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Economic Growth and Robinson Crusoe

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There is very much more to Daniel Defoe's inspired piece of 'faction' about Robinson Crusoe than seeing it just as a boy's adventure story. Its influence was widespread, judging by the great scale of new editions and reprintings, both internationally and through many translations. It can be read as a sophisticated myth of the ascent of man, of economic growth by dint of the work ethic, of the imperative of 'improvement' and the determination to master nature. It has implications for natural rights theory, the Lockeian justification of private property and the role of the 'civilised' European facing a hostile, alien habitat.

There is a long and contentious bibliography about the role of entrepreneurship in the process of industrialisation in Britain. This text seeks to add a dimension to the debate by discussing a source that has seldom been invoked by economic historians, prudently sticking to the evidence of fact rather than fiction. However, the value system associated with improvement and the enterprise culture, which feature prominently in discussions about entrepreneurship is nowhere revealed more clearly than in Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* (1719). This many-faceted book, amongst the most famous publications in any language in the 18th century, can be read in many guises. One scenario is to regard it as 'faction', a narrative elaborated in fiction but based, with astonishing verisimilitude and cunning, upon the factual record of mariners such as Alexander Selkirk, in the manner of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*. It is also, perhaps, the most successful adventure story for boys that has ever been (editions still roll off the printing presses). However, for our purpose here we should regard *Robinson Crusoe* as the most influential economic 'myth' to have been created and publicised in the 17th and 18th centuries. The astonishing number and scale of reprintings testify to this. If children's literature can be taken as revealing important norms of social values by motivation and aspiration if not by result, and in relation to particular social groups rather than

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for society as a whole, then *Robinson Crusoe* is in a class of its own. Its general influence upon contemporary generations, for example, must have been much more widespread than that of Adam Smith or Ricardo. At least 587 editions of *Robinson Crusoe* are recorded before 1900, with an astonishing number of translations.

The range of these editions and reprintings is remarkable, revealing much about the impact of the book. The original publication in London was in 1719, followed by four others (one pirated) in the same year; within two years there were 23. No less than 327 editions/reprintings followed in London by 1870; others were published in 49 other towns in Britain by mid-century. French and German editions began in 1720 (56 in Paris by 1870, 35 in Germany, 27 in Italy (mainly in Venice) and 149 in North America). The range was impressively multilingual as well as worldwide; translations into 56 languages had appeared by 1870 including such exotica as Maori, Albanian, Berber Arabic, Eskimo, Serbo-Croat, Swahili, Yiddish, Zhosia and Zulu and even short-hand.[1]

We may well ask what has made *Robinson Crusoe* such compulsive reading for peoples of many cultures over nearly four centuries, amply demonstrated by the extraordinary canon of its publication record, which is still continuing. In their day Defoe's other writings were also popular (he wrote for income, with no other significant sources of support), if not approaching the commercial success of *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe's writings, both fact and fiction, show an astonishing capacity to inform, he offers a great range of data supported by convincing detail. With this, imagination is integrated. Defoe had a novelist's imagination at a high level of perception. He can project himself into a situation and imagine responses with uncanny accuracy. This combination of great perception with mastery of practical matters and detail is the basis of verisimilitude in his works of fiction producing a convincing effect upon the reader, a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. We can imagine that these would have been our own reactions when facing the situations posed by Defoe. This makes his best fiction wholly convincing.

The Journal of the Plague Year (1722) (followed by *Due Preparations for the Plague* (1722)), is the prime example of Defoe's 'faction' but he wrote adventure stories parallel to *Robinson Crusoe*, which exemplify the same characteristics. *The Life and Adventures and Piracies of the famous Captain Singleton* (1720) published a year after *Robinson Crusoe* is the closest analogue. This is high adventure in exotic circumstances – more exotic than Robinson Crusoe's. Singleton was stolen by gypsies as a child, cast away with mutineers on a tropical island in South East Asia. Dangerous voyages to Mozambique followed, then an extraordinary trek across from the East coast of Guinea through jungles, deserts and mountains with exotic wild animals, all the African big game and with tigers thrown in for good measure. Further unlikely adventures unfold in the

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Mediterranean, the Gulf, South Asia and South East Asia with Singleton making his fortunes as a pirate.

Some of the passages in *Captain Singleton* are as vivid and convincing and in the same style as *Robinson Crusoe*. Finding the means to trade with the natives, for example, offers practical details and a moral for readers living in a 'commercial society', while the story of desalinating water in an emergency is verisimilitude at its most convincing. Similar convincing episodes and vignettes may be found in the 'pure' novels, such as *Moll Flanders* (1722), and in other works of 'faction', some based on real-life characters (mostly villains), such as *The Life and Adventures of Duncan Campbell* (1720), *The Life of John Sheppard* (1724), *An Account of Jonathan Wild* (1725), *An Account of John Gew* (1725), *The History of Colonel Jacque* (1722), *The King of Pirates* (Captain Avery) (1719), *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720) and *Memoirs of Daniel Williams* (1718).

This is an astonishing sequence of writing and publication, with only the fiction listed. They were accompanied by substantial, well documented non-fiction studies, *A Tour of the Whole Island* (two large volumes in a recent edition), *An Essay on Projects* (1698) and *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), together with an unceasing flow of tracts and pamphlets. Defoe's oeuvre is remarkable: 11 books between 1709 and 1718; 26 books from 1719–1724; 26 more in 1725–1730.

Given that *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York. Mariner* (1719) and its immediate variants – *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720) – was but one piece of writing in a long, busy sequence, what accounts for *Robinson Crusoe* being so much more popular than the other books of similar genre, both in Defoe's lifetime and ever since? The comparison with *Captain Singleton* is particularly revealing. At its best, as with many other tales, this story can be as riveting a read, with high adventure and fascinating episodes. But perhaps *Captain Singleton* is too exotic to allow the reader easily to imagine being in his shoes and having to cope, as the reader can with Crusoe's predicaments. And the second half of *Captain Singleton* becomes a sequence of rather unrelated, scrappy episodes, unlike the sustained theme of the first half.

In *Captain Singleton*, the castaways do not attempt to improve their environment but to escape from it. They are a band of 20–30 mutineers cast in a common fate, without the focused drama of the single man being alone responsible for his survival and salvation. On their great trek across Africa in the jungles they find an Englishman who had been captured by local tribesmen many years earlier. He escaped and had lived off the country in a state of nature ever since – naked, existing on only what he could collect – without attempting to improve or civilise, in short, an anti-Crusoe icon. Parallels can be found in

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Singleton's awareness of God and fate after a great storm east of New Guinea, when he found himself in danger. But he was never alone as Crusoe.

There are certain parallels in the two sagas. On their hazardous voyage Singleton and the mutineers find a wrecked ship with stores and equipment which they utilise to make a better ship of their own (iron was the key thing they needed). On their trek they make camps with palisades. And, as with *Robinson Crusoe*, there is no sex or acknowledgement of sexual drives in the party. Taken as a whole, however, the general framework of the book is the inverse of *Crusoe*, not staying put and creating a 'civilised' world to the best of their efforts, but staging an exotic adventure story of escape. The decision to try to reach England by crossing Africa on foot was to be 'one of the rashest and wildest and most desperate resolutions that was ever taken by man, or any number of men, in the world'.

Robinson Crusoe has much greater unity (although there is more to the story than his time on the island), with a central unifying theme, systematically explored. The reader is fascinated by the experience of Crusoe struggling with his fate. The tale grips because it is believable in terms of what we ourselves might have hoped to do in the same circumstances. *Robinson Crusoe* is also gripping because it is a story of great achievement at the narrative level of triumph over the adversities of climate, nature and hostile 'savages'. The triumph is of human will, determination, staying-power, but with a vivid awareness of the doubts, fears, frailties which we all experience in less dramatic, less extreme contexts. Credibility is established both by the context and the response, the mastery of practical detail, even (perhaps particularly) Crusoe's failures, as with his inability to launch the boat he had striven so hard to make.

A further dimension of the appeal of *Robinson Crusoe* lies in it being a microcosm of a wider set of values with which contemporaries, and subsequent generations, identified. Subsequent sections of this text explore the values of self-improvement, and the betterment of the human condition by means of hard work, saving, investment, innovation and technical change. A clear vision of 'progress' by way of 'improvement' was extant, particularly with certain social groups in the protestant countries of north-western Europe, and in such a vision both moral and material advancement were conjoined. At the heart of this faith was the assertion that mankind gained from the advance of knowledge and that greater knowledge gave greater command over nature. More areas of life thus became subject to human will and endeavour, with man less helpless in determining his own fate. It was a set of values favouring 'activism', stressing the potentiality of human endeavour. It was a message that could be simplified as didactic moral tales for the instruction of the young, inculcating these values for pedagogic purposes, and all the more effective, when cast in terms of an adventure story, 'educating by stealth' as it were. But the message about the virtues of hard work, and determination was clear.

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Defoe's Non-Fiction Works and *Robinson Crusoe*

We should remember that Daniel Defoe was the best informed economic commentator of his day, author of a long series of studies such as *An Essay an Projects* (1697), *The Complete English Tradesman* (2 vols, 1726, 1727), *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), *A Tour through the Whole Island* (1724–26) and *A General View of the World so far as it Relate to Trade and Navigation* (1728) and many other works, long and short, objective and partisan where he combines the roles of observer, critic and advocate. He himself sprang from protestant, non-conformist, middle-class and petit-bourgeois circles in London, deeply embedded in small-scale manufacturing and trading activities. Religious consciousness ran high in Defoe and in his social circles. Divine providence was a constant theme in his writing, but nonetheless his vision was that of secular improvement: material well-being, based on greater wealth, offered better security from the hazards of fate and nature or hostile human forces, a more secure secular foundation from which higher objective might be pursued. Defoe was a great proponent of 'improvement', that great aspiration of 17th- and 18th-century progressives in which material and moral objectives were conjoined. Defoe has the greatest knowledge of the political aspects of Britain and Britain's trade and relationships with other countries of anyone in his generation He ranges more widely even if much of his knowledge is vicarious, learned from books and newspapers, meetings with merchants, and gossip. He did not visit the far-flung lands whose trade and industry be wrote about so convincingly.

Many of the exotic trades experienced through the adventures of Captain Singleton are listed in detail in *A Plan of the English Commerce*. This contains a special chapter on a 'Proposal for the Encrease and Improvement of the British Commerce on the East Coast of Africa'. He also ranges right across Europe, the Middle East, the Baltic, the Arabian Gulf, India and South East Asia in listing trades, plus the Empire of China and of the Great Mogul, of the Kingdom of Golconda, of Siam, of Cochinchin and many more too long to reckon up. But there is no mention of Japan, despite the Dutch trading link there, which was well known in Europe.

A consistent common theme between *Robinson Crusoe* and the economic commentaries of Defoe is the importance of hard work and the gains from 'improvement' of all kinds. Hard work is the secret of prosperity for everyone, including the poor (where the virtue is hard work for high wage), a consistent theme in the *Tour of the Whole Island* and *A Plan for the English Commerce*. Defoe was always alert for new trades and industries, the prosperity of the poor and the workers (and through them the merchant, the farmer and the landowner, the seaman and all others in society) through a high wage economy. He strongly supports trade and industry, towns and the growth of wealth from which all benefit.

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The emphasis on trade as a prime source of wealth, of course, is quite alien to Crusoe, alone on his island, as, indeed are rewards gained from wages in commercial economy. Growing material wealth provides the basis for a better moral, more civilised society, with a more dignified life for all. Wealth increases options, creates opportunities for both greater material well-being and a more civilised life. Defoe therefore sees no contradiction between growing wealth and a more moral life: indeed for him one depends upon the other. There is a contrast to another tradition of social commentary where 'wealth increases but men decay'. Defoe refers to regions of England without extensive trade and manufactures as 'unemployed countries'. His encomium about the virtues of trade is uncompromising. 'Now whence is all this poverty of a country' he asks. "tis evident 'tis want of trade and nothing else'. This is elaborated: 'Trade encourages manufacture, prompts invention, employs people, increases labour, and pays wages: as the people are employd, they are paid, and by that pay are fed, cloathed, kept in heart and kept together'. 'As the numbers of people increase, the consumption of provisions increases, as the consumption increases, the rate of value will rise at market; and as the rate of provisions rises, the rents of land rise; so the gentlemen are the first to feel the benefit of trade by the addition to their estates'.

He elaborates the advantages of a high-wage economy '… in those Countries 'tis observable, that where Trade is most effectually extended, and has the great Influence, there the Poor live best, their Wages are highest; and where Wages are highest, the Consumption of Provisions encreases most; where the Consumption of Provision is most encreas'd, the Rate of Provision is highest; and where Provisions are dearest, the Rent of Lands are advanc'd most.' 'First. I insist, that if you would reduce the Price of our Manufacture, by reducing the Wages of the Poor, who are the Workers or Manufacturers, It is not possible but that you will reduce the Value and Goodness of the Manufacture. If you expect the Poor should work cheaper, and not perform their Work slighter and more overly, as we call it, and superficially, you expect what as not in the Nature of the Thing. Again, if you lower the Wages of the Poor, you must of Course sink the Rate of Provisions, and that of Course will sink the Value of Lands, and so you wound the Capital at once; for the Poor cannot earn little and spend much, the End of that is starving and misery; the Rate of Provisions will follow the Rate of Wages, there as no possibility of its being otherwise; at has ever been so, and ever will be so, the Nature of the Thing requires it.'

Defoe has a nationalist, if not racist, view of the British (and the Dutch) being determined Improvers by hard work. He singles out the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Turks and other nations for failing to improve and imposing poverty as a consequence upon their peoples. About the Spaniards' failure to improve their colonies, he comments 'We can charge them with very little of improvement, the

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Sin of Diligence cannot be lay'd at their Door'. 'Had the Spaniards been an industrious, improving Nation, like the English, the Islands of Cuba and Hispaniola alone, having been planted and improved, as our small Island of Barbados is improved, would have produc'd more Sugar, Cotton. Indigo, Cocoa, Piemento, and other valuable things, than all Europe could have consumed, and they would have been able to have supply'd all their other Colonies with Flesh, such as Beef and Pork, and with Rice and other things, more than they could consume. In lieu of which, those fruitful Islands are now left to lye waste, untill'd, unplanted, and the great Discoverers have not made any one Step that deserves the Name of Improvement upon them, except only the fortifying the Port of the Havana.' Also the Portuguese; and the Turks: 'The Turks who are enemies to Trade and who discourage Industry and Improvement; 'tis plain they dispeople the world rather than improve and cultivate it. View their conditions; they are miserably poor! distressingly poor! they are idle, indolent and starving … poor and wretched to the last Degree and all for want of Trade'. 'Poverty-stricken nations alone supply armies: the recruiting sergeant finds few come forward to join the colours when they are in good wage employment'. 'In a war, 'tis Poverty and Starving that fills Armies, not Trade and Manufacturing.' The emphasis given to improving wealth and material well-being by 'improvement' – by productive investment through ingenuity and new devices as well as hard work – hard work in the service of technical improvement is a main theme in *Robinson Crusoe*. It is also made clear, in many examples, in *A Plan for the English Commerce*. Here is a revealing instance of Defoe's recognition of the gains brought by technical change and higher productivity.

'We are told, that in Russia and Muscovy, when for want of Commerce, Labour was not assisted by Art; they had no other Way to cut out a large Plank, but by felling a great Tree, and then with a multitude of Hands and Axes hew away all the Sides of the Timber, till they reduc'd the middle to one large Plank; and that yet, when it was done, they would sell this Plank as cheap, as the Swedes or Prussians did the like, who cut three or four, or more Planks of the like Size from one Tree by the Help of Saws and Saw-Mills: The Consequence must be, that the miserable Russian labour'd ten times as much as the other did, for the same Money'. Time and time again Defoe returns to the virtue of hard work (well rewarded) as the secret of prosperity and the distinguishing characteristic between rich and poor countries. This is one of the essential messages, the essential moral tale, in *Robinson Crusoe*. Work is the foundation of progress, particularly when in alliance with ingenuity, skills, tools, innovation and inventions to improve productivity.

These ideas, trade apart, exemplified at the narrative level in *Robinson Crusoe* can be explored in a more conceptual analysis, because a sophisticated system of values is embodied in the story. Robinson Crusoe exemplified these values and

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his life, when shipwrecked on his island, became an odyssey to attain them. In personal microcosm this embodied the long march of mankind from a primitive state of nature to a civilised life with modern accoutrements. Crusoe was cast up on a shore unprotected from the forces of nature, directly dependent upon hunting and gathering. He had inherited an initial capital stock, all the emphasis placed by 18th century economists on the initial accumulation of capital was symbolised by the tools and equipment Crusoe was able to rescue from the wreck. But, that apart, Crusoe had to create his own world by dint of hard work.

Defoe, the Philosophy of Natural Rights and *Robinson Crusoe*

Defoe was familiar with the writings of the philosopher and constitutional theorist John Locke, who published his *Essay on Government* in the 1690s. He was well aware of the implications of the new 'natural rights' philosophical movement, as espoused by Locke and there is evidence that he also knew the work of the great German jurist of natural law theory, Pufendorf. In an 'optimistic' view of this, one of the basic assumptions is that men's instinctive nature is to be constructive and co-operative, a basic 'natural harmony' of sentiments which derive from the awareness of a common humanity amongst 'civilised peoples'; 'savages' and slaves who do not attain these aspirations are excluded from the assumption.

Freedom of action of the individual is therefore a basic right, a 'natural right' consistent with the establishment and maintenance of civil society by a social contract. Freedom of the individual to exercise his own will has to have limits to preserve the claims of freedom of action of others in society, a legal system is required to defend the rights of individuals, which includes their private property rights (property is not just land but also personal chattels and financial assets).

The defence of private property involves the marketability of these assets, the legal right to sell, and in a legally-constituted market with rules agreed by society (through the legislature and the judiciary, parliament and the judges).

'Civil society' derived originally from a voluntary surrender of minimum constraints on individual freedom to achieve these ends for all citizens (a concept with limitations). The assumption is that constraints on individual action need to be minimal, and require justification according to the objectives of civil society. The justification for limits on the freedom of action of individuals is contingent on the existence of civil society, on man as a social animal. This is clearly not the case with Robinson Crusoe (at least until the arrival of Man Friday) and Defoe is clearly aware of the implications this had under the assumption of a natural rights philosophy. Private property is defended on similar grounds of justification for individual rights: the assumption that property is created by the individual

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'mixing' his labour with materials to produce that property which embodies his labour and hence his individual right to own that property (as well as enjoy it) and to transfer it by sale or gift to persons of his choice. That would normally be to his family in succession but not necessarily so. The empirical basis of the assumption may be illusory but the conceptual power of the idea is great and persuasive. It is a further basis of individual rights and freedom and a foundation of the labour theory of value, with its long subsequent role in economic thought. The concept of private property, defined in this wide way, is clearly embodied in *Robinson Crusoe* – in the purest form of 'mixing' one's labour as the justification for subsequent ownership.

The extension of the same principle of the rights of ownership – property rights – does not apply, of course, to Crusoe because it presumes a social context. Maintaining property rights in society depends on their negotiability in succession, disposal, and, above all, for sale. Only in such a context, which depends on the legal endorsement and embodiment in law with ultimate legal enforceability, does private property become endowed with value. The value of assets depends upon their price being negotiable in a free market so that their 'true' value can be discovered and realised. Without negotiability in these terms the operational concept of private property remains limited. This depends also, of course, on peaceful civil society with the defence of property against illegal sequestration and deprivation, alienation by force majeure. In this way, at its most basic, civil society is necessary to defend individual property rights and give them reality in practice.

This implies a market: the marketability of assets is a basic condition of individual rights. This includes the sale of commodities in trade, the sale of services, the selling of labour, the labourers have essential rights of access and selling their labour in a 'free market' (even though with various formal constraints), freedom of movement to find a job (if not freedom to combine), and freedom of access to occupations. The valorisation of assets requires an operating capital market when an economy becomes monetized, to legitimise monetary claims on whoever holds your money, the negotiability of 'paper' claims, bills of exchange, notes of land, cheques, holdings in government stock ('the Funds'). This evolves from private transactions between individuals to an organised capital market in various manifestations (the banks, the Stock Exchange etc).

But the essence is that to implement property rights the concept implies the legitimisation of markets, embodied in legal procedures. A natural right of access to the market follows. This becomes the basis, when further elaborated, of economic individualism. An individual has the right of access to the market. Clearly, as with other aspects of the matter, issues about markets, wages, the tradability of assets, is far away from Crusoe's world in operational terms. But

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at the more conceptual level there are links and this is particularly the case with a concept of individualism and freedom. The particular concept of freedom has subsequently been called the 'negative' concept of freedom. Freedom is the absence of external constraint on the individual exercising his own will. The justification of constraint in principle, as indicated above, is the existence of civil society, of other men in the community who have equal claims to exercise their rights. Constraint derives from the existence of others in society. In the absence of others, legal constraint has no legitimisation. By definition, therefore Crusoe is absolutely free according to this concept of freedom. Law has no intrinsic justification, according to some ultimate authority derived from God or an absolute ruler (usually claiming that his right to exercise power derives from God via the Church or Divine Right) or a general overriding ethical principle but is only conditional upon the maintenance of individual rights in a social context. This is a quite different justification of the law and authority than the long-standing medieval tradition of 'natural law' rather than 'natural rights'.

Crusoe, once again, embodies this idea. It is challenged when Man Friday appears on the island. Does he have rights? Is there now civil society? Friday as a native – a 'savage' – even if a human being, does not enjoy citizen's rights, as such, being assigned to the role of a slave, over whom Crusoe can exercise his own will. This embodied the impact of European man beyond the confines of Europe, of a 'civilised' culture in contact with the 'non-civilised'. Crusoe lived in fear of the hostile natives, who were cannibals and beyond the limits of civility. This was the inverse of the cult of the 'noble savage'. European civilisation versus native barbarism meant that, when Crusoe encountered a native he could control, he naturally took him as a slave exercising the authority of European culture. The assumption of European superiority over lesser peoples was being played out for real in Defoe's time in many far-flung parts of the world. In particular it was a main justification of slavery when it was being extended through the transportation of blacks from Africa to New-World plantations. This was far from being the only context of slavery of course, which was widespread across the world in various forms.

Philosophic individualism presumed an 'atomistic' view of society composed of discrete individuals with equal claims to rights, rather than an 'organic' one. In certain basic ways the individual was alone and in competition (in a legally regulated way) with all other individuals. This was a dimension of 'anomie'. Crusoe was without any institutional or kinship intermediation for his life and his fate. He was responsible completely for his own actions, his own recognition, legitimisation, approval, acceptability, expectations, sanctions. All these derived only from himself and his internal codes: no sovereign, no priest or church, no family, no laws, no master, no civil society. He was absolutely alone, before nature and God. This sense of 'anomie' is strongly present in Crusoe – his fears not only

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for safety and satisfaction in this world but in the face of eternity. Defoe creates for Crusoe a marvellous dimension of awareness.

Crusoe and the Myth of Economic Growth

Here, in stark and absolute terms, was individual responsibility and self-help. Crusoe's fate lay in his own hands, while in the macrocosm so did that of everyone on earth. What were the dynamics of Crusoe's economy and how did leisure feature in it? Later economists have made much of 'Crusoe economics' as a model of economic growth. Crusoe was able to survive initially by spending sufficient time in hunting and gathering to fulfil the minimum demands of subsistence. Such being the bounty of nature on his tropical island, this still left him time to spare. Beyond this point he faced three options. A subsistence-level existence could be equated with leisure occupying the rest of the time available. If such 'leisure preference' maximised his satisfactions, material consumption needs would, of necessity, remain at the minimum consistent with subsistence. But two alternative paths lay ahead. He could use the time available beyond that mortgaged to fulfil immediately current minimum needs to continue to work. This would enable him to increase consumption (itself of potential value for his labour by giving greater strength and energy). It would not, however, either diversify his range of consumption or increase productivity. But Crusoe could also utilise the extra time won to build up stocks and hence save more future time for other commitments. In particular, he could utilise time saved to make a tool or a piece of capital equipment as an alternative to increasing his leisure or current consumption.

By creating such tools and equipment, by such acts of investment, Crusoe could make his labour more productive and enhance his level of comfort and also his future consumption, if the increasing surplus was enough to allow both continuing productive investment and rising claims on current production. Surpluses allowed choices. This was a model for accumulation and economic growth, dependent upon the allocation of potential surpluses between leisure, consumption and investment, but critically dependent upon motivation and the will to improve. Capital accumulation was the key to advance: abstinence from excessive or luxury consumption was the means of such accumulation of capital, provided that the time could be redeemed by work. Hence also Adam Smith's assertion: 'capitals are created by parsimony' and a long tradition of invective against the sins of luxury and idleness, which presided over failures to accumulate and the dissipation of capitals (and savings) once accumulated. Crusoe fulfilled the ideals embodied in this model of the secular advance of human society to a more productive economy by way of productive investment, a higher level of capital equipment supporting production, higher returns to labour, larger surpluses,

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renewed investment. Once established on the island, Crusoe built a compound for his own security; he domesticated animals and fenced them in; he started to cultivate and improve, he made cloth and clothes. There was a disastrously mistaken investment when, by dint of immense labour, he built a boat only to discover that it was too heavy to drag to the water. When finally rescued he looked with pride on the material culture he had created from his own labour. Hard work and practical skills, persistence and endurance; above all the determination to improve, the will to succeed, the motivation to tame the forces of nature and acquire mastery over the physical world lay behind this allegory of economic growth.

Crusoe's economic model centred on capital accumulation and improved equipment; it clearly derived no momentum from the source of increased productivity emphasised by Adam Smith, the division of labour. But Crusoe's world was not a market economy, being without trade and money. He lamented the sterility of money for its own sake: 'I had … a parcel of money, as well gold as silver … and I often thought that I would have given a handful of it … for a hand-mill to grind my corn [or] for sixpennyworth of turnip and carrot seed out of England …' He also wanted tobacco pipes and ink.

The key was work and capital accumulation to increase productivity; the evil was leisure and laziness. As with Adam Smith, the whole happy circle rested upon human motivation and that derived from a particular set of values where the pursuit of secular gain for 'improvement' was both endorsed by religion and endowed with moral force. It was a product of labour, of 'redeeming the time'. The motivations antagonistic to such achievements were laziness, idleness, willingness to remain content with one's lot in life, to accept inherited misfortunes, and all these negative attitudes were expressed in a preference for leisure rather than achievement. Crusoe himself observed the 'iron law of idleness' in operation; 'the diligent lived well and comfortably, and the slothful lived hard and beggarly …'.

In this scenario, which captured so much of significance in the real world of values in the 17th and 18th centuries, at least amongst the social and occupational groups that set the norms for such debate, leisure was thus a potentially dangerous goal when subverting human endeavour from work. This was a secular view of the matter, where other condemnations of leisure came from moral or religious criteria. As a phenomenon of the secular world, of course, leisure might be enforced from the vagaries of climate and the limitations of technology, and thus removed from choice. Leisure for relaxation after hard work could be justified; refreshment and recuperation had their place in the moral scheme of things. Leisure also occupied a traditionally sanctioned role in the religious calendar of Saints days and secular popular festivals. All these endorsements Defoe knew well, and they had their own presence on Crusoe's island.

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Conclusion

The condemnation of leisure was of long standing and was justified according to many criteria. The long anti-leisure canon cannot be reviewed in extenso here. Fear of leisure was rooted in religious, moral and practical values, and most hostile commentaries about leisure were assertions made from ideological value-systems rather than from an objective study of the empirical context. This did not prevent such widespread and deeply-structured views from having great influence over social policy. Where work was lauded as a virtue, leisure was damned as a vice – the root of laziness, idleness, dissolute living and sin – in short a condemnation in moral terms endorsed by a religious ethic in a wide variety of faiths. 'Redeeming the time' was thus a moral imperative, Satan found work for idle hands.

The moral evil of leisure had many more practical adverse consequences, and a secular tradition condemned leisure on a utilitarian basis. Leisure was identified with unemployment, with forced idleness. Unemployed people could become desperate, footloose, violent, subversive. Men without work might cease to be subject to those normal social controls which held the fabric of society together. Debauchery, another common face of leisure where available money was assumed to be spent on drink, brought social evils of its own, savings squandered, dependency increased, levies to support the indigent extended, employers prejudiced. Employers had a particular fear of leisure. Work demanded disciplined labour, leisure encouraged indiscipline. High wages brought the possibility of gaining a 'traditional' level of consumption from fewer hours of work, in which case, it was assumed, 'leisure-preference' would prevail with more absenteeism, less work offered, more idleness and/or more debauchery. In general, employers believed in the 'utility of low wages' or the 'utility of poverty'. Labour costs were, with raw material costs, the highest components of final price in handicraft industry. Textile and metal-work employers were particularly exercised by this fear, facing export markets. Defoe's championing of high-wages, although not alone, was a minority voice in the chorus of support for low wages and keeping the poor in employment, but still poor. It was seldom acknowledged that leisure might be enforced from the vagaries of climate and the limitations of technology, and thus removed from choice.

Defoe endowed Crusoe with the ethic of hard work and 'redeeming the time', the story is the epitome of an anti-leisure culture but the myth is not just that of the work-ethic. The purpose of work was accumulation and for some Crusoe is the personification of economic man, as maximiser, even though money, the usual symbol of accumulation and the means of maximisation, is totally absent. But, as has been argued above, the myth is not just about accumulation for its own sake, either, but integrated with investment, innovation, utilising technology in the search for sustained economic progress, or 'improvements' in the contemporary

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expression. In Crusoe lies the microcosm of material advance from a basic subsistence economy and the elemental poverty of an economic system not producing a surplus. Better living standards, a richer society – in Defoe's non-fiction work the advantages of a high-wage economy – provided the basis for a more civilised life, which could be a more moral life. Material gains were therefore positively linked to moral gain, or at least to increasing the potentiality of moral gain. Defoe is thus in the 'optimistic' tradition in his views about economic progress – with commentators such as Michael Postlethwaite, Dean Tucker, Samuel Johnson and Adam Smith – rather than in the 'pessimistic' tradition exemplified by Malthus or Ricardo. At the heart of the contrast between the optimists and pessimists lies their differing views about human nature, and the intrinsic motivation of most persons for self-improvement. On these grounds the myth embodied in Crusoe has been argued as a utopian view of economic progress.

The 'optimistic' view of economic progress was identified with support for the commercial society and urban values (towns being the manifestations of the trading economy) in contrast to traditional agricultural and rural-based cultures. Views were not undifferentiated, however, on the 'optimistic' side of the debate. Different sources of wealth claimed different moral status and brought different attitudes. The condemnation of wealth based on slavery was one main distinguishing point for many groups within commercial society (such as Quaker and other protestant non-conformist minority groups but also for a devout Anglican such as Dr Johnson). Speculative trading and stock-exchange manipulation were also widely condemned on moral grounds. The South Sea Bubble, of course, was taking place just at the time Defoe was writing about Crusoe and the *Complete English Tradesman* (1722).

The enterprise culture espoused by Crusoe and advocated in many other non-fiction works by Defoe exemplified the value system of the entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution later in the 18th century. This was particularly so of the protestant non-conformists, such as the Quakers, many of whom sprang from the same socio-economic milieu as Defoe himself, manifesting the so-called Protestant Ethic. We can read much of the 'entrepreneurship' debate back into the values and assumptions discussed in these pages – a central tenet in the arguments about cultural values and economic performance.

Note

1. Original publication: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London, 1719, 8^0. W. Taylor), pp 364. Data on subsequent editions/reprintings mainly from catalogue entries for British Library, Library of Congress, Cambridge University Library. See also

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