

**Daniel Defoe, Moral Relativism and The Science of Human nature in
*Robinson Crusoe***

دانيال ديفو، النسبية الأخلاقية وعلم الطبيعة الانسانية في رواية روبنسون كروزو

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Abstract

Nature is one of the most frequently used words in Robinson Crusoe (1719) by Daniel Defoe. It refers to a range of different concepts, varying from a universally recognized natural system, to human nature, in addition to humans withstanding sickness or pain. Sometimes, Defoe projects Nature as a primarily an all self-sufficient universal system, and human nature as a product of this unerring universal scheme. However, what Defoe agrees on in his frequent deployment of the terms Nature/nature is its stability. For example, according to the Defoean perspective: to understand human nature one needs to recognize the interweaving of revealed religion with the study of human morality. Defoe primarily identifies human nature as standing upon pillar of an unchanging moral formula already determined by God, and that any deviation from this divine dictation usually ends in disaster.

Keywords: Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, Nature, Human nature, Moral Formula, Devine Intervention.

ملخص

الطبيعة هي واحدة من أكثر الكلمات استعمالاً في رواية روبنسون كروزو (1719) للكاتب البريطاني دانيال ديفو، ويهدف ديفو في استعماله المتكرر لكلمة الطبيعة إلى الإشارة إلى

مجموعة من المفاهيم المختلفة، والتي تتراوح بين النظام الطبيعي المتعارف عليه، والطبيعة الإنسانية، وبالإضافة إلى مقدره الانسان على تحمل المرض والالم، وفي بعض الأحيان، يعمل ديفو على تصوير الطبيعة بمثابة نظام ذاتي الاكتفاء، وبأن الطبيعة الإنسانية هي نتاج لهذه الطبيعة المثالية، ومع اختلاف المفاهيم التي يستعملها ديفو لوصف الطبيعة، فهو يحرص أيضاً ولا سيما أثناء نقاشه المتكرر لمصطلحات الطبيعة والطبيعة الإنسانية على تأكيد ثباتها، فوفقاً لوجهة نظر ديفو تجاه الطبيعة: من أجل فهم الطبيعة الإنسانية، سيحتاج المرء إلى استيعاب ترابط المعطيات الرئيسية للدين المسيحي السماوي وعلاقتها المباشرة بدراسة الأخلاق الإنسانية، فيهتم ديفو في روايته على تعريف الطبيعة الإنسانية بأنها تركز على بناء أخلاقي سماوي، وأن أي انحراف عن الاخلاق السماوية سينتهي عادةً بحدوث كارثة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: ديفو، روبنسون كروزو، الطبيعة، الطبيعة الإنسانية، الصيغة الاخلاقية، التدخل الإلهي.

Introduction

Nature is one of the most frequently used words in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe. It refers to a range of different concepts, varying from a universally recognized natural system, to human nature, in addition to humans withstanding sickness or pain. Sometimes, Defoe projects *Nature* as a primarily all self-sufficient universal system, and human *nature* as a product of this unerring universal scheme. However, what Defoe agrees on in his frequent deployment of the terms Nature/nature is its ambiguity and interchangeability. For example, according to the Defoean perspective: to understand human nature one needs to recognize the interweaving of revealed religion with the study of human morality. Defoe primarily identifies human nature as standing upon a pillar of an unchanging moral formula already determined by God, and that any deviation from this divine dictation usually ends in a disaster.

Moreover, one other prominent quality of *Nature* in the novel is that it refers to a self-governing natural system continually achieving, on its own, a perfect universal equilibrium. Raymond Williams (1985) argued that "Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language" (p. 219). This article argues however that the complexity in using the word Nature is most apparent in *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe is at loss sometimes while using the term due to its *interchangeability* in his narrative. This article will also discuss how Defoe represents only faulty specimens of human

nature which will necessarily require God's direct intervention. Human nature according to Defoe remains defective unless it fully adjusts to a fixed moral and a divine predestined framework. For instance, whoever violates divine moral parameters is prone to commit sin, and they will experience some kind of personal failures. What makes Defoe's determinist projection of human nature interesting is his tendency toward entertaining semi-philosophical positions about certain moral quandaries. Ultimately, always resorting to an absolutist approach to interpreting human morality in the context of divine laws, Defoe exposes flawed human nature and the subsequent moral obligations associated with its atonement. Humans tend by their nature to violate their already determined roles within a fixed universal system.

Jacqueline Taylor (2013) argues that "many eighteenth-century British theorists of human nature commonly employed the discourse of natural philosophy to achieve a more systematic and observation-based approach to their subject" (p. 65). Defoe's frequent discussion of the variable characteristics of human nature in *Robinson Crusoe* however tends to parallel less a systematic study of nature, and it is less *sophisticated* than what many of his contemporaries and early well-established philosophers and moral commentators argued. Instead of exploring the subject of human nature in scientific or philosophical terms, Defoe relies more on deploying clichés, commonplace expressions whenever he finds it necessary to comment on human nature. For instance, Defoe's tendency to use what one may describe as a hackneyed discourse about human nature may explain part of his commonplace discussion of the topic.

Defoe does not have the ability to sustain a serious opposing moral argument in regards to nature. For example, according to Maximilian Novak, "in Defoe's eyes, George I and the recipients of his favours bore no resemblances to William II and his heroic Dutch forces who had rescued England from James II [sic]" (*Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, p.513). Defoe the most active propagandist for the Dutch William II' reign became later a harsh critic of the German George I's reign, perhaps

due to the fact that among George I's favorites were Mehemet and Mustapha, his two Turkish personal valets.

In addition, Defoe, though, is more insistent, at least in *Robinson Crusoe*, to interpret human nature within a mundane perspective. He reduces all human immoral behaviors to personal deviations from already established moral original models. As a case in point, Defoe adheres to a number of unsubstantiated moral conclusions in regards to human nature. For instance, the science of human nature should always revolve, according to Defoe's perspective, around an absolutist perception of the intertwined relationship between innate moral principles in man and divine law (Novak, p.513). It would be more informative to examine Defoe's unique position toward human nature through contextualizing his controversial points of view within a larger eighteenth-century debate.

Eighteenth-Century and Human Nature

Unlike Defoe who was a writer concerned with social, political and commercial problems, few English philosophers were at ease when they used methods of natural philosophy to study human nature. Natural philosophy referred primarily to the study of Nature before the advent of modern sciences. For example, one can recognize nearly four schools of thoughts illustrating some major English philosophers' varied interests in the study of human nature during the long eighteenth century. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) for instance, being perhaps the most pessimist among early philosophers in regards to human nature, insists that human nature primarily consists of a group of fixed and negative elements. According to Pascal, in addition to being fidgety, self-absorbed, and self-deceiving victims, humans can't understand themselves. He directly addresses humankind in his book *Pensees* (1660):

Know then, proud man, how great a paradox thou art to thyself. Bow down thyself, weak reason; be silent, thou foolish nature; learn that man is altogether incomprehensible by man, and learn from your master your true condition which you ignore. Hear God [sic] (P.70).

Pascal's moral absolutist approach to the study of human nature revolves around his biblical call for humankind to accept "without

hesitation that [God] He is" (p. 39). Humankind are required to submit to the will of God and desist from any attempt to comprehend their own nature. Almost like Crusoe years later, Pascal insists that humankind are unable to comprehend their own nature because its origin and different manifestations are fully under the guidance of God. Pascal's Biblical thinking leads him to view human nature as a rigid, ambiguous entity. The sinning nature of humans prevents them from understanding themselves.

Pascal's denial that humankind can understand themselves is not as absolutist than in the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who insists in *Leviathan* (1651) that "the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (p. 110). Both philosophers are eager to underline the doomed nature of humanity. Humans according to Hobbes have no other option but to accept the reality of their existence: "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". The only thing that might drive man toward seeking peace with man, according to Hobbes, is the fear of death. Human nature according to Hobbes is already doomed from the start by humankind tendency toward aggression and brutality.

Unlike Pascal however, Hobbes identifies *Power* as one important variable in the life of humans because it establishes law and leads to justice. For instance, the power of the state should govern humankind; otherwise, they will lead a brutish life. According to Fred Kaplan (1987) in his book *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature*, one of the widely read novelists by the Victorians was Defoe. The author of *Robinson Crusoe*, according to Kaplan represented the "Hobbesian world of suspicion about human nature and dramatized its faulty moral potential" (p.10).

Both Pascal's and Hobbes' project human nature as imperfect, sinful, aggressive or self-deceiving and this pessimistic representation is one of the outcomes of the counter- reformation discourse. Both philosophers perceive humans as permanently contaminated by the original sin of Adam and Eve, and therefore, they will always incline toward evil. This philosophical position however does not correspond exactly with Defoe's perspective toward human nature. Instead of emphasizing the concept of

sin as a fundamental characteristic of human nature, like Pascal and Hobbes, Defoe deviates. For example, he rarely recalls the original sin in his musings and reflections about human nature. Instead, Crusoe attempts to interpret Friday's behaviors and attitude according to what he perceives as universal moral tenets. In other words, Crusoe reflects about his own personal thoughts and actions, however, he assigns Friday's primitive nature to a failure in a universal model of human nature. Unlike Defoe's relative, and sometimes confusing interpretation of human nature, Richard Allestree (1748) proposes a more fundamental interpretation. He argues in his book *The Whole Duty of Man* that "for tho' by that Sin of Adam all Mankind were under the Sentence of eternal Condemnation [sic]" (p. viii).

Theological discussions of human nature continued to be the landmarks of early eighteenth-century philosophical discourses. However, one can distinguish the writings of John Locke about human nature from the rest of the early and late eighteenth-century philosophers. Locke argues primarily that human nature does not necessarily represent a fixed but a flexible entity. For instance, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke explains that:

let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience (p. 248).

Crusoe repeats what Locke argued earlier; arguing that one should be "thankful" for all the negative and positive experiences of others (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 105)⁽¹⁾.

Defoe and Natural Philosophy

(1) "for both Defoe and Locke the state of nature was, more or less, theoretical and always implied a level of civilization beyond that associated with the savages of African and America" (Novak, p. 37).

Defoe did not project himself in the eighteenth-century public sphere as a natural philosopher, nor does his interpretation of the relationship between Nature and human nature account for a serious philosophical argument. However, due to his ability to produce voluminous writings about different contemporary topics, trade, politics, religion, journalism, he was popular. Yet, he lacked not just the education, but the intellectual sophistication to be an authority in the field of natural philosophy. Jonathan Swift (1709) notices Defoe's prolific writings and describes him as "one of these Authors (the Fellow that was pilloryed, I have forgot his Name) is indeed so grave, sententious, dogmatical a Rogue that there is no enduring him [sic]" (p. 2). The Dean of St. Patrick's unflattering image of Defoe as an assertive scoundrel, to imitate Swift's irascible tone, may perhaps reflect one of Swift's own common moments of irascibility. His anger against Defoe exposes one famous characteristic of his reputation among his contemporaries: testy character. Both authors competed for patronage in an increasingly complicated political environment, each switching sides between the Tories and the Whigs.

Even if it is difficult to recognize Defoe as a polemist of the first degree, he was, at least to some extent, influenced by the philosophical debates about human nature common to the early eighteenth-century intellectual environment. However, showing little knowledge about natural philosophy, Defoe might have attempted to compete with the leading philosophical figures of his time. For instance, Swift might have been correct when he uses the adjective '*so grave*' to describe Defoe's didactic writings. Defoe's tendency toward didacticism and perhaps preaching leads him to practice *sententiousness*. Some critics however identify certain philosophical positions Defoe adopted toward individualism.

Sercan Öztekin for example in his article "An Analysis of Individualism and Human Nature in Robinson Crusoe" (2015) argues that Daniel Defoe is generally known as being more close to John Locke in terms of his political philosophy. Defoe's political philosophy can be seen in *Robinson Crusoe*, beginning with the emphasis on his

individualism, then the depiction of political societies development from the smallest units such as families (p.9).

It is obvious that Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* emphasizes individualism especially in the context of the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. Moreover, Crusoe's frequent references to the development of his Island into a micro political and economic entity testify to his consciousness about the need to transform his temporary residence into perhaps an independent kingdom. He actually refers to his island as "my property" on which he can practice "undoubted right of dominion" (p. 385). Furthermore, the allusions to colonialism are obvious here. Defoe's other fictional works like *Captain Singleton* and *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* reveal the connection between Nature and the colonial enterprises. For instance, Crusoe deals with Friday, who is a product of primitive Nature in the Island as his slave, while he insists in dealing with the white mutinous sailors as "my people" (Robinson Crusoe, p. 385).

John Moore in his *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (1958) argues that Defoe "was widely read in controversial political writing". Moore quotes a "modern historian [who] said 'it was Defoe who applied and popularized Locke, and drove home the philosopher's principles" (p. 203). However, one may need to be careful in describing Defoe as an ardent supporter or even a comprehending reader of Locke's political philosophy for that matter. For example, the political and colonial interests in Defoe's work reveal a writer who sometimes deliberately voiced his support for colonialism. In other words, he might have briefly dabbled in different political and philosophical theories, however; he lacks a much-needed sophistication. Ultimately, Defoe fails to live up to most of the philosophical premises he announces in *Robinson Crusoe*. His absolutist views about human nature for example goes beyond typical philosophical rhetoric revealing primitive understanding of human nature as it was discussed by many of Defoe's contemporaries.

Defoe's Absolutism

Defoe's lack of philosophical sophistication in regards to higher philosophical issues clearly appears in his intellectually crude discussion of human nature. At least in *Robinson Crusoe*, he tends to view the original sources of moral norms and values as unconditionally intertwined between innate principles in man and in divine law. He does not ignore acknowledging the impact of social interaction in forming human nature. Instead, Defoe's typically immerses his usual commentary on human nature in Biblical literature. This tendency toward religious referencing is apparent in the novel. On the one hand, Defoe reveals an intellectually absolutist frame of mind based on crude premises and assumptions in regards to human nature. He believes in a limited number of political religious or moral principle and he thinks of them as always true in all circumstances (OED). For example, according to Novak, "Defoe was already what was called a 'court whig' by the middle of the 1690s...in favour of a standing army when it was to be used in the service of a monarch who was trying to protect English liberties [sic]" (p.120). On the other hand, Defoe pretends to be an arcane thinker while commenting on human nature. However, he lacks a proper understanding of human nature as it was discussed and illustrated during the eighteenth century. His almost always definitive views do not correspond to contemporary philosophical debates about the subject. He believes for instance that human nature will always be the same in all situations of life. According to Defoe's line of thought: if humankind is to turn away from its already Biblically established path, they will definitely become prone toward Evil. Human nature in Defoe's writing does not necessarily include non-European individuals. In fact, he sometimes excludes non-whites and especially non-Christians in particular from his conception and analysis of human nature. The non-European in particular remains in Defoe's writings a marginalized, almost non-human entity.

Human nature in *Robinson Crusoe*

Defoe's didacticism and noticeable inclination to give moral instructions to others on how to live a good Christian life is paramount in *Robinson Crusoe*. Even though, the novel might represent a colonial text par excellence, however, Defoe's conception of human nature is peculiar.

For example, human nature in the novel is reflected on from a Biblical perspective. However, Defoe is unable to contribute a solid or a deeply philosophical perspective about what human nature really is from a Christian perspective. He relies in his discussion of human nature mostly on clichés and his generous use of biblical references. Yet Defoe offers passing remarks on the actual application of his Biblical examples about the failure of humankind to live up to God's dictates. Immediately, he would “veer into mundane and *sententious* reflections”, to quote Swift, about human nature without attempting to be specific. For example, Crusoe shows a basic if not a naive understanding of human nature. He, like his creator, links his moral failure to obey his parents with his evil human nature. He admits that the rashness of his youthful desires to see the world encouraged him to disobey his father. He explains that his "inclination to this [desire to see the world] led me so strongly against the will, nay, the commands of my father." Here Defoe juxtaposes Crusoe's unwillingness to obey his father with Adam's refusal to listen to the commands of God not to approach the tree of good and evil. According to Defoe, Crusoe inherits Adam's defective human nature with human propensity toward the life of misery (p. 3). When Crusoe errs, he simply repeats what Adam did earlier; attempts repentance. Instead of confessing his sin, Crusoe assigns his youthful rashness to a fundamental fault in human nature: humankind unguided by the dictates of religion or patriarchal control falls victim to a failing human nature⁽¹⁾.

Desperate Human Nature

Unlike Locke who argued that the human mind in its early stage of development is similar to an empty sheet of paper, Defoe tends to represent humans as prone almost genetically to follow the moral prescriptions of an already determined Christian path. Swerving away however from the natural propensity of human nature to be always good represents the acts of those "men of desperate fortunes," or those of

(1) According to Novak, “for Defoe, nature led neither to the benefits of religion nor to the comforts of civilization” (p. 47).

"superior fortunes" (p.3) Crusoe distinguishes here between men of desperate and superior fortunes, perhaps the unlucky ones, and men who overcome obstacles to achieve greatness. According to Crusoe those *desperate* men however would find themselves undertaking "a nature out of the common road" because they sometimes disobey their parents and do desperate acts. Defoe does not apply here any known technique of the study of natural philosophy, for instance searching for an organizing pattern to explain human behavior, but bases almost all his moral arguments on what he considers as truisms.

However, people will turn away from an already determined destiny when they become desperate. It is apparent here that Crusoe is attempting to diagnose his own condition. He was deaf to his father's recommendations who:

pressed [him] earnestly, and in the most affectionate manner, not to play the young man, nor to precipitate [himself] into miseries which nature, and the station of life [he] was born in, seemed to have provided against; that [he] was under no necessity of seeking [his] bread (p.5).

Defoe does not recognize here that Crusoe's youthful rebellion/independence goes against patriarchal power represented by his father, but he instantly recalls the biblical anecdote about the prodigal son who does not listen to his father's warnings and deviates from an already established path of acceptable Christian behavior. The prodigal son returns to his father and he was "lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). Desperate humans might go against the dictates of their original nature if they become impatient with what nature has already determined for them. What is confusing here however is that Defoe does not account for youthful foolishness in young Crusoe, but chooses the defying of parents to be one shortcoming of man: his inability to live up to the expectations of predetermined destiny.

Abusing the Help of Providence

Because human nature is a product of providence, it will always provide help to humans. In fact, according to Crusoe, both "nature and Providence concurred to present [him] with, and to make [his] duty" (p.

59). However, being a restless young man in love with adventure, and overwhelmed with desires to see the world, Crusoe sometimes abuses the help of providence. He confesses for example that he "abused their help [his parents] and assistance, who would have lifted me in the world, and would have made everything easy to me" (p. 145). Parents are the givers of providential wisdom. They advise young Crusoe to remain in England and choose the middle state, however because his destiny is already determined, Crusoe rejects his parents' advice which makes him an abuser of providence. Young Crusoe, unlike the prodigal son of the Bible however, will return to England after the death of his parents. Defoe is eager to point out here that the fundamental moral flaw in young Crusoe is that he repeatedly fails to comprehend the universal correspondence between providence and man's already determined destiny. Rejecting to abide by the universal rules or providential/patriarchal morality and failing to fulfil the dictates of the divinely formulated human nature leads consequently to earthly punishments.

According to Defoe, if one abuses Providence by not listening to their parents and by refusing to abide by what prototypical human nature dictates, rebellious young men will be destined to fail. Those who intentionally swerve from the Godly established path of human nature determine in advance their own destiny; they have to expect no less than the worst because they have not fulfilled their side of the universal and divine bargain. One indication that Crusoe abused the guidance of providence is reflected in his "immoderate desire of rising faster than the nature of the thing admitted" continually exposing himself to many unnecessary difficulties (p. 59). What is interesting here is that Defoe does not elaborate further about what he means by the nature of the thing admitted, however it is safe to argue the following: Crusoe defies the commands of his parents by refusing to accept his middle status, which his life's prospect admitted, that is why God punishes him. His defiance of his parents goes beyond the nature of the thing admitted and accepted for him in life. He would have acted within the nature of the thing admitted if he would have accepted his lot in life; otherwise his only option in this regard is to await patiently the punishment of God.

The Nature and End of Being

What inspires most of Defoe's archaic representations of human nature in the novel is his belief that it is an external framework and a universal mindset determined not by man, but by God. Man's mission and the end of his being in the universe is to fulfill a list of divinely determined moral obligations within a recognizable moral framework. If man wishes to be always assisted by God he needs to comprehensively adapt and harmoniously adjust to his human nature. As a case in point, Crusoe explains that he had previously lived "a dreadful life [refusing to listen to his parents who attempted to infuse into him] what the nature and end of my being required of me" (p. 208). His religious parents believe that the end of being of humankind nature corresponds with the important need to abide by what God has already predestined for them. However, if an individual fails to comprehend or fails to be convinced of his/her already determined destiny, s/he violates the universal moral law represented by the teachings of the gospel. Young Crusoe however, refuses to acknowledge his end of being because he refuses to be satisfied "with the station wherein God and Nature hath placed [him]." Individuals like him usually come into a "primitive condition"(p. 310). Due to his obstinate behavior, ignoring his father's advice, God punishes Crusoe by reducing him to a primitive way of living. His life on the Island represents the kind of moral punishment those who disobeyed their parents deserve. There is no *becoming* in Crusoe's life because his moral consciousness and upbringing does not allow him to envision anything beyond fulfilling his predetermined path. There is only one end of being in the life of Crusoe and it is to achieve salvation through repentance.

Defoe's absolutist understanding of human nature does not only stem from his lack of philosophical and intellectual sophistication. Defoe believes that man's nature is categorically determined externally and not solely by himself. He continues to interpolate providence in Crusoe's life, between his moral duties as a Christian and his failure to fulfil an already determined human nature. God punishes Crusoe if he "acted like a mere brute, from the principle of nature" and divine anger will certainly visit

him. (p. 141). He admits his failure to appreciate providence's assistance, but also fails to live up to his later reflections and guilt. Moreover, when Crusoe suffers from fever on the Island, he informs us that his spirit "began to sink under the burden of a strong distemper", and it is only nature which exhausted the violence of his fever, which leads him later to experience one of the first awakenings of his conscience." Defoe sees Crusoe as ultimately influenced by his already determined path of repentance and atonement. Crusoe starts to "reproach myself with my past life" (p. 143). Whenever Crusoe is in trouble, he remembers his past sins, but immediately forgets to appreciate what he just experienced. Nature and the end of being in the life of Crusoe correspond to his predestined path which he succeeds in forgetting as soon as he is out of trouble.

Mean Nature and the Devil

Defoe acknowledges the fact that Nature can be sometimes mean. For instance, it may exert extraordinary pressures on individuals and push them to their limits. When Crusoe reaches the lowest degree of loneliness and feeling of helplessness, he starts to blame cruel nature. Almost immediately after the shipwreck he starts to recognize that his miserable existence is a situation so unpleasant to him that it pushes him almost to the edge of madness. Nature conspires against Crusoe causing him to lose all hope⁽¹⁾. To illustrate, while attempting to build a safe shelter to protect himself from the elements, or while attempting to sustain his decreasing food supplies, Crusoe continues to be conscious of how Nature exposes his utter reliance on his limited human capacities. Crusoe starts to lose the ability to think clearly, revealing a fundamental human failure opposite to cruel Nature: man's loss of control under severe physical and psychological pressures. As a case in point, while attempting to make his first boat out of tree trunk, it never occurs to Crusoe that it might be very difficult to guide his boat "over forty-five

(1) Both Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* share the Island setting. In addition, both Crusoe and Prospero are concerned with moral issues.

miles of sea than about forty-five fathoms of land, where it lay, to set it afloat in the water" (p. 201). Even though Crusoe admits earlier that he relies on his common sense while travelling or being involved in other adventures, however, his mean human nature fails to activate when needed. It prevents him from using his common sense during the most precarious situations. It is interesting here to point out that what Crusoe describes as common sense does not correspond to practical thinking or to the ability to concentrate on what is important for the time being. Instead, Defoe projects his lack of common sense or the inability to use it appropriately as indications of mean human nature.

Sometimes, Crusoe does not directly blame nature for the different mishaps he experiences. He assigns most of his personal shortcomings and in fact all deviations from nature's path to the work of the devil⁽¹⁾. It is the devil, according to Crusoe, who has created a "print of a man's naked foot on the shore" from nowhere, perhaps for the single purpose of scaring him (p. 244). This seminal episode in the novel constitutes perhaps one of the most dramatic moments in Crusoe's life. Discovering the single footprint reminds Crusoe of his sin to the extent that he "slept none that night." He feels awkward later because of his overblown fear "for how should any other thing in human shape come into the place?" (p. 246). Crusoe instantly finds an explanation for what he was experiencing which corresponds to his absolutist perspective: it is human nature "abandoned by heaven," which can trigger "some hellish degeneracy", for instance, resorting to cannibalism (p. 272). Chaotic human nature abandoned by God testifies to its own degradation. Crusoe therefore suffers from hallucinations because he has sinned against God by disobeying his parents. His human nature would not have erred if he had abided by the commands of God. There are other and more serious indications that human nature is mean, the descent of man into cannibalism.

(1) Nature, or more specifically the wilderness in nineteenth-century American literature is sometimes represented as a place where the devil resides.

Cannibalism and Human Nature

Crusoe does not immediately contextualize his horrific experience with cannibalism within an explicitly biblical framework (i.e. corruption of human nature). However, Biblical references to cannibalism inform Crusoe's abhorrence against the practice. For instance, after discovering some human remains, hypothetically what is left of a cannibalistic festivity, Crusoe becomes:

So astonished with the sight of these things, that I entertained no notions of any danger to myself from it for a long while: all my apprehensions were buried in the thoughts of such a pitch of inhuman, hellish brutality, and the horror of the degeneracy of human nature, which, though I had heard of it often, yet I never had so near a view of before (p. 263).

Crusoe is shocked by the wickedness of human nature. It takes him a while to come to his senses. Looking at the remains of human flesh envelops Crusoe in a kind of moral trance; he does not believe that divinely inspired human nature can descend to such levels of decadence. He feels more the moral danger of cannibalism rather than the actual event of consuming human flesh. What is interesting here however is that Crusoe's shocked reaction to cannibalism provides a glimpse about how he views Africans. In one rare episode of adopting a universal outlook, Defoe considers Africans as fellow humans who have degenerated into cannibalism. Viewing Africans as fellow human beings corresponds with Crusoe's reliance on Biblical interpretation. For instance, Crusoe, while experiencing the horror of cannibalism might have been reminded of the punishment of the ancient Hebrews who were punished to "eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you (Deuteronomy 28:53).

Crusoe views cannibalism as a universal human plight, not particularly an African custom. He does not seem to blame Africans for the act of cannibalism, for “it is certain these people do not commit this as a crime; it is not against their own consciences reproving”. In fact, Crusoe believes that these cannibal Africans “do not know it to be an offence” (p. 273). When humans from different races turn into cannibalism, they do so because God punishes them for their violation of his commands. Nature intervenes and minutes later, Crusoe informs us that at “the point of fainting” nature discharged the “disorder from [his] stomach; and having vomited with uncommon violence, [he] was a little relieved (p.264). What moves Crusoe to vomit at the sight of human flesh is not quite clear. He does not specifically point out the reason for his abhorrence; does it originate in his sensitive nature or is it due to some contradiction in human nature?

Cannibalism: A Contrary Human Nature

Cannibalism represents for Crusoe a fundamental contradictory condition in human nature: man is both divine and impious. What strikes Crusoe as disgusting in cannibalism is that it defies his previous expectation of divinely planned human nature. He does not trouble himself too much by the presence of human remains, as much as he is troubled about the possibilities of human moral degeneration. Crusoe is more confused about the possibility that humans can degenerate to cannibalize other humans, more than the gruesome act itself. The Bible dictates the act of cannibalism as abhorrent to God, therefore Crusoe acknowledges that African cannibals disintegrate into moral “hellish brutality” (p. 263). The Bible offers Crusoe a much needed clarification in regards to whether Cannibalism represents moral degeneration and whether Africans can be treated as equal human beings. The Africans commit cannibalism because they suffer from contrary human nature. God punishes them and turns them into “wretched creatures”. How is it then that the wise Governor of all “things should give up any of His creatures to such inhumanity” (p. 314). The African cannibals cursed practice does not correspond to the dictates of Benevolence, and God creates them (cannibals) as a reminder to Crusoe and to the rest of

humanity about the potential degeneration of human nature. There is here ambivalence in regards to viewing the African cannibals. Crusoe attempts to underline his moral shock against consuming human flesh. Being a civilized European individual, unlike the primitive Africans, his "very blood" set "into a ferment, and [his] pulse beat as if [he] had been in a fever". All caring Nature intervenes and "threw [Crusoe] into a sound sleep" (p. 316). The symptoms that Crusoe experiences do not resemble a panic attack, but something similar to a complete revulsion. Nature might be kind to Crusoe; however, it ignores the African cannibals as terrible specimens of contradictory human nature. Nature according to Crusoe is enveloped within Christian and Biblical parameters, therefore the African cannibal, being unchristian violates the biblical principle that humans should not eat their fellow humans. Therefore, there is a colonial tendency here. These Africans in other words need to be Christianized. The African cannibal intentionally ignores the natural intertwining of human and divine relations; eating another human flesh therefore reduces those Africans to sub-human creatures. Therefore, Crusoe needs to rehabilitate Friday and reintegrate him into the Christian human society; and he does so by teaching him the tenets of Christianity.

Friday: A Specimen of Human Nature

Crusoe's first encounter with Friday represents what is to be an encounter with a primitive archetype of human nature. Even though Friday initially reminds Crusoe of one aberration of human nature, however, he qualifies somewhat his first impression of him. For example, when he first meets Friday, he was running away from the other cannibals. Crusoe, looks from a distance at his future slave and reflects on how "nature inspired him with hopes of life, and [that Friday] started away from them, and ran with incredible swiftness" (p. 321). This early indication of a natural revulsion in Friday of cannibalism does not materialize because his "hankering" later for human flesh reminds Crusoe of who he is dealing with (p. 331).

Ambiguity surrounds Friday. Crusoe for instance views him as a child of Nature whom he can teach the tenets of Christian life, and

perhaps save him from cannibalism. If Nature controls human fate, then Crusoe can sympathize with Friday because he has been sent to him as his potential pupil/companion. He informs us that while he was watching the other cannibals chasing Friday, he comes to the realization that he, Crusoe, "was plainly called by Providence to save this poor creature's life". Crusoe "immediately [runs] down the ladders with all possible expedition, fetched two guns", and shoots one of the cannibals (p. 323). Saving Friday from the other cannibals is saving one specimen of human nature. Friday's predicament reminds Crusoe that human nature in its primitive state will become evil if not guided. Therefore, if one can save it in its infantile state, one may save humanity as a whole. If Crusoe could cure the savage from his instinctual hunger for human flesh, he can certainly redeem him as a human being. Crusoe begins his education of Friday by showing "so much abhorrence at the very thoughts of [cannibalism], and at the least appearance of it, that [Friday] durst not discover it". Crusoe "had, by some means, let him know that I would kill him if he offered it" (p.331). Interpreting the hunger of Friday for human flesh as due "to absence from Himself [God]", Crusoe immediately offers the following conclusion: "[Friday] sinning against that light [of providence]", is the real cause of his aberration (p. 334).

Friday represents an enigma to Defoe's Biblical understanding of human nature. It was easy for Crusoe for example to convince Friday of the existence of God because "Nature assisted all [his] arguments to evidence to him [Friday] even the necessity of a great First Cause". Nevertheless, Friday's pagan human nature does not always lead him to a natural/biblical conclusion of the presence of God or the devil. He continues to resist acknowledging the presence of God. In fact, Friday starts to question the existence of evil in Nature which creates more problems for Crusoe. The Master recognizes the difficulty in convincing Friday to accept "nature [of the devil], and above all, of his inclination to do evil, and to draw [humans] to do so too" (p. 347). It is clear here at this stage in the novel that no type of catechism would convince Friday to believe in the fundamental tents of Christianity.

Friday's primitive sense defies Crusoe's Christian logic. It makes Crusoe feel "run down again", and admits that even though "the mere notions of nature", will lead "creatures to the knowledge of a God", yet "nothing but divine revelation can form the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of redemption purchased for us" (p. 349). Even though Nature fails to provide Crusoe with enough rhetorical and logical powers to convince Friday about the existence of God, however, it conspires to assist Robinson Crusoe in his other endeavors.

Nature Conspires to Assist Crusoe

Even though human nature sometimes reveals its evil, cannibalism, however, ultimately its fundamental framework is providential. Being a product of universal providence, Nature represents the benevolence of God. It is through this perfect Nature that God intervenes to assist Crusoe when he is in need. In fact, almost every product of Nature on the Island is already geared toward sheltering Crusoe from an inevitable doom. As a case in point, Crusoe finds himself "reduced to a mere state of nature", yet discovers that Nature contrives ways to assist him in his time of need (p. 187). He grows his grain without "any help of seed sown, and that it was so directed purely for [his] sustenance on that wild, miserable place" (p. 123). As long as Crusoe reads "the Scripture and pray[s] to God" and thinks only of "things of a higher nature", as long as Nature will conspire to assist him (p. 154).

Moreover, Nature creates different ways to assist Crusoe in almost all his activities. He informs us for instance that Nature "gives supplies of food to every creature", and actually teaches Crusoe how he should make use of it" enabling him, who "never milked a cow, "how to make butter and cheese (p. 234). In addition, Nature provides Crusoe with an enclosure to fence" round that my flock" to make them "well enough secured" (p. 260).

Imperfect Human Nature

Even though Defoe is eager to depict Nature as a perfect system, and that human nature is part of a divinely structured universe, yet humans commit errors. The dichotomy between an all-benevolent Nature and

frequently imperfect human nature appears in Crusoe's conversion of Friday. Religious conversion represents a key word in the relationship between Crusoe and Friday. Crusoe for example, informs Friday that it is because Jesus took the form of a human, God forgives our sins. Crusoe continues to explain to his "man" that "angels had no share in the redemption", and that is why Jesus did not take the form of an angel, otherwise things would have been quite different. One reason for the imperfection of human nature and humankind tendency to commit sin is that Jesus took "the seed of Abraham" (p. 350). However, Crusoe admits that he had "more sincerity than knowledge in all the methods I took for this poor creature's instruction" (p. 351).

One can argue that because Defoe lacked an appropriate education he tended to be as Swift implies "sententious, dogmatical a Rogue that there is no enduring him [sic]" (Swift, 1709, p. 2). It is one other thing to argue that Defoe's consistency in projecting absolutist views about Nature and human nature go against some major cotemporary Enlightenment conclusions. Defoe's tendency to suggest in his writings that to understand human nature one needs to recognize first the interweaving of revealed religion with the study of human morality makes him unique among his contemporaries. He primarily identifies human nature as standing upon a pillar of an unchanging moral formula already determined by God, and that any deviation from this divine dictation usually ends in a disaster.

Moreover, unlike many eighteenth-century writers, Defoe does not use the tools of natural philosophy to examine human nature. His perception of human nature tended to be less complex however. He perceives it as largely imperfect, and this perception of the imperfection of human nature does not come from a deep Defeoan philosophical thinking about human existence. On the contrary, Defoe tends to rely more on popular clichés, which make his discussions of the different characteristics of human nature less philosophical. It is improper however to compare or contrast Defoe with the millennium's philosophical minds like Hobbes or Locke. In regards to the study of

human nature, Defoe possesses one unique voice, mostly unimpeded by philosophical sophistication.

What shapes Defoe's absolutist comprehension of human nature is his propensity toward propaganda and exaggeration. Always the distinctive, the popular voice of mundanity and common sense, Defoe remains one of the intriguing eighteenth-century fictional writers, the father of the English novel and the perpetuator of unsophisticated views. Swift might have despised him as a competitor for the much sought after patronage. Yet, unlike Swift, Defoe has fared quite well as a political commentator, a government agent, a propagandist par excellence. In his last years, Swift remained the ever-irritable and poor Irish clergyman; turned propagandist, Defoe however was able to provide 500 pounds for his daughter's dowry even while hiding from his creditors.

In conclusion, even though Nature is one of the most frequently used words in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), however, Defoe does seem to experience a few difficulties in interpreting it or in fully understanding its implications. This inability to distinguish between the lowercase *nature* and capitalized *Nature* may reveals Defoe's mastery of fictional and propagandist disguise. However, the illogical blending of Nature and human nature in the novel creates a morally confusing discourse: human nature is not solely applicable to white and European individuals, unless Defoe is using Nature to justify colonialism, which clearly he was.

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