Political Science

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 **Rousseau**

Rousseau is an author who is famous for his contemporary views on human behavior and psychology. In his First Discourse Rousseau tells us we are born as utterly free individuals. Individuality precedes society. All social forms, from family to tribe to township to nation, are built up from individuals, and reducible to them. We are born with a right to live as we wish, unmolested, unconstrained, unoppressed, unexploited. The only thing setting a limit on that natural right is the self-same right inhering to every other human being. We form an understanding to respect the free individuality of others in as much as we want the same from them. In modern parlance, we might call this a right to privacy, for Rousseau was really not thinking so much of the “Rights of Man” as posited by Enlightenment philosophers as he was concerned with the right to be left alone. According to Rousseau, this mutual understanding forms a contract. What distinguishes a contract from a mere agreement or promise is that in return for enjoying some specified benefit the parties exchange/forfeit something of value. Here the quid pro quo is a duty of non-interference that each avows to others. At this point, the mutual understanding acquires a legal aspect, and is in principle, enforceable. And enforceability requires an institutionalized system/authority to which the parties accede. For Rousseau this primeval contract forms the basis for all societies and their legal institutions and government. The Social Contract is what enables people to get along in groups despite their individual difference. This social contract then translates into the concepts of amour propre and amour de soi. Both the cconcepts were given by the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Amour propre can be defined as “being aware of your persona and how others portray you”. While Amour de soi means “self love and acting on one's interests.” I agree with Rousseau and his analysis of civilization because a human's mindset is always going to prioritize themselves.

Rousseau believes that all humans are born with the good in themselves, it is the society that ruins us. Kolodny elaborates the same notions of “Amour-Propre” and how it can turn people selfish. Humans are naturally selfish in terms that they put themselves first over everything. As per Kolodny’s opinion “Rousseau suggests that society makes amour-propre inevitable. So, if amour-propre itself makes men wicked, then it would seem that men could be good only by withdrawing from, or never having entered, society. But Rousseau denies that withdrawal from society is possible or desirable.” (Kolodny, 2010, p. 168). Imagine a group of people living in a such kind of valley, without any sign of industrialization or any kind of technology, they are kind, helping each other, living freely and raising their off springs at this peaceful environment, unlike our industrialized world. It is only a vision of imagination since we live in a society where being selfish is a common thing. Another point Rousseau made was about the self-love (amour propre), at the civilized world, one cannot love himself, because with the emotions such as jealousy and arrogance, where the main passion became nothing but the desire of being better than anyone else. Rousseau claimed this desire made man forgot to love himself, which is one of the main reasons that made the state of nature the best place to live. Rousseau believes that by rremoving “Amour-Propre” from our thoughts we all would be able to become better people. His source of happiness is probably the imagination of the state of nature. It is “imagination”, because hence we cannot live in the state of nature due to the industrialization/civilization where the humans have more tendency to develop technology instead of arts and beautiful things as in his state of nature.

Rousseau further elaborates the concept of Amour De Soi. Amour De Soi features on self love but only for one’s own self. The concept according to the author is essential to every individual because self-love is a fundamental root source of happiness. When you really ‘love’ yourself, you simply refrain from doing whatever comes in path of you and happiness. Self-love shouldn’t be confused with self-obsession though. Self-love, unlike self-obsession, doesn’t mean that you value someone less than you, but it simply implies you value yourself as much as you value others, something very rare in today’s world. Rousseau believes that we have lost this concept. Self-love means you don’t allow anything to hamper your peace of mind; self-love means you don’t allow anyone to make you feel miserable; self-love means you strive to make a better you every day, every moment.

I totally agree with Rousseau’s analysis of civilization. He believes that humans are savages with intrinsic desires for praise and acceptance from others. ‘Rousseau thinks human beings in the state of nature do not possess any ethical qualities. As he explains in the Discourse on Inequality he thinks of the first humans as living in isolation, and moral understanding as developing through prolonged social interaction, which comes at a later stage of human development. He does, however, think that even in the state of nature human beings were naturally compassionate; they were naturally disposed not to harm others and to help them when in difficulty. He thinks this because compassion tends to the preservation of the species. So, I can speak of Rousseau’s savage in the state of nature as ‘good’, in the sense of being free of malice. But he or she is not noble or virtuous, since that quality requires a deeper level of ethical understanding. Human beings in the state of nature were vigorous and healthy and they were happy, in the sense that they could satisfy their immediate needs, the only needs they were aware of. Their intelligence was limited, but crucially it had the power to develop. They devised weapons and tools; they built shelters. Casual intercourse was replaced by couples dwelling together in these shelters; families developed and interacted with other families, forming a loose kind of society of what we would call hunter-gatherers. Rousseau thinks that this was the happiest stage in human development. But it had its weak points. In relationships with others, people developed a fuller self-consciousness and a sense of their own and others’ preferences. Instead of satisfying their desires with the first person they meet, they competed to be the object of a particular person’s preference; rivalry, jealousy, ill-will thus emerged at the same time as affection, gratitude, respect. So, this development involved a kind of corruption. The natural urge to self-preservation (love of self) became an artificial passion: self-love. At the same time, the beginnings of moral consciousness began to emerge from the process of forming relationships of whatever kind with other human beings. But the corruption became systematic only when agriculture and metal-working developed together. Instead of independent families responsible for their own subsistence through hunting and gathering, we find the emergence of exchange of one kind of goods for another, with the result of enrichment for some and poverty and dependence for others. Eventually these inequalities became built into durable social structures ‘civilized societies. This is what really corrupted human nature, in Rousseau’s view. Rousseau’s account is empirically inaccurate but beautifully argued; and his diagnosis of the evils of inequality is very relevant today. On the other hand, it is only in these civilized societies, that people can fully develop the intellectual and moral qualities that make up what we call a noble character and that Rousseau valued very highly. Tensions of this kind are part of the fascination of Rousseau’s thought.

To conclude, the civilization today can be made ideal as per Rousseau if all the people forego their own selfish desires and contribute fairly to work for the welfare of not only themselves but each other. Amour Propre and amour de soi involve notion of self-love but not only about one self but how other perceive us. I second Rousseau’s concepts about self-love and how every person prefers themselves and work to achieve his self-goals.

**References**

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