

HUMAN NATURE IN ROUSSEAU'S STATE OF NATURE: AN ANALYSIS

Dr. Anita Agarwal

Department of Political Science

Dyal Singh College, Karnal

Email: anitadsc@gmail.com

Abstract

The main philosophical objective of Rousseau was to show how society had corrupted human nature's positive inclinations and qualities. This article covers Rousseau's opinion of what went wrong and his suggested solution. He maintained that amour de soi, or "love of self," was what drives individuals in their natural state. This meant that they were just alive to eat, sleep, and reproduce in order to preserve the species. As a result, there was no "war of every man, against every man," as Hobbes hypothesized, and life remained tranquil. Rousseau characterized the transition in terms of a mythological history. Being recognized and respected gained value when individuals began to create broader social groupings outside of the family. People started to want more than just survival; becoming the finest dancer or the best orator became valued in the community. According to Rousseau, the novelty of status and attention "was the first step towards inequality and immorality."

Keywords

Philosophy, Man, State Of Nature, Freedom.

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Dr. Anita Agarwal

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Introduction

That nature destines man to be free and Independent in all respects, is a reasonable statement to make. according to Rousseau, freedom to act according to the dictates of instincts seems to be the inherent prerogative of man. In addition to this, man also has gregarious instincts. These two cumulatively give birth to “the earliest of all societies, and the only natural one”- namely the family. Rousseau opines that up until this stage of development, everything is natural and man remains as emancipated as he was born, without any impediments of sort. Beyond this stage, with overlapping structures and institutions, and a more complex set of predicaments, everything becomes unnatural and thus, “man is everywhere in chains”. To put it succinctly, Rousseau set to imply that man, as he was in his original habitat, was free of any outward impediments as he acted on his natural instincts, without any conditionalities. However, as and when society set into progression and man efforted to become a better and more developed version of his crude self, he inevitably got caught up so much in artificiality and instincts, that he found himself bound in chains (conditionalities) everywhere.

Picture Of Man In “ Discourse “

In his ‘Discourse on the Origin of Inequality’, Rousseau gives us a picture of men living in the state of nature. He is seen to believe the man was a solitary savage, living the happy nonchalant life, without any fixed abode, no articulate speech, and no needs or desires whatsoever. He was contented, self-sufficient, independent, and healthy. Thus, no delinquency prevailed in the state of nature and the man led a life of idyllic happiness. Supreme bliss was the prevalent quality of the state of nature. Thus, unlike Hobbes, he believed that the state of nature was the one of perfect equality, freedom, and innocence. Hence, the statement, “That man is naturally good and that our social institutions alone have rendered him evil.”

According to Rousseau, the reason was the out-growth of human development. It wasn’t something inherently present within man, but only when he was exposed to the diabolical structures and institutions that it was employed, in order to direct man towards what is right and what’s not. The existence of this reason, however, is what drove the society into ruins as the self-inflicted power and inevitable greed of individuals induced one to own private property. That one event doomed man and life altogether. Rousseau’s problem is not to go into the historical origin of society, but to judge its legitimacy from a moral angle. According to him, though the individual may be in chains everywhere, yet if this phenomenon is of his own violation, then such chains are legitimate. But if the chains are based on force, such a phenomenon cannot be justified. That is to imply, if the people are coerced or

forced to obey, then they are justified in resorting to force in order to recover the original freedom or liberty. In the Social Contract, Rousseau attaches immense importance to social order, as the basis of all other rights. But he is very clear and emphatic about it that the social order or the civil society does not flow from nature, and must, therefore, be founded on convention. That means, the state, according to him, is merely an artificial creation of individuals, resulting from the contract.

Rousseau's thesis was quite antithetical to what was conventionally thought at that time, and "he was bold enough to extol natural man at the expense of so-called civilized man, for our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have improved." The much boasted of politeness, the glory of civilized refinement, is for Rousseau solely a "uniform and perfidious veil.", under which he sees "jealousy fear, coldness, reserve, hate and fraud".

Rousseau sees a direct correlation between luxury, constantly enlarging needs, and the rise of art and science, after which true nerve flags and the virtues disappear. Roman history, Rousseau holds, supports his view: as long as Rome was poor and uncomplicated, it was able to command respect and conquer an empire; after having developed luxury and engulfed the riches of the universe, Rome "fell prey to people who knew not even what riches were."

Picture Of Man In "The Social Contract "

In his work, 'The Social Contract', he remains reasonably consistent and reiterates on how man is by nature good, that the acts and institutions of civilization have produced a corrupt expression of his true nature; that good can only be restored among civilized men through such institutions which give the freest possible expression to natural human desires. It thus becomes pertinent to note that according to his ideas, organized social restraint is justified only in so far as it rests upon a consent given freely by all members of the community. Hence, the problem at hand that Rousseau wants to address in the 'social contract' is to find a form of association that will defend and protect with the whole common force man and his goods as in accordance with each other, and where man may still remain as free as he was before.

In the opening paragraph of his book, Rousseau puts the same question in a more perceptible demeanor: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. Many a one believes himself the master of others, and yet he is a greater slave than they. How has this change come about?"

He attempted to settle this question by inducting within the domain of political theory his famous doctrine of General Will. Rousseau set out to assert that true happiness and contentment were that which men enjoyed when everyone was free and equal, when nature provided abundant nourishment for all. He further

proceeded to contrast with his early blissful state the inequality, the oppression, the poverty which is a common lot of the bulk of the inhabitants of most modern political states.

With further progression, the human race strives to become increasingly numerous. Divergencies of soil, climate, and season began to introduce differences between each type. The economic progression carries further. As exemplary, the casual caves transform into rude huts. Family and property now are at hand, surrounded by imminent evils. But, at this stage, the primitive society is not unbearable. This period, i.e. the middle period, is the best period in the life of humanity- “the least subject to revolutions, the best for man”

In the further stages of development, followed war, murder, misery, and horrors. Rich and poor frantically ranged against each other, furthering the divide within the already fragmented society. The evils that were absent in the savage state now became universal. This inevitable result was the stage of final inequality and conditions of masters and slaves. The truly natural man, i.e. the savage, acts on two principles. Firstly, he acts on a feeling of interest in his own welfare and preservation. Secondly, he acts on a feeling of abhorrence towards the sight of death. As mentioned earlier, Rousseau opines that these feelings give way to reason. “By nature, a man scarcely thinks. With the growth of the reason the degeneration goes so far that it necessitated the constitution of civil society.” Thus, in these prevalent circumstances, ‘Back to nature’ becomes his ultimate cry. This does not mean that the society must be demolished and the savage state reinstated, but it does mean that the nature must be the rule and the only legitimate way to go about for men in society. It is thus conspicuous that when Rousseau recommends the rule of nature for man, it flows from his own reasoning that ‘reason’ and ‘philosophy’ have beguiled men, corrupted them, and brought them to ruin.

After having briefly read what Rousseau opined and implied with this statement, “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains”, it can be deduced that man ought to be free (not in the absolute sense of being able to do just whatsoever he wants, but in the sense of being an element in a general will, of what’s reasonably expected of him), and that he hardly ever is free for real (because most states are actually founded on force, instead of on a general will, as they ought to be). According to this interpretation, thus, freedom does not mean an unbridled permit to get away with doing anything men might desire and please. Rather, it has to be viewed in a positive connotation, a kind of participation in a larger life- as being subject to the general will of the entire society, in a harmonious manner. This happens to be a rather unusual undertone of freedom.

According to Rousseau, Hobbes' natural freedom and Locke's moral freedom are both an unrestricted permit- Hobbes', the physical license to do whatever men may deem fit, if they have the necessary force and power to absolve themselves of their acts; Locke's, the moral permit to make (unconditional) decisions for ourselves. What Rousseau substantiates is the conception of a freedom not only compatible with, but actually implying, a certain kind of restraint.

In the light of his views and the different set of times and circumstances in which he has written in, Rousseau's political philosophy is sometimes described as a medley of skepticism. It seems to be an assortment of democracy, absolutism and socialism.

Conclusion

Contrary to the beliefs of many of his contemporaries, Rousseau believed that the natural world was the most beautiful place and that the development of civilization had irreparably harmed how people interacted with one another and with themselves. Yet, Rousseau contends that these inclinations may be diverted towards creating a society that more effectively satisfies the needs of individuals rather than being constrained by urges towards renown. We may live a more peaceful existence and liberate ourselves from our own conceit by developing a society built on the will of its members. The philosopher also believed that all men were socially equal. Inequalities, he argued, were the artificial creations of social systems based on private property and organized labor – systems that allowed the domination and exploitation of some people by others. Rousseau's insistence on the fundamental freedom of human beings in their "natural state" contributed to the modern notion that people have inalienable rights, regardless of their place in society. This notion is clearly reflected in 20th-century documents such as the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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