

Humanities 4: Lecture 9



Jean-Jacques Rousseau:
Discourse on the Origin of Inequality

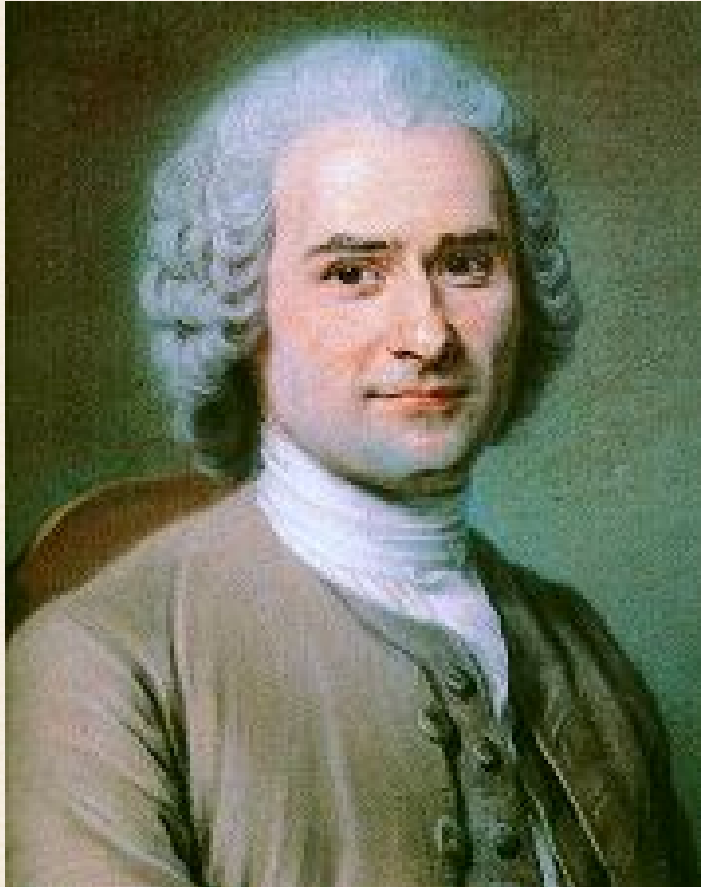
Outline of Lecture

- Intellectual Background
- Biographical Information
- *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
 - Rousseau's account of the state of nature
 - R's criticisms of alternative accounts
 - R's positive account of the origin of inequality

Intellectual Background

- Academy of Sciences
 - Regional
 - Royal “think tank”
 - Prize Essays

Biographical Information



- (1712-1778)
- Range of professions
- First Discourse (1750)
- Second Discourse (1754)
- *Social Contract & Emile* (1762)

Discourse on the Origin of Inequality

- R's description of man in the state of nature: no inequality
 - Physical man (as an animal)
 - Man considered morally (self-perfection)
 - Self-preservation and pity
- Criticisms of others' conceptions of the state of nature
 - Basic criticism
 - Specific criticisms of Hobbes and Locke
- Positive account of the origin of inequality

The State of Nature (I)

- Science of Man (39-43)
- Positive description of Physical (47-48)
 - Well-rounded abilities.
 - Desires are simple.
 - All needs are satisfied.
 - comparison and contrast with animals
 - domesticated vs. wild (51)

The State of Nature (II)

- Man from a moral point of view
 - Faculty of self-perfection (reason) is driven by passion (53-54), but no such passions exist in savage man.
 - No foresight, no curiosity, no language, no reasoning (64-69), no marriage (65-66), no oppression (67).
 - Heart is at peace & body is in good health, and there are no moral duties. (61)
 - Two basic desires (64):
 - self-preservation
 - “an innate repugnance to seeing fellow men suffer” or pity. (See also p. 64, for the role pity plays.)

R's Basic Criticism of Other Conceptions of State of Nature

- Others attribute to savage man features that he could have only in society.
 - “all of them ... have transferred to the state of nature the ideas they acquired in society” (46).
 - “make a man a philosopher before making him a man” (42).
 - “human race would long ago have ceased to exist, if its preservation had depended solely on the reasonings of its members” (64).
 - Presuppose a conception of what is good for man in society and then argue that the rules that promote it are natural laws (41)

Specific Criticisms

- Against Hobbes
 - Savage man would not attack and fight (48-9).
 - H “wrongly injected into the savage man’s concern for self-preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions which are the product of society” (61).
 - H failed to notice pity (62).
- Against Locke
 - Private property already requires society.

R's Positive Account of the Origin of Inequality

- In Part II, R describes the process whereby society forms and inequality arises.
 - Public esteem (73) and the utility of cooperation (74) led to the introduction of property, labor and inequality.
 - Metallurgy and agriculture were both necessary for this development.
 - Establishment of govt. and laws benefits the rich and powerful => source of inequal.

قوله تعالى: "وَمَا يَكْفُرُ لَكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ خَالِكُ الْأَمْثَلِ الْعَزِيزِ" (سورة النحل: 91)

“Since inequality is practically nonexistent in the state of nature, it derives its force and growth from the development of our faculties and the progress of the human mind, and eventually becomes stable and legitimate through the establishment of property and laws” (91).

Summary

- Human beings today are not better than they used to be, but worse. => no progress
- Savage man has simple desires that are easily satisfied, which contrasts with the state of contemporary man.
 - Man is corrupted by society's influence and by the use of reason.
- Rousseau criticizes other accounts of man in the state of nature for presupposing too much.
- Utterly pessimistic conclusion?