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EVIDENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSLESSNESS
IN THE MAJOR FICTION OF DANIEL DEFOE

BY
NICHOLAS J. GOERGEN

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Science, Major in
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1965

EVIDENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSLESSNESS
IN THE MAJOR FICTION OF DANIEL DEFOE

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser

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Date

Head, English Department

July 16, 1965

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INTRODUCTION

This investigation will consider the thesis that the fiction of Daniel Defoe contains definite indications that he idealizes communism in the sense that he seems to uphold a system in which goods are owned in common and are available to all as needed. He often seems to emphasize, therefore, a concept of a society which is economically and socially classless.

Previous criticism of the work of Defoe has considered the apparent dichotomy between his presentations of seemingly virtuous moralizing alongside mercenary capitalism. The critics of my acquaintance discuss these ideas separately and are apparently unable to correlate Defoe's morality with his economics, except, perhaps, as an ironic device. This study, on the other hand, will suggest that Defoe is not shallow or confused or ironic in his thought when he presents such seemingly contradictory moral and economic ideals as a character's apparent repentance of his life of fortune hunting and his seemingly intense desire for money. Instead, this thesis will submit that Defoe's moral and economic beliefs are not at odds at all; rather they are growths of consistent thought based upon socio-economic classlessness.

Chapter II will review the criticism pertinent to the topic under consideration. This chapter will contend that the approach to Defoe's fiction in this thesis has not yet been attempted by the

critics. The basis for this contention will be a demonstration that the critics nearly always separate Defoe's morality from his economics.

Chapter III will consider Defoe's idea of economic classlessness in the Robinson Crusoe trilogy. Of primary concern in this argument will be Crusoe's wanderlust and his "original sin" which are based upon an intense quest for money, and the economic life on Crusoe's island which is economically classless both while Crusoe and Friday are there and while the Spaniards are there. On the island, all these characters live a communistic life of communal sharing.

Chapter IV will continue the analysis of Defoe's theme of ideal economic classlessness by reference to Captain Singleton, Moll Flanders, Roxana, "Jonathan Wild," and A Journal of the Plague Year. All these narratives definitely indicate that Defoe's model society is classless.

Definition of Terms

In this thesis certain words often recur which seem to have special meanings to Defoe. In order that the reader may more easily understand this study, these words will be defined in this section as Defoe seemed to define them in his fiction.

First, the terms middle class and classlessness seem to be quite closely connected in Defoe's mind. Idealizing a socially and economically classless society, Defoe saw, however, that this ideal was not being realized in eighteenth century England's capitalistic expansion. Quite the contrary, Defoe saw that England was moving

further and further away from a communal state. Defoe, therefore, preached against capitalism by writing stories about people who are caught in a society which has capitalistic classes at its foundation. His narratives often portray such people as Moll Flanders and Colonel Jack who are forced to steal in order to live because capitalism provides no useful place for them in its society. Untrained for any honest labor, they have no alternative to a life of crime. For stealing or whoring while they are poor, therefore, according to Defoe the thieves cannot be blamed.

These thieves, however, can rise financially only to a certain middle level if they are to retain their morality. If they rise any higher, they are, as Defoe sees them, taking money from the hands of the poor in the same way that money they needed was once taken from them by mercenary financiers. Therefore, the thieves satisfy themselves with contentment in the middle class. If they attempt to climb any higher than the middle socio-economic position, they will, like Roxana and Jonathan Wild, most probably meet calamity. If, on the other hand, they are satisfied with enough money to ease their necessity, if they perhaps even share it with less fortunate persons, they, like Captain Singleton and Colonel Jack, will usually live a happy, useful life.

By "middle class" then, Defoe apparently means that class of people in England who have enough money to live contentedly and who do not strive for more than is necessary for maintenance of self and family. This class, Defoe seems to feel, most closely approximates

the more ideal society of total classlessness because the middle class represents that stratum of people who are neither rich nor poor, who do not strive for wealth from avarice or from necessity.

In this study, therefore, classlessness means an ideal communal society which Defoe describes only when he presents a group of people far removed geographically from the harsh capitalistic realities of England, or when he presents the effects of the Great Plague which, for a time, creates communistic realities to replace those of capitalism. The term "middle class," on the other hand, refers to people living in England whose contentedness with moderate wealth can allow money to be placed in the hands of the poor. This middle class seems, to Defoe, to be England's closest kin to his concept of the communal life which would lead to the best of all possible earthly worlds. As many critics have pointed out, Defoe realistically pictured eighteenth century English society. It is the contention of this study that, together with this portrayal, Defoe presents a clear picture of an ideal society which he could only hope for--that is, a society founded upon complete socio-economic classlessness.

A second correlation which should be described in this chapter is Defoe's apparent nexus between the capitalistic ideal of financial self-gain and avariciousness. It will be the argument of this thesis that Robinson Crusoe, according to the critics a symbol of capitalism, is portrayed by Defoe as avaricious throughout most of Robinson's life because he attempts to rise above the middle class into which he was born. This study will further contend that certain of Defoe's

thieves, such as Roxana, are also pictured as avaricious characters, not while they attempt to escape poverty, but after they are no longer impoverished when they still try to obtain as much wealth as they possibly can.

Many critics point out that Defoe's characters do, in fact, symbolize the capitalistic spirit, but the critics correlate this spirit with an ideology which Defoe favored. It seems more logical, however, to say that Defoe's characters do represent capitalism during their early lives at least, but that rather than approve capitalism or the actions of the characters, Defoe condemns them as avaricious.

Thirdly, Defoe's use of the term, "Providence" should be analyzed in this section. Of particular importance in the Robinson Crusoe trilogy, the term is defined by Defoe as follows:

This I call Providence, to which I give the whole power of guiding and directing of the creation, and managing it, by man who is his deputy or substitute, over ruling man himself also.¹

By this statement Defoe apparently means that Providence has the power to direct man to follow the course towards happiness on earth. Man, however, as will be demonstrated in the succeeding chapter, has the power to obey or ignore these directions. Defoe evidently feels

¹ Daniel Defoe, Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe With His Vision of the Angelick World, The Works of Daniel Defoe, Vol. II (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Company, 1903), p. 186.

that, if man, at any time during his life, chooses to obey the commands of Providence, he will find happiness. If he does not obey them, he will find disaster.

The forms that these directions from Providence take are somewhat ambiguous. Apparently, Defoe feels that certain calamities in the life of a man who is disobeying God's will indicate that the man had better change his way of living. In other cases, certain repetitious events in a man's life suggest that Providence is telling him to follow a certain course of action, or perhaps to alter the course he is following. Through a vague combination of reason and intuition, man is, according to Defoe, supposed to recognize and obey the signs from Providence.

Lastly, in this study, the terms "capitalism" and "communism" are void of most of their twentieth century connotations. By "capitalism," Defoe's critics usually mean an ideology which emphasizes the individual's right to gain monetarily at the possible expense of others. By "communism," this thesis means an ideology wherein the community is placed before the individual, thereby ideally benefiting both the community and the individual much as the First Century Christians attempted to do. In this thesis, then, the two words, "communism" and "capitalism," only represent an emphasis upon the community at one pole and upon the individual at the other.

II

REVIEW OF PERTINENT CRITICISM

Of the criticism which has been written concerning the fiction of Defoe, this thesis will concern itself only with that which treats Defoe's ideas on economics and morality; only these particular aspects of the criticism of Defoe are pertinent to the topic under consideration in this study. The critics are split in their opinions regarding these topics between those who claim that Defoe is essentially an economist and those who allege that he is primarily a moralist. To my knowledge, no critic has thus far tried to correlate Defoe's morality with his economic thought.

To many critics of Defoe, mercenary capitalism is the most important philosophy found in his fiction. Ian Watt, for example, after pointing out that almost all of Defoe's main characters pursue money, writes that *Robinson Crusoe* is an embodiment of economic gain. Accordingly, Crusoe subordinates everything to business, including his friends.¹ Following his discussion of Crusoe as the money-seeking capitalist, Watt insists that much of the appeal of Robinson Crusoe stems from the capitalistic idea of economic individualism. He pictures Robinson Crusoe as a capitalistic individualist who is able to create a private world on a lonely island. On this island "Crusoe . . . enjoys the absolute freedom from social restrictions for which

¹Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 68-69.

Rousseau yearned--there are no family ties or civil authorities to interfere with his individual autonomy."¹ This freedom that Crusoe enjoys is, Watt says, one of the mainstays of Defoe's capitalistic spirit. Crusoe, according to Watt, is free to pursue his own economic ends on the island, free to start with very few material resources and build as much as his imaginative and physical resources will permit.

Watt thus argues that Defoe is almost totally concerned with economic gain. He concludes his argument by saying that Defoe "was not ashamed to make economic self-gain his major premise about human life; he did not think such a premise conflicted either with social or religious values."² This statement seems misleading. It is certainly true that Defoe does describe people in constant search of economic gain, but I cannot agree that Defoe completely condones such action. This study will assert that Defoe favors financial gain only to the point at which physical necessities are relieved. According to this theory, Defoe would condemn the young Crusoe's search for wealth because Crusoe has no exigencies to relieve.

Another critic who sees the capitalistic economist in Defoe is Mark Shorer, who writes that all of Defoe's protagonists are trying to make as much money as they can as fast as they can. Analyzing Moll Flanders as exemplary of Defoe's fiction, Shorer says that:

¹Ibid., p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 127.

Moll Flanders comes to us professing that its purpose is to warn us not only against a life of crime but against the cost of crime. We cannot for very many pages take that profession seriously, for it is apparent all too soon that nothing in the conduct of the narrative indicates that virtue is either more necessary or more enjoyable than vice. At the end we discover that Moll turns virtuous only after a life of vice had enabled her to do so with security. The actualities of the book, then, enforce the moral assumption of any commercial culture, the belief that virtue and worldly goods form an equation.¹

This quest for profit, Shorer feels, is the essence of Defoe's philosophy.² Moll Flanders and, for that matter, all the rest of Defoe's protagonists become moral only when they can afford to do so.

Essentially, Shorer has a valid point in his assertions concerning Defoe's concept of security and morality. Defoe apparently does connect a man's morality with his financial security, but Defoe does not, it seems to me, adhere to a policy of constant struggle for financial gain. Rather, he pictures such a struggle as representative of sinful avarice as he does with Robinson Crusoe who even calls himself a sinner for seeking more fortune than he needs.

A third critic, James Sutherland, says that Defoe follows the path of mercenary worldliness. He maintains that Moll's and Roxana's prostitution is important to Defoe only in so far as it demonstrates that the two women have something to sell. Like Robinson Crusoe, the

¹Mark Shorer, "A Study in Defoe: Moral Vision and Structural Form," *Thought*, XXV (1950), 283.

²Ibid., p. 284.

women are simply tradesmen.¹ Sutherland does not, however, take into account the different endings of the two tales and the importance of these endings to Defoe's moral. It will be my contention that the conclusions of the two books, one happy, the other unhappy, are direct consequences of the lives that the heroines ultimately choose. Put most simply, *Moll Flanders* recognizes and repents her sins; *Roxana* does not.

Not all critics, however, agree that Moll does, in fact, repent her early life. In addition to Mark Shorer, Dorothy Van Ghent and Robert R. Columbus also claim that Defoe is utilizing Moll's moralizing as an ironic device to tighten the structure of the book. Van Ghent says "the morality that is preached by Moll is a burlesque of morality."² Van Ghent feels that the juxtaposition of Moll's criminal actions and her didacticism serve to make the book a well-organized, ironic satire on middle class morality.³ Agreeing with Van Ghent, Robert Columbus says that Moll's moralizing is ironic. He feels that Moll is controlled by her circumstances and environment. Realizing that she is the victim of an impoverished condition, Moll is aware that she has nothing to repent because, according to Defoe, an indigent

¹James Sutherland, Defoe (New York: J. P. Lippencott Company, 1938), p. 239.

²Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel/Form and Function (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 42.

³Ibid.

thief has a right to steal; therefore, her repentance is her way of being ironic.¹

Implicit in these interpretations of the irony in Moll's moralizing is the idea that Defoe is consciously advocating mercenary capitalism because the protagonist of Moll Flanders devotes her life to making money. When she finally repents, her penitence is not sincere; therefore both Defoe and Moll uphold her life of seeking wealth.

There are a number of other critics who picture Defoe as a capitalist. Holbrook Jackson, for example, says that "Defoe was vainglorious and ambitious, life to him was a great battle and the one desirable thing the honours and rewards of victory."² Ernest Baker says that Defoe's thinking represents "strictly a utilitarian code. Whatever he did and whatever he conceived his characters as doing was judged by its material effects."³ Willa Cather says that Defoe is a bore whose only theme is one of making money.⁴ The arguments presented by these three in support of their assertions are essentially the same. They trace one or more of Defoe's characters from poverty

¹Robert R. Columbus, "Conscious Artistry in Moll Flanders," Studies in English Literature, III (Summer, 1963), 431.

²Holbrook Jackson, Great English Novelists (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1908), p. 38.

³Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1929), p. 169.

⁴Willa Cather, On Writing (New York; Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1949) p. 75.

to wealth. They assume that, because Defoe's heroes almost always gain financially, because the characters devote a great deal of time to telling the readers precisely how much money they have made, and because the characters seem happier with their acquired money than without it, Defoe must be encouraging as much monetary gain as possible. I cannot entirely agree with them. This thesis will prove that financial gain is not necessarily a good to Defoe; indeed it can be harmful if carried too far.

A final critic, one who imagines Defoe as an English capitalist, is H. W. Hausermann, who links Defoe's capitalism to a Puritan viewpoint. He joins Defoe to the Puritan concept of equating financial gain and moral good. According to Hausermann, Defoe's heroes are representative of the Puritan idea of capitalistic heroes seeking financial satisfaction as economic individualists.¹ However, Hausermann seems inaccurate because, when Defoe's heroes become too economically gainful, their individualism usually turns to greed, a sin in any Christian dogma.

Besides these critics who call Defoe a capitalist, there is another group, who, though they analyze Defoe's work in economic terms, more closely approach, it appears to me, the economic theory which Defoe advocates than do those who interpret his fiction as capitalistic in

¹H. W. Hausermann, "Aspects of Life and Thought in Robinson Crusoe," Review of English Studies, XI (1935), 442-444.

nature. William Minto, for example, describes Defoe's characters and their attempts to make money, but he states that Defoe is actually delineating the effects of poverty upon a character. He feels that Defoe's characters are forced to attempt to make money because of their impoverished conditions.¹ Although Minto's interpretation appears to be essentially accurate, his argument does not seem to adequately explain Robinson Crusoe's many money-making ventures. Crusoe is born into the middle class and does not have to spend his life seeking fortune. He is not a thief, but his lust for fortune is as strong as that of any of Defoe's rogues. If Defoe were describing people who are forced to seek money by necessity, and if he were consistent, he would surely provide Crusoe with a necessity. But Defoe does not do so. It seems, therefore, that Defoe is not primarily concerned with the effects of poverty on a man's existence. Rather he is more concerned with avarice and its potential effects on people who, either owing to their natures or their impecunious circumstances, are particularly susceptible to it.

A second critic who discusses poverty and its effects in Defoe's fiction is Maximillian Novak. Novak writes that Defoe's characters are victims of situations or natures over which they have no control. Novak's theory, unlike that of Minto, does include Robinson Crusoe,

¹William Minto, Daniel Defoe (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), pp. 154-156.

for Crusoe, Novak says, is a victim of his "personal characteristics: his lack of economic prudence, his inability to follow a steady profession, his indifference to a calm bourgeois life, and his love of travel."¹ This analysis of Robinson Crusoe makes him consistent with Defoe's thieves because both Crusoe and the thieves are shaped by conditions over which they have no control.

Further supporting his deterministic argument, Novak writes that Defoe's thieves, too, are shaped by their impoverished conditions. Because they are trained to no profession and have no money with which to live, they are "thrown into a state of necessity through conditions which they cannot control."² This state of necessity forces them to steal, an act for which they are blameless because "necessity returns society to a state of nature in which all property is held in common."³ The impoverished thief, therefore, as a needy member of the community, has a right to any property which may relieve his necessity. Novak further argues that "if there is no guilt involved in theft, there is no need for restitution of property" because society is ruled by

¹Maximillian E. Novak, Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 516.

²Maximillian E. Novak, "The Problem of Necessity in Defoe's Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XI (October, 1961), 523.

³Ibid., pp. 515-516.

"imperfect right governed by the conditions which brought the thief into his necessity."¹ As a result, no other law but natural law can judge an impoverished thief.²

Novak claims, then, that the economic system under which Defoe's thieves are born is responsible for their poverty. In his assertion, Novak has the force of numbers on his side. All of Defoe's thieves are either born into poverty or become poor shortly after their births. This argument implies that Defoe is not the capitalist that many critics think he is. According to Novak, Defoe feels that capitalism provides a necessity for theft. Novak's argument also implies that, in times of greatest need, Defoe feels that a communal society is preferable to capitalistic individualism. Further, one can find in Novak's argument the hint that, in Defoe's opinion, a communal society would be better than a capitalistic one: in an ideal communal state there would be no poor who are forced to steal or otherwise disobey God's laws. In a purely capitalistic system of economics, however, indigent classes are an inherent part of the socio-economic structure.

Novak's assertions are, it seems to me, quite accurate. Defoe's thieves are, indeed, victims of England's economic structure. Agreeing, therefore, with Novak, this thesis will begin where Novak left off and directly assert that Defoe does, in fact, idealize a communal society

¹Ibid., p. 516.

²Ibid., p. 513.

in his fiction. To my knowledge only one critic, John Laird, ever directly states that Defoe shows evidences of communism. In reference to Robinson's return to his island in The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Laird says:

. . . when Crusoe arrived, the colony had almost surmounted the early political difficulties of such a community. Indeed all its members assured Crusoe 'that they would never have any interest separate from one another'; and they were so delighted with the provision he had made for their advantage that they unanimously engaged not to leave the island without his consent. Thereupon he parcelled out the land and distributed the stores he had brought upon the communist principle of need, with a reserve to be distributed on the same principle

It appears that Laird, in this statement, is correct in his thinking concerning the communistic implications of this incident, but that his arguments can be carried further to a declaration that Defoe's entire economic ideology was based upon an ideal of economic classlessness.

Thus far this chapter has reviewed the critics who analyze Defoe primarily in terms of his economic thought. There is, however, a body of critics who picture Defoe chiefly as a moralist more concerned with a life of virtue than he is with personal finance.

E. B. Benjamin, for example, places all the events in Robinson Crusoe into a symbolic religious framework. He feels that all the episodes in the novel symbolize religious experiences, the sum of which eventually lead Robinson along the path to God. Supporting his

¹John Laird, Philosophical Incursions into English Literature (New York; Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 30.

interpretation, Benjamin cites such events in the book as Crusoe's relationship with Friday. According to Benjamin, Crusoe is forced to analyze his own religious ideas when he tries to explain Christianity to Friday. The end result of Robinson's conversations with Friday is an awareness and understanding of religion which Robinson had never before possessed.¹ Ultimately Crusoe understands God's commands:

Robinson Crusoe is far more than the account of a practical man's adjustment to life on a deserted island. Side by side with Crusoe's physical conquest of nature is his struggle to conquer himself and to find God. It is really a conversion story, like that of Augustine or Baxter, with the classic symptoms of supernatural guidance. . . penitential tears, and Biblical text. Despite repeated signs and warnings, Crusoe only gradually awakens to the necessity for salvation; and it is not until in his illness he stumbles upon the Bible that he crosses the hump. The final stage is his realization that his deliverance from the island is unimportant in comparison with his deliverance from sin through the mercy of God.²

According to Benjamin, Defoe is far more the moralist than he is the economist.

A second critic who imagines Defoe primarily as a moralist, Walter Wilson, argues that the economic situations in Defoe's fiction are always subservient to the moral. "His facts, however disreputable to virtue, are always subservient to it in the long run. He tells his story for the sake of the moral."³ I agree with Wilson that Defoe

¹E. B. Benjamin, "Symbolic Elements in Robinson Crusoe," Philological Quarterly, XXXX (April, 1951), 209.

²Ibid., p. 207.

³Walter Wilson, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel Defoe, Vol. III (London: Hurst, Chance, and Company, 1830), p. 525.

tells his stories for their morals. But I fail to see why the plot situation is subservient to the moral. Rather, it seems to me, the plots and the morals in Defoe's fiction complement one another. As I shall attempt to prove, Defoe's values and the situations he presents are so interdependent that they cannot be pigeonholed into economic and social predicaments at one pole and moral reflections at the other. Instead, his plot situations and moral digressions are both based upon the same concept, religious, social, and economic classlessness.

Another critic who argues that Defoe is first of all a moralist is C. E. Burch, who maintains that Defoe is always serious in his moralizing:

That Defoe early in his writing career manifested more than an academic interest in his moral questions, and that this interest continued unabated throughout his life, his numerous writings on the subject will abundantly prove.¹

Disagreeing with such critics as Dorothy Van Ghent and Robert Columbus, Burch asserts that there is no irony in Defoe's moralizing. He says that Defoe's characters are, in fact, true penitents; their repentance is not ironically juxtaposed to their often immoral actions. He bases his argument on the idea that the characters who successfully repent their crimes do so late in life when they have quit being criminals. Their very act of becoming honest demonstrates for Burch a repentance.²

¹C. E. Burch, "Moral Elements in Defoe's Fiction," London Quarterly Review, CLXII (April, 1937), 207.

²Ibid., pp. 209-211.

Agreeing with Burch that there is a definite repentance theme in Defoe's fiction, H. L. Konce feels that early in *Moll Flanders'* life there is a real conflict between her actions and her morality. Konce feels, however, that late in her life, the conflict disappears because Moll does, in fact, repent her earlier life of crime. She is, according to Konce, contrite in every sense.¹ He feels that the penitence theme is the great moral lesson contained in Defoe's fiction.²

Perhaps the most ardent supporter of the concept of Defoe as a moralist is Marjorie Nicholson. She states that in Defoe's *Review* "as always the author considered himself primarily as counselor and guide."³ She continues by saying that "one of Defoe's main purposes was to exalt virtue, expose vice, promote truth and help men to serious reflection". . . . The *Review* had as high a moral purpose as did *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.⁴ Nicholson closes her argument by saying that, in Defoe, "we find the teacher everywhere."⁵

¹H. L. Konce, "Moll's Muddle: Defoe's Use of Irony in *Moll Flanders*," *ELH*, XXX (December, 1963), 382.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 393-394.

³Marjorie Nicholson in *The Best of Defoe's Review*, Wilson L. Payne (ed.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. xv.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. xviii.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. xix.

In effect, Nicholson is attacking those critics who say that Defoe's didacticism is purely ironic and included in the narratives for purposes of satire. Quite the contrary, she feels that the economic situations about which Defoe writes are utilized by Defoe for the sake of the moral.¹

There is no doubt that the critics who maintain that Defoe is primarily a moralist are accurate to the extent that morality is important to Defoe's fiction. But it does not seem accurate to say that he is any more a moralist than he is an economist. It is true, of course, that none of Defoe's critics completely ignores the economist or the moralist in Defoe; on the contrary, it would be foolish for a critic to ignore either because both are so obviously present in Defoe's writing. The problem which has confronted the critics is one of emphasis. If Defoe's economic ideas and his morality were to clash, would his virtuous morality or his mercenary capitalism take precedence? Would Defoe, as Walter Wilson says, try to make mankind better,² or would he, as Hans Anderson says, act always in defense of his own economic expediency?³ It appears that the critics have not satisfactorily answered this question. This study will suggest that there appears to be no conflict in his ideas on economics and morality.

¹Ibid.

²Walter Wilson, p. 525.

³Hans H. Anderson, "Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe," *Modern Philology*, XXXIX (August, 1941), 39.

III

ECONOMIC CLASSLESSNESS IN THE ROBINSON CRUSOE TRILOGY

In his fiction, Defoe devotes abundant space to describing people in their quests for money. Some characters in his fiction are obsessed with economic gain, but this obsession is most often a result of the penniless conditions under which they were born. Other characters, such as Robinson Crusoe, with whom this chapter deals, are not born poor, but some ambition within their natures forces them, for a time at least, to attempt to procure as much money as they can. In this sense of constantly striving to make money, Defoe's characters, during their youths, are almost all symbolic of the capitalistic ideal.

But I cannot agree with critics such as Denis Donoghue who feels that "his [Defoe's] images merely declare that life is a narrow and grim affair in which evil means loss and good means gain and there is nothing more to it . . ." ¹ and Hans Anderson who says "whenever he [Defoe] drew a distinction between economic and ethical ends he did so in defense of economic expediency . . ." ² in their rather mercenary evaluation of Defoe. Although, for example, the young Robinson Crusoe does devote much of his life to trying to find money and adventure, his attitude changes completely as he ages. In fact the Robinson

¹Denis Donoghue, "Values of Moll Flanders," Sewanee Review, LXXI (Spring, 1963), 297.

²Anderson, p. 39.

Crusoe trilogy represents a general movement from a representation of capitalistic grasping to a depiction of the financial moderation and contentedness of the middle class. This change is symbolized by the reversal in Robinson's attitude, his recognition that neither his search for money nor fortune itself is able to make him happy.

This and the following chapter also will contend that Defoe, in his narratives, envisions an economically classless community. It must be remembered, however, that England in the eighteenth century was beginning a great capitalistic movement. It was precisely this movement that Defoe condemned and replaced with a communal life. The Robinson Crusoe trilogy provides an example of Defoe's economic ideals.

Robinson Crusoe, the son of a middle-class father, is well-educated in law before he becomes stubbornly inclined to go to sea against the advice of his relatives and friends. Before Crusoe leaves England, however, his father provides him with what Crusoe decides years later is excellent advice. He tells Crusoe that the middle class is the station that he had

found by long experience was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness . . . and not embarrassed with pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind. He told me I might judge of the happiness of this state by this one thing, viz., that this¹ was the state of life which all other people envied. . . .

¹Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 206.

Rather than take this advice, however, the young Crusoe commits his "original sin" by going to sea to seek his fortune, a mistake for which he will be punished.

By leaving home to seek fortune rather than remain contented with the "middle station," Crusoe shows himself to be the capitalist that Donoghue and Anderson claim that Defoe is. These critics, however, do not seem to consider the entire trilogy of Robinson Crusoe. In the first and most of the second book, Crusoe is indeed a capitalist seeking his fortune. But by the third book he finds contentment as a member of the middle class. His attitudes change completely, a change which is motivated by the many signs that Providence sends to him throughout the major portion of his life. Crusoe's father may be considered the first instrument from Providence directing him how to live. Shortly after Crusoe's departure, Providence warns him a second time that he would be better off at home practising law: "The ship was no sooner gotten out of Humber but the wind began to blow, and the sea to rise in a most frightful manner . . ." and for the first time "I began now seriously to reflect upon what I had done, and how justly I was overtaken by the judgment of Heaven for my wicked leaving my father's house and abandoning my duty. . . ."¹ Because he is filled with youthful wanderlust, however, Crusoe heeds neither of these two warnings. He continues his voyage and soon

¹Ibid., p. 12.

receives a third, much stronger warning, as his ship is wrecked. He is then forced to return to England.

But a victim of persistent wanderlust, Crusoe does not remain in his homeland for long. This time, however, he will not be allowed to return so soon. He has been given more than one chance to remain in England, but, in his youthful ambition and desire for travel, he has flaunted his Maker and committed what he later calls his "original sin" of too much greed.

This "original sin" is central to the meaning of Crusoe's life because the years that he will spend on the island and later in roaming the world are a direct result of it. R. G. Stramm describes the wrong that Crusoe committed in the following terms:

If Robinson's misfortunes had to appear as a means by which Providence punished and improved a sinner, Robinson had to be a sinner. Defoe made him one by interpreting his going to sea against the will of his parents as a sin. In doing so he applied antiquated standards, developed by the Puritan teachers of the seventeenth century who definitely saw a sin in man's wish to choose a course of life other than that which Providence has made natural for him.

It appears that Stramm is accurate in his assertion that Crusoe would be punished for his sin, but somewhat improved by his life on the island. In this sense the island is a kind of purgatory where he will be cleansed. But the island is simultaneously another powerful command of Providence, telling Crusoe that the itinerant, fortune-hunting life he has chosen is sinful, not because, as Stramm feels,

¹R. G. Stramm, "An Artist in the Puritan Tradition," Philological Quarterly, XV (July, 1936), 243-244.

Crusoe had chosen a way of life other than that into which he was born, but rather because he had tried to achieve gain quickly and to rise above the middle class. If Crusoe were sinning by merely attempting to leave his pre-ordained place in society, Defoe's thieves would all be sinners from the beginning. They are born into poverty, but Defoe does not condemn them for attempting to escape it. As I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, he condemns them for trying to rise above a certain middle class point, the very same thing that Defoe condemns Crusoe for doing. Crusoe's island punishment, then, is classically just, because instead of making the quick fortune that he tries to achieve, he is thrust into a place where there is no possibility of gaining fortune.

On Crusoe's island there are no economic classes. Although superior to Friday in his religious beliefs, Robinson is never economically supreme. From the beginning, the two men share everything. By the time Friday is killed in the second book of Robinson Crusoe, the two are devoted equals in every way. The strata which had existed only religiously on the island are gradually erased until only Defoe's ideal of the socially and economically classless society remains. By the second book of Robinson Crusoe, Defoe's secular thought, based upon economic classlessness, and his religious thought, founded upon religious classlessness, merge until Crusoe and Friday represent a society in which classes do not exist in any form. In Robinson Crusoe,

at least, the conflict that R. G. Stramm describes as existing in Defoe's mind between the secular and religious¹ does not really exist.

Like Stramm, Donoghue, and Anderson, Ian Watt, too, believes that Defoe is strictly mercenary. In his searching analysis of the early English novel, Watt states that Defoe "was not ashamed to make economic self-interest his major premise about human life."² Watt attempts to prove, by citing the many capitalistic goals of Robinson Crusoe, that Defoe advocates personal economic gain.³ Yet, late in his life, Crusoe reflects in the following terms:

For example, supposing from my own story, when a young fellow broke from his friends, trampled upon all the wise advice, and most affectionate persuasions of his father, and even the tears and entreaties of a tender mother, and would go away to sea, but is checked in his first excursions by being shipwrecked, and in the utmost distress saved by the assistance of another ship's boat, seeing the ship he was in, soon after sink to the bottom; ought not such a young man to have listened to the voice of this providence, and have taken it for a summons to him; that when he was on shore, he should stay on shore and go back to the arms of his friends, hearken to their council, and not precipitate himself into farther mischiefs; what happiness might such a prudent step have procured, what miseries and mischiefs would it have prevented in the rest of his unfortunate life.⁴

This recognition of the wisdom in his father's words is not the reflection of the fortune-hunter that Crusoe was in his early life; this is the lesson that has taken him most of his life to learn. Crusoe was

¹Ibid., pp. 222-229.

²Watt, p. 127.

³Ibid.

⁴Defoe, Serious Reflections, p. 213.

born at a certain agreeable, middle point in society, and he should have stayed there. He was born into the class that Defoe's thieves must strive to reach. But neither Crusoe nor the thieves should attempt to climb any higher because, as society exists in England, the middle class comes the closest to representing the perfect class.

The critics mentioned thus far in this chapter have, it seems to me, confused Defoe's lengthy descriptions of economic gain with his moral. It is undoubtedly true that almost all of Defoe's heroes are ambitious climbers, but once they are past the middle class they fall morally at the same time that they rise economically. Crusoe does finally earn money, but he is not purged of his "original sin" until he recognizes the evil inherent in a self-absorbing quest for money. As will be pointed out in the next chapter, this same moral holds true for all the rest of Defoe's protagonists.

Returning to Robinson Crusoe, one finds that Defoe closes the first of the three Crusoe books with his hero indicating that there will probably be another account of his later life and the many adventures in it. Within six months after the publication of the first book, Defoe did publish a second tale of Crusoe's adventures. Defoe had left his readers on Crusoe's island which by this time is inhabited by a group of Spaniards who acknowledge Crusoe as their head. He is, in a sense, a king. When Crusoe leaves, however, the Spaniards prove that they do not need a king by living a classless, communal life. When Robinson revisits his old island, he finds the people there working for the common good, engaging "in a strict

friendship and union of interest," and there "[are] no misunderstandings and jealousies" among the workers.¹ The tailor, the smith, and the carpenter spend their time providing, not for themselves alone, but for all the Spaniards in the commune.² These Spaniards, like the Englishmen and their wives who inhabit another part of the same island, represent Defoe's ideal society devoid of the classes which allow some to become rich at the expense of the poor. For on this idealized island which represents a world separated from the harsh classes of Europe, there are no rich and no poor.

Unlike these island residents, however, Crusoe, even after almost thirty years of punishment, is still not able to repress his intense lust for traveling and fortune hunting. He becomes more and more what James Sutherland calls the economic tradesman.³ In The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Crusoe decides to join a Japanese merchant. His reflections on this decision tell us that he has learned little about his station in life during his twenty-eight years on the island. "So eager did my head still run upon Rambling that I could not but begin to entertain a notion of going my self with him."⁴ The purgation is not complete; Crusoe has not yet found rest.

This second book of the trilogy is certainly intended to further portray Crusoe's wanderlust. It is not until the end of this

¹Defoe, The Farther Adventures, p. 350.

²Ibid., p. 352.

³Sutherland, p. 239.

⁴Defoe, The Farther Adventures, p. 448.

story, when he returns to England, that Crusoe is finally successful in controlling himself. He returns comfortably wealthy, but no more so than he probably would have been had he stayed and practised law. He certainly cannot be called rich, but he has sufficient funds to return to the middle class from which he originated. Crusoe has learned by what Novak has rightly called "empirical fact acting upon the smooth wax tablet that is the . . . personality."¹ The impressions that have been made on this tablet through the course of his life have taught Crusoe that he needs only enough money so that he does not have to worry about health or comfort. By using his ingenuity and the things that were left on the island with him, he had been able to live reasonably well with little to worry about except wild animals; as his travels widened he slowly became impressed with the fact that all his traveling and searching was meaningless when compared to a contented middle station in life. As an old man he finally resolves to "harass myself no more, I am preparing for a longer journey than all these, having lived seventy-two years a life of infinite variety, and learned sufficiently to know the value of retirement, and the blessing of ending our days in peace."² Symbolizing the mercenary part of the capitalistic society as a young man, he learns that peace is not purchased by living the life of a constantly grasping capitalist. Instead, it is gained only by being

¹Novak, Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe, p. 239.

²Defoe, The Farther Adventures, p. 500.

satisfied with the things that are necessary for spiritual and economic comfort.

As a great number of critics have pointed out, Defoe was successful in the sale of his first two books about Robinson Crusoe, a success which, perhaps, motivated him to write a third book defining the things that Crusoe learned throughout the course of his life. Whether the writing of this third book makes Defoe inconsistent with the philosophy that he preached about the middle class, or whether Defoe felt that he had not yet reached the point at which he must stop capitalizing may be of more import to a biographer than it is to a critic. The biographers unanimously agree, though, that Defoe never reached a comfortable financial position in his life. Possibly trying to alleviate an uncomfortable financial condition, he wrote a third book about Crusoe with the didactic title of Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe With His Vision of the Angelick World.

Reminiscent of Thomas of Kempis' Imitation of Christ, Defoe's book outlines the best way for a man to live. Behind the didacticism, however, there is a definite doctrine of morality and economics. Morality, to Defoe, is based almost entirely on economics; thus the two ideas merge and become one. Indeed, according to Defoe, so dependent are a man's morality and economic status one upon the other, that a poor thief is usually far more moral than is a rich bourgeois. Maximillian Novak, recognizing this theory of Defoe's, says that Defoe had "a concept of imperfect right governed by the conditions which

brought the thief into his necessity."¹ This idea of right being relative to economic conditions is ubiquitous in Defoe's fiction, but it is defined nowhere so clearly as in the third of the Robinson Crusoe narratives. At one point, Crusoe tells his readers that:

I am of the opinion that I could state a circumstance in which there is not one man in the world would be honest. Necessity is above the power of human nature, and for Providence to suffer a man to fall into that necessity is to suffer him to sin, because nature is not furnished with power to defend itself, nor is grace itself able to fortify the mind against it.²

This deterministic view absolves from sinning against man, for a time at least, the many thieves about whom Defoe writes. Man must ease the necessity for his basic needs of food, clothing, and some financial security. But when these needs are satisfied, it is personally sinful and socially unjust to continue to steal or seek wealth excessively:

But when we are considering human nature subjected, by the consequences of Adam's transgression, to frailty and infirmity, and regarding things from man to man, the exigencies and extremities or straitened circumstances seem to me to be most prevailing arguments why the denomination of a man's character ought not by his fellow-mortals (subject to the same infirmities) to be gathered from his mistakes, his errors, or his failings; no not from the manner and method of his behavior. Does he go on to commit frauds, and make a practice of his sin? Is it a distress? Is it a storm of affliction and poverty has driven him upon the lee-shore of temptation? Or is the sin the port he steered for? A ship may by stress of weather be driven upon sands and dangerous

¹Novak, "The Problem of Necessity in Defoe's Fiction," p. 516.

²Defoe, Serious Reflections, p. 41.

places, that runs against the wind, and without any necessity, upon a shelf which he sees before him, must do it on purpose to destroy the vessel, and ruin the voyage.¹

In Defoe's view, Robinson Crusoe commits an "original sin" because he is not driven by "a storm of affliction and poverty." He is warned as Providence tries to destroy his voyage by more than once ruining his vessel. But Crusoe is not to be deterred even though he has no need to try to find more fortune. He started with enough to be comfortable. It takes him a lifetime to learn the precise things that his father had told him many years before, that the middle class is the most moral and spiritually the least dangerous of all the classes in England. Man should aspire to no greater heights than to this class because his ambition may easily turn to uncontrollable greed as Crusoe's almost does.

Considered as a whole, then, the three Robinson books are an account of the early sin of a middle-class man and of his gradual absolution of this sin late in life through his willingness to obey the dictates of Providence. On his island Crusoe finds a certain happiness, but it is not the happiness that he expects to find in his travels. The island existence offers Crusoe time to contemplate the value of seeking self gain, and later to observe how well a system wherein everyone works for the good of the group can succeed if it is given the chance. Still not satisfied, however, Robinson continues his travels, during which his life becomes emptier than it had been on the

¹Ibid., p. 47.

island. Upon realization of this fact he finally returns to England to write his memoirs and to describe the benefits to be found in middle class life.

E. B. Benjamin's description of Crusoe's recognition of God's voice¹ is, it seems to me, a perceptive insight. But Benjamin's proposition may be more accurately applied to the entire trilogy than just to the first book. Benjamin would be hard put to explain why Crusoe continues to wander, and therefore to sin, throughout the second book. But in the three narratives the sin is present and so is the repentance. The sin is the economic one of attempting to quit the middle station; Crusoe does not steal, yet in the eyes of his Creator he is more guilty than are almost all of Defoe's thieves. For the thieves are merely trying to survive, an act which is not sinful in Defoe's eyes. Crusoe, on the other hand, is already comfortable when he leaves home, but he is dissatisfied with his middle-class life. For this dissatisfaction he is punished.

There is little doubt that Defoe finds in the life of the middle class the best life that is to be found in England. The aspirations of the capitalist are sinful in Defoe's eyes; he scorns the system in which some get rich at the expense of others. Rather than this system which encourages financial grasping, he would prefer a socialistic society in which no man will sin against God and his neighbor through greed, and where no man will be sinned against through poverty.

¹Supra, p. 17.

As I shall attempt to prove in the next chapter, this Christian socialism is a consistent ideal in all Defoe's fiction.

IV

THE MIDDLE CLASS AND ECONOMIC CLASSLESSNESS IN SELECTED NARRATIVES

Besides permeating The Robinson Crusoe trilogy, Defoe's theme of economic classlessness recurs often in his other works of fiction. It must be remembered, however, that Defoe is a realist and as such he describes English conditions as he sees their external realities. In England, except during the plague, there were few communal societies. Remaining a realist, Defoe, therefore, saw England's middle class as being very close to his ideal classless society because there was no upper or lower level of this middle group. There was usually contentment with sufficient wealth to satisfy personal comfort. When, therefore, Defoe described conditions in England he portrayed the middle class as the closest representative to a communal society. There was, of course, a difference between the two, but England had nothing else to offer Defoe if he was to be realistic as well as didactic in his descriptions. This chapter will suggest that, although not socialistic in nature, the contented, middle class is, in Defoe's eyes, the best place in society for the people in highly capitalistic England.

One book epitomizing this idea of the middle class is Captain Singleton. The protagonist of the narrative, Bob Singleton, is impoverished early in his life. According to Maximilian Novak, Bob's experiences in early life are "the experiences that shape most of

Defoe's characters [which] are contact with poverty and hunger, and the lack of early training and education."¹ Singleton, realizing his misfortunes, reflects as follows:

I had no sense of virtue or religion upon me. I had never heard of either, except what a good old parson had said to me when I was a child of about eight or nine years old; nay, I was preparing and growing up apace to be as wicked as any one could be, or perhaps ever was.²

Having been raised, then, without religion, Bob muses further and says that of "education I had none."³ Existing in such a manner with no religion, education or money, Bob decides that perhaps the only alternative to starvation is piracy.

Defoe, however, makes it immediately clear that Singleton is not a wicked man who would steal for its own sake. On the contrary, Defoe puts the following words into his protagonist's mouth:

Fate certainly . . . directed my beginning, knowing that I had work which I had to do in the world, which nothing but one hardened against all sense of honesty or religion could go through; and yet, even in this state of original wickedness, I entertained such a settled abhorrence of the abandoned vileness of the Portugese, that I could not but hate them⁴ most heartily from the beginning, and all my life afterwards.

In Defoe's estimation, then, Bob is not an evil person merely because he is a thief. His stealing is justifiable on the grounds that his condition is one of necessity.

¹Kovak, Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe, p. 16.

²Daniel Defoe, The Life and Adventures of Captain Singleton (London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1904), p. 144.

³Ibid., p. 13.

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

As a thief he is quite successful, but as his wealth amasses he considers retirement from his piracy. He thinks of settling down to a more honest life now that he can afford to do so. His accumulated wealth is, like that of Captain Avery in Defoe's "King of Pirates," becoming an actual hindrance to him. He does not know what to do with it. Singleton wisely perceives that his recent failures at robbing and his trouble storing his wealth are signs from Providence warning him to be satisfied with the money he has.

Bob's recognition of the signs of Providence is occasioned by the constant petition of his comrade, Quaker William, who, throughout their adventures, has helped to keep Singleton as moderate as possible in their pirating lest they offend God by being too greedy. William helps convince Bob that they are wealthy enough to end their thieving lives and properly to repent their crimes:

. . . first, it is true that, if we consider the justice of God, we have no reason to expect any protection; but as the ordinary ways of Providence are out of the common road of human affairs, so we may hope for mercy still upon our repentance, and we know not how good he may be to us; so we are to act as if we rather depended upon the last, I mean the merciful part, than claimed the first, which must produce nothing but judgment and vengeance.¹

This statement about the mercy of God interests Bob. He asks William how they can repent if they cannot give the money back to its rightful owners. William's answer is set forth in the following terms:

To quit what we have and to do it here, is to throw it away to those who have no claim to it, and to divest ourselves of it, but to do no right with it; whereas we ought to keep

¹Defoe, Captain Singleton, p. 303.

it carefully together, with a resolution to do what right with it we are able; and who knows what opportunities providence may put into our hands to do justice, at least, to leave it to Him to go on. As it is, without doubt our present business is to go to some place of safety, where we may wait His will.¹

Told, thus, to wait God's will, Bob finally feels that it is the will of God that he give to a poor woman that part of his wealth which he does not need to be comfortable. He finds satisfaction in this act of charity and goes back to England to live what we are led to believe will be a very happy life.

Defoe's middle-class ideology is present throughout this book. According to Defoe, Bob has a right and a necessity to better his impoverished condition. But Bob has the right only to a certain economic level or, as it almost does, his wealth will become an evil rather than a relief. Bob, recognizing this possibility, contents himself with the economic middle class.

Like Captain Singleton, Moll Flanders is also impoverished early in her life, but she manages to ward off poverty with a succession of marriages for profit. After her fifth husband leaves her, Moll discovers to her consternation that she is getting along in years, and husbands are no longer so easy to come by. For a time she is desperate and wonders what she will do for a living. But she soon learns that she can make a profitable living as a thief, a trade at which she is successful for twelve years before she is finally caught and sentenced to transportation to Virginia.

¹Ibid., p. 304.

Moll's early life, although dishonest, is necessary. Like Defoe's other thieves and whores, Moll has no education for any trade which might be called honest. She is born a victim of the society which offers no consideration for the poor. I cannot agree with Pierre Legouis who feels that Moll is a victim only of her own passions and desires¹ because Defoe asserts many times in his Review and in his fiction that people like Moll have to live somehow. She epitomizes the type of persons whom Defoe succinctly describes in his Review:

. . . Poverty makes thieves, . . . distress makes knaves of honest men, and the exigencies of tradesmen when in declining circumstances . . . will make honest men do that which at another time their very souls abhor.²

It is obvious from the above passage that Defoe despises poverty. It seems logical to assume, then, that Defoe despises an economic system in which poverty is not uncommon. Moll, to Defoe, is a victim of just such a system, capitalism. Recognizing that she is helpless if she has the misfortune to be born into indigence, Moll laments her own fate and the fate of all poor, untrained people:

O, let none read this part without seriously reflecting on the circumstances of a desolate state, and how they would grapple with want of friends and want of bread; it will certainly make them think not, sparing what they have only, but of looking up to Heaven for support, and of the wise man's prayer, Give me not Poverty lest I steal.

¹Pierre Legouis, "Marion Flanders est-elle un victime de la societe," Revue de l'enseignement des langues vivantes, xlvii (1931), 299.

²Daniel Defoe, The Best of Defoe's Review, William L. Payne (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 207.

Let 'em remember that a time of distress is a time of dreadful temptation, and all the strength to resist is taken away; poverty presses, the soul is made desperate by distress, and what can be done?¹

In far too many cases, according to Defoe, nothing can be done except steal. Because Moll is helpless to improve her condition in other than dishonest ways, she does not sin against man when she steals his property; instead, as Maximillian Novak points out, Defoe considers that man's property is rightfully hers.²

When, however, Moll reaches a comfortable economic position, she realizes that she must give up her criminality and satisfy herself with her wealth, which in the end she does. If she had not, she would have sinned against herself and her fellow humans with her avarice. This sin of avarice almost dominates Moll. At one time she says that "as poverty brought me in, [to stealing] so avarice kept me in."³ As she becomes controlled by her greed, Moll develops a stronger and stronger love for money. She is, in a sense, helpless because as she is dominated by her passion for money, she loses her reason. Although she many times recognizes that what she is doing is now wrong, she is rendered nearly totally helpless by her greed. At one time she desired money to alleviate her needy condition, but eventually she wants money merely for its own sake. This development illustrates the danger that all Defoe's rogues face; some like Captain Singleton, recognize the

¹Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 176.

²Supra, p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 176.

danger and quit stealing before they allow monetary values to control them for mere avaricious reasons. Others, like Roxana, are carried away and eventually find themselves in a miserable condition.

As was demonstrated in the Robinson Crusoe trilogy, the only way that Defoe's characters are ever able to save themselves from the evil of avarice is to recognize and obey the signs of Providence warning them to shun their hunger for money. Because late in her life she does realize that her many profitless and unsuccessful marriages, her many close escapes while stealing, and her final capture, are Providential warnings, Moll is able to shed her greed before it controls her completely. Becoming content with the money she has, Moll represents another of Defoe's testimonies to the benefits of the middle class in society. It takes Moll nearly all her life to realize the personal and social advantages of this class, but ultimately she does discover, as does Robinson Crusoe, the contentedness to be found in the class which Defoe calls "the middle class." She had a right and a duty to escape poverty, but not to climb too far on the economic ladder. Because she finally accepts this fact, she "liv'd . . . with the greatest kindness and comfort imaginable."¹

In these two books, Captain Singleton and Moll Flanders, Defoe dramatizes his ideal of the middle-class society, and makes his heroes recognize the ideal happiness of living in it. Defoe reinforces this middle-class theme in almost all his other books of fiction whether

¹Ibid., p. 297.

the heroes end their days happily or not. In Roxana, for instance, Defoe portrays a heroine who, like Moll, cannot control her greed; but, unlike Moll, does not end her days happily because God apparently does not sympathize with her. She disobeys too many of his warnings. For example, she has enough money to live very comfortably after her lover, a jeweler, is murdered, but she cannot control her avarice and attempts to sell her diamonds. Unable to do so, she still refuses to settle down. Later, she has an opportunity to marry a Dutch merchant, but she declines the offer because he is not wealthy enough to satisfy her. Her wealth gradually rises prodigiously, but she still refuses to stop fortune hunting, a refusal which ultimately causes her to lose all her wealth. In the end, having disobeyed these signs from Providence, she is poverty stricken and unhappy as a result of her avarice.

In this book Defoe strongly reinforces the theme that he treats so often. After her first husband leaves her penniless, Defoe has Roxana say that "poverty is the strongest incentive—a temptation against which no virtue is powerful enough to stand out."¹ Soon after, she concludes: "I think honesty is out of the question when starving is the case."² Roxana, then, like Moll Flanders, Captain Singleton, Colonel Jack, and the rest of Defoe's scoundrels, has poverty to contend with early in her life. Like them she fits into the category of those whom Defoe describes in his Review by saying that "Distress

¹Daniel Defoe, Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 35.

²Ibid., p. 36.

removes from the soul all obligations, either moral or religious, that secure one man against another."¹ She is, as Maximillian Novak says, "thrown into a state of necessity through conditions which she cannot control."² As a result she is forced to fend for herself. There is no doubt that Defoe considers whatever means she may use to improve her situation as morally acceptable so long as she is in a state of necessity. She finds that she can best escape her condition by prostituting herself, an occupation at which she is financially successful. Because she does not know when to quit, she pays dearly. She is warned by Providence as is evidenced in her pregnancy by the Dutch merchant, but she pays Providence no heed. She should have married this middle-class man, but instead she feels that she can climb higher if she remains free. For a time her life supports her theory, but only for a time. Later, after losing all her money, she realizes that she might have been better off marrying the merchant:

. . . after the shipwreck of virtue, honour, and principle, and sailing at the utmost risk in the stormy seas of crime and abominable levity, I had a₃ safe harbour presented, and no heart to cast anchor in it.³

These words literally describe Robinson Crusoe's plight, but he finally anchors in safe harbor; Roxana never does. She is gripped by avarice, a lust for which she is severely punished. At the end of her tale

¹Defoe, Review, p. 271.

²Novak, "The Problem of Necessity in Defoe's Fiction," p. 523.

³Defoe, Roxana, p. 168.

she "fell into a dreadful course of calamities,"¹ most significantly, a renewed poverty from which she never again escapes. We are led to believe that she will die financially destitute and spiritually unhappy.

Roxana, then, is not a "fortunate mistress" at all. Quite the contrary, compared to Moll Flanders, she is unfortunate. Moll has the good luck to be forced to go to America, where she is able to control her desires; Roxana, on the other hand, is never forced to do anything. Providence gives her signs, but she is always free to disregard them, a freedom which for her proves disastrous for she chooses to ignore the dictates of Providence directing her toward a middle-class life. Because she is unwilling to be satisfied once she escapes poverty, her social climbing is empty and destructive.

Like Moll Flanders, Roxana is a diatribe against a society in which poverty can exist. According to Defoe, Moll and Roxana have every right to escape their early condition by whatever means they can; they cannot, therefore, be blamed for attempting to shed economic distress. If society were so constructed that there were no poor and no rich, Moll and Roxana could never be thrust into such miserable conditions. If everyone would give his belongings to the community as the Spaniards do in The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, there could not possibly be any destructive class consciousness. Recognizing that economic classes are inherent in capitalism, however, Defoe realized

¹Ibid., p. 335.

that there has to be a poor class in eighteenth century England. Roxana, for example, is as much a victim of her economic situation as is Oliver Twist or Studs Lonnigan. More didactic than Dickens or Farrell, Defoe was not content merely to portray or condemn capitalistic economics; he attempted to teach us that in a communal state no man can financially rise above other men because only one economic class will exist.

Defoe reinforces his theme of economic classlessness in his shorter narratives such as "The Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild." Like Robinson Crusoe, Jonathan Wild is raised in a middle-class family and is educated in middle-class schools. He learns the trade of bucklemaker, "but his thoughts . . . being above trade . . . he came away to London to see if he could get into any business there."¹ Unable to find employment, he sells stolen goods back to owners in an attempt to avoid starving. At the time a law is passed against his particular brand of thievery, Wild has enough money to live comfortably, but avarice prevents him from quitting his dishonest life. Twice Providence puts him in the middle class, as a youth and as a middle-aged man, but neither time does he heed Providence. His errors in judgment cost him his life. Refusing to repent, and mocking the crowd, he dies with the throng condemning him in vicious screams. Wild, in his disaster, fits the pattern which Walter Wilson describes as follows:

¹Defoe, "The Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild," The King of Pirates, p. 243.

His rogues never prosper eventually; that is to say, while they continue so, Providence always frowns upon their ill-gotten wealth, and He contrives some natural calamity by which it is dispersed.¹

Wild's calamity is in being caught, particularly since he so easily could have avoided the misfortune.

Thus, in the characters of Roxana and Wild, Defoe has created the antithesis of his characters who heed the voices and warnings of Providence. Unlike Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe, Roxana and Jonathan Wild die miserably because they refuse to follow the dictates of Providence directing them to give up their unlawful lives when they sufficiently improve their financial condition. Attempting to climb too high on the economic ladder, they become members of an avaricious class. Had they remained in the comfortable middle class once they reached it, they, like Moll and Robinson, would unquestionably have found spiritual and economic happiness; for this is the class in which almost all Defoe's contented characters are to be found.

In reference to this middle class, it is important to remember that it represented an ideal only in so far as capitalistic England is concerned. Defoe imagines this class as representing England's closest approximation to his ideal society of economic classlessness because it is not impoverished and not mercenary; rather, it is content with the necessities of maintaining comfort. In one of his narratives concerning England, however, Defoe does portray his ideal classless society in existence. In A Journal of the Plague Year, there are no

¹Wilson, p. 498.

economic classes for the people who stay in London during the pestilence. The plague levels all classes in the "common grave of mankind."¹ Disease and death are the great equalizers; no one is superior to another in any way.

This equalization is also exemplified in the much criticized chapter which presents three brothers, a seaman, a baker, and a soldier, who leave London to escape the plague. Defoe, it seems to me, had a valid reason for including this episode which not only serves the purpose of demonstrating the brothers' ingenuity, but also of exemplifying the direction in which this ingenuity is best aimed. The chapter portrays and idealizes the economic life of socialism. Each brother uses his particular knowledge and his means, not for his own good alone, but for the good of the group. When they meet another group of people, everyone in the new, makeshift community works to better the society, not to better himself as an individual. The betterment of the group carries with it a comfortable situation for each member of the society; thus everyone is satisfied with this socialistic existence.

In A Journal of the Plague Year, then, man, according to Defoe, must become socialistic during periods of great distress, so why should he not live socialistically the rest of the time? The group in A Journal of the Plague Year are similar to the group of Spaniards in The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: the people in both cases live

¹ Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 68.

communal lives, giving what they have for the benefit of the whole community. Defoe, idealizing the communistic principle represented by these people, says that "their story has a moral in every part of it, and their whole conduct . . . is a pattern for all men to follow."¹ The moral is, of course, that of the desirability of mutual help to a primary concern with individual gain.

This moral is contained in Captain Singleton, Moll Flanders, Roxana, Jonathan Wild, and A Journal of the Plague Years. Defoe does not advocate profit for its own sake; rather, the evidence seems to indicate that today Defoe would be called a socialist or an extreme left-wing liberal. In his rogue stories he condemns the capitalistic system of which poverty-stricken classes are an integral part. As he demonstrates in A Journal of the Plague Year, Defoe would much rather live in an economic system geared to benefit the entire community. He realizes, however, that eighteenth century capitalism is in no way moving toward his socialistic ideal, hence the stories of people like Moll Flanders and Captain Singleton who are born victims of capitalism. Always the moralist, Defoe recognizes the potential dangers of thievery, but he sees no other solution to poverty than theft; poor people are forced to steal. As their lives of crime progress, it becomes proportionally more difficult for them to live an honest life because greed is a part of every man's essence, albeit a part that must be controlled. For, when gripped by avarice, man begins to work against the good of

¹Ibid., p. 120.

the community and becomes, therefore, a part of the capitalistic system which, Defoe seems to feel, represents on a large scale the avarice that is within us all.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that there is no need to separate Daniel Defoe's economic theory from his moral theory because they are both essentially the same. It is also the conclusion of this study that Defoe rigidly believed in an ideal of a society based upon socio-economic classlessness with which he seems to equate moral good. Moral evil, on the other hand, appears to be equated by Defoe with capitalistic economics. Morality and economics, therefore, are interdependent in Defoe's writing.

Chapter II reviewed the relevant criticisms and concluded that the critics are split in their opinions concerning whether Defoe is primarily an economist or a moralist. No critic makes a serious attempt to combine Defoe's economic theory with his morality. Usually the critics find themselves hard put to explain why Defoe devotes so much space to describing capitalistic gain, and then seemingly condemns the capitalistic lives of his protagonists.

Chapter III explained the above problem by reference to the Robinson Crusoe trilogy. The chapter included a discussion of Crusoe's wanderlust and his "original sin" as exemplifying his disastrous attempt to avariciously escape the middle-class society. This fortune-hunting seems to represent, in Defoe's eyes, an avariciousness common to capitalistic classes. In idyllic contrast to Crusoe's avarice is a

group of Spaniards on Crusoe's island who live a contented communistic life.

Chapter IV traced the theme of ideal economic classlessness through several of Defoe's other works including Captain Singleton, Moll Flanders, Roxana, "Jonathan Wild," and A Journal of the Plague Year. The protagonist of Captain Singleton, Bob Singleton, is able to give up his avaricious life and live peacefully in the middle class. Moll Flanders ends her days happily as a member of the middle class after a completely unlawful life. Roxana, like Moll, is a mercenary, but she is not so fortunate as Moll and spends her days attempting to rise above the middle class. To Defoe, this greediness is a crime, and Roxana, thrown back into poverty, ends her days as an impoverished wretch. Jonathan Wild, too, dies miserably because he refuses to satisfy himself with the middle class. With the exception of Wild, all these characters were born into acute poverty; therefore, according to Defoe, they have a right to escape their impecunity, but they do not have a right to allow their greed to drive them to a desire for excessive wealth.

Of primary importance to Chapter IV is the assumption that Defoe correlates the middle class in the English capitalistic society with the classless societies that he pictures only in place geographically distant from England. He seems to feel that the middle class which is content with its economic situation and does not take money from the less fortunate than itself represents the closest approximation to a classless society. As a realist Defoe had to portray

conditions as they existed in eighteenth century England; thus in capitalistic England he was unable to describe socialism around him because none existed. However, whenever he had his characters form a new society in a land away from Europe, the society is always communistic.

Defoe's narratives, then, indicate that Defoe believes that a socially and economically classless society would represent the highest order of living that man could achieve on earth. For in such a society, Defoe seems to feel that there would be no avaricious rich and no miserable poor.

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