

In fourteen short pages of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau provides a sweeping account of the origin and progress of social and political relations, and what he considers to be the concomitant loss of freedom and happiness. Rousseau's arguments are premised on his assertion that men were at their happiest as self-sufficient and independent. (1¹51) A variety of societal and economic developments led to specialization of labor and inter-dependence. Desire went from "food, rest and sex" to a yearning to accumulate goods, with new sociological pressures to keep up with neighbors, and what Rousseau calls amour-propre, whereby our self-worth depends on the opinion of others. (155) With increasing desires and inter-dependence for production came increasing strife. Political arrangements emerged to provide stability, a process that Rousseau describes as the poor sacrificing their freedom so that "the rich man, hard pressed by necessity, eventually conceived the most well-considered project which ever entered the human mind." (158-159) In this portion of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau presents powerful arguments that justify his famous statement that "human beings are born free but are now everywhere enslaved." For Rousseau, such bondage is not only in a political or economic sense but also by becoming a slave of the opinion of others.

Rousseau bases his idea of being born free and then enslaved, by describing the emergence of the idea of inter-dependence, the foundation for civil society, and how it leads to all modern ailments. Rousseau claims that as long as we are self-sufficient, we are "free, healthy, good and happy." (151) It is only when we start to need each other's help that poverty, inequality, constant labor, misery and slavery are introduced. Rousseau argues that in his natural state man was responsible for finding his own sustenance and thereby dependence leads to poverty because if we are unable to sustain ourselves, we need others to guarantee our own prosperity and whereas once, every man had an equal chance to find food and shelter, now, by dividing up tasks, we can only access these basic provisions if we have a job considered necessary by society. Therefore, our entire livelihood requires the consent of others because if they do not find our skills useful in helping to achieve their aims there is no way, not being self-sustaining, that we can achieve our own. (156)

He then argues this leads to inequality, as hierarchies would form based on how much people value the work being done. Two people could work equally hard, but one may prosper while the other fails simply because the economy benefits more and then, gives a greater reward for one form of work over another. (155) Rousseau continues by pointing out the constant labor required to support our society, since we are no longer simply working towards our own ends, but stimulating this vast economic development, based on continual, never-ending human consumption. (193) Thus, our society is founded on the

¹ All citations refer to Rousseau's *Second Discourse*

principle of wanting more and liberates human greed and self-interest, to the detriment of what Rousseau would consider key values, such as love or morality. The savages Rousseau speaks of only had to work in order to support themselves through the accumulation of food or other necessities that are inherently limited. They did not spend lifetimes slaving over collecting as many buffalo hides as they could because there are only so many buffalo hides that one actually needs or can even easily store. However, with the invention of currency, we can build up continuously, work constantly and never be satisfied. We are no longer even making money to satisfy immediate needs or view it as a means of survival. Often, we are doing it simply because it is what everyone else is doing and because it brings prestige and power, which reinforces the inequalities mentioned above.

Rousseau's second to last point is that needing others leads to misery in the sense that we are constantly viewing ourselves in comparison to others and can no longer find happiness within our own capabilities, since we need these to be recognized by society at large. (149) Civil society has made it infinitely harder for man to find happiness within himself, since he is continuously looking out, competing with others, acquiring material goods and is often so caught up in simply maintaining power, or improving upon wealth, that he forgets the simple fact that he is alive. Savage man arguably appreciated life to an extent we can't imagine, since he had to constantly and concretely defend his livelihood and found inherent purpose in simply staying alive. In civil society, it's often taken for granted that we'll wake up tomorrow, which might lead to a sort of loss, self-doubt and misery when we begin to consider what else we're working for, if survival is naturally assumed. Finally, Rousseau points out that slavery is a result of inter-dependence because when one is no longer thinking in terms of what one has to do alone to reach their aims, but rather, what other people can do to help reach these personal ambitions faster and easier, it would logically follow to make them work by force. When once I would look at a problem and think how to solve it myself, now, being aware that there is no way I can do it alone, since we have so complicated the processes involved, I'm going to do my best to make others work for me, and if they won't, I can always make them. (194) Thus, in the same way that we claim property we have no inherent right to, we can then claim fellow human beings. That is how Rousseau would justify the introduction of a completely inter-dependent civil society as the harbinger of poverty, inequality, constant labor, misery and slavery.

Rousseau continues his argument that civil society has enslaved the human race by exploring where this inter-dependence originated. It started with, he suggests, the discovery of iron and practice of agriculture. (152) Before iron and grain, man could play numerous roles. He could grow his own crops, he could forage, he could fish and hunt, he could create musical

instruments and interact with his family and to produce all of this, to create all of this, to lead his own life he did not need anyone else. However, once we began to specialize, once we began to divide man into sections of society, where he only had one role, where for as long as is needed you play your part by forging iron, you cut off the other possible areas of your life and to fill these, you require fellow man. For example, the men smelting and forging iron can no longer also grow food. So they need someone else to do this for them. And after a point, they cannot go back, they are dependent, and must continue to smelt and forge this iron, even if he does not want to, because he still needs food and can no longer produce it himself.

What, Rousseau argues, this eventually leads to is a society where we are no longer able to live for ourselves. If our job is not one that revolves around labor, we become weak and soft. We can no longer exert ourselves or use that physical force, which all savages continually needed. We, in this way, lose the freedom of our bodies, where we could be pushed to our limits and know we are strong. (147) Secondly, we lose the freedom of choosing the direction of our lives, since, as shown today, very few of us can build furniture, create a sturdy shelter, sew clothes or, in essence, support ourselves and as a result, must continually submit ourselves to the will of others. Rousseau explores this through the example of the iron worker, who by needing the farmer to provide food, soon no longer has the time or knowledge to do it himself. His happiness is inextricably linked with another's. Thus we must rely on his goodwill, or his rational self-interest, which would lead him to cooperate with us in turn. In this way, we are enslaved to each other because, in we want to survive, we must be a functioning part of society, and whatever society requires of us, we must do. This notion is so embedded in modern thought and so deeply permeates every aspect of our lives, that we hardly notice how much free-will we're sacrificing on the altar of comfort and convenience. Rousseau's theory can be distilled such: we need certain things to survive, such as food, but, because land is already claimed and divided up, or if we are not born with any, then we are forced, from the very beginning to work for others in order to achieve what we once could do by ourselves. (139)

Therefore, Rousseau cleverly transitions into the problem of property, which is at the root of the inter-dependence and competitiveness that has, he would argue, ruined the human race. (141) As explored above, once we began forging metal, we needed food for those metal workers and as more and more became involved in this metal work, and other forms of industry, agriculture was required to provide faster and greater amounts of food. (153) As people began investing in the land, began tilling, fertilizing and cultivating it, they needed the products of their labor protected. (154) This is where the notion of property came into being. The problem inherent in property is that it perpetuates inequality. Those who are stronger or work harder gain more property. (155) However, Rousseau might argue, this has nothing to do with the nature or character of the

man. He is not necessarily a better person but rather a better worker, and this feeds into the idea that we should not concern ourselves with morality but rather with how we can acquire more. Civil society in this sense, makes us amoral and selfish. We value working hard to get ahead and if that is our goal, then suddenly everyone becomes competition and we are in a society divided against itself. Though man might not be born entirely equal, as some are stronger and others more attractive, our civil society has made these characteristics, which are out of our control, completely shape the direction of our entire lives. More-so, these natural inequalities are accentuated by contrived inequalities. (155) Being born into a wealthier family provides better education, which results in categorically smarter individuals who will perform better and gain more money in turn, thus reinforcing the cycle that is no longer based off innate talent but rather false and temporary social circumstances. Finally, As Rousseau states “working equally, the one (farmer or blacksmith) earned a great deal while the other barely had enough to live.” (155) How free is that iron forger or farmer when his entire life is dependent on a fluctuating economy he not only can’t control but fails to fully understand?

This question of freedom is one Rousseau will address throughout the remainder of his second discourse. At this point in the development of human history, with agriculture, metallurgy and property fully enforced, “the rank and fate of each man is established.” (155) Neither of these seemed fully to exist for the savage man who, in his complete freedom, could do exactly what he wanted with his life as long as the basic requirements necessary for his survival were met. Rank was defined, not by how much property one owned, or how money one had acquired, but rather, on concrete characteristics such as strength and ability. It was about human talent, not material wealth, which might result from it. The modern idea of rank is drastically different. Rousseau states it is based off of the power to serve and harm. (155) The same way that savage man viewed animals as either something that could be beneficial to them, then subjected, or something which was a threat, which they then scourged, modern man looks upon his fellow neighbors in terms of these two classifications. How can we be free when our lives and even our happiness, is viewed in terms of quantity of goods, how much we own, how much wealth we have and these, instead of liberty or morality, defines much in society.

So, if wealth and goods are the measures with which we judge the success of our lives, we will continuously be trying to accumulate more of each. And, as Locke has told us, the most efficient way to do this is to be able to use each other as perfectly, and by this I mean as easily and cheaply, as possible. After all, since we know we cannot achieve our ambitions by ourselves, we need others to work with us. However, since we are placed in competition and there is limited property, which we can’t all acquire, and limited positions of power, over which we are forced to continually struggle, the only way to truly

get someone to work towards the fulfilment of your ambitions when your ambitions are placed in direct opposition with their own is either by force or coercion. This encourages either the use of force and power to make one submit to you or by pretending to be better than you are. Unlike in “savage” times when basic qualities defined what your life would be like, strength versus weakness, we now look not only upon what we own to justify our power but also upon the “mind, beauty, strength and skill” in essence “upon the merit and talent” of the individual. (155) It is not enough for us to simply compete over who can acquire the most or who is in a greater position of power but we must also compete in every aspect of our lives. This leads to the misery Rousseau addressed in his opening paragraph since human beings cannot be perfect in each of these areas, but are somehow expected to be. We continually fall short and in a society where being the best is considered to be the highest achievement, we often fake these qualities. This introduces a malicious, lying cunning that is not present in savage man. Suddenly the idea of being someone who we’re not is introduced. (155) Savage man could not help who he was whereas, modern man no longer even has a sense of what that means. He is continually shifting, continually acting as more than he is to goad others into following him and aid him in his attempt to acquire more. We are, in this way, enslaved to an idea of ourselves that we continually perpetuate and continually enforce, even if it is false and not who we really are.

As we are always trying to get ahead, we view our neighbors not in terms of who they are as individuals, and their personal qualities, but in terms of how they can help us. Thus, we treat each differently, not in terms of who is a moral or decent person but in terms of to what extent we can exploit them and how we should go about doing so. (156) If anything, the kind and decent man would be continually abused. He would be forced to conform and be tough and cruel, if he were to succeed. Some would argue because we need each other, we will be kind to each other. Rousseau would point out that if we need someone and cannot make them fear us and respond to us, we will find other methods of using him, since we want the greatest benefit for the lowest cost. This is why CEOs no matter how dependent on the worker, will still continually try to pay him as little as possible. We are enslaved in our treatment of each other, where in order to stay ahead we must continually push others back. Finally, Rousseau argues that, in savage society, violence was in the open. Because it was dealt with immediately, the source of violence was quickly expressed and resolved. In our society, we destroy each other smiling throughout. (156) Any natural anger or resentment is hidden and twists. This makes man distrustful, he must be aware that we are all wearing masks hiding ambitions similar to his own. Rousseau states that society is no longer based around subsistence but rather conquest and because conquest has no clear limitations in the same way that trying to survive does, we are doomed to continually compete until our death. Men are cruel but above all, we hide our cruelty and refuse to admit what

really drives us. Since we do not, thus, explore the root causes of these dangerous ambitions, we are never going to try and counter act them in any way.

Rousseau lays the foundation for this inequality and this drive to compete on the fact that we originally claimed property and as the human race expanded, the opportunity to do was lost. We were then placed in direct competition with each other.

Suddenly, in order to expand our own lands, we had to take from another and those with less property or those who had not claimed any in the first place, were given two choices: either to work for the rich or try to steal from the rich. In both cases, they could never fully escape and thus, it was set who would be rich or poor. These rich, who had the poor either groveling at their feet or attacking them, responded in two ways. One, they took advantage of this new domination, where they have complete control over someone's livelihood and two, they used this power to "use their old slaves to subdue new ones."

(157) They continued in this pattern, abusing those who have no choice but to work for them and then using this work to add to their own wealth. The rich used their right to property and expanded on it and gave themselves the right to control the lives of those who had none. This complete destruction of equality eventually resulted in the overthrow of the rich at the hands of the poor. The poor then became the rich and the cycle continued. (157) The hierarchies enslaving us remained, it was simply who occupied the spots that changed. Since man was continually fighting to be at the top because the conditions at the bottom were so terrible, we were in a constant state of warfare. There was continual conflict between the savage idea of the one who was stronger having the right to claim land and the modern ideal of the one who invested labor and claimed the land through reason as having the right to property. Man, without ever being able to fully decide which was "right", used violence to take as much as they could and continually fought.

This is essential in explaining the effect property has had. It not only has given man something to fight over but has harnessed human violence, once used solely for survival or against animals, and let it loose. It builds upon the worst qualities of man. Whereas, for "savages" all that was at stake was a meal or a temporary shelter, for modern man there was suddenly this notion of property, linked to domination, claiming and conquering. After all, civil society is rooted on the idea that by acquiring wealth and property, human beings will attain happiness. However, Rousseau would argue that material objects will never mean as much to us as it did for savage man, who worked with his own hands to create them, while we merely purchase them with no idea what distant processes were involved in bringing them to us. In this way, we do not take great pleasure out of them, but are still dependent on them, and made angrier when they are taken away than we are ever happy being given them. He would also suggest that the idea of constant competition destroys the loving, complacent relationships

which existed within individuals who choose to come together, and thus did not resent the forced, imposed ties our modern society has straddled us with. Finally, anything which might bring us a fuller sense of happiness, such as travel or art or education, must be financed and in order to fulfill these greater aims, we must make money and subject ourselves to the will of others. In this way, it has been decided that money and careers are how we are to achieve greater success, and few seem to understand that success does not necessarily equate fulfilment or happiness. How free are these individuals who, even if they disagree with the system, are forced to support it as they are incapable of surviving on their own?

Then, how did this civil society, based upon corralling the people within it to work for something they might not even believe, come into place? Rousseau argues it was the rich who invented it as an organized effort to subdue the poor. In this way, government was based off a theory of enslavement. (158) The rich were in a position where they had to continually defend property, in a perpetual state of war, where they had to lose all the money they had trying to protect in order to defend themselves and where the risk of life was less than the risk of property. The poor fought with nothing to lose whereas the rich had all their property at stake. The rich also realized there was no justification for holding their property and possessions. If they used force to take them, what was stopping others from using force against them in turn? Those who did not take their land by force, but rather gained their property through labor could be critiqued since there were others who worked as hard but never were given the chance to have property of their own. Thus, the rich had no reason, through force or labor and reason, to justify their defense of property. Since they had no reasoning it was difficult to goad others into fighting for the continuation of these false rights and because of the nature of competition, the rich could not depend on the other rich to help. (158) This is how they came up with the idea of government.

Rousseau clearly lays out these founding ideas of government and, by attacking them, we can thus see his arguments for how we are enslaved. The three primary focuses of government are to “protect the weak from oppression, restrain the ambition and secure for everyone the possessions of what belongs to him.” (159) However, as explored above, there is no full right of possessions or property. He cannot get it through labor, since there are others who work hard and will never achieve success and this is fundamentally unfair, or force, since others could take it from him. Thus, there is no logical reason why we should secure for everyone the possessions that belong to him if some are given much more than others. By securing this right of possessions, we are forcing the weak to remain weak. Whereas before, they had the right and opportunity to revolt and the rich were in a position of uncertainty, now, the weak are trapped in their dependence on the wealthy. With the weak now

fully submitted, there is nothing to restrain the ambitious. Rather our society encourages them as there are no limitations on possessions and no matter how much you acquire, it will never be a burden for it will always be protected. (159)

Next, there is the idea that we will “institute regulations for justice and peace to which all are obliged to conform.” (159)

Looking at our system, where, when bail is placed the rich can pay while the poor, even if innocent, wait in jail for months simply for a trial date, shows us how untrue this statement is. In this sense, how can there be justice if when one is born rich with many possessions, he has the right to keep these and give nothing away, while one born in poverty, no matter how hard he works, might never escape it? How can this be peace when the weak are continually fighting against the rich but held in a submissive, passive dependence? The rich are also able to more easily gain power and in this way set up the very regulations meant to restrain them. The powerful can manipulate the laws in place or at the very least mitigate the effects of the laws they break. Finally, there is the idea of “equally subjugating the strong and weak to mutual duties.” (159) However, the rich’s only duty is to maintain their wealth while the poor must continually struggle, both for their own survival, and unwillingly, they bend to the power of the wealthy, and thus take the workload of both. The idea of moving from internal dispute to one centralized government is simply the rich’s way of gathering power in a concentrated form. This clearly restricts the freedom of all, and divides us into a poor majority and rich minority.

The last sentence in this discourse on government is the most ironic, as civil society is meant to govern us according to “wise laws.” (159) However, these laws, put in place to protect property, are not based on good, or ethics, or the benefit of mankind but rather on our ability to acquire as much as possible and then protect what we have crudely and unlawfully taken. The idea that law will protect all members is what we sacrifice our freedom for. Yet, wouldn’t it be better to die free than live continually subjected to the will of everyone? The idea that government would repulse common enemies is interesting considering we are all common enemies within the system we’ve created where we view ourselves as individuals striving for self-interest and in no way “living in eternal concord” but rather eternal disorder, where we claw for the top. (159) Thus, government legalized enslavement of what were once free men.

Rousseau finally expands on the foundation of civil society and explores how it spread. Once there was one united force, others had to form similar unions in order to stand against them. This eventually resulted in multitudes of civil societies. However, as there was no one to apply law over them all, where once there would be conflict solely based on individual versus individual, there was now conflict country against country. (160) This brought world-wide devastation through massive wars, which prevent us from ever being able to escape back to the peace of the “savages”. The reason that conflict is

greater now is because the idea encouraged in civil society of individual superiority is then applied on a greater scale. There is no morality and ethics especially because at least for individuals, there is some love and empathy, but on a vast scale of populations, this is buried under the fundamental drive of conquest. Countries view each other the same way individuals in societies do: in terms of how they can benefit each other and in terms of competition. (161) The horror of civil society can be viewed not only in terms of enslavement but in the notion that we not only consume in massive quantities, but then kill in massive quantities. Society encourages and manipulates man into murder on an industrial scale. Thus, not only has our freedom become limited by increasing inter-dependence, by resorting to competition to motivate human beings, by turning one against the other and man into a stranger even to himself, but by dividing the human race into separate societies, willing to completely wipe each out another. We may be born free individuals but as we conform to society's expectations, as we become indoctrinated with ideas of nationalism, commercialism and industrialization, we lose the most positive qualities of the human race.

Honor Code Upheld

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