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**Competing Models of Socially-Constructed Economic Man:
Differentiating Defoe's Crusoe from the Robinson of
Neoclassical Economics**

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Competing Models of Socially-Constructed Economic Man: Differentiating Defoe's *Crusoe* from the Robinson of Neoclassical Economics

Abstract

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* has seldom been read as an explicitly political text. When it has, it appears that the central character was designed to warn the early eighteenth-century reader against political challenges to the existing economic order. Insofar as Defoe's *Crusoe* stands for "economic man", he is a reflection of historically-produced assumptions about the need for social conformity, not the embodiment of any genuinely essential economic characteristics. This insight is used to compare Defoe's conception of economic man with that of the neoclassical Robinson *Crusoe* economy. On the most important of the ostensibly generic principles espoused by neoclassical theorists, their "Robinson" has no parallels with Defoe's *Crusoe*. Despite the shared name, two quite distinct social constructions serve two equally distinct pedagogical purposes. Defoe's *Crusoe* extols the virtues of passive middle-class sobriety for effective social organisation; the neoclassical Robinson champions the establishment of markets for the sake of productive efficiency.

Key Words

economic man; Defoe's *Crusoe*; neoclassical Robinson; inter-temporality; scarcity; money

Introduction

Many more people purport to know the general content of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1985 [1719]) than have ever actually read the book. Much of this presumed familiarity results from the way in which one man's subsistence struggles against nature can be used to illustrate the standard analytical exercises of neoclassical economics. The fact that the book has its own entry in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* is testament to the assumption of its relevance to the way in which the world is first visualised and then taught through an economist's eyes (White 1998: 217). However, the requirement to read Defoe's novel in its original form is by no means necessary for the student of economics to internalise the analytical worldview that is imparted when learning how to manipulate the relationships of the neoclassical Robinson Crusoe economy. Indeed, it might even be an impediment to that end, such is the difference between the modes of reasoning which underpin the very different actions of the neoclassical Robinson and Defoe's Crusoe. In-depth knowledge of the narrative structure of the original novel forces the neoclassically-trained economist to confront the fact that two entirely independent constructions of ideal-typical economic behaviour struggle for ownership of a single name. This realisation might well be sufficient on its own to raise doubts about the supposed universality of the behavioural characteristics associated with neoclassical economics and to highlight their hortatory function instead.

Neoclassical economics is utterly reliant for the coherence of its pedagogical structure on the self-serving appropriation of the original story of Defoe's shipwrecked sailor. The purpose of turning him from one example of economic man to another is to allow for the creation of readily solvable questions of allocative efficiency. Within neoclassical theory, the desert island castaway takes on the appearance 'of a single, immortal "representative agent"' and is only allowed to act within the confines of an 'infinite-life discounted utility maximising program' (Hahn and Solow 1995: 2). The neoclassical Robinson is faced with the decision of how best to allocate labour time optimally between present and future consumption, whereupon imposing market relations onto both the labour he wishes to demand (of himself) and the labour he is willing to supply (to himself) simultaneously maximises his utility in consumption and eliminates all productive inefficiencies from the allocation (e.g., Laidler and Estrin 1989: 401; Mas-Colell et al 1995: 527; Barro 1997: 23). There are no behavioural instincts to discuss other than parametric behaviour initiated in response to signals emerging from shadow prices (Vaggi 2004: 31). The neoclassical Robinson therefore serves his primary function as a device for learning increasingly unquestioningly how to treat all allocation decisions as those on which market logic rather than social theory might be brought to bear (e.g., Jehle and Reny 2001: 215-6; Varian 2006: 592; Mankiw and Taylor 2008: 585). In short, he is a socially-constructed simulation of a particular type of economic man.

The same is also undoubtedly true of Defoe's Crusoe, yet it is a very different social construction of economic man present in this instance. According to Michael

Shinagel (1968: 122), Defoe's intention in writing his story was to project back onto the English middle classes the lessons they had drawn from early eighteenth-century history about the need to be politically submissive in the face of established social hierarchies. Crusoe's somewhat obsessive attention to mastering his own subjectivity while on the island can only be attributed to trying to learn particular habits of bourgeois politeness and respect for the status quo (Schonhorn 1991: 17). Defoe's message was that the English middle classes could continue to enjoy the economic benefits which flowed from established social hierarchies only by choosing to do nothing to destabilise them politically (Earle 1989: 9-10). The story is thus a morality play about how to think and how to act economically within established traditions. Crusoe is a heroic figure not in displays of honour or love but in becoming through iterative processes of self-realisation the prescribed economic agent of his day. All of his early life acts as a prelude to the formative experience which teaches him what he grows to believe he should have known all along about the sanctity of the prevailing economic order. As Virginia Woolf writes of the unfolding text (1988 [1919]: 8), 'We are drawn on soberly to consider all the blessings of orderly, industrious middle-class life'.

Both versions of economic man carry encoded messages designed to affirm particular behavioural attributes in the minds of readers. The neoclassical Robinson lacks the narrator's voice of Defoe's Crusoe, and he is consequently in no position to address readers directly about the essential subjectivity he is attempting to manifest. Yet this makes appeal to the specific structure of rationality associated with his conduct no less hortatory than appeal to that of his counterpart. The overall objective of the following pages is to highlight the similarity in underlying style between Defoe's Crusoe and the neoclassical Robinson (both are mechanisms for teaching "correct" economic behaviour), but to do so by emphasising their marked divergence in content (they are designed to elicit different economic intuitions). Drawing attention to the contrast between the two serves to illustrate the pedagogical purposes for which each has been constructed. If successful, I will be able to demonstrate that there is nothing natural or ahistorical about either account of economic man that lays claim to the Crusoe name.¹

The analysis now proceeds in four stages in advance of such an aim. In section one, I examine the divergent senses in which the neoclassical Robinson and Defoe's Crusoe might be said to be alone on their respective desert islands. This provides an important means of reflecting on the very different economic lives they are expected to embody. The remaining sections explore in greater depth the contrast between the two. They show that the fundamental attributes which neoclassical theorists ascribe to the Robinson Crusoe economy also appear in embryonic form in Defoe's story. Section two focuses on Crusoe's interaction with inter-temporal labour allocations, section three on the livelihood dilemmas posed by his scarcity constraints and section four on his relationship to money. Each section shows that Defoe's hero manifests altogether different forms of behaviour to those which are imposed upon the

neoclassical Robinson. Crusoe organises his inter-temporal labour allocations primarily as a means of familiarising himself with the bourgeois lifestyle then in evidence in England, while he accepts scarcity in subsistence as the price of surrounding himself with symbolic goods that remind him of the specific economic man he is trying so hard to become. His relationship with money is defined not by considerations of the utility it can purchase in the face of endemic scarcity, so much as of the social status for which it can be cashed in when he secures safe passage home.²

Defoe's Crusoe Versus the Neoclassical Robinson

There is an important sense in which – psychologically, if nothing else – Crusoe never truly leaves home throughout his time on the island. At the very least, his decisions in relation to the competing ends available to him are constantly influenced by which option he would be most likely to choose were those same ends to present themselves to him back in England (Ross 1985 [1965]: 7). Even in the depths of his despair at his physical isolation, he acts out historically- and culturally-inscribed behavioural traits from his own society, despite having nobody to imbue his actions with the social meaning he wishes to have imposed upon them. Crusoe's conduct is so exaggerated in this respect that Anthony Purdy (1996: 188) has been moved to describe it as a 'narcissistic absurdity'.

He is helped in his attempts to carry around the home life from which he has been estranged because after it had sunk 'the good providence of God wonderfully ordered the ship [on which he had been sailing] to be cast up nearer to the shore' (p. 141).³ This stroke of good fortune facilitated the thirteen separate salvage trips he undertakes to his stricken ship so as to rescue capital goods being transported on the fateful voyage. He salutes the work effort of the unknown others who laboured to create the capital goods now in his possession, noting that they ensured 'how well I was furnished for my subsistence' (p. 80). Significantly for the argument to follow, they also provide him with both instant physical reminders of bourgeois existence back home and the means of replicating in miniature form the middle-class life that he might have expected to lead were he still there. Insofar as Crusoe is a captive of his distant society's economic traditions, the determination with which he sets about creating a small piece of England on his island suggests that he is only ever willingly so.

Crusoe's entrapment within the norms of his society is reflected in the meaning he attaches to his personal history (e.g., pp. 31-2, 55-6, 107-9, 141-2). Defoe's book begins with Crusoe recalling the impetuosity of his youth, harking back to a time when he failed to see the good sense in his father's advice to accept his pre-ordained place in the existing economic order (pp. 28-30). He chose instead to go to sea in search of both the adventure and the speculative riches that played no part in the much

more sedate forms of middle-class professional life his father was advocating.⁴ The story then unfolds through a series of events, each of which the older Crusoe treats as a signal that the younger version of himself was pushing his luck with his 'seafaring wickedness' (p. 103) and should have settled instead for a more respectable way of making a living (pp. 83-4). In searching for a suitable explanation for why he was cast away, he talks of his youthful tendency 'only to pursue a rash and immoderate desire of rising faster than the nature of the thing admitted' (p. 58), latterly attributing such a tendency to the fact that 'I ... was born to be my own destroyer' (p. 60). The older Crusoe treats the storm as just punishment for a life 'beginning foolishly' (p. 297), coming quite quickly to associate it with providential guidance to mend his ways.

The island setting is fundamental to the development of his new behavioural characteristics. In his loneliness he is given ample time to consider the inappropriateness of his 'meer wandering inclination' (p. 27), as well as to use such considerations as the impetus for attempting to rebuild his economic subjectivity (Hunter 1966: 169-71). This is a lengthy process of becoming a more reasonable approximation of early eighteenth-century economic man, spread out across much of the twenty-eight years he spends in isolation from the society in which he grew up (Crowley 1972: xv). It involves step-by-step progress towards the ultimate goal, requiring him to perform repeated psychological acts on himself as a means of self-tutelage to prevailing English economic norms. When Crusoe reflects on the sort of man he wants to be Defoe instilled in his mind the image specifically of bourgeois respectability (Watt 1974: 60). His life story consequently serves as a warning to others that they abandon the demands of middle-class sobriety at their peril and that they are better advised to carry those demands around with them wherever they are.

None of these complex psychological performances are allowed to impact upon the neoclassical Robinson. The decisions he is called upon to make are governed solely by the parameters of the prevailing structure of shadow prices and, as such, they are purely technical decisions. His personal history has no bearing on his interaction with real let alone shadow prices, and what he has experienced previously in life is consequently of no importance when determining how freely he should make his labour available to himself. The neoclassical Robinson is therefore "alone" in a much purer sense than Defoe's Crusoe, because he does not have the memory of past actions to keep him company. The only obvious commonality of experience results from the need for both to divide their labour across various productive tasks. Yet even here the differences are more instructive than the similarities.

Crusoe realises that after his shipwreck he must become solely responsible for ensuring that he consumes enough to keep himself alive and healthy. While he can continue to depend on the capital goods he salvages to make the production of necessities more straightforward, he cannot depend on anybody else to physically do the 'strange multitude of little things' which ensure that subsistence needs are satisfied within society (p. 130). Everything that he does not know how to do at the

start of his time on the island – and this is a lot, given his admission of just how far away he was at the beginning from being “a compleat natural mechanick” (p. 89) – he has to learn how to do. He then uses his evolving economic socialisation to decide on the precise mix of subsistence- and socially-derived ends to which he should put his new skills.

The neoclassical Robinson, meanwhile, is not required to learn anything, because his preference orderings assume that there are no technological obstacles to efficient production. However, it is equally important that he is also placed within a desert island setting, albeit not because this reinforces the significance of Crusoe’s subsistence struggles: it is interesting to note that the consumer bundles Robinson must choose between in neoclassical textbooks are never pure subsistence bundles. He is forced into solitary existence because this eliminates the possibility that his preferences are formed interdependently with those of other people. Crusoe willingly embraces such a situation in his increasing deference to prevailing social standards, but interdependent preferences are ruled out for Robinson because they would render his calculations of utility maximisation much less straightforward (Mankiw and Taylor 2008: 584). The only feature that Robinson really retains of Crusoe’s approach to the division of labour is his capacity to exercise choice, although even this is reset within the constraint that all choices must be utility maximising. This feature, in many ways, is the core attraction of the novel to neoclassical economists. As Deirdre McCloskey (1996: 123) puts it, Defoe ‘saw in Robinson Crusoe a Choosing Man’. Robert Barro’s popular textbook expands on the same theme: ‘We examine the choice problems of an isolated individual ... In the initial framework, the only choice available is the level of work effort, which then determines the quantities of production and consumption’ (Barro 1997: 23).

The difficulty in reconciling Defoe’s Crusoe and the neoclassical Robinson in this respect is that Defoe’s Crusoe is denied the ability to exchange. His loneliness on the island (‘I lived really very happily in all things, except that of society’, p. 153) is counterbalanced by his fear of the hostility he might encounter if he were to seek out for potential transacting purposes native communities on nearby land masses (‘I should now tremble at the very apprehensions of seeing a man’, p. 164). As Alec Cairncross has asked (1966: 77-8), however, how might he exercise choice between competing ends in a genuinely meaningful economic manner if he is denied the capacity to exchange? Neoclassical economists’ re-rendering of Defoe’s novel solves the problem for their Robinson in effect by splitting him straight down the middle. If Robinson is to simultaneously exemplify optimal consumption and optimal production decisions, then he has to be allowed to engage in exchange with himself (Hirshleifer et al 2005: 424; Hoag 2008: 342). The one-person economy required to protect the neoclassical principle of independent preferences is therefore populated by a person who is really two people at the same time. He must be able to command his own labour to ensure efficiency in production, but he must also be able to choose how much of his own labour he will supply on the basis of how much production is

necessary to satisfy his optimised mix of consumption and leisure (Laidler and Estrin 1989: 403).

In recognition of Robinson's dual presence as two people at one time, Hal Varian's advanced-level microeconomics textbook warns that '[t]he discussion is a little schizophrenic at times' (Varian 2006: 593). Yet this is a necessary condition of requiring Robinson to take on the dual role of consumer and producer but disqualifying him from making consumption and production decisions together as if they are all part of the same process. He establishes a market for his own labour so that he can organise production tasks to take account of the amount of leisure he wishes to enjoy and the amount of labour he is therefore prepared to supply. In a completely unrelated move, he also establishes a market for the subsistence-oriented goods that he works to produce so he can consume them alongside his leisure (Gun 2004: 122). Paula England (1993: 37) writes about the neoclassical Robinson as a 'separative self', whereas Ben Seligman (1990: 329-30) describes the resulting decision-making as deeply 'autistic'.

Reduced to economic life lived solely in relation to quantities of goods and labour, Robinson the producer and Robinson the consumer independently arrive at the outcome that is preferred by the other (Carter 2001: 363). This is an elaborate formulation to make a really rather straightforward point, which even its proponents fully concede amounts to ascribing 'bizarre behavior' to their construction of economic man (Varian 2006: 595). The point in question is simply that markets know best and that trusting to market allocations results in efficient outcomes. Just as Defoe's Crusoe is a character in one morality play about respect for a particular economic order, so too the neoclassical Robinson takes on a pedagogical role in another. Crusoe's task is to inform readers about the unfortunate consequences of refusing to accept the way in which the embedded social traditions of Defoe's time created a particular distributional hierarchy (Schonhorn 1991: 21); Robinson serves to do likewise in relation to the market-determined distributional hierarchy of a later time (Cooper 1997: 22). The remaining sections highlight the depth of this contrast by analysing the core conceptual criteria on which neoclassical economics rests – inter-temporal labour allocations, the scarcity condition and the functionality of money respectively – in order to show just how far the neoclassical Robinson has evolved from Defoe's original character.

The Difference between Robinson's and Crusoe's Inter-Temporal Labour Allocations

The neoclassical Robinson's innate behavioural essence mandates him to organise his inter-temporal labour allocations so as to change in beneficial ways his long-run subsistence needs. He acts to lessen the long-term burden of being required to survive only by means of his work effort through splitting his labour between the satisfaction

of present and future consumption (Allsopp 1995: 297). He must always face the economy in a stationary state, but the labour that he expends at one moment of time on the accumulation of capital helps to create a production environment in future periods which requires less labour input for every given level of output (Gwartney et al 2009: 537). The neoclassical Robinson behaves in this way because the theory defines work necessarily as disutility, so if he is to be a utility maximiser he must seek to reduce the impact of routine work on his life. The lesson to be imparted here in the hortatory content of the theory is that the market rewards with enhanced long-run productivity any inter-temporal labour allocations which prioritise the future. Short-run productive efficiency can consequently lead to long-run productive efficiency, but only if production decisions replicate at all times the teachings of market ideology.

Crusoe also undoubtedly exercises forward-looking attributes in his labour, but this is not directed at creating further capital endowments which will reduce the long-run disutility of his necessary labour. His technological experimentation serves as a way of passing time in the present rather than saving it in the future, and it is also something from which he appears to derive genuine pleasure (Richetti 2001: xxiii). Besides, what drives his search for technological breakthroughs and gives meaning to his non-subsistence labour is not efficiency considerations in any case. The master economic narrative controlling Defoe's text revolves around Crusoe prioritising the production of symbolic goods over the pursuit of market-induced productive efficiency. It is this that facilitates the reconstitutive acts he performs on himself, which when successfully completed lead to the reward of safe passage home to a society in which he will fit comfortably. His inter-temporal labour allocations are driven by the desire to prove to himself that he repents for his past economic indiscretions rather than by neoclassical standards of utility maximisation (Hunter 1966: 201).

Crusoe's own evidence is incontrovertible on this point. Defoe has him say frequently throughout the text that providence was prompted to dispatch the fateful storm only because he had rejected his father's established position within professional society (e.g., p. 199). Crusoe's inter-temporal labour allocations are designed to culturally condition him to become a social type that he had previously refused to be: to accommodate himself to 'the station of life I was born in' (p. 29) so that he might emulate the way middle-class gentlemen 'went silently and smoothly thro' the world' (p. 28). He spends his time much more obviously working to change his own approach to life than he does to change the parameters of the neoclassical Robinson's production possibility frontier. His time on the island is all about educating himself to give ever more enhanced expression to a number of historically-produced economic instincts with which he was already familiar but had not previously embraced in unambiguous fashion. The inter-temporality of Crusoe's decision-making consequently departs from that of the neoclassical Robinson insofar as it is not primarily economic so much as psychological in its fundamental detail.

The most startling thing about Crusoe's evolving economic subjectivity as the plot unfolds is just how few concessions he makes to what must have been the utterly unfamiliar conditions of life on the island (Downie 1996: 24). As Jean-Paul Engélibert puts it (1996: 270), 'Defoe's novel replaces this radically foreign experience, this opening out on to a different, pure life, by recreating English society on a smaller scale'. There is no sense in which Crusoe sets out to explore genuinely new insights into his state of being in order 'to build a new Jerusalem' (Ross 1985 [1965]: 17). Defoe allows him to make himself anew but not to do likewise with the economic institutions within which he lives his life. These institutions are drawn entirely from the society from which he is temporarily excluded, to the point at which he exhibits a more thoroughgoing socially-constructed Englishness when physically separated by half a world from England than he ever had done when actually living there. He is content only to reflect on his preceding antipathy to social conformity and to treat this as the reason for his current social exclusion (p. 87).

Crusoe's increasing acceptance of the prevailing economic order and its in-built social hierarchies are perhaps best summed up when observing the destruction of a Spanish ship almost at the end of his stay on the island. He contemplates whether providence brought a punishment to the Spanish sailors similar to his own for a youthful life lived injudiciously. At that point he surmises about 'those who are touched with the general plague of mankind, whence, for ought I know, one half of their miseries flow; I mean that of not being satisfy'd with the station wherein God and nature has placed them' (p. 198). Turning this reflection back onto his own experiences, he rues 'my unlucky head, that was always to let me know it was born to make my body miserable' (ibid). The mere fact of being able to remonstrate with his former self about previous economic indiscretions is itself evidence that his earlier yearnings for adventure are no longer likely to distract him from a life of middle-class domesticity (Grapard 1995: 44). These pivotal passages in Defoe's text are not only about social conformity but also the mental ease that follows from accepting the requirements of social conformity.

They also draw attention to the significance of a narrative break which occurs in the text at a point at which Crusoe has been cast away for six years. In reflecting on the fate that he has brought upon himself, he declares at that time that 'we never see the true state of our condition till it is illustrated to us by its contraries, nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it' (p. 149). This is the moment that he first becomes truly conscious of his decision to live back at home upon physical deliverance from the island in the 'middle station of life' that his father had advised him to accept when a young man (pp. 28, 30). The decision to purposefully reinvent himself as someone it was always within his capacity to be subsequently guides all of his labouring activity, increasingly rendering necessary in his own mind the strictly superfluous labour time involved in the administration of the island as a miniature replica of the existence he forsook to go to sea. Up until this point his attempts to create for himself physical resemblances of English middle-class life are largely

unconscious: the additional labour involved, say, in making a table and chair to enable him to dine in a sedentary position (p. 85); in dividing his main residence into separate rooms by function (p. 91); or in making a spade with ‘the handle exactly shaped like ours in England’ (p. 90). Yet after recognising the psychological benefits he stood to enjoy from aspiring towards middle-class domesticity all further efforts to impose the structures of English life onto his island experience are much more deliberate and consciously thought through.

From this point onwards until finally securing safe passage home, it is Crusoe’s conscious Anglicisation of the island which imparts coherence onto his labour and not in any sense the neoclassical Robinson’s attempts to reduce the long-run disutility associated with work. Crusoe uses early eighteenth-century bookkeeping techniques to try to Anglicise those aspects of solitary island life that he does not understand on his first encounter and to relegate to the status of unhelpful those things that continually defy Anglicisation (Damrosch 1994: 382). Yet as Stephen Curkpatrick observes (2002: 259), his propensity to call upon inventories to render everything knowable in relation to his old life serves only as ‘a hindrance to inventing his way into a future of the other’. As soon as he settles into this socially-ingrained pattern of knowing, his range of options of how to live is severely circumscribed. In effect, he denies the very possibility of alternative forms of existence as a means of demonstrating his new-found allegiance to the behavioural characteristics of his society’s template of economic man. The cost of social conformity in this regard is his inability to develop the island specifically to lessen the physical drain of routine labour, but this is a cost that Crusoe willingly bears. After all, Defoe made his eventual restoration to society conditional upon him developing himself and not his economic environment.

Both the neoclassical Robinson and Defoe’s Crusoe thereby divide their labour effort between prioritising current and future consumption. However, Robinson’s decisions differ from Crusoe’s in this respect because he is not required to change himself psychologically when becoming oriented increasingly towards the future. He remains fundamentally unaltered in essence by the utility gains he enjoys from developing more efficient production technologies. He is able to maximise more advantageous utility functions than before by expanding the boundaries of his production possibility frontier, but that is the only difference he experiences. By contrast, Crusoe’s focus on the future is solely about what he must do to change himself if he is to achieve unproblematic incorporation into the prevailing economic order back home. He pays no regard to the utility functions through which he might begin to adjudicate the relative effectiveness of his production techniques. Indeed, as I will argue in the following section, his actions are a complete derogation of neoclassical efficiency criteria insofar as they increase rather than reduce his exposure to scarcity in subsistence.

The Difference between Robinson's and Crusoe's Approach to Scarcity

Every choice that the neoclassical Robinson makes on his desert island occurs with the economy in a stationary state (Milgate and Stimson 2009: 215). He has to submit to his circumstances in the short run and do the best for himself within an environment of strictly limited resources (Mankiw and Taylor 2008: 585). Existential concerns about scarcity bring home to Robinson the premium which is to be placed on allocative efficiency and therefore also increase the incentive to delegate all allocations to market-based competition (Lipsey and Chrystal 1995: 407).

Neoclassical proponents of the Robinson Crusoe economy typically wish their protagonist to be so like Defoe's Crusoe that they deny the latter the material goods he claims property rights over when fortunate happenstance brings them into his possession. McCloskey highlights scarcity as the defining feature of Defoe's text by drawing the 'contrast to the stories of shipwrecks in the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*, over which hover gods willing to perform miracles of abundance' (McCloskey 1996: 123). Yet, this is far from the situation that Defoe actually created for Crusoe. It is true, of course, that everyday production tasks must rely on his labour and nobody else's for the duration of his physical isolation on the island (Starr 1997: 10), but he was also intermittently provided with the chance to acquire new property in a manner completely at odds with the strict scarcity criterion that Robinson faces.

The Defoe scholar, Ian Watt, argues that property acquisition of this nature – McCloskey's "miracles of abundance" by any other name – is the counterbalance to his ill fortune in finding himself stranded alone. Quite clearly, further survivors of his shipwreck would have diluted the reasonableness of his property entitlements. He is able to assert absolute property rights *only* because he is the sole survivor (Watt 1974: 87-8). This is true not only of his own shipwreck (pp. 69-75), but also when a subsequent storm brings the remains of a Spanish ship within his grasp (pp. 195-6), when the cannibals unwittingly present him with Friday (pp. 206-7), and when the mutineers allow him to lay claim to the ship that eventually returns him home (pp. 269-70). These events challenge the neoclassical story about scarcity but are not a corruption of it, for the fairly straightforward reason that the neoclassical story is not the one that Defoe was trying to tell. His morality play was focused instead on how Crusoe might learn obedience to the bourgeois order. To this end, the scarcity-busting gifts represent tests to determine the success Crusoe has thus far had in reshaping his economic subjectivity and acculturating himself to middle-class life. The novel's narrative structure unfolds progressively in this respect, Crusoe's reflections on each succeeding event showing that he is increasingly attuned psychologically to the norms of the society to which he covets return.

It should perhaps go without saying that the prospect of eliciting the desired approbation of other people for his new-found social conformity is by no means close at hand. It remains locked-up physically faraway in England, with subsistence needs being the only thing that he can satisfy directly through his labour on the island.

However, the fact that he can reason with himself to undertake his work in fundamentally “uneconomic” ways serves to emphasise the depth and the significance of the socialisation trajectory he has set himself upon. Crusoe’s activities on the island revolve crucially around his attempts to subdue its fundamentally alien character to his Anglicisation strategy (Novak 1962: 57-8). He appears to be undaunted by the manual labour required to impose the principles of property ownership from back home onto the island, almost to the point of physically revelling in the amount of superfluous work this entails (Curkpatrick 2002: 258). As Watt suggests (1974: 70), ‘wherever Crusoe looks his acres cry out so loud for improvement that he has no leisure to observe that they also compose a landscape’.

The contrast could hardly be starker between Crusoe deliberately “over-working” himself in pursuit of symbolic goods and Robinson combining consumption and leisure in the most economically efficient manner. Crusoe pushes on with his grand plans for improvement even when he decries their utility for the limited life he can lead (pp. 90, 118). Demonstrating to himself that he is now capable of acting like a responsible property owner is more important than what he stands to gain materially from transforming the physical appearance of the island. It is noticeable, for instance, the lengths to which he goes to enclose as much of the island as possible by fencing it off. Manuel Schonhorn (1991: 155-6) makes much of this point, as it shows Defoe forcing Crusoe to do something that no account of actual castaways’ lives ever recalls having been done at that time. Real-life lone castaways made no attempt to fence land off because property rights always require the presence of an excluded other if they are to have genuine economic meaning (Sapir 2007: 96). Property rights cohere, in other words, only in the context of the rights-holder living amongst other people, but this is the one thing that Crusoe is denied on the island (pp. 83, 153, 164, 202-3). The fact that he remains so fastidious in physically demarcating his property captures the extent to which Defoe was prepared to have him act out of character as a castaway so that he might learn how to act in character as an example of early eighteenth-century economic man.

Driven by the perceived need to continually improve his land, Crusoe divides his labour between different types of work according to clock time (pp. 126, 127; see also Hammond 2001: 74-5). Such decisions represent familiar territory to him, because this is the standard denominator of labour effort in the nascent capitalist society from which his shipwreck excludes him (Thompson 1991: 15). By contrast, the subsistence environment into which he is thrust operates more obviously to standards under which labour time is regulated by the tasks that need to be fulfilled (Purdy 1996: 192), which is consistent with his frequent complaint that the economic value of time dissipates in a solitary existence (e.g., pp. 83, 85, 120-1). Despite this, he cannot shake the habit of organising his working days in direct parallel to the contemporary English manner (pp. 126-7). Crusoe allows himself to work for a set amount of time per day and, as a result, he is forced to accept further inefficiency as the cost of the technological experimentation he undertakes to improve his land.

Unlike the neoclassical Robinson who faces no technological obstacles along his production possibility frontier, all of Crusoe's production activities are stalked by inefficiency in any case. He begins his time alone on the island in self-admonishment for being 'but a very sorry workman' (p. 89), bemoaning that 'it is scarce credible what inexpressible labour every thing was done with' (p. 92). However, Crusoe brings upon himself more exaggerated impediments to the satisfaction of his subsistence needs beyond his inherent lack of inventiveness (p. 146), because he makes no attempt to use the resources at his disposal in advance of the most efficient solution economically speaking. He puts them to work instead to find ways of creating physical reminders of the bourgeois lifestyle he has now decided that he will live back home if he survives his time on the island. Those artefacts of his new social aspirations do little to help him meet subsistence criteria.

There is no better example of this in the novel than the superfluous effort he expends building a second dwelling when his need for shelter is fully satisfied by the first. He imprints the island with the Anglicised manifestation of having both a main and a subsidiary residence (Sill 1983: 160), allowing himself to subsequently describe his island life in the language of the English middle classes of the time (Damrosch 1994: 384). He refers to his subsidiary residence as his 'country seat' (p. 160, 173), from which he could spend his days performing the rituals of an English gentleman by going 'abroad with my gun and my dog' (p. 89). His initial attempt to survey the island in its entirety comes towards the end of his first year there, whereupon he describes himself as 'lord of all this country indefeasibly ... as completely as any lord of a manor in England' (p. 114).

However, in devoting so much of his attention to physically imprinting the island with prompts to remind him of his property-owning status, he contradicts the neoclassical Robinson's most cherished behavioural trait. He forces upon himself further scarcity constraints by not organising his labour specifically to make it easier in the future to meet his immediate consumption needs. The scarcity with which Crusoe is most concerned relates to access to the bourgeois society to which he increasingly aspires. Defoe's narrative strategy is only to reward Crusoe with eventual sight of the ship that will save him once he has demonstrated his acquiescence to Defoe's preferred conception of early eighteenth-century economic man. He is unfit for pedagogical purpose unless the plot unfolds sequentially in this manner. Yet in allowing it to do so Defoe requires Crusoe to act contrary to efficiency considerations, to the extent to which his production activities are not oriented solely – or perhaps even primarily – to the relief of scarcity in subsistence. Kemper Simpson's neoclassical textbook tells readers that: 'If Crusoe had produced clumsily, he would not have been satisfying his wants "economically"' (Simpson 1978: 47). This serves, though, merely to emphasise that Crusoe is not the neoclassical Robinson. He makes no obvious effort simply to satisfy his wants economically in the manner of an instinctive utility-maximiser, because his most important wants are in any case psychological.

The Difference between Robinson's and Crusoe's Attitude to Money

For the Robinson Crusoe economy to demonstrate unequivocally the superiority of market solutions, it is necessary for the neoclassical Robinson to be treated as a price-taker on both the consumption and production sides of all goods markets (Mas-Colell et al 1995: 526; Carter 2001: 363). However, this does not bring him into contact with real prices, because market pricing mechanisms can only coordinate economic activity in the presence of more than one person. It is shadow prices only which allow Robinson the consumer to align his interests with those of Robinson the producer (Tobin 1992: 130). In this context money does not come into play as anything other than a secondary feature of the efficiency constraints by which Robinson abides. He maximises his utility due to his interaction with shadow prices, and it can only be shown under post hoc examination of his optimal solution that exactly the same solution would hold were he to treat money as a functional commodity designed purely for the "purchase" of utility (Jehle and Reny 2001: 216). In this way the neoclassical Robinson's activities place no importance on the role of money, and he certainly gains no new self-understanding from acknowledging his psychological relationship with it.

The same is palpably not true of Defoe's Crusoe. No aspect of the novel is more adept at capturing the evolution of his economic subjectivity than his attitude to money (Shinagel 1968: 124). The learning process he experiences before securing safe passage home is not about stepping back from his general fixation with money, so much as about how best to give expression to monetary ambitions in a socially-acceptable manner. The disagreement the young Crusoe has with his father over going to sea is given great prominence by Defoe as the backdrop to Crusoe's hardening resolve to change his ways (e.g., pp. 103, 107-9, 139, 141-2, 198, 199). Yet although the disagreement took the form of a dispute about filiality (p. 30), this is not its underlying essence. At its core it is the failure of two generations to see eye-to-eye on the most assured way of making the money that would subsequently be treated by others as a sign of social progress (Watt 1974: 65). The contrast that Crusoe draws between staid middle-class professional life in England and the adventurous life of a prospecting seafarer (pp. 27-9) is a metaphor for the difference between the steady and the speculative pursuit of money.⁵

Defoe peppered Crusoe's later thoughts on the matter with the realisation that his father had been right all along in his advice (e.g., pp. 141-2, 198-9). This is Defoe's own mature preference for a carefully scripted and safe path through life being projected onto Crusoe as the latter also grows older (pp. 181, 297). Defoe himself spent a period in jail for bankruptcy following the failure of a number of speculative investments (Rogers 1971: 451). His decision to render Crusoe captive on the island as punishment for his initial refusal to accept the economic order of bourgeois England thereby provides an obvious parallel with his own incarceration for economic indiscretions.

Throughout the story Crusoe repeatedly hoards gold whenever the opportunity arises. However, such exertions make no sense from the perspective of the neoclassical Robinson, because the tremendous effort he expends in this way provides him with a store of wealth that is economically meaningless for the entirety of his island existence. It occupies time not directed towards present consumption, but it does nothing to reduce the labour that will be required to satisfy subsistence needs in the future. The sudden possibility of seizing the gold is itself antithetical to the existential assumption of scarcity described by neoclassical economics, but the money cannot be put to use in changing for the better future states of scarcity. The hoarding of unusable gold only becomes a justifiable investment of Crusoe's labour time once physical deliverance from the island has been assured and the gold becomes socially meaningful as a means of purchasing status symbols consistent with middle-class domesticity. Even then this relies on knowing that he will return to England not as the youthful, headstrong Crusoe who was willing to put his capital at risk in the name of adventure but as a paragon of bourgeois respectability.

Crusoe first comes across a supply of money that he can claim for himself from his own stricken ship. This occurs before he has any opportunity to reflect on the providential basis of being cast away, let alone to work on himself psychologically in an attempt to internalise the bourgeois behavioural characteristics that will allow him to live comfortably as a gentleman when he returns home. At that point, his immediate reaction is to acknowledge that the gold has no use value on the island and hoarding it therefore represents entirely unrewarded labour time (Hymer 1971: 20-1). 'I smiled to my self at the sight of this money', he recalls, "'O drug!" said I aloud, "what art thou good for? ... e'en remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving"' (p. 75). A further salvage opportunity comes Crusoe's way almost at the end of his stay on the island, when a Spanish ship is wrecked with all hands lost. His initial reaction to the sight of more unclaimed gold is expressed in an identical fashion as previously. 'I got very little by this voyage that was of any use to me', he writes (p. 197), 'for as to the money, I had no manner of occasion for it: 'twas to me as the dirt under my feet'.

These instances are important for the way in which Defoe's narrative unfolds, because they pretty much book-end Crusoe's stay on the island. The imputation of worthlessness onto his stock of gold is a constant refrain of the story, and this appears to change the meaning of money in his mind. The recognition begins to crystallise that its use in his former life as an objective symbol of wealth has no obvious parallel on the island: 'Alas! there the nasty sorry useless stuff lay; I had no manner of business for it' (p. 140). Yet still on both occasions he goes to considerable lengths to preserve the money from the respective wrecks, effort that might otherwise have been directed towards salvaging more that could have been of direct and explicit use to him in securing his subsistence and changing his future conditions of scarcity.

On the first occasion of salvaging the money, Crusoe says simply that 'upon second thoughts, I took it away' (p. 75). No explanation is given to justify such an action and

nothing more is said about it as the narrative returns immediately to the further tasks at hand if Crusoe is to ensure his survival. The Defoe scholar Bonamy Dobrée (1959: 414) suggests that this is simply an instinctive piece of self-regulation: not knowing what to do with it, but not yet having had time to reflect upon what taking it might eventually mean to him socially, he takes it anyway without knowing why. This confirms that Crusoe arrived on the island already partially the man that he aspired to be by the time he left it, because it is an instinctive rather than a reasoned decision to do what most people of his background would have done. On the second occasion, he rues the fact that half the Spanish ship was lost to the sea before he had the chance to embark upon a salvage mission, and it is his new-found desire to acquire money for subsequent social effect which provides the focus of the narrative. Had the wreckage remained intact, he says (p. 198), ‘I am satisfy’d I might have loaded my canoe several times over with money’. The reason for his regret is not that this additional gold would have served any purpose in making his life materially more bearable on the island by altering the nature of scarcity constraints, but that hoarding it opens up the prospect of enhanced social approbation when he receives safe passage home. ‘[I]f I had ever escaped to England,’ he reflects, ‘[the money] would have lain here safe enough, till I might have come again and fetched it’ (p. 198).

The fact that hoarding activities are consciously reasoned in the second instance but purely instinctive in the first is informative in itself. It suggests that Crusoe has been successful in the interim in tutoring himself to the dominant middle-class assumptions of early eighteenth-century England. Social norms of that time dictated that money should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a means of acquiring status symbols to be admired by other people (Berg 2005: 27). Visible signs of wealth in the form of symbolic goods were therefore more important than bulging bank accounts. This is the model of economic man that Defoe designed Crusoe to illustrate. In acting out such a role, Crusoe treats money as a means of accessing new self-understandings related to the society to which he seeks return, not as a means of deriving utility in straightforwardly economic terms. As with the other two fundamental traits of neoclassical economics, Crusoe therefore also stands in marked opposition to Robinson on the issue of money. Robinson has no need of money other than to confirm under post hoc examination that his production possibility frontier is in perfect tandem with his utility function; this is a purely economic consideration.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the neoclassical Robinson’s appropriation of Defoe’s name is an almost complete red herring. Their very different actions prove that they are by no means derived from the same social type. They represent competing rather than complementary visions of economic man, and what is true of Crusoe in this respect must also consequently be true of Robinson. Even though Crusoe has a narrator’s voice to give ostensible life to his actions on the

island, in truth he is nothing more than an abstract construction of ideal-typical economic behaviour which is specific to his own century and reflects the predominant assumptions of that time about social organisation. Defoe was an ardent supporter of an England built around middle-class gentility (Rogers 1974: 383), and his belief in the propriety of such a social system is instantiated in Crusoe's gradual conversion to its norms (Shinagel 1968: 137-8). Crusoe himself is required to comment upon the extent to which he learns to accept 'those measures of life which nature and Providence concurred to present me with' (p. 58).

Even though the scope of the current piece necessarily limits it to historicising Crusoe as a particular, temporally-bound vision of economic man, a similar historicisation of Robinson will be no less informative in the future. The ability to locate Robinson concretely as an equally particular, temporally-bound vision of economic man will enhance awareness of the practical implications of the pedagogical purposes to which he has been put. It will also draw attention to the hortatory potential contained in conceptualising economic man in such a way. For now, it is perhaps sufficient to speculate briefly on the basis for using the neoclassical Robinson to extol the late nineteenth-century commitment to the market allocation of scarce economic resources.

In this respect it seems likely that there is a direct parallel between Robinson and Crusoe. Defoe's Crusoe was designed as part of a morality play about social conformity, with his castaway status providing impetus for realising that he had transgressed "reasonable" societal expectation by not accepting earlier in life his predestined place in the prevailing distributional hierarchy. The narrative structure of "redemption" and the language of "conversion" assist in shaping the reader's understanding that Crusoe had no choice but to behave as he did if he was to emerge from the island a better man. In a directly analogous manner, the neoclassical Robinson became an important means of initiating deference to the late nineteenth-century market-based distributional hierarchy and therefore for securing conformity to it. The analytical structure of "optimisation" and the language of "universal" problems of economic organisation reduce the space for challenging the conclusions that the reader might derive from exposure to Robinson's choice matrix. Both accounts of economic man therefore act in the manner of a successful Kuhnian exemplar. Each confirms that the assumptions rendering their respective intellectual problems meaningful simultaneously contain the necessary information for solving the problem in a pre-specified way (Kuhn 1977: 297-8).

Just as Crusoe is a historically-produced account of one economic man, so too Robinson is of another. The early neoclassical economists were typically social reformers, each arguing for policies that would ameliorate the situation of the worst off within a market-based distributional hierarchy (Blaug 1996: 286). Yet at the same time they stressed that *the* economic problem was inter-temporal allocative efficiency under conditions in which money scarcity reflects scarcity across all goods markets. As such, they directed all immediate analytical attention to creating economic agents

in the image of that problem (Robinson 1964: 65). Policy was to be used to assist the individual's livelihood struggle only after market allocations had divided winners from losers, not to protect the individual from market allocations per se. Choice theoretic frameworks continue to pervade popular economics books and economics textbooks, and they do so for exactly the same reason. Readers are still being taught through their everyday exposure to economics to "be like Robinson", where this means accepting passively social inequalities produced by markets.

Notes

¹ I am indebted to the referee who saw more in this aspect of my argument than I had initially done and who encouraged me to pursue this line of reasoning. More generally, I wish to thank the three anonymous referees and the editors of *NPE* for providing me with the means of ensuring that the published version of the article represents a significant improvement on my original submission.

² Throughout, I restrict myself to analysing the time that Crusoe spends alone on the island. It might be said that this is an unfortunate restriction, because it eliminates from the study Friday, the cannibals, the mutineers and the captain whose ship eventually returns Crusoe to society. In all of these relationships Crusoe proves that he is a product of his society, and they could therefore be used to illustrate further my main claims. However, my priority is to keep the analysis focused on the same context as that occupied by the neoclassical Robinson.

³ All of the references to the text of *Robinson Crusoe* take this form and they relate to Defoe (1985 [1719]) listed in the bibliography.

⁴ Crusoe's father had prepared him for the legal profession (p. 27).

⁵ The voyage that shipwrecked Crusoe was slave-running (p. 59).

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