, and referred to his having tried to contest it in the first part of the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard". Jean-Jacques summarized this note by refuting the essential educational assertion which Helvétius made, saying, "...il n'est pas vrai que l'inégalité des esprits soit l'effet de la seule éducation, quoiqu'elle y puisse influer beaucoup."⁷⁰⁰ This particular note, though, has been a point of controversy. In it Rousseau went on to suggest that,

...j'ai taché de le combattre et d'établir de nos jugements,

⁶⁹⁷ Rousseau, marginal notes in De l'Esprit, p9.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, p41. "...vous réunissez sous un mot commun deux faculté essentiellement différentes."

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, p9.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, p256.

et dans les notes que j'ai écrites au commencement de ce livre, et surtout dans la première partie de la profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard.

This led Albert Schinz to assert, in 1910, that "Rousseau n'a lu le livre De l'Esprit qu'après avoir achevé la Profession de foi." Schinz proceeds to suggest that the marginal notes were written concurrent with the Profession de foi, considering that for Rousseau to have written the notes, and then to have returned to them in order to write the long summary comment, would have been a "Bizarre procédé."⁷⁰¹ However, even with a cursory glance at the original of the note, on page 256, it is easy to ascertain that it was made with different ink than most of the others. Thus, from its content and appearance Pierre Maurice Masson was correct to suggest, in a 1911 response to Schinz, that there was every reason to believe that it was a later addition.⁷⁰²

Rousseau's was an original, pre-publication version of De l'Esprit⁷⁰³ which he had obviously held for a full four years prior to the publication of Emile. If he had written his notes for posterity one might suggest that he would have done so in a more neat and complete manner. Apart from those on page 256, they have the appearance of being intended for his own purposes, probably as working notes for the document mentioned earlier (quotation from "Letters Written from the Mountains") which Rousseau dispatched to the flames. It is suggested

⁷⁰¹ Schinz, p254, p255 and p256.

⁷⁰² Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius, p120.

⁷⁰³ Correspondance générale d'Helvétius, Vol. III, letter from Rousseau to Richard Davenport, 9th February 1767, p282.

that he again used the notes when compiling the "Profession de foi" and, perhaps, at that time appended the summary note at page 256.

Rousseau's Covert Critiques of Helvétius in La Nouvelle Héloïse and the "Profession de foi..."

The years immediately following the publication of De l'Esprit, in 1758, were times of great industry for Rousseau. They were to culminate in his own publications of La Nouvelle Héloïse in 1761, and Emile and the Social Contract the following year. The latter work, by far the shorter of the three, and laid out more in the form of a manual for political correctness, was in contrast to the novelistic style of the other two works. Thus in style, and content, the Social Contract did not lend itself to rebuke from Helvétius. But, La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile, in their preponderance of philosophical dialogue, were ideally suited to addressing the new (Enlightenment) philosophy of education, as outlined in De l'Esprit. Education was the focal point of Emile, and by no means out of context in La Nouvelle Héloïse. And, in each case Rousseau found occasion to reinforce his concepts of the disposition and development of the mental faculties. Rousseau wanted to destroy the predictability of the new view of education and, as Jean Bloch suggests, "...re-establish the freedom of the will and the activity of human judgement."⁷⁰⁴

The following statements in La Nouvelle Héloïse could have been equally 'at home' in Emile as they form the core of Rousseau's notions

⁷⁰⁴ Bloch, p22.

of the child:

La nature, a continué Julie, veut que les enfans soient enfans avant que d'être hommes... L'enfance a des manieres de voir, de penser, de sentir qui lui sont propres.

La raison ne commence à se former qu'au bout de plusieurs années, et quand le corps a pris une certaine consistance. L'intention de la nature est donc que le corps se fortifie avant que l'esprit s'exerce... Sans cesse enfermés dans une chambre avec des livres, ils perdent toute leur vigueur;...

Tous les caracteres sont bons et sains en eux-mêmes, selon M. de Wolmar. Il n'y a point, dit-il, d'erreurs dans la nature*. Tous les vices qu'on impute au naturel sont l'effet des mauvaises formes qu'il a reçues.⁷⁰⁵

These comments lay out Rousseau's opposition to Helvétius, not only by the force of his argument, but by direct contention. In a note on the manuscript submitted to the publisher Rey, against the asterisk (*) in the text, Rousseau wrote:

Si l'auteur du livre de l'esprit eut considéré la question par ce côté, je doute qu'il eut avancé cette proposition insoutenable que tous les esprits sont égaux par eux-même et ne tirent leur différence que de l'éducation...⁷⁰⁶

Jean-Jacques, then, was unquestionably using La Nouvelle Héloïse as a tool to refute Helvétius' work, and it is suggested that Rousseau's text was conditioned by the existence of the ideas presented in De l'Esprit.

In order to position Helvétius' philosophy against his own, Rousseau embedded their different ideas into two of his characters, in La Nouvelle Héloïse. As Masson notes, the character St. Preux presents the theory of Helvétius in the terms of the text of De l'Esprit, to the

⁷⁰⁵ Rousseau, "La Nouvelle Héloïse", pp562/3.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, "Notes et Variantes", p1672.

extent of being precisely⁷⁰⁷ in the terms of Rousseau's copy of it, and Wolmar speaks for Jean-Jacques. In fact, as Masson points out, part of St. Preux's comment that, "... en douant les uns préférablement aux autres d'un plus de finesse de sens, d'étendue de mémoire ou de capacité d'attention" is an exact extract from page 256 of Rousseau's copy of De l'Esprit; the page on which he chose to write his longest summary marginal note.⁷⁰⁸ Rousseau then, must have written La Nouvelle Héloïse, at least some of the time, with his copy of De l'Esprit open by his side, for him to have so clearly plagiarized Helvétius. Thus, while Rousseau's philosophy was distinct and unique, he refined his thoughts as he sought to contend Helvétius. As Kenneth Unwin suggests, "...his attempts to stem the exaggerations of some of the philosophers became an exaggeration of his own feeling."⁷⁰⁹ In fact, Helvétius' ideas had acted as a stimulus to Rousseau, and without them he would have been less forceful in articulating his own pedagogical doctrine.

If Masson was to be complemented for his astute research in identifying Rousseau's mode of attack upon De l'Esprit, in La Nouvelle Héloïse, then he has been equally applauded for his investigations into the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard". The commentators in the Pléiade edition of the Oeuvres complètes say of Masson that he,

...a fait une mise au point aussi précise que possible des

⁷⁰⁷ Pierre-Maurice Masson, "Sur les Sources de Rousseau" Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, Vol. XX, 1912, p644.

⁷⁰⁸ Masson's notes, Ibid, p644; De l'Esprit (Rousseau's copy), p256; "La Nouvelle Héloïse", p564.

⁷⁰⁹ Kenneth Urwin, A Century for Freedom: A Survey of the French Philosophers (London: C.A. Watts, 1946), p86.

rapports entre les deux ouvrages, concluant au terme d'une démonstration impeccable que pas une des annotations n'ayant trouvé place dans la première rédaction de la Profession de foi,...

The basis of Masson's review was the Rousseau copy of De l'Esprit at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and an early version of Emile, which is claimed to be the first compilation of the "Profession de foi" with Emile, which he had found at "...une bibliothèque particulière..." at Genève.⁷¹¹ Masson correlates Rousseau's objections to De l'Esprit and finds that, "A tous les détours du chemin, dans la première partie, le Vicaire savoyard rencontre la pensée d'Helvétius."⁷¹²

In the "Profession de foi" Rousseau returned to the fundamental message of the marginal notes when he had the old priest saying that, "juger et sentir ne sont pas la même chose."⁷¹³ As the commentator to the Pléiade version of Emile notes, Rousseau contended Helvétius and followed Locke⁷¹⁴ when he argued here against the notion in De l'Esprit that,

...d'apercevoir les ressemblances ou les différences, les convenances ou les disconvenances qu'ont entr'eux les objets divers, que consistent toutes les opérations de l'esprit. Or cette capacité n'est que la sensibilité phisique même:...

And, in the margin of his copy of De l'Esprit Rousseau had written, "La

⁷¹⁰ J.-J. Rousseau: Oeuvres complètes, Tome II, pp1778/9.

⁷¹¹ Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius", p121.

⁷¹² Ibid, p116.

⁷¹³ Emile, p571.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, p1522.

⁷¹⁵ De l'Esprit (Rousseau's copy), p7.

conclusion me paroît claire, mais c'est de l'antécédent qu'il s'agit." Rousseau then, as Masson traced, covered his concerns with De l'Esprit in his final version of the "Profession de foi".

In the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard", as in the writing of La Nouvelle Héloïse, it is obvious by an exact comparison of Rousseau's terminology, with Helvétius', that Jean-Jacques kept De l'Esprit in close proximity as he penned his text. An example which is highlighted by Masson compares Helvétius' statement in support of his materialist stance "...qu'il n'y avoit dans la nature que des individus..." which Rousseau picked up in the form, "Il n'y a, dit-on, que des individus dans la Nature,..."⁷¹⁶ Rousseau might well have substituted the word Helvétius for "on" here.

Rousseau also quite obviously took his contemporary to task as he defended his notion of the 'active principle' in the mind, against Helvétius' more 'purist' interpretation of the 'tabula rasa' concept. In De l'Esprit Helvétius had written,

On ne peut donc se former aucune idée de ce mot de liberté, appliqué à la volonté; il faut... convenir... qu'un traité philosophique de la liberté ne seroit qu'un traité des "effets sans cause."

The argument against Helvétius was again paraphrased in the terminology of De l'Esprit, as Rousseau made his 'Lockean' point for an 'active principle' in the mind, as he said,

Le principe de toute action est dans la volonté d'un être libre... Ce n'est pas le mot de liberté qui ne signifie rien, c'est celui de nécessité. Supposer quelque effet qui ne derive pas d'un principe actif, c'est vraiment supposer

⁷¹⁶ Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius", p114; De l'Esprit I, iv, p43; Emile, p584.

des effets sans cause, c'est tomber dans un cercle vicieux.⁷¹⁷

Masson notes several other instances where the terminology employed by Rousseau implies that he was addressing himself directly to an element of De l'Esprit.

There emerges a view of the development of Rousseau's antagonistic plan for De l'Esprit. Firstly he read the text and made notes in the margins. These notes indicate a careful reading, much as Diderot did in readiness for his Réflexions sur De l'Esprit,⁷¹⁸ and perhaps a second run through in preparation for his intended refutation. With the persecution of Helvétius, Rousseau destroyed his refutation, but retained his De l'Esprit complete with notes. As he progressed with Emile and La Nouvelle Héloïse he came to realise that he had to address Helvétius' ideas; either his writings would exist as an alternative to his contemporary, or he could take advantage of his position in time to accentuate the advantageous contrast of his own ideas. It is suggested that, in the same time-frame, Rousseau addressed his copy of De l'Esprit, and his own notes, to the two major novels which he had been working on. Then, after reworking important elements of both tracts, he turned his pen back to the marginalia. In the knowledge that he had not directly connected his own writings with Helvétius' he would realise that the marginal notes were a significant link for future scholarship.

⁷¹⁷ Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius", pp114/5; De l'Esprit, I, iv, pp46-8; Emile, p586.

⁷¹⁸ Georges Dulac discusses Diderot's notes in "Les notes et les marques en marge de l'Esprit d'Helvétius", Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1988), pp227-31.

Therefore, at that time, he compiled his long summary note at page 256 of De l'Esprit, referencing the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard". In the process he presented evidence of the fact that by his direct attacks on Helvétius' writings, he was strengthening the articulation of his counter-Enlightenment philosophy. In this one small section of Emile Rousseau's views on natural religion brought all the forces of the French establishment down upon him, and his attack on Helvétius, and on the philosophes, consolidated his alienation from his former close associates.⁷¹⁹ It left him with no sanctuary among his contemporaries. His attack on De l'Esprit thus sharpened his separation from the Enlightenment philosophy, but in his uniqueness, and in the quality of his writing, it saw him rise to a position in the Western consciousness from which he has not descended.

Isiah Berlin recognizes the benefits which accrued to ongoing philosophical thought from Rousseau's severe critique of the Enlightenment doctrine: (when he says)

Kant acknowledged a profound debt to Rousseau who, particularly in the "profession of faith of the Savoyard Vicar"... spoke of man as an active being in contrast with the passivity of material nature, a possessor of a will which makes him free to resist the temptations of the senses... But although this doctrine of the will as a capacity not determined by the causal stream is directed against the sensational positivism of Helvétius and Condillac, and has an affinity to Kant's free moral will, it does not leave the objective framework of Natural Law which governs things as well as persons, and prescribes the same

⁷¹⁹ In the "Profession de foi" Rousseau said of his contemporaries, "Je compris encore que loin de me délivrer de mes doutes inutiles, les philosophes ne feroient que multiplier ceux qui me tourmentoient et n'en resoudroient aucun." Emile, p569.

immutable, universal goals to all men.⁷²⁰

It is in the "Profession de foi" Berlin suggests, that Rousseau's legacy to the history of ideas is most acute; most refined. In contesting Helvétius he makes the contribution which endears him most to his greatest philosophical admirer, and projects him into the position of one on whose shoulders later great thinkers stood.

With the publication of Emile, however, Rousseau made the transition from abstract reasoning to a form of application. Much has been written on the impracticability of this treatise yet in it Rousseau did move away from theorizing about how the mind works, to a discussion of what that means for the education of a child, and a developing citizen. When he did so, he 'took the high ground' from Helvétius and never lost it. His view of the workings of the mind was presented in novel form for public review and debate; presented in a framework which the non-philosophe could readily appreciate. The practicality of Emile was evident in 'audience appreciation' - it was widely read and translated, and Rousseau gained popular respect as an authority on education. Helvétius had no such vehicle, so his work remained in the circle of theoreticians. Consequently, De l'Homme reads like an addendum to De l'Esprit, where a proportion is dedicated to refuting aspects of La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile, but no alternative 'practical' vision is presented. Whereas De l'Esprit existed as an authoritative Enlightenment work when Rousseau was preparing his own major educational tract, by the

⁷²⁰ Isiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment" in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Vol. II, ppl07/8.

time Helvétius penned De l'Homme pre-eminence had moved to the Genevan. A response to De l'Homme was therefore quite redundant; it was not a threat. Also, it could be said that Helvétius retained a notion of the 'ideal society' but with no road map to get there. In Emile and the Contrat Social, Rousseau did present a more complete rendition, albeit utopian.

De l'Homme as Helvétius' Defence

The route from De l'Esprit, through La Nouvelle Héloïse and Emile to De l'Homme is an extended argument with no prospect of resolution. Helvétius and Rousseau had taken up pedagogical concepts which were at opposing poles from each other; there was little common ground between Helvétius' materialist educational concepts of the 'mainstream' Enlightenment, and Rousseau's reaction to it. The consistency of their dispute may be followed through their major writings. For instance, in "Rousseau contre Helvétius" Masson traces Rousseau's objection (that "Chacun, dit-on, concourt au bien public pour son intérêt;...") to its corresponding origin in De l'Esprit.⁷²¹ Jean-Jacques argued that it was an "innate principle of justice and virtue",⁷²² not personal interest, which motivated the citizen in his actions. So, in De l'Homme Helvétius returned to just the same page of the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard" (p109) in order to make his criticism that "Personne,

⁷²¹ Masson, "Rousseau contre Helvétius". pp115/6.

⁷²² Emile, p598, "...un principe inné de justice et de vertu,..."

répondrai-je, n'a jamais concouru à son préjudice au bien public."⁷²³ It is a fundamental aspect of the calculated approach to moral decisions, which Helvétius would prefer to see as scientific. However, for most scholars of Helvétius it is a root error in his approach⁷²⁴ - it is too impersonal and leaves no scope for compassion, duty, or the human unpredictability which we all cherish.

Helvétius then, in repeating and expanding on his ideas from De l'Esprit,⁷²⁵ overtly attacked Rousseau in the opening section of the second volume of De l'Homme. One can detect the frustration which Helvétius felt at Jean-Jacques' inflexibility in the assertion that Rousseau "repeats incessantly" that all men are good, and all the first movements of nature right.⁷²⁶ His exasperation sees him claiming that Rousseau is more interested in the way he articulates his argument, than in the validity of his ideas.⁷²⁷ The core of Helvétius' attack on Rousseau, across several instances, was his perception of the Genevan's inconsistency.⁷²⁸ An instance is Helvétius' discussion of Rousseau's ideas on virtue in which he took his agreement with Rousseau (and Locke), on a lack of innate ideas, to imply that virtue must also be

⁷²³ De l'Homme, V, i, p457.

⁷²⁴ Speaking of Helvétius' reform of morality based solely on utility, Guyau sees him as having "...commis de très graves erreurs." La Morale d'Epicure, p259.

⁷²⁵ Plekhanov, p161.

⁷²⁶ De l'Homme, V, iii, p470.

⁷²⁷ Ibid, V, i, p459.

⁷²⁸ Bloch, p178.

lacking.⁷²⁹ He chose to take a shallow reading of Rousseau, by going on to put interpretations of virtue as innate, against assertions which appear to show that virtue is an acquisition; thus attempting to demonstrate that Rousseau, at times, contradicts himself. But, as Bloch notes, the inconsistencies which Helvétius observed are a consequence of his not taking the "...whole of Rousseau's system into account..."⁷³⁰ That 'system' though, is something which has emerged through two centuries of analysis. Helvétius chose to attack what he perceived to be the inconsistencies in Jean-Jacques' educational philosophy.

De l'Homme is an extensive work, running to two lengthy volumes. In it the same theses with respect to the mind, ethics and education remain. What emerges is a composite Helvetian view of the child as some sort of basic clone, or human model, for which education is the only determinant, and individuality is a romantic dream. Helvétius alluded to the human susceptibility to manipulation early in De l'Homme where he explained that, "...pour diriger les mouvemens de la poupée humaine, il faudroit connoître les fils qui la meuvent"⁷³¹ and he was convinced he had that secret. The belief that equality of the mind renders everyone equally capable of learning is paramount. He believed himself to have an obvious case as he proclaimed,

...toute vérité est essentiellement à la portée de tous les esprits;
...toute vérité peut être clairement présentée.
La puissance que tous les hommes ont d'apprendre un métier

⁷²⁹ De l'Homme, V, i, p456.

⁷³⁰ Bloch, p30.

⁷³¹ De l'Homme, Intr, ii, p45.

en est la preuve...⁷³²

The failure of the populace to reflect this notion seemed to frustrate Helvétius. His only answer for poor learners was that they must be lazy, and so must be induced to learn. The only reliable method to do so is presented as being to early habituate children to the "fatigue de l'attention."⁷³³ Helvétius, despite his afterthought in favour of prudence, required an oppressive school regime in asserting that,

Ce sont les maîtres justes et sévères qui forment en générale les meilleurs élèves... c'est la crainte du châtement qui seul peut fixer son attention. La crainte est dans l'éducation publique une ressource à laquelle les Maîtres sont indispensablement obligés de recourir, mais qu'ils doivent ménager avec prudence.⁷³⁴

Lack of a natural ethic puts a heavier load on the Helvetian tutor. Despite the fact that Rousseau's manipulation⁷³⁵ of the child is covertly authoritarian, placing the burden of constant attention on the tutor, his pupil will tend to err towards goodness. Thus, Emile's tutor is busy, but only shielding and protecting. His Helvetian counterpart, however, can only know anything through education, so that everything he learns, his mathematics, his language, his humanities and his morals, must be spoon-fed by the tutor. In the words of the author of De l'Homme, "...la bonté et l'humanité ne peuvent être l'ouvrage de la

⁷³² Ibid, II, xxiii, p269.

⁷³³ Ibid, III, iii, p316.

⁷³⁴ Ibid, Recap, notes, p969.

⁷³⁵ Bantock, Vol. I, p272, discusses the fact that by his covert manipulation of the child Rousseau is in no way allowing the child freedom to learn by discovery, and in fact his régime is quite authoritarian.

nature, mais uniquement celui de l'éducation."⁷³⁶ Thus, the Helvetic teacher has full responsibility for the child's goodness.

The antipathy which Helvétius held for organized religion was demonstrated in his statement that, "Le pouvoir du prêtre est attaché à la superstition et à la stupide crédulité des peuples."⁷³⁷ Helvétius had good reasons for his antipathy towards the church. Not only did his absolute belief in *tabula rasa* run contrary to the basic tenets of Christianity but the 'Affair' over publication of De l'Esprit was inspired by religious authorities. This was why Helvétius preferred to leave De l'Homme for posthumous publication. The church in France still retained strong powers to deal with blasphemers. Jean Calas, the Huguenot who was accused of the false charge of killing his son, because he wanted to convert to Catholicism, was tortured and executed in 1762. Although the verdict was finally quashed it certainly did nothing for Calas, and the episode stands to demonstrate the environment which justifiably worried Helvétius.

Another more troubling occurrence for Helvétius, and the other philosophes, was the condemnation of the chevalier de La Barre⁷³⁸ - in

⁷³⁶ De l'Homme, V, iii, p472.

⁷³⁷ Ibid, I, ix, p81.

⁷³⁸ In De l'Homme, published several years after the execution, Helvétius noted,

"Il n'est presque point de Saint qui n'ait une fois dans sa vie lavé ses mains dans le sang humain et fait supplicier son homme. L'Evêque qui dernièrement sollicita si vivement la mort d'un jeune homme d'Abbeville, étoit un Saint. Il voulut que cet adolescent expiât dans des tourmens affreux le crime d'avoir chanté quelques couplets licencieux."
Ibid, VII, note 3, p646.

(continued...)

1766 - to torture and execution for blasphemy. Unlike Calas, whose supposed blasphemy was cloaked in an accusation of murder, La Barre was accused, and convicted, of blasphemy alone. The execution of La Barre was an act of fear⁷³⁹ - it was a consequential act caused by the perceived increased (and dangerous) influence of the philosophes. The reaction spawned fear and the philosophes took the La Barre incident as a warning. It led Voltaire to caution his contemporaries to maintain a covert attitude, explaining his reasons to the Abbé Morellet thus:

Vous savez que le conseiller Pasquier a dit, en plein parlement, que les jeune gens d'Abbeville qu'on a fait mourir avaient puisé leur impiété dans l'école et dans les ouvrages des philosophes modernes.⁷⁴⁰

What would have been particularly alarming to Voltaire was the fact that, after torture and beheading, La Barre's body was publicly burned, accompanied in the flames by a copy of the elder philosophe's Dictionnaire philosophique.⁷⁴¹

D.W. Smith explains that Helvétius pursued the method used by most of the philosophes, as "...pointing out the futility, the dangers, and the cruelties of religions similar to Christianity he slyly levelled his

⁷³⁸(...continued)

And, eight years after the event, Voltaire still referred to the La Barre execution as "...plus odieux encore de celui des Calas." in a letter to Frederick the Great of Prussia (7 December 1774). Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome XI, p866.

⁷³⁹ Peter Gay, Voltaire's Politics: The Poet as Realist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p279.

⁷⁴⁰ Voltaire, Correspondance, Tome VII, p531, "...les jeunes gens d'Abbeville..." refers to the group of accused men which included the chevalier de La Barre.

⁷⁴¹ Gay, Voltaire's Politics, p280.

attack at Christianity itself."⁷⁴² Helvétius was quite concerned, as most Enlightenment thinkers were, that the power of the church be diminished or destroyed, so that its stranglehold over society could be released. The Enlightenment, as a turning-point in Western social values, was wholly based on the release of society from the grip of religion. It was the later stage of the process which began in the Renaissance, of ending Petrarch's millennium of darkness,⁷⁴³ during which time Christianity had held the Western world in the grip of its intolerant bondage.

It is quite common for Helvétius to be labelled an atheist;⁷⁴⁴ as a member of the ungodly 'coterie holbachique'. Such an assertion is difficult to prove one way or the other because he never claimed to be an atheist (a public statement to that effect could have brought serious persecution). Cumming claims that the enthusiasm which Helvétius retained for freemasonry is a firm indication that he was not an atheist.⁷⁴⁵ His own words, in De l'Homme, appear to confirm this position. There was no need for him to go so far as to recommend natural religion to cover up atheism; he would merely have remained silent on the subject. Yet he wrote,

Voilà le seule culte auquel je veux que l'homme s'éleve, le
seule qui puisse devenir universel, le seul digne d'un Dieu

⁷⁴² D.W. Smith, A Study in Persecution, p121.

⁷⁴³ Gay, The Enlightenment, Vol. I, p265.

⁷⁴⁴ J.H. Huizinga, Rousseau: The Self-Made Saint (New York: Grossman, 1976), p163.

⁷⁴⁵ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p120.

A full discussion of Helvétius' freemasonry activities is presented in Gordon R. Silber, "In Search of Helvétius' Early Career as a Freemason", Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1, Fall 1981, pp421-41.

et qui soit marqué de son sceau et de celui de la vérité.⁷⁴⁶

However, despite his antipathy to organized religion Helvétius was not averse to borrowing from their processes⁷⁴⁷ by using the moral catechism in order "...y graver les préceptes et les principes d'une équité..."⁷⁴⁸ onto the minds of children. The scheme is quite opposed to Rousseau's belief that children should be left free to pick up education where they find it (although he does sometimes advocate sprinkling it in front of them).

Both Rousseau and Helvétius were concerned that their pupils not be unduly exposed to the wrong ideas. Jean-Jacques keeps his Emile at home with access to few other people⁷⁴⁹ than his tutor so that the boy will develop naturally good, and ultimately into a perfect citizen. Conversely, Helvétius did not want his child to go home, even for vacations,⁷⁵⁰ because he did not want him to neglect his studies and fall into idle ways. But, in both cases family influence was seen as inappropriate to the developing citizen. Rousseau's tutor attends the child at home, but allows the boy little parental contact, and no formal

⁷⁴⁶ De l'Homme, I, xiii, p102.

⁷⁴⁷ This analogy supports the thesis of Carl Becker's The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers in which he criticizes the philosophes for their use of Christian methods in putting over their anti-Christian message.

⁷⁴⁸ De l'Homme, X, vii, p903.

⁷⁴⁹ Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of the individual and the evils of prevailing society is summarized in the classic passage: "Everything is good as it leaves the author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man." Emile, p37.

⁷⁵⁰ De l'Homme, X, iv, p894.

guidance from that direction. Rousseau described the protection he would provide for his pupil as 'negative education'.⁷⁵¹ Helvétius, however, identified this passage as an example of error, returning to his theme that "Il en est de l'esprit comme du corps, l'on ne rend l'un attentif, et l'autre souple que par un exercice continuel."⁷⁵²

De l'Homme was Helvétius' response to the phenomenon of Rousseau's Emile. In spite of the author's persecution, or perhaps (to a degree), as a consequence of it, Emile was widely distributed and quickly established a reputation for its author. Charles Fox's mother read the work in the first year of publication (and persecution) in 1762, and wrote,

I have just finished reading Rousseau's Emile, ou de l'Education, there are more paradoxes, more absurdities, and more strikingly pretty thoughts in it than any book I ever read...⁷⁵³

She was to come to a different viewpoint, but not before taking pride in the fact she was raising Charles' younger brother Harry "...according to Mons. Rousseau's system;..." Obviously Helvétius was less willing to forgive the paradoxes and absurdities of Rousseau's scheme, and he was not sympathetic to what Bloch notes as the credibility of his 'system'.

⁷⁵¹ Emile, p323.

⁷⁵² De l'Homme, V, vi, p485.

⁷⁵³ Ayling, p14.

De l'Homme then, was an elaboration of Helvétius' radical educational views, in which he 'held the line' against Rousseau.

Helvétius gives all power to education, but it becomes a mighty tool which must be handled with care. It certainly cannot remain under the influence of any form of church authority. For Helvétius the church epitomised the woes of prevailing education, and the ideal society of the future would have no more of it. So, as government establishes the rules of conduct of society, then for Helvétius the roles of educator and legislator become closely identified with each other. Cumming summarises this relationship:

His primary object was to convince educators and legislators that genius, virtues and talents, to which nations owed their greatness, were not simply due to the differences in the sense organs but were the effect of education over which the laws and the form of government were all powerful.⁷⁵⁴

In the words of Helvétius,

...l'excellence de l'éducation morale dépend de l'excellence du gouvernement... La bonne ou mauvaise éducation est presque en entier l'oeuvre des lois.⁷⁵⁵

The necessary relationship between government and education endeared Helvétius to the Utilitarians, and to other educational theorists.

Georges Dumesnil suggested that,

...il nous semble que le point culminant de son système est la liaison étroite qu'il établit entre la pédagogie et la forme de gouvernement. Il a, de ce côté, une grande supériorité sur Rousseau. Celui-ci, en écartant son élève du monde, nous le présente dans l'état d'une abstraction et d'une sorte d'entité tout imaginaire. Helvétius garde le mérite de n'avoir point séparé l'individu de ses semblables et de nous l'avoir montré dans ses relations nécessaires

⁷⁵⁴ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p217.

⁷⁵⁵ De l'Homme, X, xi, pp925/6.

avec la société, dans l'état social, c'est-à-dire dans le véritable état de nature pour l'homme.⁷⁵⁶

Thus, Rousseau's eloquence may be viewed as taking him to a realm of unreality, separating him from a true link to the improvement of society. The Genevan may well have taken pride in his Platonic pronouncements with respect to the objectives of his pedagogy, but a critical assessment of his work has to consider the utility of his ideas, to some extent.

Giving responsibility for education over to government can be seen as something of an excuse. Roland Mortier is of that opinion, seeing it as "...another way of saying it will happen tomorrow:..."⁷⁵⁷ Rousseau's stoicism led him to improvement through the determination of individuals, while Helvétius needed government to set the conditions. This is not to say that either is any more realistic. Despite the fact that Rousseau's doctrine has no pre-requisites, the possibility of societal improvement through widespread individual efforts is impractical. On the other hand, people like Jeremy Bentham recognized the need for legislative improvement, coupled with educational progress, and worked in that direction. In fact, in the late 1700's and early 1800's there were numerous educational theorists pursuing pedagogical schemes which were in some way attributed to the inspiration of either Helvétius or Rousseau. They were both recognized as authorities with their own keen followers.

⁷⁵⁶ Buisson, Dictionnaire de Pédagogie, Tome I, p1247.

⁷⁵⁷ Roland Mortier, "The "Philosophes" and public education", Yale French Studies, #40, 1968, p72.

The criticisms of Emile and La Nouvelle Héloïse, which Helvétius presented in De l'Homme, are by no means sophisticated and read more as a reiteration of opinions presented originally in De l'Esprit. An example is Helvétius' quotation from Emile that, "...sans un principe inné de vertu, verroit-on l'homme juste et le Citoyen honnête concourir à son préjudice au bien public?"⁷⁵⁸ Obviously Rousseau had sufficient confidence in the integrity of at least some people to believe that they do act for the common good. Helvétius replied in a tone which implied that he had the final word on the matter, saying, "Personne, répondrai-je, n'a jamais concouru à son préjudice au bien public." This is a particularly surprising proclamation from a man who dedicated so much time to preparing this particular treatise. His religious convictions, or lack of them, likely led him to expect no afterlife benefit, yet he saw the work as a benefit to the very nation in which he feared for his life to have it published.⁷⁵⁹ Perhaps he would identify the pleasure as occurring for him in the present anticipation of its benefits, or in some anticipation of eternal adulation. However, his fear of persecution must have put a heavy counterweight of pain onto him. It could certainly be said that he was an example of the error of his own assertion to the extent that he appears to have failed to notice that his own work on De l'Homme was more akin to duty than pleasure. He appears to have taken

⁷⁵⁸ De l'Homme, V, i, p457.

⁷⁵⁹ In "Helvétius and the Problems of Utilitarianism" Utilitas, #2, Nov. 1993, D.W. Smith asks what trust can be placed in Helvétius' theory if he is "incurably egoistic" (p275). Smith discusses the way that Helvétius sets himself apart from his rules for everyone else, much as Rousseau was prone to do.

pains to ensure that his message not be lost.

Most of the criticisms which Helvétius had for Emile's education were presented in De l'Homme,⁷⁶⁰ in the same fashion, with Rousseau's passage presented first, followed by a re-statement of the Helvetian view from De l'Esprit. They covered the essential aspects of what Helvétius had posited in the earlier work; his view of mental mechanics and his ethical and educational interpretations. Helvétius took advantage of Rousseau's famous contradictions. As Cumming says, "By a judicious choice it is possible to quote from Rousseau and agree with most conflicting opinions on education."⁷⁶¹ It could be said in like manner that to many of Rousseau's 'pro's', he kindly provides a 'con' elsewhere, and Helvétius saw it as meaningful to identify them. An example is where Helvétius identified Rousseau as having, in different parts of Emile, supported the 'tabula rasa' concept, and also favoured innate inclinations.⁷⁶² Rousseau saw no contradiction, and it was on this difference of understanding that their theories parted.⁷⁶³ But, for Helvétius it was a point of error, leading him to enquire; "...peut-être M. Rousseau a-t-il souvent sacrifié l'exactitude à l'éloquence."⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶⁰ De l'Homme, Discours V, occupies itself exclusively with Helvétius' 'correction' of Rousseau's errors.

⁷⁶¹ Cumming, Helvétius: His Life and Place, p194.

⁷⁶² De l'Homme, V, i, p456.

⁷⁶³ See also, discussion in Chapter 5.

⁷⁶⁴ De l'Homme, V, Pref., p453.

Rousseau was concerned about the pessimistic, or limited, view which some thinkers were maintaining with respect to human faculties. He explained his view that there is a level of mental activity which the Helvetian doctrine cannot reconcile. It involves the way that the mind continually interacts with 'things', assessing distance, light, density, speed and all those other conditions of our immediate environment. These are the features of the mind which recognize what is happening around us, and facilitate smooth reaction and movement by the individual. It is Jean Starobinski's "language of eloquence" which he explains, "...cannot be based only on the received knowledge, second hand, but needs personal interaction with things."⁷⁶⁵ The following, more lengthy explanation, direct from Rousseau, can easily be recognized as being aimed straight at Helvétius and his more limited view of human understanding:

One of the errors of our age is to use reason in too unadorned a form, as if men were all mind. In neglecting the language of signs that speak to the imagination, the most energetic of languages has been lost. The impression of the word is always weak, and one speaks to the heart far better through the eyes than through the ears. In wanting to turn everything over to reasoning, we have reduced our precepts to words; we have made no use of actions...

I observe that in the modern age men no longer have a hold on one another except by force or by self-interest;...⁷⁶⁶

Rousseau's message for education had more faith in us as individuals. Helvétius wanted us to be subdued into a mass of predictable people; Rousseau appeals to our uniqueness. Perhaps this is why Rousseau still has an attractive doctrine and Helvétius is just another theorist who

⁷⁶⁵ Starobinski, Transparency and Obstruction, p319.

⁷⁶⁶ Emile; Allan Bloom (trans.), p321.

has had his day; few of us are satisfied with the notion of our being subdued into the masses. We recognize our place in the immensity of society, yet want also a place for our own individuality. That was Rousseau's message; one which Locke had championed. Helvétius's lasting gift to education though, was that he worked out the full consequences of his Enlightenment ideas for education, permitting Jean-Jacques Rousseau to better focus his opposition. As Alfred Cobban notes, "Despite, or possibly because of the criticism of... the philosophes, Rousseau maintains his position consistently, and sometimes with apparently undue severity."⁷⁶⁷ On the matter of education, the philosophe who concerned him was Claude Adrien Helvétius.

The lasting success of Rousseau's educational ideas are due in great part to the existence of a full presentation of the pedagogical concepts of the Enlightenment which Helvétius articulated. Some of the most rigorous aspects of Rousseau's thought, in Emile, particularly in the "Profession de foi", result from the author's careful response to the positions taken by Helvétius in De l'Esprit. Rousseau's revolutionary doctrine could only be such, if he had an 'authority' to attack. The philosophes, by the 1760's, had been attacking church dogma for a generation, and Locke had put forward his educational ideas in the previous century. In De l'Esprit Helvétius gave Rousseau his opportunity. Despite his own scandal, Helvétius became a new, enlightened, educational authority; one which by no means pursued Locke's complete doctrine, despite its claims to that effect. As such he

⁷⁶⁷ Cobban, p128.

created a forum which would help Rousseau attract attention to his own ideas. Jean-Jacques was forced to be more rigorous with his philosophy (an endeavour for which he was eminently skilled), and it resulted in a more thorough, and lasting, doctrine than that which Helvétius had articulated.

7. Adoption of Helvétius' Legacy by the Utilitarians

From Helvetian Epicureanism to Utilitarianism

It is pertinent to ask why a dissertation on the ideas of Helvétius should also pursue his legacy in England - and not in his native France. Helvétius' place in the tradition of epicurean thought has been discussed earlier, and movement of focus across the English Channel has been noted. It was the British Utilitarian movement which recognized in Helvétius' ideas the seeds of their own initiatives. In the importance which Bentham and the Mills put on education and legislation they echoed the French thinker to an extent which no other reform-minded group did, in any country. And (as the ensuing discussion notes) the Utilitarians acknowledged their debt to Helvétius.

In order to understand how the focus of "epicurean" thought transferred from eighteenth-century France to nineteenth-century England the retrospective comments by Jean-Marie Guyau offer useful insights, in his text on the British Utilitarians entitled La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine. It was a sequel to his study of the Morale d'Epicure, and a significant vehicle by which utilitarian philosophy came to the wider attention of French intellectuals. From Guyau's perspective, in the later nineteenth-century, there were three periods in the "...histoire de la morale utilitaire." The first, which deserves handling in at least three sub-periods, covers the epicurean tradition from Epicurus, through Hobbes, to eighteenth-century France. The second period focuses on the work of Jeremy Bentham, and the third is the modern period of John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, and others - which of course, also became

the period of Guyau (and Marx).⁷⁶⁸

In Guyau's historical sketch of the course of epicurean thought he made no excuse for the movement of focus between France and England, though one might wonder why he identified Hobbes, and not Gassendi as exemplifying his first period.⁷⁶⁹ Guyau's reasons for pursuing epicurean thought into England are similar to those for extending a dissertation, centred around the ideas of Helvétius, in the same direction. As the late nineteenth-century scholar explained,

Ces principes de Bentham sont les mêmes que ceux d'Épicure, d'Helvétius et des autres moralistes utilitaires; mais il y a cette différence que Bentham n'essaye même pas de les prouver. Il les pose comme évidents:...⁷⁷⁰

Bentham's work was complementary to, and relied on, Helvétius'. He accepted the French philosophe's ideas as truths, and proceeded to lobby for social reforms based on them. And, the fact that Bentham's

⁷⁶⁸ Jean-Marie Guyau, La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine (Paris: Librairie Germer, 1885), pxi.

Also, when Karl Marx came to trace the intellectual course which had led to the idea of communism he traced some of the same Anglo-Gallic exchanges, saying,

"...mature communism comes directly from French materialism. The latter returned to its mother-country, England, in the form Helvétius had given it. Bentham founded his system of enlightened interest on the morality of Helvétius, just as Owen, proceeding from Bentham's system, founded English communism."

Marx, "The Holy Family" (p395).

⁷⁶⁹ Despite describing Gassendi's important role in reviving a 'true' understanding of Epicurus' philosophy, and his regard for Hobbes as a disciple of Gassendi (in La Morale d'Épicure, pp192/5), in La Morale Anglaise (p89) it is the English philosopher's utilitarian ideas which are considered more noteworthy. In the first of these references Guyau quotes at length from M. Caro's Comptes Rendus de l'Académie.

⁷⁷⁰ La Morale Anglaise, p6.

initiatives were a purely British phenomenon is highlighted by Guyau's reference to "l'esprit anglais," and his comment that, "Il n'y a peut-être aucun pays où l'on s'occupe plus en ce moment des questions morales qu'en Angleterre."⁷⁷¹ Bentham's influence is said, by Guyau, to have dominated the first half of the century⁷⁷² - not only by his work inside England, but by the reputation he gained for his endeavours in France, Poland, Russia and the United States.

At the heart of utilitarian thought is interest; people will naturally pursue what is in their own interest, and they should be required to do no more. This point is discussed earlier as it is fundamental to Helvétius' ideas, and an essential element of the epicureanism which he embraced. And, it is on the matter of interest that Guyau links the major philosophical milestones of utilitarian thought. He identifies three figures (prior to his own time, and that of John Stuart Mill) who embraced the demand that "Suivez votre intérêt" be a rule of conduct. These were Epicurus, Helvétius and Bentham.⁷⁷³

Pursuit of Helvétius' ideas through the Utilitarian period, from Bentham to John Stuart Mill, affords a view of an attempted implementation which was beyond the scope of Helvétius' work. In the Utilitarians it is possible to view the doctrine of social reform as it came into contact with the social reality of political lethargy, industrial growth and extreme financial constraint. Utilitarianism

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, p2.

⁷⁷² Ibid, p3.

⁷⁷³ Ibid, p74.

adapted to the constraints which it encountered, and suffered from the extreme conditions of its own definition. However, it is possible to trace the extent that Helvétius' ideas remained valid as the movement paved a way for English socialism. Through the realities of Locke's empirical method, Helvétius' ideas were tried, tested and conditioned, as Bentham's rigid rule-bound adoption of the principle of utility became, ultimately, John Stuart Mill's adaptation.

Despite the fact that all of the Utilitarians embraced the 'greater happiness principle', each brought a unique perspective to the discussion. James Mill came under the influence of Bentham's utilitarian thought only after his own formal education was complete. Although he found the older writer's views illuminating, his own development had established certain predispositions which were not to be overshadowed. Jeremy Bentham, himself, had adopted his utilitarian views from earlier writers, but had by no means taken the doctrine wholesale from any one philosopher, having formulated a very personal creed. And, while James Mill found himself taking a philosophical path different from Bentham's, though still utilitarian, the younger Mill pursued yet a third path - neither Benthamite, nor that of his father, and not even a middle route. As his faculties for disseminating ideas developed, John Stuart took powerful ideas from both sources of influence, but went on to evolve his own view of the world around him.

Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill agreed on the central notion of Helvétius' philosophy, that improvements in education and legislation were complementary. All agreed that coupled with the

need for political reform was a need for educational reform. In fact, to the greater portion of the population there was simply a need for basic education. In their educational proposals Bentham and the Mills each brought different ideas to the British public; not a progression of pedagogical thought but three distinctly individual contributions to the history of educational thought, coupled with a variety of initiatives aimed at providing school facilities for all children. In their endeavours they represent, along with certain other philanthropists, the attempt of industrializing British society to implement the pedagogical concepts of French Enlightenment philosophers. In the efforts of Bentham and the Mills, and Robert Owen, and others, may be seen the educational idealism of Helvétius come to grips with a British government preoccupied with the value and cost (economical and social) of capitalism. The reformers came looking for a new and enlightened world order, and found little support from the legislators. Any hopes of a full implementation of Helvétius' concept of equal capability and opportunity for children ran aground at the first stage. Government was unwilling to participate in the concept of schooling for all. The Utilitarians then, concentrated on methods of bringing about the primary requirement of Helvétius' pedagogy; recognizing the equal propensity children have for learning, and through action on that fact, looking for a general societal improvement.

The Utilitarians found themselves preoccupied with the activity of lobbying government. They applied their energy to both aspects of the Helvetian equation, lobbying for government to recognize a new role as

representative of all citizens, and doing what was necessary to educate the citizenry to be able to accept their new political role. Albert Keim explained the theory thus,

Le bonheur dépend des lois sous lesquelles ils vivent et des instructions qu'ils reçoivent. Transformation nécessaire de la société par la législation et par l'éducation, telle est la conclusion de l'Esprit.⁷⁷⁴

Government was the organization best suited to matters of general concern, that is, the 'common good'. As Frederick Vaughan comments,

...by pursuing the greatest good of the greatest number in legislation, the state would thereby pursue the most common - i.e. least individualistic - good of its citizens and thus moderate the force of individualism.⁷⁷⁵

It should be noted, however, that Vaughan is paraphrasing Jeremy Bentham, and on this particular point, which will be discussed later, the British Utilitarians did not maintain a consistent view. The utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill did not look to the repression of individuality which Bentham sought. The younger Mill was also concerned about being labelled epicurean⁷⁷⁶ - he lived in the Victorian period when the excesses of the French Ancien Régime carried no endearing features.

⁷⁷⁴ Keim, p511.

⁷⁷⁵ Frederick Vaughan, The Tradition of Political Hedonism from Hobbes to J.S. Mill (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p210.

⁷⁷⁶ John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" in Alan Ryan (ed.), J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham, Utilitarianism and Other Essays (London: Penguin, 1987), p278.

"To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure - no better and nobler objects of desire and pursuit - they designate as utterly mean and grovelling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened;..."

The epicureanism of John Stuart Mill had to be conditioned to his era. He did so by explaining his utilitarianism in an apologetic manner intended for the better appreciation of his nineteenth-century audience, thus:

The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures,... having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing.⁷⁷⁷

Mill's was akin to the epicureanism of Thomas Jefferson, which was noted earlier.

Bentham, however, was no apologist. His writing concentrated on explaining and exercising his utilitarianism. In 1774, twelve years after the publication of Rousseau's political tract, he was disclaiming the notion of an "Original Contract" as a "chimera" which he believed had been effectively discredited by David Hume.⁷⁷⁸ The legislator in Bentham had no time for a social contract, or its founding principle, natural law. For Bentham, the only law is that "...which the magistrate has announced that he will enforce..."⁷⁷⁹ and the only reasonable basis for that law is an assessment of the amount of general pleasure which will accrue, or the extent of pain which will be eased. A set of rules in a fictitious social contract would rank for him with religious doctrines which were expounded by priests; they were formulations which had to be abandoned in the quest for an improved social order. Bentham

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid, p284.

⁷⁷⁸ Bentham, "A Fragment on Government", p439.

⁷⁷⁹ Charles W. Everett, Jeremy Bentham (New York: Dell, 1966), p66.

was not the philosopher who defined the 'good' and then walked away, for others to attempt to sort it out. He laid little emphasis on the definition of utilitarianism. "Bentham's merit," says Russell, "consisted not in the doctrine, but in his vigorous application of it to practical problems."⁷⁸⁰

A major mouthpiece for the Utilitarian movement was the Westminster Review which was founded by Jeremy Bentham in 1824, and edited by John Stuart Mill for much of the 1830's. A common theme of articles in that journal was criticism of the way religious bodies persisted in impeding progress in education. One such article appeared in July 1825. It criticized prevailing education as not providing Britain's leaders with the required knowledge to function appropriately in the modern world. The author, who was not quoted by the journal, criticized the use of priests as teachers by stating that, "Because clergymen possess more idle time than most other classes, that is not a reason for selecting them;...", going on, however, to suggest that should they "...learn to educate, and education will scarcely be taken out of their hands;..."⁷⁸¹ The writer was concerned that religious bodies favoured the classics in education, to the almost total exclusion of the sciences. After all, had not the rise in the sciences, in the previous century, also been coupled with calls for tolerance? Hence, science was

⁷⁸⁰ Russell, p741.

⁷⁸¹ "Present System of Education", The Westminster Review, July 1825, p172. This article is a review of George Jardine's work, "Outlines of Philosophical Education, illustrated by the Method of teaching the Logic Class in the University of Glasgow."

viewed by the clerics as analogous to the Enlightenment itself.

Utilitarians found religion to be a restriction on the proliferation of education. They also criticized the Church of England for censoring the curriculum to such an end that even the leaders of the country were ill equipped for their roles. In the same article the author went on to explain this problem in the following manner,

...the world is not merely a moral world. The physical world, the endless and mixed relations by which the two are intertwined, of all of these, youth learns nothing... The youth is not taught the nature of the world which he inhabits... Every thing, what we teach and what we omit, bears the stamp of the barbarism and ignorance of the monastic ages.

...science is not honoured in Britain... The peer despises the chemist, who teaches him whence comes the colour of his blue garter,... scarcely one ray of science or art pervades the darkness of either House.⁷⁸² (of Parliament)

The leading British Utilitarians shared an antipathy towards religion.

Jeremy Bentham, however, sidestepped the issue in his design for a Chrestomathic school. He explained that as his curriculum was intended to take up only six hours of the child's day, then in the other eighteen hours parents could involve the offspring in any form of moral training which they preferred,⁷⁸³ or none at all. In the last of his one hundred point list of "Advantages derivable from learning of intellectual instruction" Bentham explained his omission of "Private Ethics or Morals" thus:

Controverted points stand excluded, partly by the connection they are apt to have with controverted points in Divinity, partly by the same considerations by which controverted

⁷⁸² Ibid, p175.

⁷⁸³ Jeremy Bentham; M.J. Smith & W.H. Burston (eds.), Crestomathia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p91.

points in divinity are themselves excluded."⁷⁸⁴

Thus, the first of the British Utilitarians set the tone of hostilities with the Church of England.

The Utilitarians were not exclusively preoccupied with education for the poor, as Joseph Lancaster was, but they recognized the need to rationalize the economic benefits of schooling. Public funding would not be available for widespread education, so if schooling was to become available it would have to be cheap. For that reason they embraced monitorial schooling, even though in Bentham's case, it was to be utilized in providing education "for the use of the middling and higher ranks in life" (as noted on the original title page of Chrestomathia). As well as keeping instruction cheap, the Utilitarians looked for a 'cost-benefit' achievement from education. Edwin West explains the economics of education, as observed by Bentham,

...the main argument offered was that since education reduced crime there would be a positive net payoff to society from the investment of public funds.⁷⁸⁵

Mechanization in agriculture and the proliferation of factory working forced more people to the urban areas. Towns were not expanding adequately to cope with the influx, and failed to provide appropriate employment and social protection - so crime became an acute problem in

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, p95.

⁷⁸⁵ Edwin G. West, "The Benthamites as Educational Engineers: The Reputation and the Record" History of Political Economy, Vol. 24, No. 3, Fall 1992, p599/600.

The source of West's assertion is Jeremy Bentham, "Principles of Penal Law", Part 3, Chapter 20 in J. Bowring (ed.), The Works of Jeremy Bentham (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), Vol. 1.

the early nineteenth-century. Not surprisingly, reformers seized on the simplicity of their solution. After all, most crimes were perpetrated by the poorer, uneducated classes; certainly the huge bias of convictions was indicative of this. Thus, education was expected to awaken the criminal to the immorality of his (or her) illegal endeavours. Newspapers tended to support the case by carrying articles highlighting the poor educational state of criminals awaiting trial. For instance, a Manchester Guardian article of the 17th August 1837⁷⁸⁶ carried statistics on the forty four prisoners awaiting trial at the South Lancaster Assizes, categorizing them on the extent of their inability to read and write. The supporting article directly linked lack of education with criminal tendency.

Jeremy Bentham

It is noted earlier that for Jeremy Bentham, education was a 'means to an end'. He was first a Utilitarian, and next came those other avenues which would further his ideals of utility. Although it was not his first venture into public penmanship, Bentham's "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation" is said to have begun his great work of fifty-two years.⁷⁸⁷ In it he laid out, in terms which betray his closeness to the writings of Helvétius,⁷⁸⁸ the basic principles which

⁷⁸⁶ "Elementary Education and Crime", The Times, 17th August 1837, p3, c6 - a re-presentation of an article in the Manchester Guardian.

⁷⁸⁷ Everett, p109.

⁷⁸⁸ Douglas Long's article "Censorial Jurisprudence and Political Radicalism: A Reconsideration of the Early Bentham" visits the obvious
(continued...)

would be the creed of the Utilitarians. The essence of that creed is presented in the following three short quotations. The first, however, is the one on which all utilitarian thought hinged:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.

The interest of the community then is, what? - the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.

A measure of government ... may be said to be conformable to or dictated by the principle of utility, when in like manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it.⁷⁸⁹

Bentham was not a philosopher of the type of Hume, or even Helvétius, or Rousseau. His campaign strategy was to establish his ideals and then to pursue them towards implementation - and he did so with single-minded determination. He truly dedicated his life to pursuing the implementation of utilitarian thought into social consciousness. Bentham dedicated himself so much to writing on behalf of his cause that even John Stuart Mill was to criticize his mentor for lack of peripheral vision, metaphorically speaking. Mill said,

...Bentham's knowledge of human nature is bounded. It is wholly empirical; and the empiricism of one who has had little experience... He never knew prosperity and adversity, passion nor satiety; he never had even the experience which sickness gives; he lived from childhood to the age of

⁷⁸⁸(...continued)

links between Helvétius' ideas and Bentham's, under the sub-heading, "Helvétius and Bentham's 'Genius for Legislation'. (pp7-12) Long notes, "The young Bentham had been moulded to a remarkable degree by his reading of De l'Esprit: it would not be too much to say that in Helvétius he had found a mentor." (p12)

⁷⁸⁹ Bentham, The Principles of Morals and Legislation, pp1-3.

eighty-five in boyish health.⁷⁹⁰

But, despite Bentham's characterization as a pure intellect, operating somewhat in a vacuum, this view overlooked earlier experiences. Mill probably only thought of the old man as he saw him, working away every day continuously documenting his ideas. In his younger days though, Bentham was very much interested in the world outside his own. With his younger brother Samuel, he pursued interests in the natural sciences, organizing experiments, and writing up solutions to physical problems. His close contact with his brother, who became something of an engineer and spent much of his professional life in Russia, certainly broadened the knowledge of the elder Bentham. Also, Jeremy's visit to Russia gave him experiences beyond those of the ordinary English academic.

Bentham had trained as a lawyer, and saw that, as Helvétius had pronounced, only through the law could social change be implemented. English law, at that time, was strictly grounded on Christian belief and monarchical rule. So long as the law reflected this state, then change could not have any semblance of reality. He pointed the way, in the "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation", thus:

...the happiness of the individuals, of whom a community is composed, that is their pleasure and their security, is the end and the sole end which the legislator ought to have in view:...

His life's work was aimed at persuading governments to incorporate the greater happiness principle into laws, and in the process to remove

⁷⁹⁰ John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", p149.

⁷⁹¹ Bentham, The Principles of Morals and Legislation, p24.

those aspects of laws which involved anything other than the enhancement of happiness, or the easing of pain, as their defining criteria.

In 1763, at sixteen years of age, Bentham appears to have been both conventionally successful, and to have fallen under influences which were to carry him in anything but the usual path of an English lawyer. He had acquired a bachelor's degree from Oxford, and then gone on to take a student's seat in the Court of King's Bench.⁷⁹² However, he was also reading such Enlightenment figures as Hume, Montesquieu, Priestley and Helvétius. So, when he returned to Oxford, late in his graduation year, to hear Dr. Blackstone's lectures on the laws of England, this combination of activities, in one who was obviously quite a formidable scholar, led to the development in the young student of a severe criticism of Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England." It led, by the end of 1775, fourteen years before the publication of "The Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," to Bentham's preparation of a "Comment on the Commentaries" as a direct refutation of Blackstone's great work.

Bentham looked directly to the law, wanting it to take on the mantle of science. He said,

Nothing has been, nothing will be, nothing ever can be done on the subject of Law that deserves the name of Science, till that universal precept of Locke, enforced, exemplified and particularly applied to the moral branch of science by

⁷⁹² Everett, p19.

Helvétius, be steadily pursued,...⁷⁹³

In his criticism of Blackstone it is clear that Bentham adopted the philosophy of Helvétius. It was merely a matter of time before he adapted it to become his own utilitarian creed. At that time he was quoting Helvétius directly to make his point, thus,

Would you not say he is a moral man all of whose actions tend to promote the public good.* How would you characterize a good citizen? In the same words.

[footnote]* 'Un homme est juste, lorsque toutes ses actions tendent au bien publique.' Thus says Helvetius (De l'Esprit, II, vi, 177), and in this short saying, has comprised more useful truth, than is contained in whole Volumes of Ethics, compiled in the manner of our Author's introduction.⁷⁹⁴

One might say that Bentham's exposure to the writings of the English and French philosophers of his era was a dangerous risk at such an impressionable age. On the other hand, his mind was virtually free of preconditions so his wide reading led him to adopt the most logical criterion which he came across, for making moral judgements. Thus, having convinced himself of its worth he set about to convince the world likewise.

Both Bentham and Helvétius recognized the inter-relationship of education and law. Long suggests that "After reading Helvétius Bentham dedicated himself to the study, not of utility, nor of jurisprudence,

⁷⁹³ Jeremy Bentham, "A Comment on the Commentaries or An Introduction to the Introduction" in J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (ed.'s), A Comment on the Commentaries and A Fragment on Government (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), Appendix F, p347.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, pp376/7. Reference to the "Author" is to Dr. William Blackstone.

but of 'legislation.'"⁷⁹⁵ And, as the Frenchman looked for the law to aid his ideas for utility and education, the Englishman looked for education and the law to forward his principles of utility. In both cases the lack of a religious belief meant that whatever the individual was to become had to occur within the confines of this world.⁷⁹⁶ It would not come pre-packaged from another. Edwin West explains it,

...because he did not believe in a preestablished or providential harmony, but in a harmony that could be engineered by "rational planning", Bentham needed the control of education as the main instrument.⁷⁹⁷

So, among the mass of written work which Bentham produced, in forwarding the cause of utility, it is appropriate that there should have been one dedicated to the cause of education.

What Bentham did produce on education however, was not a philosophical work, in the vein of Helvétius', Rousseau's or even James Mill's tracts. He did not pursue theories on the operations of the mind, or on the matter of how children learn. Bentham satisfied himself that education, in itself, was necessary, so he went on to design both a school and a curriculum - the Chrestomathia. The original model Chrestomathic school was to have been built in Bentham's London garden. The building itself was to have been formatted so that as many children as possible could come under the scrutiny of one master, and the

⁷⁹⁵ Douglas Long, "Censorial Jurisprudence...", p10.

⁷⁹⁶ James E. Crimmins discusses the (non) religious views of Bentham and Helvétius. Bentham is noted as considering that "...as an agent of moral welfare religion is inadequate..." (p66)

⁷⁹⁷ West, p598.

operation of teaching would be deputized by that teacher to monitors.

Charles Everett says of Bentham's scheme that, "His system of education was severely utilitarian,..."⁷⁹⁸ That might be a fair description of the Chrestomathic curriculum, if utilitarianism is taken to imply the greater happiness of the greater number. The curriculum is heavily biased in favour of the sciences, which most enlightenment thinkers would favour, but it lacks any semblance of art or literature, and completely omits any teaching of the classics in a distinct way - which had been such a mainstay of schooling to that time. A review of the six stages of Chrestomathic instruction impresses one with the lack of relief in his program (presented at Appendix I to this paper is an abbreviated version of the Chrestomathic curriculum). Obviously, to Bentham childhood is a period in which one crams the developing mind with as many facts as is possible in the hope that this will better prepare the child for his vocational role in later life. He accepted Helvétius' call "...d'habituer de bonne heure les enfans à la fatigue de l'attention."⁷⁹⁹ Bentham's hope was that instruction would be so difficult that adult employment would come as something of a relief. He explained in his Chrestomathia,

Strengthened to so many comparatively arduous purposes, the mind of the pupil cannot be otherwise than strengthened to the purpose of the comparatively easy occupation, be it what it may, to which it is to apply itself with a view to obtain a livelihood.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ Everett, p73.

⁷⁹⁹ De l'Homme, III, iii, p316.

⁸⁰⁰ Bentham, Chrestomathia, pp26/7.

Bentham, however, was by no means a complete pupil of Helvétius. He adopted the latter's doctrines, but adapted them. For instance, the French philosopher spoke against diffusing attention on too many subjects⁸⁰¹ whereas Bentham wanted every child to experience almost every scientific pursuit known to man at that time. In that way, the Englishman was certainly not as 'severely' utilitarian as Helvétius would have been. Another of Helvétius' beliefs, which Bentham did not pursue, was in corporal punishment. Bentham referred to such disciplinary methods as "superseded."⁸⁰² He went on in the same passage to sarcastically ridicule the great schools of the day by enquiring,

It is a question not unworthy the consideration of mothers, even in the highest rank, whether they will have their sons taught a smattering of Latin and Greek by tasks and flogging at Eton, Winchester, and the Royal School at Westminster, or in the way of a pastime (without flogging) at the Chrestomathic School,...

Helvétius held quite a different view. He countered Rousseau's belief in not chastising children with the advice that,

...L'Enfant craint encore plus la douleur qu'il n'aime un bonbon, Le châtement est-il sévère? Est-il justement infligé? On est rarement obligé d'y revenir. ...et s'il se souvient du fouet, c'est dans ces momens calmes et consacrés à l'étude, où ce souvenir soutient son application.⁸⁰³

So, although Bentham's method of instruction was somewhat harsh in application, it was not as brutal as conventional schooling at the time, nor did it carry the utilitarian logic, as Helvétius proposed, to the

⁸⁰¹ De l'Esprit, IV, xvi, p551.

⁸⁰² Bentham, Chrestomathia, p35.

⁸⁰³ De l'Homme, V, notes, pp518/9.

point where the rod became the symbol of pain which the pupil would naturally work to avoid. He summarized Chrestomathic instruction in modern economic terminology, thus,

On the one hand, the quantity of instruction raised to its maximum; on the other hand, the quantity of punishment and reward employed in the production of that effect, sunk to its minimum; in a word, profit maximized, expense minimized:..."⁸⁰⁴

The correlation of pain with expense would be most relevant as a personal consideration, because for Bentham, both pain and cost were to be minimized.

Although Latin and Greek did not disappear completely from the curriculum, for Bentham they took a minor role."⁸⁰⁵ He recognized that there was some justification in learning these languages if pursuing certain careers, but he gave them only a minor role."⁸⁰⁶ The writers of antiquity, however, fared even worse than the languages they had employed, and Bentham had no role for them, saying,

As to the classical authors, Greek and Roman, to any such purpose as the present, the question is not what they knew, but what, by the study of them, is at this time of day to be learnt from them, more than is to be learnt without reading them. Such is the question, and the answer is - not

⁸⁰⁴ Bentham, Chrestomathia, p55.

⁸⁰⁵ Bentham echoed Helvétius in his approach to the 'dead languages.' Whilst the French philosophe complains of the loss of eight to ten years which the learning of Latin causes, he nevertheless he steps back from totally outlawing the process. De l'Esprit, IV, xvii, pp554/5.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid, p39 and p38. Speaking of Latin, Bentham said, "Under the proposed system of instruction, ornamental and respectable as it is, and necessary as it is to raise the scholar above the imputation of vulgar ignorance, it is in a manner put aside, and placed in the background."

anything.⁸⁰⁷

So, Greek and Latin were buried along with German, French and English in the one subject titled Grammatical Exercises. Any more sophisticated command of the two classical languages would have to be obtained outside the normal school day.

The Chrestomathic school, despite its intended upper-class clientele, was fundamentally monitorial and, despite the financial benefits which were envisaged, the concentration of large numbers of pupils in one place had its drawbacks. The foremost was the lack of space for any pursuit of physical activity. Space apart, however, Bentham would appear to have viewed any time away from formal instruction as "unprofitable pastime":

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy: such is the concession made, the plea pleaded, by the homely proverb, in favour of unprofitable pastime. That by all play and no work, Jack would ever be made a learned boy,⁸⁰⁸ is a result, to the truth of which neither proverb nor prophecy has ever dared to look.⁸⁰⁹

The Chrestomathia was a very detailed design for both a school and its curriculum. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of James Mill, Francis Place and several others, to raise money, the ultimate stumbling block to implementation of the scheme became Bentham himself. It appears that the impact of so many children housed in a building in his London

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid, p40.

⁸⁰⁸ This appears to be a criticism of Rousseau's maxim that children should be encouraged to "Love childhood; promote its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct." Emile, Bloom (ed.), p79.

⁸⁰⁹ Bentham, Chrestomathia, p56.

garden began to dawn on the old man. He soured to the scheme, and the other supporters failed to find a suitable alternative site. It is a pity that the scheme never saw reality, partly from the fact that its uniqueness warranted putting to the test, but also for one other reason. New for his era was the provision that "Females proposed to be received..."⁸¹⁰ The proponents of mixed education were so rare that this provision has to be seen as progressive. And, this view was by no means shared even by Bentham's utilitarian supporters. When two of them, James Mill and Francis Place, summarized the Chrestomathic school in a set of 'proposals' girls were not mentioned, and Robert Fenn asserts that it is "reasonably clear that girls are not to be permitted."⁸¹¹

Despite their many years of co-operation, and the older Mill's considerable moral debt to Bentham, their work remained quite independent. Obviously, by the time they met, in 1808, Bentham was sixty years old, had much of his important writing behind him, and had 'fixed his agenda'. Mill, at thirty-five, was also not particularly flexible. The two men came together because both accepted the same utilitarian principles, but on the details they retained their own views and this appears not to have been a matter of contention between them. Although they were close, living on the same premises for up to six months of each year at their height of co-operation, each pursued his own individual works. Thus, in the way they addressed education itself, each

⁸¹⁰ Bentham, Chrestomathia, p122.

⁸¹¹ Robert A. Fenn, James Mill's Political Thought (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987), p86.

took a different approach. As Burston says, "Mill developed a philosophy of education, while Bentham produced a detailed plan."¹² Thus, their relationship was not one of mentor and disciple, but of two thinkers with views sufficiently similar for them both to benefit from the acquaintance.

James Mill

There was not much about James Mill which was straight-forward. He emulated Godwin insofar as he trained for the clergy, but opted out and soon became an agnostic. In Mill's case, that early emphasis on Christian duty, perhaps coupled with his Scottish environment, left him a Stoic at heart. His elder son referred to James Mill as predominantly Stoic in his personal qualities while Epicurean in his standard of morals.¹³ The older Mill paints a dour portrait, with John Stuart going on to say of him,

...he had (and this was the Cynic element) scarcely any belief in pleasure;... He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by... He would sometimes say, that if life were what it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having: but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility.

But, despite his personal pessimism, James Mill was, in his work, generally optimistic. He looked for progress in society, and worked so hard to that end that he must have believed improvement possible.

The French philosophes are commonly considered to have exerted a

¹² W.H. Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p155.

¹³ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, pp33/4.

particular influence on James Mill. John Stuart believed that they "...were the example he sought to imitate,..."¹⁴ Ian Cumming's study of Mill's Commonplace Books suggested to him the influence, in his educational thinking, of French authors,¹⁵ and Robert Fenn takes a further step in referring to James Mill as "...a philosophe out of season,..." However, despite this comment, in the preface of his work, Fenn sees the French influence on Mill as not predominant, although he does acknowledge Helvétius as being of particular interest to Mill.¹⁶ This assertion is supported by Mill's own words. He said, "No one man, perhaps, has done so much towards perfecting the theory of education as Mons. Helvétius."¹⁷

Ian Cumming says of James Mill's adherence to Helvétius' doctrines that,

His usefulness to British education, through *De l'Homme* particularly, was first clearly stated by James Mill in the article on 'Education' which he contributed to the Encyclopaedia Britannica.¹⁸

In the encyclopaedia article, James Mill left no doubt about his pedagogical allegiance, and offered an explanation for the poor

¹⁴ Ibid, p76.

¹⁵ Ian Cumming, James Mill on 'Education' (Auckland: University of Auckland, Bulletin No. 54, Education Series No. 1, 1959, p5.

¹⁶ Fenn, piii and p14.

¹⁷ James Mill, "Education" in W.H. Burston (ed.), James Mill on Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p68. Mill was engaged in 1815 (intro., p3) to write "Education" for the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

¹⁸ Ian Cumming, James Mill on Education, p22.

recognition of Helvétius' ideas in early nineteenth century Britain, thus,

Whoever wishes to understand the groundwork of education, can do nothing more conducive to his end, than to study profoundly the expositions of this philosophical inquirer, whether he adopts his conclusions, in all their latitude, or not. That Helvétius was not more admired in his own country, is owing really to the value of his work. It was too solid, for the frivolous taste of the gay circles of Paris, assemblies of pampered noblesse, who wished for nothing but amusement.¹⁹

Mill went on from pointing out the lack of support which Helvétius' work received from the salon society of his era, to explain the primary importance of Claude Adrien's pedagogy.²⁰ Mill then, not only pursued an educational philosophy based on equal mental capability at birth, he clearly acknowledged the origins of his ideas.²¹

Both Helvétius and Mill sought the route to an improved society through analysis of the mind; that pedagogical process is assisted by an understanding of the human mental faculty. Each writer feared the uncontrolled development of the child - each cautioned against the natural tendency of the human to subject others to their power. Helvétius cautioned that "Le pouvoir est l'objet unique de la recherche des hommes"²² and Mill claimed that "The grand object of human desire is a command over the wills of other men."²³ Or, as John Plamenatz expands

¹⁹ James Mill, "Education", p68.

²⁰ Ibid, pp68-72.

²¹ Ian Cumming, James Mill on Education, p22.

²² De l'Homme, IV, iv, p338.

²³ James Mill, "Education", p100.

it,

Mill believes that it is a law of human nature that every man desires as much power as will enable him to make the persons and properties of other men subservient to his pleasures.⁸²⁴

Hence, in each case there was a need to channel natural development, and the tool for doing so was the control of education. Thus, for James Mill, as for Helvétius, education was both a positive tool and a form of social protection. The lust for power, which had been so ill used by priests and monarchs, was to be controlled by education.

The writings of James Mill cover a wide spectrum. His most voluminous single work was the History of India. However, although extensive and time consuming, having taken about a decade to complete, it is somewhat 'out on a limb'⁸²⁵ from the rest of his writings. But, as Burston points out, it was through the reputation which he gained for this work that he attained full-time employment at the East India Office in 1819; a post which allowed sufficient time for Mill to engage in further writing pursuits.⁸²⁶ On the theme of social progress based on utilitarian morality, Mill wrote books, journal articles, encyclopaedia

⁸²⁴ Plamenatz, p105.

⁸²⁵ Mill's History of India is 'out on a limb' from his other works to the extent that it was outside of his practical efforts in pursuit of social improvement in a British setting. Mill the author of the History of India however, remained Mill the utilitarian and his fundamental doctrine is evident in this major undertaking.

J. Majeed argues that "Mill's views on education and psychology were central to his attitudes to India" and further, "...his *History* argued that India itself was a tabula rasa..." J. Majeed, "James Mill's 'The History of British India' and Utilitarianism as a Rhetoric of Reform", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 24, 1990, p211.

⁸²⁶ Burston, James Mill on Education, p3.

chapters, and contributions to whatever medium was interested in accepting his 'message.' A categorization of what he wrote takes one back to the first principles of the problem of liberation of the masses from subservience in early nineteenth-century England. Education was required to raise the awareness of the working people, and the laws were needed to recognize these people as participants in government, not merely as the governed. There is something of a 'chicken and egg' situation - both improvements were necessary to facilitate the other. Also, education for the masses was such an innovation that it was necessary to give attention to both the question, 'how to educate the mind?' and secondly, 'how to provide the facilities?'

James Mill attempted to handle all of these concerns. On the operation of the mind he looked to Locke, Hume, Hartley, Condillac and Helvétius. Cumming asserts that Mill gave greatest credibility on the subject to Condillac and Hartley²⁷; and Fenn, from his assessment of the Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, considers that, "Although little reference is made to Hartley by name, it is evident that the extensive use of the doctrine of the association of ideas comes from him,..." Fenn goes on, "great stress is placed by Mill on the order and situation in which one receives or feels sensations and ideas."²⁸ And, James Mill explained, in the preface to Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind,

The phenomena of the Mind include multitudes of facts, of an extraordinary degree of complexity. By observing them one at

²⁷ Cumming, James Mill on 'Education', p26.

²⁸ Fenn, p41 and p42.

a time with sufficient care, it is possible in the mental, as it is in the material world, to obtain empirical generalizations of limited compass, but of great value for practice.⁸²⁹

The older Mill in fact went further than to assert that sensations 'can' be observed individually, he believed that as sensations occur in sequence, then they are retained in that same sequence, and recognition of the sequences could be an aid to learning. He explained,

As the ideas of the sensations which occurred synchronically, rise synchronically, so the ideas of the sensations which occurred successively, rise successively... Of these none seem better adapted to the learner than the repetition of any passage, or words; the Lord's Prayer, for example, committed to memory. In learning the passage, we repeat it; that is, we pronounce the words, in successive order, from the beginning to the end.⁸³⁰

From this work on the operations of the mind, Mill carried his ideas into his educational thought, and allied them to his fundamental belief in the utility of the pleasure/pain basis of moral choice. In his "Education" he connected the two thoughts thus:

...the character of the human mind consists in the sequence of its ideas; that the object of education, therefore, is, to provide for the constant production of certain sequences, rather than others;... there are two things which have a wonderful power over those sequences. They are, Custom; and Pain and Pleasure. These are the grand instruments or powers, by the use of which, the purposes of education are to be attained.⁸³¹

As with any theory which depends on the operation of the mind, the most important period is the first. James Mill addressed education as ideally

⁸²⁹ James Mill, Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869), px.

⁸³⁰ Ibid, p80.

⁸³¹ James Mill, "Education", p58.

occurring in four phases: Domestic, Technical, Social and Political Education. Everything, however, relies upon the effectiveness of the first, Domestic Education, which will "...present a good or bad subject for all future means of cultivation," and no period is said to be of more importance.⁸²² It is an important theme echoing Locke's fears for the educational process once the tabula rasa has been improperly addressed.⁸²³

In the ideal case education will be so construed to head off the worst consequences of natural development. The alternative scenario was sketched by Mill in the following terms,

When the education is so deplorably bad as to allow an association to be formed in the mind of the child between the grand object of desire, the command over the wills of other men, and the fears and pains of other men, as the means; the foundation is laid of the bad character, - the bad son, the bad brother, the bad husband, the bad father, the bad neighbour, the bad magistrate, the bad citizen, - to sum up all in one word, the bad man.⁸²⁴

Burston labels Mill an environmentalist, comparing him with Helvétius.⁸²⁵ He asserts that Mill's emphasis on early childhood was in fact an emphasis on the child's early environment. Helvétius had gone to great lengths in emphasizing the formative impact which environment has on early childhood.⁸²⁶

⁸²² Ibid, p92 and p93.

⁸²³ See the concluding paras. of Chapter 2.

⁸²⁴ Ibid, p101.

⁸²⁵ Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p195.

⁸²⁶ Helvétius explained that differences in people occur solely due to differences in environment; that even the slightest differences in
(continued...)

James Mill may well have been a "philosophe out of season," but in one aspect he was truly more progressive than his intellectual forebears. Unlike Voltaire and Rousseau, who looked for social justice, but shied away from improvement of the lot of the poorer classes,⁸³⁷ Mill's view of the need for social improvement held no class limitations. As Burston explains:

Mill was, I think, the first educational theorist to face the problem squarely. For democracy rests on the assumption that each citizen, however humble, should have a voice in public decisions and the ultimate basis of this is that such decisions are in the end moral ones. But with Mill the matter went further than what we ordinarily understand by the term 'moral education.' To him all moral behaviour required calculation of the consequences of one's actions and this required a certain standard of intellectual education for all.⁸³⁸

The "consequences" are the tendencies of actions to enhance pleasure or mitigate pain. For Mill, as for Bentham and Helvétius before him, government's function is to aid the people in making these choices, and that is done by amending laws accordingly. And likewise, through education the whole population will understand the choices which they make. In An Essay on Government, Mill presented his basic utilitarian

⁸³⁶(...continued)
experience causes the great differences in adults. De l'Homme, I, i-iii, pp55-62.

⁸³⁷ Voltaire wrote to Frederick the Great of Prussia, in 1767, that,
"...chez la canaille, qui n'est pas digne d'être éclairée et à laquelle tous les jougs sont propres"
Correspondance, Tome VIII, p819; see also Emile, p267, "Le pauvre n'a pas besoin d'éducation..."

⁸³⁸ Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p240.

belief:

Human pains and pleasures are derived from two sources: - They are produced, either by our fellow-men, or by causes independent of other men... Government is with the former of these two sources; that its business is to increase to the utmost the pleasures, and diminish to the utmost the pains, which men derive from one another.⁸³⁹

Mill knew that the British government by no means regarded itself, in American terminology, as a 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Parliamentarians and the aristocratic elite saw themselves as charged with running the country in terms which paralleled their own aspirations. The mass of the people were a tool in that process, to be used and abused as appropriate.

Mill distrusted the motives of government, as it existed, almost as much as the great anarchist William Godwin did. Mill said:

If the powers of Government are placed in the hands of persons whose interests are not identified with those of the community, the interests of the community are wholly sacrificed to those of the rulers.

and

...under the same temptations the members of Government lie, to take the objects of desire from the members of the community, if they are not prevented from doing so.⁸⁴⁰

If Mill was frustrated with his nation's legislators, he saw that the sure route to good government was through improvements in overall knowledge. Mill explained it thus:

⁸³⁹ James Mill, An Essay on Government (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), p3.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid, p64 and p5. Mill echoes Helvétius' call for legislators to be so thoroughly educated in their craft that they will subdue their own interests in deference to the state's. See De l'Esprit, II, xvi, p154.

What is necessary, then, is knowledge. Knowledge, on the part of those whose interests are the same as those of the community, would be an adequate remedy. But knowledge is a thing which is capable of being increased: and the more it is increased the more the evils on this side of the case would be reduced.⁸⁴¹

Government, for James Mill, should work through education to achieve a classless society, for as he said, paraphrasing the words of Locke (which Helvétius had found so important), "the difference which exists between the classes or bodies of men is the effect of education". He pursued the point further in his "Education", believing that he had proved the case for education as the answer to class barriers:

Enough is ascertained to prove, beyond a doubt, that if education does not perform every thing, there is hardly anything which it does not perform:... all the difference which exists, or can ever be made to exist, between one class of men, and another, is wholly owing to education.⁸⁴²

Thus he was convinced, and convincing, on the need for political and educational reform - the watchwords of the Utilitarians and of Helvétius.

James Mill's support of Joseph Lancaster was somewhat non-partisan, as Mill's agnosticism prevented him from too close an identification with the Quaker reformer. Mill's interest lay in whatever educational scheme would render positive results, and for him that could only be achieved by removing all barriers to the proliferation of educational facilities. His plea was Helvetian; it respected the potential which all have to benefit from education. He supported

⁸⁴¹ Ibid, p34 and p65.

⁸⁴² James Mill, "Education", p52 and p71.

schooling for the poor (Lancasterian), for the middle classes (Chrestomathic), the Mechanics Institute, the University of London and education in India.⁸⁴³ He also demonstrated faith in a logic of self-perpetuation where education was concerned, believing that once the foundations were laid, even if pupils were not well taught, their own inquisitiveness would take over. He said:

Let the people only be taught to read, though by instruments ever so little friendly to their general interests, and the very intelligence of the age will provide them with books which will prove an antidote to the poison of their pedagogues.⁸⁴⁴

His thought is obviously pointed at religious education, and the passage indicates that Mill was happy to accept even religious education, on a 'better than nothing' basis - so long as it did not impede other initiatives.

The message of Mill's pamphlet, "Schools for all, in Preference to Schools for Churchmen only", as Robert Fenn says, was "unity of the community" and sectarian education works counter to such an ideal.⁸⁴⁵ That was why, in the pamphlet, Mill found himself rationalizing Lancaster's 'Quakerism' as an irrelevant factor,⁸⁴⁶ and one which should not be considered as negating the benefits of Lancaster's contribution

⁸⁴³ Fenn, p83.

⁸⁴⁴ James Mill, "Education of the Poor" The Edinburgh Review, Vol. XXI, Feb-July 1813, p212.

⁸⁴⁵ Fenn, p85.

⁸⁴⁶ James Mill, "Schools for all, in Preference to Schools for Churchmen only." in W.H. Burston (ed.), James Mill on Education, pp129-137.

towards the education of the masses of the poor. And, at the higher level of learning, where institutions were obviously going to be much more scarce, Mill spoke against any religious ties, as in the case of the new University of London.⁸⁴⁷ Mill shared Helvétius' antipathy for religion and religious bodies. The philosophe had assimilated the Enlightenment view that religion had stifled learning and advancement, and that it had no place in any vision commensurate with progress and the modern age. After the rough handling of De l'Esprit by the religious 'lobby' Helvétius used De l'Homme to make it clear that religion had no place in a properly organized state.⁸⁴⁸ Unfortunately, when it came to implementation, Mill's hope for progress in education, through limitations in the interference of religious bodies, was not to be realized. For real progress in the proliferation of education, England, as Fenn says, needed to be "either religiously united or religiously indifferent"⁸⁴⁹ and it was neither. Only government was indifferent.

The scope of James Mill's educational initiatives, although extensive, have not yet been fully discussed. It remains to address his personal role as domestic schoolmaster. This role was so important to him, that the older Mill is sometimes characterized as a "schoolmaster first and a parent second."⁸⁵⁰ But, despite the importance to James Mill

⁸⁴⁷ James Mill, The Westminster Review, October 1826; Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p74.

⁸⁴⁸ De l'Homme, VII, ii, p608. "L'esprit Religieux... fut toujours incompatible avec l'esprit Législatif..."

⁸⁴⁹ Fenn, p88.

⁸⁵⁰ Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, pp91/2.

of this domestic education, the schooling of his children was not a subject for written record. Instead of forming an extension of his own published theories Mill's education of his children was a very private affair. Nevertheless, a record does exist through the eyes of the first pupil, John Stuart Mill.

The first thing which strikes one about the education of James Mill's eldest is the early emphasis on classics; Mill's utilitarian education does not bear the stamp of Bentham on it. From three years of age John Stuart learned Greek, and at eight years he began Latin. In between he learned arithmetic and read books of history on his own. Mathematics was developed to a high degree and at twelve years John Stuart passed to an "advanced stage... of instruction" beginning with logic.⁵¹ As Burston explains, Mill's domestic education builds to an ultimate high point in logic and philosophy.⁵² This format pursues, in principle, Plato's training of his philosopher-rulers,⁵³ and prompts John Stuart Mill to say,

There is no author to whom my father thought himself more indebted for his own mental culture, than Plato, or whom he more frequently recommended to young students.⁵⁴

John Stuart Mill's formal education was completed at fourteen years when he left to spend more than a year at the home of Samuel Bentham, in

⁵¹ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, pp3-6 and p12.

⁵² Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p167.

⁵³ Plato, The Republic. Part III, "Education: The First Stage" and Part VII, "Education of the Philosopher".

⁵⁴ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p15.

France. Although he returned to study under his father's guidance, John Stuart commented that by then "...he was no longer my schoolmaster."⁵⁵

James Mill's education of his family was performed on monitorial principles - father taught the first child, and he in turn was expected to both continue his own lessons, and take responsibility for teaching his siblings. In Mill's scheme for the education of his family, Burston finds "...the most amazing ever devised by man" saying it,

...was of a piece with the Benthamite principle that, just as a nation's character is a result of its laws, so the individual character can by education be moulded to any pattern we please.⁵⁶

However, if utilitarian education can be taken as one which enhances the happiness of the greater number, Mill's isolated family group did not in any way appear to develop that ideal. When it came to his own family, James Mill appears to have adopted more of the doctrines of Rousseau than his rival in the philosophy of education, Helvétius. The point can be appreciated in another of Burston's comments:

Even when John Mill's education had reached an advanced stage, he [James Mill] refused tempting offers to send him to Cambridge. It is hard to resist the conclusion that a major purpose in all this was to insulate his children from the influence of a corrupt society, and that in general he might have regarded monitorial education as the logical means of reforming education...⁵⁷

Mill appears to want to emulate the tutor of Rousseau's Emile, in the book of the same name, in which the child is sheltered from societal

⁵⁵ Ibid, p21.

⁵⁶ Burston, intro to James Mill on Education, pp36/7.

⁵⁷ Burston, James Mill on Philosophy and Education, p227.

influences, in order to become a truly good citizen - avoiding traits of a prevailing corrupt society along the way. But, he ignored Helvétius' plea⁵⁸ for the benefits of public, over domestic, education.

James Mill's domestic education was yet another pedagogical design. For each of the Utilitarians there was a different interpretation of what works to the greater happiness of the community. If two men as philosophically close as James Mill and Jeremy Bentham were not in accord, then there is little possibility of reaching a wide consensus on the matter. The significant difference between the two was Bentham's low regard for the classical languages, even in his middle class Chrestomathic School, and Mill's high regard for these same subjects.

In this respect John Stuart Mill echoed his father's faith in the classical languages and found Jeremy Bentham's low regard for Greek authors disturbing. He said of Bentham, "Socrates and Plato are spoken of in terms distressing to his greatest admirers,..."⁵⁹ But, even for John Stuart Mill, the greater problem was not so much the lack of training in the classics (in Bentham's educational scheme) as the bad name given to such pursuits by the great schools of the day. In the same way as Bentham pointed to those schools in his Chrestomathia, J.S. Mill also noted:

How absurd, they say, that the whole of boyhood should be taken up in acquiring an imperfect knowledge of two dead languages. Absurd indeed; but is the human mind's capacity to learn measured by that of Eton and Westminster to teach?

⁵⁸ De l'Homme, X, iii, pp889-891.

⁵⁹ John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", p145.

I should prefer to see these reformers pointing their attacks at the shameful inefficiency of these schools,..."⁶⁰

Elsewhere John Stuart Mill presented his experience as an example of the utility of his own education in the classical languages, thus:

...the course of instruction which I have partially retraced... places in a strong light the wretched waste of so many precious years as are spent in acquiring the modicum of Latin and Greek commonly taught to schoolboys; a waste which has led so many educational reformers to entertain the ill-judged proposal of discarding these languages altogether from general education."⁶¹

In this aspect then, the two Mills took a common view, but with John Stuart recognizing the logic of Bentham's opposition.

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill was not to maintain such a closeness to all aspects of his father's educational doctrine. After all, it was an austere regime, and the boy was particularly isolated. Similarly with Helvétius' preference for avoiding lost time for vacations,⁶² James Mill avoided them for the added reason of maintaining the isolation of his children. In discussing this, however, John Stuart Mill referred to the deficiencies of his education.⁶³ He appears to regret not having developed so well physically. These, of course, are disagreeable

⁶⁰ John Stuart Mill, "Inaugural Address at the University of St. Andrews" in Francis W. Garforth (ed.), John Stuart Mill on Education (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971), p161.

⁶¹ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p21.

⁶² De l'Homme, X, iv, p894.

⁶³ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p25.

elements of his total educational experience. Overall, John Stuart Mill benefitted intellectually, not only from the instructions which his father delivered, but from his closeness to two of the great minds of his age.

In John Stuart's schedule sufficient time was allocated for his own analysis and free reading. As Mill said, his was not "an education of cram,"⁶⁴ and he was encouraged to develop a healthy intellectual curiosity. He was obviously intellectually astute and benefitted greatly from the works of James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, and in some aspects he accepted their bias.

On religion, the son accepted the beliefs of his father - anything less would have been out of the question:

It would have been wholly inconsistent with my father's ideas of duty, to allow me to acquire impressions contrary to his convictions and feelings respecting religion: and he impressed upon me from the first, that the manner in which the world came into existence was a subject on which nothing was known:...

Also, inasmuch as James Mill enthusiastically accepted the associationist psychology of David Hartley, so by example, in his own education (by limitations on his possibility of association), and in what he read and learned from his father, John Stuart accepted the doctrine of utilitarianism; particularly its educational implications.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid, p22.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp33/4.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p75.

But, for the source of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, one has to look beyond the father to Jeremy Bentham. Although he acknowledged learning a form of "the greatest happiness" principle from his father, on what he calls "the Platonic model," J.S. Mill claimed that his first reading of Bentham's Traité de Législation was "an epoch in my life; one of the turning points in my mental history."⁶⁷ He went on,

...in the first pages of Bentham it burst upon me with all the force of novelty. What thus impressed me was the chapter in which Bentham passed judgement on the common modes of reasoning in morals and legislation, deduced from phrases like "law of nature," "right reason," "the oral sense," "natural rectitude," and the like, and characterized them as dogmatism in disguise,... It had not struck me before, that Bentham's principle put an end to all this.⁶⁸

Not only did he feel that he had merely acquired some additional feature of knowledge; Mill was transformed. And, it was directly through Bentham that he came to recognize the important social implications of Helvétius' ideas on utility. He summarized his feelings thus:

When I laid down the last volume of the Traité, I had become a different being. The "principle of utility" understood as Bentham understood it, and applied in the manner which he applied it through these three volumes, fell exactly into its place as the keystone which held together the detached and fragmentary parts of my knowledge and beliefs.⁶⁹

It was after this experience that John Stuart went on to read Locke's Essay, Helvétius' De l'Esprit and Hartley's Observations on Man. James Mill had been particularly influenced by his study of the latter work, and at this time he began to reflect it in his own writing of the

⁶⁷ Ibid, p45.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp45/6.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p47.

Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind.⁸⁷⁰

John Stuart Mill points out in the Autobiography that he read De l'Esprit in the late stages of his education, at or before the age of sixteen. He had done so at his own choice, and used a well tried learning method. He read passages, prepared an abstract of each chapter, and then recounted his observations for discussion with his father.⁸⁷¹ Consequently Helvétius (and the rendition of his ideas which were articulated by Bentham and James Mill) became a founding influence on John Stuart's work. Indeed, the younger Mill drew attention to the importance of De l'Esprit and Helvétius in his 1838 article "Bentham".⁸⁷²

In "Utilitarianism" he returned to the first principles which had been accepted and promoted by Helvétius and Bentham. All are said to be born with equal mental capability and nothing is innate.⁸⁷³ Even so, Mill proceeded to explain that there is a moral predisposition of the human which is not innate, but a natural tendency to give regard to pleasure and pain. Moral feelings, therefore, spring up spontaneously; "a natural outgrowth of our nature."⁸⁷⁴ The consequences for Mill, as for his philosophical forebears, was that without innate talents the only factors governing good or bad human development is education, and circumstance. Although this concept has much to favour it, particularly

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid, p49.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid, p48.

⁸⁷² John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", p169.

⁸⁷³ John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism", p285 and p302.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid, p303.

if it leads to the equal treatment of all people, there are some consequences to this line of thought which presented difficulties to the average citizen of Mill's era, and our own. Such a problem was Robert Owen's view of the punishment of criminals, which J.S. Mill supported thus:

Mr. Owen, again, affirms that it is unjust to punish at all, for the criminal did not make his own character; his education, and the circumstances which surround him, have made him a criminal, and for these he is not responsible. All these opinions are extremely plausible;... The Owenite invokes the admitted principle that it is unjust to punish anyone for what he cannot help.⁸⁷⁵

This sort of philosophical reasoning is much like Rousseau's operation of the general will;⁸⁷⁶ it is utopian, and only works in the ideal sense where the goodwill of all concerned can be taken as a given commodity.

For John Stuart Mill a unique experience led him to change his whole philosophy of life. In the winter of 1826-7 he appears to have undergone some form of breakdown. The consequence was quite positive though, with Mill coming out of it with a better appreciation for personal happiness and fulfilment. He maintained his firm commitment to Utilitarianism, but claimed that, "The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points of my ethical and philosophical creed."⁸⁷⁷ He went on, "I now began to find meaning in the things which I had read or heard about the importance of poetry and art as instruments

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid, p329.

⁸⁷⁶ Rousseau; Maurice Cranston (ed. & trans.), Social Contract (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), Book I, ch. 6 & Book II, ch. 3.

⁸⁷⁷ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p101.

of human culture." Mill discovered personal pleasures which his father's education had steered him away from,⁸⁷⁸ and that did have an impact on the way he advanced his utilitarian consideration of pleasure itself.

To that time he had accepted quantity of pleasure as a basic measure of utility. This concept was rooted in the extreme materialism of Helvétius, adopted and adapted by Bentham, which views all facets of human behaviour as mechanical, and thus measurable. The problem with an assessment of quantity, however, is that it takes no regard for the nature of the pleasure concerned. Mill, in fact, criticized Bentham for his quantitative view of pleasure. Jeremy Bentham, even the one for detail, had categorized all pleasures and pains as if somehow one could hold up a decision to check the morality of an action from his list.⁸⁷⁹ Mill was to use the example of push-pin and poetry to explain the error of Bentham's way of measuring pleasure. Bentham is said to have claimed that if men found push-pin made them happy, then it was as good as poetry⁸⁸⁰ - all items in the 'happiness index' carried equal merit. John Stuart Mill, however, was to establish a belief in a qualitative assessment of happiness. Unlike Bentham, however, Mill did not attempt to establish any criteria for the assessment of pleasure. Qualitative

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid, p11.

"My father never was a great admirer of Shakespeare,... He cared little for any English poetry except Milton... the poetry of the present century he saw scarcely any merit in, and I hardly became acquainted with any of it till I was grown up to manhood,..."

⁸⁷⁹ Bentham, The Principles of Morals and Legislation, pp89-96.

⁸⁸⁰ John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", pp173/4.

considerations defy measure, although there are some who believe he could have gone further, like Maurice Cranston.⁸⁸¹ John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism became a reaction against Bentham and what Guyau referred to as "les purs utilitaires."⁸⁸²

In his transition towards a more individualistically based utilitarianism, there can be detected a symbolic drift away from the utilitarianism of Bentham and his father (with its influence of Helvetian ideas) and a respect for Rousseau. In "Utilitarianism" he said that "The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others."⁸⁸³ Such a notion is stoic, an aspect of doing one's social duty, and completely contrary to the epicureanism of Helvétius, who recognised no valid case for sacrifice to the benefit of the common good.⁸⁸⁴ Rousseau was quite different. From an early association with the philosophes, including a habit of frequenting the home of Helvétius, he had taken on his self-inflicted exile.

Rousseau's departure from the philosophic community was more than a matter of personal distaste; he had developed a philosophical view

⁸⁸¹ Maurice Cranston says,
"The evasion of the problem of value is the great theoretical weakness of Mill as an ethicist. Indeed, the only justification he gives for saying that happiness is desirable is 'that people actually desire it.'"

John Stuart Mill (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958), p12.

⁸⁸² Guyau. La Morale Anglaise, p424.

⁸⁸³ John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism", p288.

⁸⁸⁴ De l'Homme, V, i, p457.

which was at variance with the fundamental philosophy of his former associates. John Stuart Mill's new utilitarianism also led him to the outcast's doctrines. He explained the Genevan's separation from the philosophes in a way which is most sympathetic:

...in the eighteenth century, when nearly all... were lost in admiration of what is called civilization... with what a salutary shock did the paradoxes of Rousseau explode like bombshells in the midst,... Nevertheless there lie in Rousseau's doctrine, and has floated down the stream of opinion with it, a considerable amount of exactly those truths which the popular opinion wanted; and these are the deposit which was left behind when the flood subsided. The superior worth of simplicity of life, the enervating and demoralizing effect of the trammels and hypocracies of artificial society, are ideas which have never been entirely absent from cultivated minds since Rousseau wrote;...⁸⁵

Rousseau, the group outcast, the champion of individuality, ultimately found a place in (modern) utilitarian thought.

John Stuart Mill, however, did not 'buy in' to Rousseau in any complete sense, but with his new respect for individuality, the most important utilitarian of the mid nineteenth-century came to recognize that there was something useful in the eighteenth-century Genevan philosopher's work. But, what has this to say for education? The answer is that, along with a respect for individuality comes a respect for the virtues of training which concentrates on capability for personal expansion, and not particularly the limited horizons of vocation. John Stuart Mill became a champion of liberal education. In this aspect of educational thought John Stuart Mill distanced himself from Helvétius. The philosophe, however, toying with the benefits of a broad curriculum,

⁸⁵ John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty". p53.

had come down firmly in favour of a vocationally restricted education. In essence, if humans are mechanical, and education all-powerful, then a diffusion of the curriculum would merely dilute the pupil's skills, and guarantee failure to achieve potential. Helvétius had visited the concept of liberal education, but quickly sidelined it, in saying:

Il est utile et de suivre la marche uniforme de l'esprit humain dans les différens genres de sciences et d'arts... Cette étude donne plus de force et d'étendue à l'esprit; mais il n'y faut consacrer qu'un certain tems, et porter sa principale attention sur les détails de l'art ou de la science qu'on cultive.⁸⁶

A broadly based education appears as a luxury which the child cannot afford the time for.

Mill presented his belief in liberal education forcefully in his "Inaugural Address at the University of St. Andrews" when he was elected Lord Rector in 1865. He defined the role of a university thus:

Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers and physicians or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings.⁸⁷

He looked for the university to encourage initiative in study, and not to "...tell us from authority what we ought to believe." He did not want the university to spend time dealing with, say, the facts of history, but its role was to deal with the "philosophy of history."⁸⁸ These words echo Rousseau's requirements for his pupil Emile, who was to develop a

⁸⁶ De l'Esprit, IV, xvi, p551.

⁸⁷ John Stuart Mill, "Inaugural Address", p155.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p215 and p168.

'multi-faceted' capability through the operation of his own inquisitiveness. He was also to be guided away from any form of teaching based on opinion or authority.

Although John Stuart Mill's speech was to a university, his overall support for liberal education comes through. The following passage has equal applicability to any citizen, whether a student at university, or a common labourer:

...unless an elementary knowledge of scientific truths is diffused among the public, they never know what is certain or what is not, or who are entitled to speak with authority and who are not; and they either have no faith at all in the testimony of science or are the ready dupes of charlatans and imposters.⁸²⁹

Liberal education takes regard for the individual first. It is true to assert that society ultimately benefits from most forms of organized education. Liberal education, however, looks first to the needs of the person, not to some purpose beyond them, which is the 'greater happiness of the greatest number.' John Stuart Mill's advocacy of liberal education was a step beyond the curricula of Bentham and his father. Bentham, as can be seen in the Chresthomatic plan, at Appendix I, did believe in a broad, but somewhat extreme, curriculum. Every conceivable branch of science was to be investigated by the child, but the classics and literature were hardly considered. Bentham's was a vocational education. James Mill was different, giving the classics a place, at least in the education which he applied to his own family. His scant respect for literature however, leads one to believe that he was most

⁸²⁹ Ibid, p184.

concerned with the ultimate use, or utility, of education than with the way it developed the individual.

John Stuart Mill, in the appreciation which he came to adopt for literature and art, after his breakdown, came closer than his utilitarian predecessors to what is defined as a liberal educationalist stance. One such definition is provided by the highly respected modern educational philosopher A.N. Whitehead, who says,

In its essence a liberal education is an education for thought and for aesthetic appreciation. It proceeds by imparting a knowledge of the masterpieces of thought, of imaginative literature, and of art.⁹⁹⁰

At the opposite end of an educational scale, which balances liberal and vocational education, the consequence would be the citizen who is converted, as Karl Marx describes it, "...into a living appendage of the machine;..."⁹⁹¹ Both Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, despite the latter's emphasis on classics, favoured the vocational emphasis in education, and John Stuart Mill came to embrace liberal education; he alone embraced the aspirations of the individual.

Jeremy Bentham did display an inclination towards liberal education when, in his Chrestomathia, he said, "How much more complete the security of him who possesses in his own mind a stocked and variegated garden of art and science!"⁹⁹² It sounds like an adequate

⁹⁹⁰ A.N. Whitehead, "Technical Education and its Relation to Science and Literature" in The Aims of Education and Other Essays (London: Collier Macmillan, 1967), p46.

⁹⁹¹ Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p614.

⁹⁹² Bentham, Chrestomathia, p21.

description of a liberal educationist philosophy, but in the same document his curriculum does not deliver it. He excused "Belles Lettres," including literary and poetical composition, as "time of life too early" and had no other place for literature and poetry. Of music, painting and sculpture he claimed an insufficient school room, even though he designed the building. His reason for the exclusion was given as, "Utility not sufficiently general."⁸³

James Mill hoped that support to Joseph Lancaster's monitorial school system might further the cause of increasing the number of educated people in the country. Once educated, people could be expected to see beyond their personal needs, and operate in favour of the common good. As John Stuart Mill presented the case,

Education, habit, and the cultivation of the sentiments, will make a common man dig or weave for his country, as readily as fight for his country... Interest in the common good is at present so weak a motive in the generality, not because it can never be otherwise, but because the mind is not accustomed to dwell on it as it dwells from morning till night on things which tend only to personal advantage.⁸⁴

J.S. Mill's expression here was not merely a desire that the mass of ordinary people understand, and exercise utilitarian principles. Embedded in his thought was a fear of the advancement of legislation without education; both were necessary, but both together. If the ordinary people were given powers which they were inadequately prepared to exercise, then the consequences could have been disastrous. For this

⁸³ These points are contained in the "Chrestomathic Instruction Tables, Table I", which are transcribed as an appendix to the Dissertation.

⁸⁴ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p163.

reason J.S. Mill found himself less inclined to political reform, as time went by, wanting education to keep pace with the powers which people were acquiring generally. He explained:

We were much less democrats than I had been, because so long as education continues to be so wretchedly imperfect, we dreaded the ignorance and especially the selfishness and brutality of the mass:...⁸⁹⁵

Basic schooling alone would not transfer the mass of ignorant people into an intelligent and discerning citizenry. They would need to be shown the way in which they should handle themselves, and the utilitarians knew who should do that.

Government was too aloof to have any real closeness to the people, and the aristocracy was thoroughly despised. John Stuart was suspicious of both despite his participation in parliament from 1865 to 1868. F.W. Garforth alludes to Mill's regard for government's agenda in educating the ordinary people. He says,

There is little doubt that much of the (often reluctant) assistance given to English education by nineteenth-century governments was politically motivated by a desire to 'tame' the working classes, to forestall trouble, to provide a compliant work force for industrial expansion. However, this was not the purpose of the utilitarians in general or of J.S. Mill in particular; for the latter, certainly, the impelling motive was none other than his profound and ingenious concern for human improvement.⁸⁹⁶

Who then, was to be the example which the improving working class were to emulate? It was, in fact, for John Stuart Mill, as for his father, to be their class neighbours, the middle class.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid, p162.

⁸⁹⁶ Garforth, Educative Democracy, p57.

James Mill believed that there existed a tendency for people to want to imitate those of superior rank. In an article in The London Review of 1836 he said that "...the laborious classes are prone to imitation of those who are in circumstances above them;..."⁸⁹⁷ For James Mill, then, the people above them, who should be their guides, were the middle class. In fact, the middle class became a vital link in the achievement of the utilitarian ideal. The basic concept of the greatest good of the greatest number warrants no exclusions. For Utilitarianism to work it had to reflect the whole of the people, and Bentham and the Mills, being of the middle classes themselves, saw their group as the one to ensure political and social justice for all. The alternatives, as Fenn says, would destroy Utilitarianism itself. He says of James Mill:

It is the imitative principle which allows him to argue that the working class, or lower class, or lower ranks, will follow the lead of the middle class, and are thus safe recipients of the right of franchise.⁸⁹⁸

Fenn proceeds to argue that without the middle class link in the route of the ordinary people to full participation in government, the Utilitarians would find themselves with an elitist concept which would be incompatible with the notions of the greatest good of the greatest number. If the Utilitarians had been reservedly for the middle-class then their claims in favour of the 'greater' happiness would have been pretentious.

⁸⁹⁷ James Mill, "Aristocracy" in The London Review, Vol. II, No. 4, Jan. 1836, p285;
Fenn, p100.

⁸⁹⁸ Fenn, p101.

John Stuart Mill's logical link between education and legislation, and his particular concern that the former at least keep pace with the latter, led him to an interesting point. He became convinced that education was so necessary that its proliferation required some form of enforcement. He required that,

An age might be fixed at which every child must be examined, to ascertain if he (or she) is able to read. If a child proves unable, the father, unless he has some sufficient ground of excuse, might be subjected to some moderate fine, to be worked out, if necessary, by his labour, and the child might be put to school at his expense. Once in every year the examination should be renewed,...

Mill then, wanted to force education to keep pace with legislative reform. In his concern that education and legislation keep pace with each other Mill was retaining an important maxim which Helvétius had presented in De l'Homme, and in fact, giving it greater emphasis. Helvétius had said,

J'ai montré la dépendance réciproque qui se trouve entre la partie morale de l'éducation et la forme différente des Gouvernemens. J'ai prouvé enfin que la réforme de l'un ne peut s'opérer que par la réforme de l'autre.

Mill, however, in his own observations, was able to note that not only were the two aspects of reform complementary, but the rate of change for each needed to keep pace with the other. Educational improvement prior to legislative would give the people the yearning for democracy without the means, and democracy without education presented the fearful spectre of a vast mass of the people exercising their tremendous power, without

"" John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty", p118.

"" De l'Homme, X, x, p924.

judgement.

A further innovation which was proposed by John Stuart Mill, which was intended to emphasize the fact that the right of political choice should favour the educated, was the recommendation of plurality of votes. In the Autobiography he noted that in,

...discussions on the Reform Bill of Lord Derby's and Mr. Disraeli's Government in 1859, I added a third feature, a plurality of votes, to be given, not to property, but to proved superiority of education.⁹⁰¹

He expanded on the idea in his "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform" in which he said,

The perfection... of an electoral system would be, that every person should have one vote, but that every well-educated person in the community should have more than one, on a scale corresponding as far as practicable to their amount of education.⁹⁰²

By this means J.S. Mill managed to be faithful to democratic equality, while assuaging his fear of the impact of unleashing the uneducated masses on political questions which they did not fully understand. Everyone would participate in political choice, but greater power in the electoral process would accrue to those who were most capable of exercising their rights wisely.

⁹⁰¹ John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p180.

⁹⁰² John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform", Essays on Politics and Society in Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Vol. XIX (Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p325.

John Stuart Mill came closest to our age and was to translate Utilitarianism into a concept which we are able to most clearly identify with. Jeremy Bentham and James Mill were very much of the immediate post-Enlightenment and the bright promises which had not yet been worked out. Their attempts to do so were preliminary and probing, but John Stuart was able to smooth the sharp edges, and particularly in his reflections on individualism, to attempt a reconciliation of the utility of the greater, and the personal, good. He thus modernized Utilitarianism, rather than abandoned it. Consequently, through the middle to the second half of the nineteenth-century he became the latest focus of the epicurean tradition, which had as its important contributors Gassendi, Locke, Helvétius and Bentham.

In explaining a reconciliation between his own views and Bentham's, John Stuart Mill presented the case for achieving objectives by stepping down to a lower level the way in which one pursues the ultimate objective. Instead of always rolling out the grand principle, and judging everything by it, there is room for approaching the ultimate goal by a non-direct route. By this method it may be possible to pick up travellers who had embarked in a different direction. Mill commented:

At present we shall only say, that while, under proper explanations, we entirely agree with Bentham in his principle, we do not hold with him that all right thinking on the details of morals depends on its express assertion. We think utility, or happiness, much too complex and indefinite an end to be sought except through the medium of various secondary ends, concerning which there may be, and often is, agreement among persons who differ in their ultimate standard; and about which there does in fact prevail a much greater unanimity among thinking

persons, ...⁹⁰³

It might be argued that John Stuart Mill was merely disguising his retreat from Utilitarianism. In fact, what he was doing was making Utilitarianism more realistic. Rigid adherence to the old doctrine was destined to make it exactly that; an old doctrine which could not keep pace with progress.

Bentham, with James and John Stuart Mill, shared faith in the principle of utility, and each was thoroughly convinced that educational reform was necessary to achieve their philosophical ideals. What is most notable though, considering the progressive chronological overlaps of their lifespans, was that the doctrine of Utilitarianism did not evolve, in itself, to some ultimate high point. Utilitarianism is seen as a "transitional school"⁹⁰⁴ on the road to Darwinism and socialism. Thus, there is also no progressive development in their educational ideas. It may be claimed, in fact, that the first of the group, Bentham, was more modern than the others with his emphasis on science in the curriculum, and his willingness to countenance the equal education of females. That would be, however, only one interpretation of modern, but one which would find favour with many current educational planners, and political observers. Others though, would favour the liberal educational ideas of John Stuart Mill, but few would favour his father's scheme for domestic education. Of course, it cannot be claimed that his father offered such a system for general application, and it is reasonable to suggest that

⁹⁰³ John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", p170.

⁹⁰⁴ Russell, p746.

he would have accepted whatever pedagogical formula which would provide widespread general training for all the children of the country.

The problem which these three Utilitarians encountered went right to the heart of Helvétius' philosophy; social improvement was to be realized by the combined action of education and legislation. Both were essential, and both in some way co-ordinated. The obstacle however, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British society, was government lethargy. Helvétius' educational scheme was built on the foundations of enlightened government - a prerequisite to implementing other aspects of his quest for an improved society. In every case - for Bentham and the Mills; for Owen; for Lancaster - it was the unwillingness of government to embrace the 'utility' of widespread education which impeded their initiatives.

The important facets of Helvétius' ideas which all of the Utilitarians retained was the advocacy of the pleasure/pain principle as a prerequisite of good legislation and good government; absolute faith in the correlation of legislation with education, and a conviction of the power which education has for personal and societal betterment. These notions demonstrate the usefulness of the ideas which Helvétius originated, despite the fact that they are frequently submerged in the Utilitarianism of Bentham and the Mills. Those concepts, however, were so fundamental that they weathered the differences of those three important, yet singular, social reformers. Bentham and the Mills were all Utilitarians because the key concept (that morality can be based on the human propensity to favour pleasure over pain) remained, as their

active minds sought to adapt to the rigours of social and political reality - and that key concept was adopted directly from Helvétius.

Whereas the 'greater happiness principle' may have endeared Helvétius most to Bentham, it is his concept of the absolute equality of humankind which may yet prove to be his most important legacy. It may be easily disproved scientifically, but it is a socially important concept. The notion of differential mental capacity feeds discrimination of a most insidious kind. By it people have been restricted in their aspirations throughout time. But, if all may aspire to any intellectual ambition, through the assumption of an equal start point, then they will rise to an appropriate level of academic and career achievement unencumbered by assumptions of inferiority. The usefulness of the concept was recognized by Karl Marx, in the form that it was taken from Helvétius by Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen. This is not to say that it has a bearing only on socialist, or communist, ideology. Assumed equality is not only fundamentally democratic, but it works in the modern world; as a benefit to the individual, and to the national entity.

8. Conclusion

John Locke (perhaps unwittingly) contributed to two quite different avenues of pedagogical thought. In his belief that God had given humankind a series of natural laws to live by, he traced human relationships, including those between parents and children, to standards which would ensure a continued amiable condition of society. In order for society to be perpetuated, its members have given up certain freedoms, and taken responsibilities, or duties, to the community. In his natural law based philosophy Locke, in the Two Treatises of Government, presented a case for the rights and duties of the individual, at the 'macro' level of national government, and at the 'micro' level of family administration.

In the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, however, Locke articulated a quite different philosophy. Instead of looking to God-given natural laws for guidance, the individual was presented here as being activated principally by the pursuit of happiness. In place of duty, and consideration of what God would have required, are substituted "innate practical Principles" of desire for happiness and aversion to misery.⁹⁰⁵ Natural law philosophy, and the doctrine of hedonism, represent two quite different currents of thought. And, though Locke may well have intended to unite them in a later chapter of the Essay, as John Dunn suggests, he did not, and his two major works remain somewhat contradictory. Consequently, Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education, published after both the Essay and the Two Treatises, contains aspects

⁹⁰⁵ Essay, I, iii, #3, p67.

of both of these philosophical currents. So, when Helvétius and Rousseau came to write their own educational tracts, each could draw support from Locke's Education to argue quite different pedagogical theories.

One may conceptualize the relationship of Locke, Helvétius and Rousseau, on the matter of educational philosophy, as a triangular interface, with Locke directly influencing the other two; and the eighteenth-century philosophes, in turn, influencing each other. This is a good conceptualization - it recognizes where each author 'touches' the other, but loses the component of time. Even the concept of a divergent flow of ideas, from Locke to the other two, loses sight of where Helvétius and Rousseau exist on the continuum of educational progress. Besides Locke's influence, Rousseau owed a debt to his Calvinist upbringing in Geneva, but also to Helvétius, for the help he received in formulating his pedagogy. As Lévy-Bruhl has explained, De l'Esprit "...had at least the merit of calling attention to the quite new science of pedagogy, and of preparing the public to welcome Rousseau's Emile."⁹⁰⁶ It did more though, than prepare the public for Emile, it prepared Rousseau (and Emile) for the public, because Jean-Jacques' work became a reactionary text to the extent that it responded to the existing materialist pedagogy of Helvétius. De l'Esprit also permitted Rousseau to articulate a discrete, anti-Enlightenment (anti-materialist) pedagogy which gave him a more individual and lasting reputation than was possible for just another post-Lockean; like Condillac. By doing so it consolidated his most significant role as a counter-force to the

⁹⁰⁶ Lévy-Bruhl, p230.

Enlightenment.

Jean-Jacques' notion of the demise of mankind, in his Discourse on Inequality, had already seen him alienated from Voltaire and the Encyclopédistes, with their optimistic views of social progress. In education, however, there was no-one to counter until Helvétius filled the role. Rousseau's refutation of Helvétius was a criticism of the materialist interpretations of Locke's Essay. Prior to (or without) De l'Esprit Rousseau's Emile would have been nothing more than a modern articulation of the English sage's existing pedagogical concepts. Jean-Jacques' pedagogical text then, benefits from its timely appearance four years after De l'Esprit, and from its author's consequent ability to engage the most significant of Helvétius' ideas in his own covert discussions. Thus, instead of a conceptualized triangle of interfaces, there exists only a linear continuum with Helvétius expanding on what he believed to be the most important of Locke's ideas for education, and with Rousseau defending his English mentor by reworking Locke's pedagogy as his own.

Some of the most notable aspects of the "Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard", which were to so impress Immanuel Kant, and other eminent philosophers since, were in fact merely dialogues with Helvétius. Rousseau was so articulate that Helvétius' response to him in De l'Homme could do little more than accentuate the different ideas of the two philosophes, and restate at length its author's views. It was, in fact, as much in style as in content, that Rousseau outshone Helvétius. Without doubt the Genevan was destined for an eminent

position in European literature, but without its role as a counter-Enlightenment educational treatise Emile might well have taken its place in literary history alongside Richardson's Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded as a novel which included some discussion of Locke's pedagogical ideas. Rousseau's motivation helped him to eclipse Helvétius. Jean-Jacques was a passionate advocate of his ideas, yet Helvétius comes over as being merely ambitious. And ironically, given that Helvétius had so much to say about how ambition is driven by passion, his own passion for philosophy was fired at a lower level of intensity than was Rousseau's. Morley says of the relationship of De l'Esprit to Emile in public consciousness:

A fatal discredit fastened upon a book which yet had in it so much of the root of the matter, from the unfortunate circumstance that Helvétius tacked the principle of utility onto the very crudest farrago to be found in the history of psychology. What happened, then, was that Rousseau swept into the field with a hollow version of a philosophy of reform, so eloquently, loftily, and powerfully enforced as to carry all before it. The democracy of sentimentalism took the place that ought to have been filled in the literature of revolutionary preparation by the democracy of utility.⁹⁰⁷

The implication which Morley makes, is that Helvétius had ideas which warrant merit, but was not so adept at elaborating them. Rousseau's penmanship, in contrast, left a lasting mark on the literature of his

⁹⁰⁷ Morley, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, Tome II, pp136/7.

age.⁹⁰⁸

Helvétius' ideas may be rendered down to two central principles, as Lévy-Bruhl summarized them, that,

a: personal interest or the pursuit of happiness is the only principle of human actions,

and,

b: education can do everything⁹⁰⁹

Both ideas have merit. Who can deny, at least on occasion, employing the 'hedonic calculus' to determine a more pleasurable (or less painful) course of action; and the virtues of assuming education to be equally useful to all has already been fully discussed.

If, however, Helvétius was unable to adequately articulate his ideas in a way which would demand the attention of those who could exercise change, then Jeremy Bentham had no such problem. He employed the skills which he had developed in his training for a legal career, in the task of reforming society through legislation, and education. For more than half a century the British Utilitarians - Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill, and their followers and contemporaries - pursued the notion of egalitarian education, and lobbied legislators for all manner of social reforms. And, despite their limited success,

⁹⁰⁸ The true mark of literary accomplishment is often acknowledged by the misuse of an important author's work. When Rousseau's opening remarks to the Social Contract are deliberately misquoted in the suggestion that "Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains," his important literary status is confirmed. It is a witty play on words which the reader is expected to recognize.

Anon., The Economist, 17 - 23 September 1994, p15.

⁹⁰⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, p228.

the Utilitarians retained their view (derived from Helvétius) that education was more than basic schooling.⁹¹⁰

It was Bentham's skill as a "practical lawyer" which permitted him to "...map out the motives and actions of men in a systematic and objective classification, to which the principle of utility became the key..."⁹¹¹ Unfortunately for Helvétius' long term reputation, it was the thing he had so much worked for that Bentham's skill and objectivity took over and made his own. Unlike Rousseau, whose ideas were often adopted, but never overshadowed, Helvétius has receded from view. Despite John Stuart Mill's optimistic assertion that Helvétius' name will,

...live by the side of Rousseau, when most of the other metaphysicians of the eighteenth century will be extant as such only in literary history.⁹¹²

he was to be proved wrong. Even in his own era Benjamin Disraeli was to need an explanatory note to articulate the background and significance of Helvétius. And then, he mistakenly attributed to him the claim that "inequalities of intellect are removable"⁹¹³, whereas the philosophe believed, on the contrary, that at birth no inequalities exist. Those which occur as a consequence of bad education are thereby an unfortunate

⁹¹⁰ James Mill, "Education", pp69/70.

⁹¹¹ Morley, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, pp138/9.

⁹¹² John Stuart Mill, "Bentham", p170.

⁹¹³ Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil; or, The Two Nations (London: Henry Colburn, 1845 - reprinted, Boston, L.C. Page, 1904), pp57/8 & 567, also noted that "Helvétius was a philosopher of some fame in his own lifetime, but of little influence afterwards.

'fait accompli'.

The central consequence of Helvétius' pedagogical theory was what may be termed a democracy of education. Behind his claim that all could be equally educated was the commendable corollary that all should be treated equally, by both the politicians and the pedagogues. The two conditions belong together. If children could be educated equally, then they should be. But, as long as the concept persisted that they were not similarly equipped, then the excuse existed to develop a multi-tiered system. This is not to say that Helvétius called for universal schooling, to some level, as did Diderot, La Chalotais and Condorcet. Nor did he reject education for the lower classes, as did Voltaire and Rousseau. What he did do though, was to elucidate a framework which leads to the conclusion that, logically, all can be educated (equally), and it fell to James Mill to implore that all should be. This assertion is more Marxist than Kantian, despite the coincidental formulation. In fact, it would be something of an impertinence to couple Immanuel Kant's philosophy with discussion regarding the validity of Helvétius' ideas. As Ernst Cassirer noted, "Kant's... ethical theory... deprived the calculus of pleasure and pain of all moral and religious significance."²⁴

Helvétius clearly deplored the notion that children are in any way differently endowed by nature. The idea that certain people are 'born to lead' or fated to excel in some professional endeavour was, and is, a convenient excuse for exercising the privileges of aristocracy, wealth,

²⁴ Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, p151.

religion, or any other power group. As Helvétius went to great lengths to demonstrate, "...le génie n'est point un don de la nature;..."⁹¹⁵ All are born with the same mental capability, and,

...tout l'art de l'éducation consiste à placer les jeunes gens dans un concours de circonstances propres à développer en eux le germe de l'esprit et de la vertu.⁹¹⁶

Education is thus the key to an improved social role for the citizenry, in general, and the implications for national benefit were maintained to the last sentence of De l'Esprit, where the author noted that,

...une excellente éducation pourroit, dans les grands Empires, infiniment multiplier et les talens et les vertus.⁹¹⁷

For Helvétius, then, education was the key to enlightenment; it was a call emphasizing the possibilities, with little regard to restrictions.

It was for his faith in the equal potentiality for education that Helvétius received greatest ridicule. Gabriel Compayré wondered why the author of De l'Esprit had not looked to his own daughters for an example of two individuals who had received similar education, but fared differently as a consequence. Helvétius was, of course, sufficiently aware of scientific principles to recognize that two cases were an inadequate sample. Also, he was presumably close enough to his 'subjects' to know just how equal their education really was. Compayré noted his surprise at the fact that the German Pedagogical Library had

⁹¹⁵ De l'Esprit, III, xxx, p415.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid, III, xxx, p417.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, IV, xvii, p563.

chosen De l'Homme as its first French work for translation.⁹¹⁸ Perhaps the Germans were seeing something in Helvétius which Compayré missed. From Bacon, through Locke, Diderot, Condorcet, and others, the important interconnectedness of science with education, and technology with progress, was recognized. Western humanity has come to seek its fulfilment in the pursuit of technological improvement, and those most adept at advancing any facet of it are the most revered members of our species. So, those philosophes of the eighteenth-century who wanted to destroy the authorities of old merely heralded their replacement with a new hierarchy. The intellectual and political participation so loudly proclaimed by Rousseau, gave way to a redefined system of privilege in meritocracy. Would the philosophes have been proud of the new society which they so enthusiastically ushered in? John Ralston Saul suggests not.⁹¹⁹ He looks at Voltaire's criticisms of the elites of his day, and finds the modern technocrat just as ignorant of contemporary civilisation.⁹²⁰

There is something of the betrayal of an ideal in Saul's tone; that Voltaire and his companions had seen the 'new Jerusalem', but their

⁹¹⁸ Compayré, pp329/30.

⁹¹⁹ Saul, p113.

Christopher Lasch suggests similarly that:

"Our twentieth-century experience of imperial rivalries, international competition for markets, and global wars makes it hard for us to share the Enlightenment's conviction that capitalism would promote world peace."

The True and only Heaven (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p122.

⁹²⁰ Saul, p324.

followers had not done justice to the vision. The betrayal, however, began in the Enlightenment itself. Diderot the humanist, who, as editor of the Encyclopédie was at the centre of the Enlightenment movement, betrayed the humanities on the altar of science.⁹²¹ If Diderot was going to sacrifice all to technology, how can others with a lesser understanding of social justice, and the wider implications of civilization and progress, be expected to speak against it? Indeed, for the majority of people their destiny was to become "a living appendage of the machine"⁹²², as Marx so aptly suggested, with only a few aspiring to join the new technocratic elite. Helvétius' pedagogy by no means set out to achieve social equality, but he did want to begin with a socially equitable baseline. As Stenger explains,

Il n'est pas question pour Helvétius de vouloir prouver que tous les hommes sont identiques, et il ne prétend pas les rendre tels par une éducation uniforme... Il s'agit pour lui de montrer que principiellement, a priori, tous les hommes sont capables d'apprendre et de développer leur raison, que personne n'est exclu,...

To the extent that the British Utilitarians did harbour notions of the equal capability of individuals to succeed, they were totally preoccupied with political reform and the delivery of a modest level of schooling to all. Anything beyond would have been lost in the realms of fantasy for them. They pursued Helvétius' ideas as far as they could,

⁹²¹ Compayré, p324 - "How are we to explain the contradictions of an inconsistent and ungrateful humanist who extols the humanities to the skies, and at the same time puts such restrictions on the teaching of them as almost to annihilate them?"

⁹²² Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p614.

⁹²³ Stenger, p280.

but it was far short of a complete test.

In our own time there is evidence that the equal propensity to education can work to the benefit of individuals and society. It is not to be found in a direct 'chain of ideas', from Helvétius and the Utilitarians. It is however, a concept to which recent researchers subscribe, in pursuit of a rationale for superior overall performance by East Asian schoolchildren, over their 'western' counterparts.⁹²⁴ It is a sufficiently convincing concept to prompt the attention of politicians⁹²⁵ and it has, to some degree, influenced new educational initiatives.⁹²⁶

Equal propensity to education is the basis of Helvétius' ideas. He deserved the credit which Bentham gave him in his own era, and he is worthy of credit now for articulating principles which are of merit today.

⁹²⁴ See Harold W. Stevenson & James W. Stigler, The Learning Gap (New York: Touchstone, 1994).

⁹²⁵ Speech by British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, to the British/American Chamber of Commerce in New York, 1 March 1994 relates his concerns with the educational advantage of children in some East Asian Countries over British and American counterparts.

⁹²⁶ In speeches by U.S. Secretary of State for Education, Mr. Richard W. Riley (28 March 1993 and 8 & 15 April 1994) he discussed the basic philosophy of his Administration's new educational policy in terms which are reminiscent of Helvétius, such as, "...children are not born smart, they get smart" and "...excellence can be achieved by every child."

Claude Adrien Helvétius articulated ideas which deserve credit in any review of the development of educational philosophy. He was an unwilling aide to Rousseau's developing pedagogical concepts, yet, his educational ideas are commensurate with the mainstream of Enlightenment philosophy, and should be recognized as such. It is inappropriate, and inadequate, to discuss only Rousseau's educational ideas simply because his rendition was considered the most eloquent. It is always appropriate to consider opponents to any philosophical position, but it is more important to first analyze the central concepts which are being opposed - and to recognize the context in which those ideas were developed. Two centuries of scholarship have erroneously preferred to follow Diderot, in deriding Helvétius' product because it was poorly packaged. But, his ideas had merit, as Bentham and his followers tried to demonstrate, and aspects of their utilitarianism prevail, in socialist doctrine, to our own time.

The task of rationalizing the concepts which Helvétius presented is fraught with the same obstacles now as it was in his own era. There exists a primary need for the observer to be willing to understand. It is so easy to contrast the notion of equal mental capability at birth with scientific evidence to the contrary, and thereafter to judge all of Helvétius' ideas as founded on the same, shaky, premise. However unscientific the notion, there is a solid social benefit to be expected from approaching the education of all children with the assumption that they are equally likely to succeed.

Even in the liberal-minded environment of the philosophical circle in which Helvétius moved few were willing to go along with his extreme articulation of materialism. With skepticism from most of his 'friends' it is hardly surprising that Rousseau's articulate rendition of Emile should have overshadowed De l'Esprit. Helvétius, however, was not totally abandoned in the circle of the French philosophes, and he did have a willing apologist in Saint-Lambert. The explanations which he presented in his "Essai sur la Vie d'Helvétius" are as much in context for a current scholar as for his immediate audience in the eighteenth century.

Saint-Lambert acknowledged that it was the suggestion of mental equality which brought the wrath of his readers down on Helvétius. And, at his time of writing, in the early 1770's, Saint-Lambert noted that to his time Helvétius had been unpersuasive of his audience. However, despite his familiarity with Helvétius' ideas, and their public reception, Saint-Lambert offered his own plea for understanding. The essence of his argument was that, although it may be appropriate for a philosopher to analyze the individual mind, in detail, and discuss the differences which nature has endowed, it is not appropriate for the legislator to do likewise. "...les différences que la nature a mises entr'eux... s'anéantissent aux yeux du législateur."²⁷ It was a plea for Helvétius' readership not to treat his ideas too literally, but to accept the beneficial social implications within them.

Helvétius was a philosopher and one can understand the notion that

²⁷ Saint-Lambert, Vol. IV, p263.

a philosophically contrived consequence will probably differ from a practical test. Rousseau reacted angrily to those who looked for physical proof of his philosophical concepts, and his rival in pedagogical theory had every right to do likewise. Whereas Bentham had not the talent for philosophy, so Helvétius by no means saw himself as a political lobbyist. Helvétius, in fact, was a catalyst for debate; he would present the philosophical conflicts, or paradoxes, and ensuing argument might lead to the development of some important idea. He described his role by analogy with his favourite pastime, seeing himself as leading "...la chasse des idées."⁹²⁸

Unfortunately for his lasting reputation, the most influential of his fellow philosophes were not playing the game. They saw his ideas as too naive to contemplate, and wanted to do little more than humour him until he passed on. However, despite his own diminished status as a philosopher, Helvétius' concepts had, and have, utility. He inspired Bentham to develop his ideas into a reform platform which would be acknowledged around the world, and he stimulated Rousseau in his articulation of a pedagogical counter-revolution.

⁹²⁸ Ibid, Vol. IV, p283.

APPENDIX I

The Chrestomathic Curriculum - Abbreviated

Introductory Stage

Reading
Writing
Common Arithmetic

Stage I

Mineralogy
Botany
Zoology
Geography
Geometry
Historical Chronology
Biographical Chronology
Appropriate Drawing

Stage II

Mechanics
Hydrostatics
Hydraulics
Mechanical Pneumatics
Acoustics
Optics
Mineral Chemistry
Vegetable Chemistry
Animal Chemistry
Meteorology
Magnetism
Electricity
Galvanism
Ballistics
Geography
Geometry
Historical Chronology
Biographical Chronology
Appropriate Drawing
Grammatical Exercises (English, Latin, Greek,
French & German in conjunction)

Stage III

Mining
Geology
Land-Surveying and Measuring
Architecture
Husbandry
Physical Economics
Geography
Geometry
History
Biography
Appropriate Drawing
Grammatical Exercises

Stage IV

Physiology
Anatomy
Pathology
Nosology
Dietetics
Materia Medica
Prophylactics
Therapeutics
Surgery
Zohygiantics
Phthisozoics
Geography
Geometry
History
Biography
Appropriate Drawing
Grammatical Exercises

Stage V

Geometry
Arithmetic
Algebra
Uranological Geography
Uranological Chronology
History
Biography
Appropriate Drawing
Grammatical Exercises
Technology
Book-keeping
Commercial Book-keeping
Note-taking

Note: This curriculum is presented in abbreviated format, from that presented in Table I of Jeremy Bentham's Chrestomathia in the edition edited by M.J. Smith & W.H. Burston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)

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