

“Life: A Study in Learning, Education, and Friendship”

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Life is difficult. Rather than disregard this statement as an overused cliché, this paper will consider its implications in order to uncover its weight and propose solutions. Why is life so difficult? While an encyclopedia worth of examples can be provided, life's difficulties are encapsulated in the following general ones: (1) being unable to do something one wishes to do, (2) being unable to do something out of ignorance, and (3) possessing one's desired thing and having it taken away. That these general difficulties are either derived from oneself, others, or circumstances is of little consequence¹, the focus of this paper will be placed on the differing amounts of control one has over them and the painful emotions involved. Depending on the circumstances, the first difficulty is either controllable or not. An example of the first difficult (as a case dealing with uncontrollable circumstances) is the desire to help someone feel better; despite the amount of effort and dedication invested in cheering them up, sometimes it is impossible to make the other person feel better. On the contrary, the outcome of controllable circumstances may be changeable with sufficient effort and determination, such as the instance of being unable to paint beautiful landscapes since quality can be improved by practice. This improvement is entirely dependent on the individual since not everyone has equivalent capabilities and as such the amount of practice will not improve the skill of someone who cannot paint. Crucial though is the painter's ability to improve their skill and achieve things they could not before practicing, proving the case to be within the individual's control. The second difficulty, which is controllable in all cases, can be exemplified by the following case: an individual who is unable to determine the reasons behind their anger at another person since they are ignorant of their own emotions. This is completely controllable if one endeavors to

¹ The cause from which the difficulty arises does not change the emotions involved or how it is dealt with, as such the causes will be not be further addressed in this paper.

understand the problem and consequently fix it. In addition to this example, the second difficulty maintains a special case: the inability to achieve something desired because one's mind is opposed to the action either due to societal norms or one's own conflicting thoughts. The third difficulty is the opposite of the second in that it is completely uncontrollable. For instance, the loss of a loved one is beyond human control. All of these difficulties if left unresolved can prolong the various painful emotions² -anger, frustration, sadness, and etc. - initially associated with these difficulties, potentially worsening the situation.

One may be upset at the inability to make one of their friends feel better, but what is to be done? One may be frustrated at the inability to paint the specific landscape they desire, but what is to be done? One may be angry at not being able to determine the reason behind being upset at someone, but what is to be done? One may be deeply saddened by the loss of a loved one, but what is to be done? Generally, it is challenging to deal with uncontrollable situations or even overcome ones that can be controlled resulting in further anger and frustration. These negative emotions if not treated properly can prevent someone from moving on, cause them to run away, cause them to avoid dealing with the difficulty, or in the worst case cause them to hurt others or themselves. In order to mitigate the initial difficulties and thus negative emotions and even further complications, education especially in the form of another person's influence is available. Learning to progress, which is prompted by another person, helps humans through life. The way in which the terms education, learning, and progress will be used in this paper will now be explicated.

² While positive emotions are equally as important in an individual's life, negative ones will be focused on as causes and effects of many human problems.

In order to understand this paper the sense of education, learning, and progress must be established. Education here, drawing inspiration from Rousseau who maintains a broad view of education via nature, another person, and/or circumstances that improves man, will be taken to mean the process of providing someone with knowledge or skills. This does not imply, however that individuals learn from education. Education merely supplies an individual with the knowledge or skills which does not necessarily mean that they understand the knowledge or can replicate the skill. Learning, then, is the process of understanding information or skills and in consideration of the broad view of education, learning must come from education yet education can fail to cause learning. This essay will focus on one how one receives education from another individual which helps one learn and in turn causes personal progress. Progress is the process of moving past impediments which in this paper will be the overcoming of the three general difficulties of life. Life has many progressions and regressions but learning via another individual can get one through those regressions in order to progress through life.

The ideas of two philosophers will be conveyed to examine the role of education theoretically and the relationships of two pairs of literary characters will be analyzed in order to determine how education and learning play a role in people's progression through life. John Locke gives an account of the way in which humans operate in society as relational creatures, which is a necessary component in this paper's treatment of education and personal relationships. He also expresses that parents teach their children how to reason and thus they gain the ability to progress in life, which is of vital import to the paper. Jean Jacques Rousseau provides a way to mitigate problems of ignorance and provides important functions of education; learning by one's own effort, being able to accept the uncontrollable, and being strengthened by ordeals. Miguel de

Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and Leo Tolstoy's Pierre, and Prince Andrew give practical insights into the ideas presented by Locke and Rousseau.

Locke demonstrates the important shift from the state of nature, in which people only react to others, to society, in which people are social creatures (which is necessary to the argument of this paper). He begins his *Second Treatise of Government* by discussing the state of nature in which individuals maintain

a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they see fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man (Locke 8).

So long as they do not break the law of nature, individuals are entirely independent having no relationships or connections with others. Interactions with others are completely reactionary, and devoid of dependence on that other person's thoughts and feelings. In this state of nature, individuals also possess a state of equality such that "all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than the other" (Locke 8). Both of these qualities lie at the mercy of the law of nature which does not allow destruction of oneself or others because it wills "the peace and preservation of all mankind" (Locke 9). This state of nature is imperfect and still encounters problems, i.e. One being able to judge oneself, punishing others too harshly, entering into a state of war, and securing one's property. The remedy to these issues comes in the form of individual deciding to quit the state of nature by mutual consent and establishment of a body politic. The power to judge is now placed upon an authority³, making it impossible to judge oneself others with bias, difficult to enter into the state of war, and causing one's personal property to be secure

³ The authority to Locke is naturally the father of the family, also called the priest, since he ruled the household and by extension should then become rulers of society, or commonwealth.

(Locke 13). Although individuals are no longer in the state of nature, freedom and equality still remain as governed by the law of nature.

Society is preferred because it still allows for the state of freedom and equality, yet mitigates the issues from the state of nature by subjection to an authority and laws. The society that Locke constructs aims at optimizing free agency while preventing disorder and destruction which comes in the form of a commonwealth⁴. He has set out his ideas of human nature- freedom, equality, and preservation- and explained how society's role is to regulate human actions to maintain those natural qualities that humans have a tendency to upset. Locke comments on the formation of society: "God having made man such a creature, that in his own judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong obligations of necessity, convenience, and inclination to drive him into society" (Locke 42). As individuals are not content with complete independence from others in the state of nature, they seek connection through society. In society, individuals are dependent on each others wills' which is a necessary component for this paper. Locke sets the scene for the society in which the literary characters mentioned before operate; their thoughts and actions are influenced by others. Aside from this scene setting, Locke also provides this paper with the necessity of reason.

In order for children to become "free and intelligent agents" who progress in life they must be taught the law of reason. Locke expresses that children are born without the use of reason and it is the parent's duty to "inform the mind, and govern the actions of their yet ignorant nonage, till reason shall take its place" (Locke 32). Rather than being devoid of reason, children lack the ability to use it and thus must be taught its proper use. Until children are mature enough

⁴ The terms commonwealth, body politic, and society will be taken an analogous in this paper.

to know and understand the law of reason in order to abide by it, their will is directed (due to lack of understanding) and their actions are regulated by their parents (Locke 33). Without reason, humans cannot make any decisions for themselves or act properly. The child possesses the capacity to accomplish these things but does not necessarily perform them unless prompted by their parents. Over time, by repetitive conditioning to act and think in a certain way, the child is able understand how to operate within the law of reason. Once this reason is imbued, the child is under the law of nature and has thus gained the freedom and ability to make their own choices, and by extension is capable of progressing in life. If one did not possess reason, their actions would be purely reflexive, or in Locke's terms, they would still be under their parents will and directions, meaning the individual lacks free agency. Consequently, the same individual would be incapable of learning and progressing. While Locke explains the necessary quality humans must possess in order to progress in life, Rousseau will deal with the second aforementioned challenge (of not being able to want something because one does not know about it).

Rousseau's argument in *A Discourse on Equality* makes a careful examination of the progression from the proposed state of nature to current society, highlighting specific causes for the transition which demonstrates how learning from another can expel ignorance. He prefaces his argument with the statement

One must not take the kind of research which we enter into as the pursuit of truths of history, but solely as hypothetical and conditional reasonings, better fitted to clarify the nature of things than expose their actual origins (Rousseau 78)

He claims to be professing human history yet not in the traditional sense as a recounting of the events of mankind. The emphasis and value is placed not on the details, but rather on the process

of examination of the state of nature as distinguished from current society which results in an understanding of human nature, in other words his inequality. Rousseau says,

It is no light enterprise to separate that which is original from that which is artificial in man's present nature, and attain a solid knowledge of a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, and which will probably never exist, yet of which it is necessary to have sound ideas if we are able to judge our present state satisfactorily" (Rousseau 68)

This process acts as an effort to mitigate ignorance, i.e. a problem must be recognized and understood first before either dealing with it or fixing it. This ignorance pertains to all of mankind and Rousseau is supplying a way to mitigate it. If an individual wishes to attack a challenge or issue, as Rousseau does with inequality, one must first come to understand the point at which the problem arises by comparing and contrasting what occurred before the problem and what occurred after, which is not necessarily a simple task. Even in the case of an individual not understanding that an issue exists, like the second difficulty of life set out in the beginning of the paper, Rousseau's process of deriving understanding can enable one to overcome that ignorance. In giving readers a way to tackle problems of ignorance Rousseau is providing education on how to rid oneself of ignorance; although he cannot force readers to learn from his words he can encourage readers to take advantage of his thoughts or use them creatively for their own purposes. He is proposing one way to solve the difficulty dealing with ignorance which is not the only way he aids this paper, he also expresses important ideas in terms of education in another one of his books, *Emile*.

In *Emile*, Rousseau gives a specific breakdown of how children should be educated in order to grant them the most free, happy life. He begins by asserting that men naturally cause

degeneration and love deformity (Rousseau 11). The solution to this problem inherent in humans is a proper education:

Now of these three different educations, that of nature does not depend upon us; that of circumstances depends upon us only in certain respects; that of men is the only one of which we are really masters, and that solely because we think we are. For who can hope to direct entirely the speech and conduct of all who surround a child? (Rousseau 13)

More specifically, he expresses how currently⁵ children are so restrained by their mothers that they lose the ability to become independent creatures. He proposes to solve the issue by creating a very particular, rigorous education focused on letting the child be free to learn from their own experiences and guiding them to think for themselves. It is achieved by the direction of the three different kinds of education- (1) circumstances (2) nature (3) other men- towards the same object (nature). He then comprehensively describes the way in which an individual must teach a child in accordance with the object of nature. Although Rousseau is describing the methodology of the teacher providing the pupil with a good education, which is not exactly pertinent to this paper, it does highlight some important aspects of education and learning that this paper draws insights from. This paper deals with how individuals learn and overcome the difficulties of life rather than determining the role of the teacher in educating a student; it endeavors to provide solutions to the difficulties in life. Rousseau does provide important insights into the role of education and education though; he encourages learning by one's own effort and being able to accept uncontrollable circumstances.

These ideas perhaps can act as suggestions to mitigating life's other difficulties; (1) being unable to do something one wishes to do and (3) possessing one's desired thing and having it taken away. In his long discussion of how a pupil should be taught Rousseau says,

⁵ Currently will be taken as current in the time for which *Emile* was written.

Obligated to learn by his [Emile's] own effort, he employs his own reason, not that of another. Most of our mistakes arise less within ourselves than from others; so that if he is not to be ruled by opinion, he must receive nothing upon authority. Such continual exercise must invigorate the mind as labor and fatigue strengthen the body (Rousseau 155)

While the teacher is the one educating and guiding the pupil, the pupil must put his own effort into learning. As mentioned before, it is feasible for an individual to be educated without learning, or actually understanding the information conveyed, but Rousseau is suggesting that without one's own input and industry an individual is incapable of learning. An individual must make an effort to learn and use their own reason to filter statements made by others; one cannot take others opinions as canon. This is particularly evidenced in Rousseau's example of Emile getting lost; he determines how to get home by being prompted by his teacher's guiding questions (Rousseau 146). Notice though, that rather than giving Emile the answers, Rousseau questions him in order to prompt Emile to solve the issue on his own;. While this pertains to Rousseau's idealistic education system, it can be extended to a typical individual; these ideas can help individuals overcome the first difficulty of being unable to do something one desires. Rousseau has highlighted the importance of working through a problem that one wished to solve but was initially unable to, which is resolved with another's guidance. While this has provided answers for the first difficulty, Rousseau also lays out hints to deal with the third difficulty.

Being able to overcome or work through negative emotions associated with the third difficulty can mitigate the difficulty; it is completely uncontrollable so individuals must be able to progress without the difficulty affecting them in a negative way. Rousseau emphasizes the importance of teaching a child to endure pain rather than coddling him:

We think only of preserving the child: this is not enough. We ought to teach him to preserve himself when he is a man; to bear the blows of fate; to brave both wealth and wretchedness; to live, if need be, among the snows of Iceland or upon

the burning rock of Malta. In vain you take precautions against his dying,— he must die after all ; and if his death be not indeed the result of those very precautions, they are nonetheless mistaken. It is less important to keep him from dying than it is to teach him how to live (Rousseau 15)

It is more important to focus on living than dwell on things that one cannot control. Although Rousseau is commenting on the failure of his current society to bring up their children with freedom due to fear of their death, this can also pertain to this paper's argument. The person helping the individual cannot coddle them but rather should explain how some things are unchangeable and must be dealt with. It definitely helps to have someone there to sympathize with, but an individual cannot change 'fate' they must learn to deal with it and others can help them through that. Although Locke and Rousseau have much different arguments, both of them contain ideas pertaining the argument at hand; learning with another's help progresses one through life, which will now be further enriched via analysis of literary characters, specifically Pierre and Prince Andrew (in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) and Sancho Panza and Don Quixote (in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*).

In particular, Pierre and Prince Andrew have an interesting conversation related to exactly how their own ideas affect the others' thoughts. After being absent from each other's lives for several years, Pierre and Prince Andrew meet up and strike up a lengthy conversation pertaining to their lives. At this point in the story, Andrew is at a low point in his life because of his recent loss of Lise, his wife, and Pierre is at a high point because of his newfound religion-Freemasonry. They share their current thoughts on life and Pierre realizes that Andrew's outlook is quite bleak which is contributing to his unhappiness. Thus, Pierre attempts to change his friend's outlook on life by showing him the 'enlightenment' of masonic ideas which has an interesting effect on Prince Andrew somehow. Tolstoy states,

And for the first time since Austerlitz saw that high, everlasting sky he had seen while lying on that battlefield; and something that had long been slumbering, something that was best within him, suddenly awoke, joyful and youthful, in his soul. It vanished as soon as he returned to the customary conditions of his life, but he knew that this feeling which he did not know how to develop existed within him. His meeting with Pierre formed an epoch in Prince Andrew's life. Though outwardly he continued to live in the same old way, inwardly he began a new life (Tolstoy 340)

Although not completely convinced of Pierre's argument in the religious sense, he has been influenced in some way to think differently than he was before. Prior to this talk, Andrew was living the life he thought was necessary; living in the best possible way without hurting others (Tolstoy 336). Living the best life for Andrew meant to live for himself because living for others almost ruined his life and living for himself has improved his life (Tolstoy 335). He was stuck in this self reserved thought process: there was no reason (at least that he could see) to change these ideas. That is, until his friend came along and demonstrated another way to think which opened up the door for him so to speak. This seems akin to the ideas previously proposed in Rousseau of the need to be shown that there is a flaw in one's thinking before that flaw can even be resolved or otherwise dealt with. Before Pierre presented Andrew with a fresh outlook, he could not change, he could not see something that was indeed problematic. Now, although Andrew has not necessarily discovered the problem at this point, he can consider the different trains of thought and decide how to move forward taking them both into account. This prompting of thought is what eventually causes Andrew to change his thinking on the topic:

No, life is not over at thirty-one! ... It is not enough for me to know what I have in me---everyone must know it: Pierre, and that young girl who wanted to fly away into the sky, everyone must know me, so that my life may not be lived for myself while others live so apart from it, but so that it may be reflected in them all, and they and I may live in harmony (Tolstoy 372)

While Pierre's explanation of Freemasonry's importance in his life was not necessarily the final push to change Andrew's mind, it definitely prompted the change.

Pierre was not imposing his own thoughts, ideas, and lifestyle on Andrew, but was providing him with his own story in order to encourage him to think. This is similar to the way in which Rousseau presents the problems in *A Discourse on Inequality*; while readers are encouraged to creatively accept Rousseau's thoughts, not get slammed over the head with them, Andrew is encouraged to creatively accept Pierre's thoughts. In this way, Pierre is helping Andrew think and thus act better, or progress; Pierre's energy, thoughts, and humanness restores Andrew (helps Andrew overcome a difficulty in life of being unable to do something out of ignorance). Pierre and Andrew are not the only two friends who influence each other with their own thoughts.

Although many characters in *Don Quixote* are influenced in certain ways by Don Quixote, Sancho Panza his squire, appears to be the most affected by his fabrications due to his constant proximity to his master. Out of all the characters, Sancho spends the most time beside Don Quixote and as such, it is easier to examine his interactions with Don Quixote and glean noticeable effects that Don Quixote's behavior has on him. Sancho Panza is first described by the narrator:

Don Quixote approached a farmer who was a neighbor of his, a good man--if that title can be given to someone who is poor--but without much in the way of brains. In short, he told him so much, and persuaded and promised him so much, that the poor peasant resolved to go off and serve as his squire (Cervantes 55).

Don Quixote begins his relationship with Sancho by approaching him, as an acquaintance, and persistently convincing him to partake in knightly adventures. This behavior is peculiar to Don Quixote's character- one does not typically convince essentially a stranger to serve under him as

a squire. Relationships typically form after connecting with another person that one meets and then becoming closer by means of discussing commonalities and continually sharing experiences. This does not seem to bother Sancho as he agrees to accompany Don Quixote. As the pair go on adventures, which for the most part end poorly, or at least harm them both in some way or another, Sancho becomes increasingly frustrated and dissatisfied with his situation, causing him to occasionally ponder leaving Don Quixote. For instance, after realizing that his saddlebags had been stolen, the narrator explains, “He cursed his fate again and resolved in his heart to leave his master and return home even if he lost his wages for the time he had worked, along with his hopes for the governorship of the promised insula” (Cervantes 131). Don Quixote responds to these qualms by convincing Sancho that a multitude of bad occurrences means that good will come soon. Sancho only scoffs at this explanation; however, he never leaves, no matter how infuriated or terrible he feels-- there is some inexplicable reason as to why he is unable to part from Don Quixote despite the inevitable harm of remaining. Instead, Sancho begins to get pulled into believing Don Quixote’s fancies and even later on lies to Don Quixote (in efforts to maintain the facade to ensure Don Quixote’s happiness) in order to continue traveling with him as a friend and companion. Sancho is inadvertently being sucked into the the imaginary world that Don Quixote has created, which is beneficial to Sancho. Near the end of the story, Don Quixote even notices marked differences in Sancho: “you sound very philosophical ... I do not know who taught that to you” (Cervantes 893). Sancho has seemingly improved and become more like Don Quixote: willing to discourse and philosophize about different topics. Traveling with Don Quixote has caused very noticeable and valuable changes in Sancho’s character.

Over the course of Sancho's adventures with Don Quixote, Sancho's behavior and mannerisms are appreciably altered. He is originally described as dull, plain, and unintelligent, but all of those qualities change when Don Quixote takes him on his crazy, often purely imaginative adventures. By the end of the story, Sancho clearly sounds more intelligent, he is well liked by others, and is not afraid of things. When conversing with his wife about going off to adventure for a third time, she dissuades him by saying that he should not aim for what is above his status, but he replies, "Why do you want to stop me now, and for no good reason, from marrying my daughter to somebody who'll give me grandchildren they'll call Lord and Lady? Look, Teresa: I've always heard the old folks say that if you don't know how to enjoy good luck when it comes, you shouldn't complain when it passes you by" (Cervantes 488). Leading by Don Quixote's example, of being unafraid, Sancho strives against staying within the confines of his status. Don Quixote challenges his restraints, there is nothing he believes he is unable to do e.g. even though he is neither young nor agile he jumps into battle with the energy and passion that do not indicate his age. Similarly, Don Quixote perseveres and employs force of will: he is always against ending his adventures and staying home, in other words, he acts as he wishes and no one else can convince him otherwise. In his words and actions Don Quixote has encouraged Sancho to act and think more freely than before demonstrating the ability that Don Quixote has, of constructing an illusory world and pulling others into it, is beneficial for them. Sancho began the story as an unintelligent man, who had no purpose in life, could not stand up to others, or voice his opinions. Now he is a willful and passionate man who can live out his life the way he wishes. By the end of the story Sancho and Don Quixote have become very good friends because of Don Quixote: Sancho is crying at Don Quixote's deathbed while continuing to keep up the

facade. Here the fruition of Don Quixote's efforts are realized by Sancho's change in personality, his dispositions, and will. Very similar to the way in which Pierre was able to prompt a positive change in Andrew's outlook on life, Don Quixote was able to encourage the betterment of Sancho's entire person through his thoughts and actions. Don Quixote did not force him to behave in a certain way but demonstrate a way to be that Sancho decided to embody in his own way and pick up on. These two relationships have demonstrated how friends can influence their counterpart to progress in life; learning through friendship helps one through life.

Both Locke and Rousseau have contributed insights into education and learning that help individuals deal with the three difficulties of life, or in other words progress through life. Locke provided the basic groundwork of education, learning, and progress in the form of a relational society⁶ required for social creatures such as Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, Pierre, and Prince Andrew to learn and progress. He also argued for the importance of humans possessing reason which allows for progress to occur. Children are born with freedom and rationality but must be taught reason which will then allow them to be able to understand and dictate their own actions independently, and thus progress in life. For Rousseau, in *A Discourse on Inequality*, it is the process of recognizing and understanding a problem itself that allows for understanding of a concept; in wishing to deal with a problem in which one is ignorant of the cause, analysis of the state prior and after the problem presents an individual with an idea to attack the problem. In *Emile*, Rousseau supplies ways to overcome the first and third difficulties via learning by one's own effort and accepting the uncontrollable. Theoretically, Locke is providing the groundwork for learning and progress- prompting the individual to use their reason and providing a relational

⁶ Society here is taken to be current society.

society to operate in- and Rousseau is providing ways deal with or overcome the three general difficulties of life. Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, Pierre, Prince Andrew provide real life examples of how a friend can mitigate the difficulties.

Although these examples only explicitly deal with the second general difficulty of life, it can be inferred that the other two difficulties would also be solved in a similar fashion, akin to the way in which the first and third difficulty were dealt with in Emile. In the case of being unable to do something one desires, a friend can provide ideas with how to not dwell on the fact that one cannot console someone else (in the uncontrollable case) and a friend can also encourage one to work to practice painting in order to make it better (in the controllable case). In the case of the thing one desire's being taken away which is always uncontrollable, a friend can help give one thoughts on how to move past it. Friends help people persevere through those difficulties stated in the beginning, which allows individuals to progress in life. Progress may occasionally happen by one's own effort but more often a friend is there to help overcome difficulties and encourage one to work through them with their own ideas and thoughts. Realizing that life is not an individual event, but a team sport, so to speak, makes it that much easier to progress through. Some people will make it more difficult and others will lighten the load, but it is up to the individual to decide what to do and how they hold themselves. Friends are there to support the individual with their own ideas, thoughts, and humanness. No matter what happens in life friends will always be there in support.

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