

Joseph Andrews: The Ideal of Spontaneity

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This study deals with 'spontaneity' in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* which draws a sharp contrast between two types of characters: those that behave spontaneously and respond to their natural impulse and those hypocrites who always pretend and calculate before initiating any action. Although the first type is far from being perfect, it establishes Fielding's concept of goodness. The author belongs to the English liberal tradition which accepts man as he is and tries to free him from all the restrictions which hinder his development and concept of the happy life.

Spontaneity is one of those tricky terms that is not always easy to define. To live absolutely spontaneously in the sense of behaving naturally or exactly as one wants, regardless of social demands is almost an impossibility. Perhaps the term implies that one should not always pay excessive attention to the world of 'appearances' and to live as much as possible according to one's inclinations. In *Joseph Andrews* spontaneity is established as an ideal pursued by good-natured people. On the other hand, 'artificiality', the opposite extreme of spontaneity, is adopted by those characters whose social life has destroyed the very essence of their humanity. Spontaneity acquires a special status when we learn that *Joseph Andrews* was principally written to parody Richardson's novel *Pamela* which, from Fielding's viewpoint, represents pretence, hypocrisy, and craftiness, qualities which are directly opposed to spontaneity. As the title indicates *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* claims that it celebrates the life style of an honest girl who represents the ideals of chastity and purity: her resistance of Mr. B's temptation is rewarded by her eventual marriage to her master after the latter is being convinced of the chastity of his maid.

As a novel, *Pamela* is a remarkable achievement because it is the first attempt in English fiction which presents a comprehensive picture of the psychology of love and sexual life. More remarkable is the process of internalisation of all sides of characters. In spite of the epistolary technique which has its own limitation, Richardson is able to portray the minutest details of his people. In this he anticipates Henry James' advice to young novelists: 'dramatise, dramatise'. Yet this method of dramatising everything, even trivialities, makes *Pamela* a tedious novel because art has above all to be selective and 'interesting', to say the least.

Fielding's attractions to parody *Pamela* stems from his conviction that Richardson is just a hypocrite and that his heroine, who claims that 'to rob a person of her virtue is worse than cutting her throat', is merely a crafty girl who knows how to trade virtue to win a rich husband. Moreover, Fielding felt that life is far more complex than Richardson's artificial and methodised morality as it is outlined in his simplistic title: *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded: Now first published in order to cultivate the principles, virtue and religion in the minds of youth of both sexes. A narrative which has its foundation in truth and nature.* Indeed, whether consciously or not Richardson seems to be divided between theory and practice, between sermonising and at the same time producing a disguised sexual work which, through vividly describing scenes of rape attempts, can be more exciting than open pornography. In other words, Richardson is both a moralist and 'sex maniac' and consequently *Pamela* is just a more sophisticated Moll Flanders, Defoe's type of a prostitute. In actual life, many so-called moralists and preachers unconsciously - to give them the benefit of doubt - delight in criticising permissiveness while secretly feeling attracted to it.

The picture of a poor servant girl resisting all sorts of temptation seemed to Fielding quite funny and unrealistic. However, if *Pamela* is crafty and dishonest then this is the better for art, since it is far more realistic and appealing to deal with those who deviate from social norms than those who claims to abide by them. 'Honesty' in the strictest sense

is a very rare quality and if it can relatively be applicable to some people then this type of one sided and 'ideal' characters may not be interesting for fiction. The psychology of man, or more particularly his complex motivation, prevents him from being the ideal creature that some people think he is. Ian Watt is quite right to conclude that realism is associated with some form of deviation: 'The realism of the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding is closely associated with the fact that Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a Fornicator.'⁽¹⁾ Actually if Pamela is compared with the virtuous footman Joseph Andrews we feel that the first is tricky and warm while the second is absolutely cold and almost unreal. He also looks like a bloodless ghost if compared with the hero of Fielding's masterpiece *Tom Jones*.

This may not appear as a fair judgement because *Joseph Andrews* as a novel is so warm and lively, but Fielding's incessant attempt to prove that his hero is honest and Pamela a hypocrite, affected negatively Joseph's character. To stress the point further, realism is largely associated with breaking away from social ideals which are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to apply.

Fielding associated evil not only with the outside world but also within man himself, especially concerning his self-conceit. Evil for him is homely infiltrating through highly respected people. He felt that Pamela showed no consciousness of evil as related to self-deception which can have more disastrous consequences. As a matter of fact, his book unequivocally reveals that the man is quite conscious of all sides of human nature and how outside appearances can be quite deceiving. Thus sex in *Pamela*, which is the main motivation for action, takes a different turn in *Joseph Andrews* to be connected with avarice, stupidity, vanity, courage, love and lust. Fielding's world is far more comprehensive and warm than that of Richardson. Instead of setting action indoors and concentrating on familiar environment, Fielding moves to the open air and provides us with a wider social canvas to include all segments of society in order to put people's values and principles practically to test. Cloridge who exaggerates a little is not far from the truth when he says that, 'Picking up Fielding after Richardson was like emerging from a sick room heated with stoves to an open lawn on a breezy day.'⁽²⁾

Actually Fielding adopts a mock-heroic style which is directly opposed to the methodised moral world of Richardson. In particular, he accepts human nature as it is and directs his bitter satire against those who represent hypocrisy, vanity, and all forms of affectation. The whole concept of traditional heroism is challenged in favour of a much more natural and spontaneous form of behaviour. The artificiality of a Slipslop or a Lady Booby is inflated to the point of caricature to reveal that evil has many faces and that it is pervasive in our life under various disguises. It is a funny picture and full of vanity that the highly respected Lady Booby should act the role of innocence upon her attempt to woo her handsome footman Joseph:

'You have had the vanity to misconstrue the little innocent freedom I took in order to try, whether what I had heard

was true. O' my conscience, you have had the assurance to imagine, I was fond of you myself.'⁽³⁾

Much funnier and hypocritical still is the attempt of her lustful maid Slipslop to refer to her chastity and Joseph's assumed 'ugliness':

...he is so lewd a rascal that if your ladyship keeps him much longer, you will not have one virgin in your house except myself. And yet I can't conceive what the wenches see in him, to be so foolishly fond as they are; in my eyes he is as ugly a scarecrow as I ever upheld.'⁽⁴⁾

Both women have the capacity for evil by dismissing poor Joseph out of service in response to their selfish motives. In other words 'respectability' can hide within its folds more evil than many other harmful actions.

Directly opposed to this world of affectation is a much healthier one. Fielding postulates a new untraditional concept of goodness which is particularly present in ordinary unsophisticated people who usually behave spontaneously and on the spur of the moment. When Joseph is robbed and left quite naked, Fielding tests the humanity of the passengers of a passing coach by confronting them with a bleeding and helpless man. Although they partially help Joseph but their motivation is not pure:

'O J-sus,' cry'd the lady, A naked man! Dear coachman, drive on and leave him.' Upon this the gentleman got out of the coach; and Joseph begged them, 'to have mercy upon him: for that he had been robbed, and almost beaten to death.' 'Robbed' cries an old gentleman; 'Let us make all the haste imaginable, or we shall be robbed too.' A young man, who belonged to the law answered, 'he wished they had past by without taking any notice: but that now they might be proved to have been last in his company; if he should die, they might be called to some account for his murder.'⁽⁵⁾

It is only the postillion who represents a very disrespectable class of people and whose background is not particularly decent that rushes without contemplation to help Joseph wholeheartedly:

...and it is more probable, poor Joseph, who obstinately adhered to his modest resolution, must have perished, unless the postillion, (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost) and voluntarily stript off a great coat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath, (for which he was rebuked by the passengers) 'that

he would rather ride in his shirt all his life, than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition.'⁽⁶⁾

In this he is directly contrasted not only with the coach people but also with all the other so-called respectable characters, whether they belong to high class society or to church, whose humanity has been hardened by their greed and devotion to satisfy the formal requirements of their position: the image of respectability would not allow them to respond naturally to such a situation. The author deliberately attaches an unfavourable quality like stealing to the postillion to prove that despite his deviation from social norms, he is a better human being than many others, as Fielding concludes about the class which the postillion belongs to:

I do not pretend to say that the mob have no faults; perhaps they have many. I assert no more than this, that they are in all laudable qualities very greatly superior to those who have hitherto, with much injustice, pretended to look down upon them.⁽⁷⁾

Similarly, Betty the chambermaid, who happens to be promiscuous, is the only one who rushes to help Joseph at the inn without any hesitation or thinking about the consequence of her action, while Mrs Tow-Wouse, the respected wife of the inn keeper, responds negatively to the whole situation.⁽⁸⁾ Fielding's 'God' is not a hardliner but he is as tolerant as an affectionate mother who may not approve of the behaviour of her children yet she both understands and forgives their naughtiness, providing that they are essentially good and liable to help their fellow human beings. This is a remarkable position by a liberal humanist who looks at man as essentially good despite everything. Fielding is only against those who have closed the door of their hearts and calculate everything before initiating any action. He often urges man to help others with a pure motive without thinking of reward and without being pressured by religion:

Good-nature is that benevolent and amiable temper of mind which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former; and that without any abstract contemplation on the beauty of virtue, and without the allurements or terrors of religion.⁽⁹⁾

Fielding lived in a Puritan age when churchmen were very hard on social deviants and outcasts. Punishment was extremely severe and it expressed the rigidity and artificiality of people in authority rather than their desire for reformation. The Puritans were hardliners and did not tolerate any form of vice. Their God is Calvinistic and vengeful and his motto is 'Vengeance is mine, and I shall repay.' In Calvinism man is destined either to salvation or damnation and his work cannot change

his status. This is directly opposed to Fielding's liberal position of tolerance and his emphasis on work and goodness in man's life rather than on obscure faith. his creation of Parson Adams who is unconventional and contradicts the image of respectability established for clergymen by church indicates that Fielding is more interested in the human and natural side of man rather than in any form of behaviour which is artificially imposed from above. The Parson may not be exemplary but in the eye of Fielding he is far better than his counterpart Trullibar whose selfishness does not allow him to respond humanly to somebody in distress or Parson Barnabas who is more interested in the formality of religion rather than in its spirit. The clerical debate between the liberal Parson Adams and the Calvinist Parson Barnabas reveals the divergent viewpoints between somebody who emphasises the human and practical side of religion and another who stresses its formality and arbitrariness:

... but when (the Calvinist Whitefield) began to call nonsense and enthusiasm to his aid, and to set up the detestable doctrine of faith against good works, I was his friend no longer; for surely, that doctrine was coined in Hell, and one would think none but the Devil himself could have the confidence to preach it. For can any thing be more derogatory to the honour of God, than for men to imagine that the all-wise Being will hereafter say to the good and virtuous, Notwithstanding the purity of thy life, notwithstanding that constant rule of virtue and goodness in which you walked upon earth, still as thou did'st not believe every thing in the true orthodox manner, thy want of faith shall condemn thee? Or on the other side, can any doctrine have a more pernicious influence on society than a persuasion, that it will be a good plea for the villain at the last day; Lord, it is true I never obeyed one of thy commandments, yet punish me not, for I believe them all?⁽¹⁰⁾

Although the religious discussion is quite direct and obviously referential, Fielding presents dramatically the picture of a God who is given words to act ironically the role of arbitrary judge. The rhetorical question is presented so persuasively that the only answer it can have is 'nay, God can never be like that.' In other words, it is ultimately man's action that should decide everything rather than blindly inherit and embrace a particular traditional religion through accidents of birth and environment; far worse is the belief that some vague and divine force has already decided the fate of man regardless of his action as the Calvinists insist. Furthermore, Calvinism reiterates the question of sin that is concomitant to man from birth to death and which is particularly attached to his sensual desires. When Barnabas is recalled to prepare dying Joseph for the next world, Fielding powerfully shows a corrupt priest who is reluctant to come owing to the class status of Joseph and who performs his prayer hastefully and mechanically to enable Joseph get rid of all his sins once and for all without any feeling:

Mr. Barnabas was again sent for, and with much difficulty prevailed on to make another visit. As soon as he entered the room, he told Joseph, 'he was come to pray by him, and prepare him for another world: in the first place therefore, he hoped he had repented of all his sins?' Joseph answered, 'he hoped he had: but there was one thing which he knew not whether he should call a sin; if it was, he feared he should die in the commission of it, and that was the regret of parting with a young woman, whom he loved as tenderly as he did his heartstrings?' Barnabas bad him he assured, 'that any repining at the divine will, was one of the greatest sins he could commit: that he ought to forget all carnal affections, and think of better things.' Joseph said, 'that neither in this world nor the next, he could forget his Fanny, and that the thought, however grievous, of parting from her for ever, was not half so tormenting, as the fear of what she would suffer when she knew his misfortune. Barnabas said, 'that such fears argued a diffidence and despondence very criminal: that he must divest himself of all human passion, and fix his heart above.' Joseph answered 'that was what he desired to do, and should be obliged to him, if he would enable him to accomplish it.' Barnabas replied. 'That must be done by grace.' Joseph besought him to discover how he might attain it. Barnabas answered, 'By prayer and faith.' He then questioned him concerning his forgiveness of the thieves. Joseph answered, 'he feared, that was more than he could do: for nothing would give him more pleasure than to hear they were taken.' 'That,' cries Barnabas, 'is for the sake of justice.' 'Yes,' said Joseph, 'but if I was to meet them again. I am afraid I should attack them, and kill them too, if I could.' 'Doubtless,' answered Barnabas, 'it is lawful to kill a thief: but can you say, you forgive them as a Christian ought?' Joseph desired to know what that forgiveness was. 'That is,' answered Barnabas, 'to forgive them as - as - it is to forgive them as - in short, it is to forgive them as a Christian.' Joseph reply'd, 'he forgave them as much as he could.' 'Well, well,' said Barnabas, 'that will do.' He then demanded of him, 'if he remembered any more sins unrepented of; and if he did, he desired him to make haste and repent of them as fast as he could: that they might repeat over a few prayers together.' Joseph answered, 'he could not recollect any great crimes he had been guilty of, and that those he had committed, he was sincerely sorry for.' Barnabas said that was enough, and then proceeded to prayer with all the expedition he was master of. (11)

The lengthy and vivid dialogue between Barnabas and Joseph shows Fielding's dramatic skill of persuading us of the reality of the situation. The whole concept of traditional sin is mocked here through concretely juxtaposing two divergent points of view, one representing innocence

and natural impulse, the other artificial and methodised religion. Barnabas's confusion over how somebody can forgive 'as a Christian' is quite perplexing and embarrassing for the whole Christian doctrine which is in a way unnatural and which Christians have inherited without much thought. It is needless to say that present day Christianity in the West has come closer to Fielding's liberal point of view in emphasising people's work and behaviour in society without worrying too much about the whole concept of traditional sin or rituals, and at the same time characterising man's sexual life as something personal which has little to do with religion. R.F. Brissenden is right in concluding that Fielding associates goodness not only with love in general but also with sexual passion:

Fielding also believed that good-nature was intimately associated with the capacity to love - in the fullest sense of the word. Thus good-natured people, he would maintain, are usually sexually generous and affectionate, while the selfish and the hypocritical are often puritanical and intolerant in sexual matters. It is significant that the only person who treats Joseph with any common decency when he is carried naked, bleeding, and half-dead into the inn is Betty the chambermaid. Betty, says Fielding, 'had good-nature, generosity and compassion, but unfortunately her constitution was composed of those warm ingredients, which, though the purity of courts or nunneries might have happily controlled them, were by no means able to endure the ticklish situation of a chambermaid at an inn.'⁽¹²⁾

Indeed, Fielding is highly critical of a puritan kind of upbringing which distorts the image of sexual passion for young girls and illustrates men as abominable creatures who should be avoided:

...for which thou wilt not be angry with the beautiful creatures, when thou hast considered, that at the age of seven or some thing earlier, miss is instructed by her mother, that master is a very monstrous kind of animal, who will, if she suffers him to come too near her, infallibly eat her up, and grind her to pieces. That so far from kissing or toying with him of her own accord, she must not admit him to kiss or toy with her. And lastly, that she must never have any affection towards him; for if she should, all her friends in petticoats would esteem her a traitress, point at her, and hunt her out of their society. These impressions being first received, are further and deeper inculcated by their school-mistress and companions; so that by the age of ten they have contracted such a dread and abhorrence of the above named monster, that whenever they see him, they fly from him as the innocent hare doth from the greyhound.⁽¹³⁾

One can only lament with the author that this kind of upbringing is quite unhealthy and is bound to create some psychological bloc if not handled properly. Although this passage is presented directly, its application to the middle aged Lady Booby gives a dramatic force to the direct method of presentation and makes the whole passage as a comic prelude to illustrating the oddity of love for the immature young Joseph.

The characterisation of Lady Booby and all the other 'villains' in the book is almost one-sided and they are largely treated comically. They are rarely internalised or given a fair chance to speak for themselves, consequently they do not hold our sympathy; the plight of age for either Slipslop or Lady Booby when they try to seduce young Joseph can only enhance the comic effect rather than present a serious situation. As a comedy this is well and fine but it would probably be a more powerful criticism of society if a comprehensive picture of character was sought and occasionally an ambivalent attitude on the part of the reader was generated.

Lady Booby is portrayed as a selfish and heartless monster who is humiliated by her passion for Joseph. The unreality of Joseph's idealism and fidelity for his beloved Fanny can only be matched by another kind of unreality represented by the rich and powerful Lady Booby who, in spite of her determination and unyielding effort to win Joseph, is constantly resisted and defeated; presumably her humiliation can only bring shame to her class. Probably Fielding fell in the trap which he set for himself to prove that unlike Pamela who, through marriage to Mr B. betrays her class, Joseph is both honest and faithful to his class and consequently is better rewarded, if only spiritually by his romantic marriage to Fanny; the discovery of Joseph's real father does not change this judgement, at least concerning Joseph's attitude towards class.

There is no doubt that the triumph of the book is the characterisation of Parson Adams. He is directly opposed to Lady Booby who, despite her power and wealth, is unhappy; by contrast despite his poverty and adventurous life he is not only happy but also full of life and energy. The special charm about his character is his self-deception, mild affectation, self-contradiction and his enthusiasm and simplicity. Actually these characteristics make him more of a dupe than a hero. His liveliness is particularly manifest in contradicting his own philosophy of life. He advocates pacifism yet he is always ready to fight and to throw himself where angels fear to tread. A typical reaction of Adams is when he preaches stoicism, immediately afterwards reacts violently upon learning that his son drowned, and then again rejoices extravagantly when the news proves to be false.(p.14) His simplicity leads him to believe that 'knowledge of men is only to be learnt from books, Plato and Seneca for that', and to show his mild affectation by telling Joseph 'those are authors, I am afraid child, you never read.'⁽¹⁵⁾ In a symbolic scene Fielding reveals Adams's natural goodness while stripping off his mild affectation. When Fanny faints Adams immediately throws his Aeschylus, his means of affectation, into fire and rushes to save her in response to his good nature. The burning of the book symbolises that in the face of harsh experience this object is of no real value. Fielding of

course is aware that man is far from being perfect and that in as much as a quality like affectation is not harmful it can be tolerated, especially if it does not affect his personality negatively.

Adams's career and adventurous life in addition to his constant contact with all sorts of people and his inclination to 'poke his nose' in everything enables Fielding to reveal the reality of all segments of society. As Walter Allen observes Adams 'is in fact largely the source of satire in the book'.⁽¹⁶⁾ His social criticism is particularly effective with those people who weigh things up and rarely, if ever, respond humanly to help others; far worse is when they cause damage to their fellow human beings as a reflection of their selfish motives as when Lady Boody dismisses Poor Adams out of service. Fielding does not accept the simplistic view of man adopted by his contemporary John Locke who views him as ultimately good:

Men are rational creatures, living together according to reason, without a common superior, in a state of liberty without licence, everyone administering the laws of nature for himself.⁽¹⁷⁾

Nor does he adopt Hobbes's radical view that man is just a beast struggling to assert himself in a cruel world where only the fittest can survive:

Men are in that condition which is called war...with no arts, no letter, no society, and continued fear of violent danger; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.⁽¹⁸⁾

Fielding's position is a middle way between these extremes. Like Jean Jacques Rousseau, he believes that man is essentially good and that it is civilisation and circumstances which spoil him. Although Fielding does not romanticise country life, he thinks that people there are less spoilt than those who have to endure living in the city with all its requirements. In *Joseph Andrews* the characters which are originally brought up in the country can still maintain some form of their goodness and natural impulse despite everything. On the other hand, city life demands of its dwellers to be more sophisticated and consequently less spontaneous.

It should by now be clear that for Fielding the humanity of man is given top priority: anything which fosters man's goodness should be encouraged; by the same token, anything which spoils his natural impulse should be avoided. Fielding adopts a practical position which allows him to work everything for promoting the happiness of man. Nothing, not even religion, should prevent man from achieving his own happiness by any way of life which he sees fit, providing of course that this will not harm any one else. Fielding will enthusiastically embrace Jesus' well-known position that the Sabbath was made for man (upon a

protest by some Jews concerning work on this holy day) not the other way round. In other words, a particular religious concept should be done away with as soon as it is unequivocally realised that it does not promote the happiness of people. Indeed, every page of *Joseph Andrews* supports the liberal humanist position of establishing a spontaneous philosophy which revolves around the welfare of man regardless of religion, tradition and any ideology which forms an obstacle to his happiness.

Notes

- 1- Ian Watt, *The Rise of English Novel* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1981), p.11.
- 2- S. T. Coleridge, *Biography Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (London, 1907), p.307.
- 3- Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977, p.59. (referred to hereafter as JA)
- 4- JA, p.54.
- 5- JA, p.68-9.
- 6- JA, p.70.
- 7- George Sherburn, 'Fielding's Social Outlook' in *Eighteenth Century English Literature*, ed. J.L.Clifford, A Galaxy Book (Oxford University Press, 1959), p.252.
- 8- See JA. p.72.
- 9- JA, p.13.
- 10- JA, pp.91-2.
- 11- JA, p.75.
- 12- JA, p.13.
- 13- JA, p.281.
- 14- See JA, pp.290-1.
- 15- JA, p.176.
- 16- Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1954), p.56.
- 17- John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.S. Pringle-Attison (Oxford, 1924), p.69.
- 18- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford, 1946), p.59.

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يعالج هذا البحث مسألة العفوية في السلوك في رواية جوزيف اندروز لهنري فيلدينغ التي تصور نمونجين واضحين من الشخصوس : الأول الشخصيات التي تتصرف بشكل عفوي وتتجاوب مع دوافعها الطبيعية والثاني الشخصيات التي تتصنع وتناقض وتحسب كل شيء، قبل أي عمل. وعلى الرغم من أن الشخصيات العفوية بعيدة عن الكمال فهي تشكل مفهوم الخير عند المؤلف. فيلدينغ ينتمي إلى التراث الانكليزي التحرري الذي يتقبل الإنسان على ما هو عليه ويحاول أن يحرره من جميع القيود التي تعيق تطوره ومفهومه عن الحياة السعيدة.