



Inequality Issues and Their Effects on Social Relations in Society: A Philosophical Perspective

CHIDI PAUL ORJI

University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo, Imo State, Nigeria

Abstract. Humanity is still plagued by inequality. In line with J. J. Rousseau, this article aims to investigate how social relationships in society have been impacted by existing inequality. The purpose of this paper is to show how inequality was the basis for human society's modernity, civilization, and political advancement. We argue that nature itself has produced inequality among humans since each person is born with their own unique set of potential. Despite this, we also argue that a number of measures, such as the creation of legislation and universal access to opportunities, should be taken by individuals to lessen these differences. As a result, the threat of inequality in our social relationships will change. Rousseau's theory of inequality will be discussed, with both its advantages and disadvantages noted. The subject of inequality is contextualized through the experience of Nigeria. This work's insightful analysis allows us to illustrate, within the framework of Rousseau's postulate, the tremendous threat that inequality has presented to our society.

Keywords: Inequality, Social Relations, Rousseau, Corruption

1. Introduction

A significant issue in human civilization for a long time has been inequality. This leads to chaos, corruption, greed, poverty, abuse, and a devaluation of individuals as human beings. People have started to consider their social surroundings and question what caused the disparity in society as a result. The aim of this article is to investigate the reasons for inequality and determine if natural law allows it. Rousseau tries to demonstrate that moral inequality in the modern world is abnormal and unconnected to the core nature of humanity. It is the result of a men's agreement.

According to Rousseau, human nature and how it has evolved over time to create modern man and modern society must be considered in order to assess natural

law. He does this by beginning with a fictitious natural condition that predates civilization and the development of reason. Rousseau rejects the biblical account of human creation and evolution in favor of speculating or making an informed guess as to what man may be like in this stage. He examines the mental and physical characteristics of humans and finds that they are all animals with two primary motivations: self-preservation and sympathy.

Man's perfectibility, which is essential to the process Rousseau explains, is the one thing that truly distinguishes him from the animals. In his natural state, man has few desires, little sense of right and wrong, and little social engagement. Still, he's happy. Rousseau's theory of inequality, which will be discussed in this article, holds that environmental factors and imperfections contribute to social injustice. According to him, the wealthiest keep becoming richer while the poor keep getting poorer. Inequality, which arises from want, greed, and competition, prevents people from being treated like human beings. As Charles Darwin famously stated, "survival of the fittest" dictates that only the strong and capable compete and may even trample on others in order to succeed (Gregory, 2000:223), leaving the majority of people behind. Rousseau sought to address the problems of inequality by attempting to establish a political system that allowed free and equal citizens to coexist in a society where they were the only ones making decisions. These and other concerns related to inequality in Rousseau are the concern, objective, and goal of this research endeavor. In this article, an analytical method will be employed. This strategy breaks down phrases, thoughts, and concepts into understandable groups of linked concepts (Ukpokolo, 2015:37). In order to provide a better understanding, this research will examine the main concerns, including inequality. Moreover, it will examine different philosophical perspectives on inequality and define the boundaries of equality and difference. Once the basics of inequality have been established, it will discuss the

strategies Rousseau suggested avoiding disparity in society. After the work has been examined, the conclusion will come next.

2. Rousseau's Perspective on Inequality

In his discourse on the basis of inequality, Rousseau argues that human societies are fundamentally characterized by inequality. "How can humans live freely within society?" Rousseau then queries (UNHCR, 1991). His conception of human nature serves as the foundation for his beliefs. Unlike some of his predecessors and contemporaries (like Montesquieu and Thomas Hobbes), he believes that people are naturally inclined toward goodness and that caring for oneself does not negate concern for the welfare of others. Owing to Rousseau, all men are socially equal. The notion of human rights is strongly supported by Rousseau's ideas, and his insistence on the basic freedom of humans in their unaltered state has influenced the current idea that persons have unalienable rights, independent of their position in society. He argues that inequality is the result of the artificial construction of a social structure based on private property and an organized labor system, which leads to the dominance and exploitation of some individuals by others. He is well-known and has particular viewpoints that others ought to follow and supports direct democracy, where each individual has an equal obligation to decide on the rules that govern them (UNHCR, 1991).

Since Rousseau insists that dependence is the cause of all conflict and injustice in general, it would seem at first that he wants the states to remain as independent of one another as possible. In wartime, he had doubts about the objectives of leaders. According to the UN Refugee Agency, "Since Rousseau's time until now, the world has changed significantly, and his ideals of internal unity and the independence of states feel outdated" in a globalized world characterized by mass migration, diaspora populations, and transnational social movements (UNHCR, 1991). As a result, it is unknown if Rousseau would have been in favor of organizations or global government. Rousseau had no idea what humanitarian participation was. However, he remains steadfast in his trust in humanity's innate capacity for compassion and in people's desire to ease the suffering of others. That is why Rousseau's life and work are so important today.

The first to criticize Rousseau's arguments for his theory of inequality were his fellow thinkers, especially Voltaire. Rousseau's second talk enraged Voltaire, who had already been annoyed by his first.

Johnson Bill, quoting Voltaire and Barzun, claims that Rousseau "would like his readers to walk on all four like animals, behaving as savages, and believing them to be creatures of perfection" (Johnston, 1946). Barzun, in contrast to popular opinion, maintains that Rousseau was not a primitive; in his opinion, "the model man is the independent farmer, free of superiors and self-governing" (Johnson, 1996), and that this was enough to make the philosopher angry with their former friend (Rousseau), who rejected the luxuries and comforts of a civilized life, which they believe was his unforgivable crime.

3. Inequality from a Philosophical Perspective

Since individuals began to consider the social environments in which they lived, the issue of inequality has occupied a central place in human consciousness. The problem of hierarchy, equality, and inequality is present anywhere social interactions bring individuals together. The perspectives of different thinkers on inequality will be examined in this part, taking into account both its supporters and critics. Scholars like Simon Shaapera are interested in Jean Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory and its potential applications in contemporary society. He went into some depth in his article, "Evaluating the Social Contract Theoretical Ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau: An Analytical Perspective on the State and Relevance to Contemporary Society," detailing his views. He suggests using Rousseau's ideas to enhance the way the state is now run and governed. There are several reasons why he thinks Rousseau's social contract theory is important. In addition to giving rise to the contemporary referendum and direct popular legislation, it serves as the basis for democracy and the impetus for revolt against an unjust government (Shaapera, 2014:39–40).

Although Rousseau's theory exposes a blueprint, it cannot be maintained that this model is complete enough for people or society to follow. The author pointed out that his political proposals were inadequate in the area of the unbridled will of the people, which may lead to absolutism. Despite his assertion that "all men are equal by nature," John Locke asserted that "I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of equality" (Voegelin, 1999:150). In his works, he cites a variety of circumstances as legitimate sources of inequality, such as birth, advantages received, exceptional parts and virtues, age, and virtue. Despite the fact that men may not be equal in every aspect, the iron premise that permeates the entire book is that they are equal in the protection that they receive for that disparity (Slomp, 2000:26). Stated differently, the government

will use divine justice to preserve the riches of both the rich and the poor. Both Locke and Rousseau's majority rule theories are compatible. This idea of Locke's is that there is a wealth discrepancy. This suggests that some of the levels of inequality in Locke's society are positions that Rousseau disagrees with. Rousseau argued that natural or physical disparities, as well as moral and political injustice, should never be accepted.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the social contract and its potential to enhance our society also piques Woolner's interest. He expressed his opinions in an essay titled "To What Extent Can Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract and John Berger's be said to show democracy as the best political model for a society?" Woolner claims that the democratic theory is the best theoretical framework for society since it aligns with Rousseau's ideas about the sovereign and the collective will (Woolner, 2009:308). However, in his writings, Rousseau articulated basic principles that a society must adhere to rather than outlining a strict governmental model that he considers ideal. This results in varying interpretations of his work among individuals. One of the main arguments in favor of Rousseau's contention that democracy requires a low level of security is because democracy is based on the confidence of the populace, according to Woolner. Respectable gatherings with open invitations for everyone to join and share their opinions are possible in a tiny state. Unlike Rousseau, who considers that democracy is the greatest option, Woolner understands that the aristocracy is the best type of government. This clearly demonstrates the differences between Rousseau's and Woolner's works. To illustrate its applicability to contemporary issues of inequality, Fredrick Neuhouser attempts to rebuild Rousseau's philosophical viewpoint on the legitimacy of social inequality, especially economic inequality. He focused on the reasons of inequality in the conversation, but ideas from *The Social Contract* are necessary to comprehend his viewpoint completely. The author claims that Rousseau only uses economic equality as a tool to advance people's freedom and ensure the social circumstances necessary for everyone to have access to sufficient recognition, which is a necessary element of human well-being (Neuhouser, 2008:15). He contends that Rousseau's stance is firmly egalitarian as it sets boundaries for acceptable income disparities. According to James Conyers's article "Radical Inequality, "Emphasis on Explanations," there are three types of theories about racial disparity: insufficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories (Conyer, 2002:249). Conyers

defines social equality as the state of having equal access to desirable resources, services, and social positions. The basis of Conyers's deficiency thesis is the belief that the decline in the economic, social, and political status of racial minorities is due to some kind of defect within the minority groups. Conyers attempted to group several theories under racial inequality, which he views as the single most important form of social inequality, despite the fact that the structural discrimination theories of racial disparity place the explanation of racial inequality in the structure of society rather than in people's minds, bodies, or sub-cultural groupings (Conyers, 2002:250). Rousseau, on the other hand, rejects inequality and advocates for social equality, which indicates that all people would have access to equal chances in society.

He considers inequality to be unjust. Extremely possessive and greedy, an unjust person desires more honor and property- benefits of fortune- than are reasonable. Additionally, he argues for gender inequity, arguing that children should be ruled by kings rather than women, even if both groups should be subject to political governance. Men are naturally better at exerting leadership than women, which explains this. Justice is equality, according to Aristotle, which is true—but only for those who are equal, not for everyone. Inequality is also seen as being justified, which is true- but only for the people who are unequal (Barnes, 1995:53–54). Finally, Nancy Birdsall, who also expressed interest in inequality, proposed that disparity is likely to spur growth by concentrating money among the rich, who are more likely to save and invest, as well as by giving individuals the motivation they need to put in extra effort (Birdsall, 2001:64). Income disparity, she argues, is significant if individuals and countries are worried about their relative income position. Both individuals at the bottom of the income spectrum, who may despise the wealthier, and those at the top, who may find it more difficult to appreciate their own prosperity if others are obviously less fortunate, may find absolute income disparity annoying. Reduced inequality may therefore be a goal in and of itself for certain people and cultures (Birdsall, 2001:64). Inequality is significant for three reasons, according to her:

Inequality often undermines the democratic system and might lead to an insufficient social compact. Additionally, inequality can trigger flawed economic policies that have detrimental effects on poverty alleviation, growth, and human development. The third reason is that inequality may promote self-justifying tolerance at the societal level, sustaining the current state of high inequality despite possible

negative effects on the economy and politics. It may also hinder certain forms of group decision-making and be harmful to civic, social, and political life (Birdsall, 2001:65). Instead of examining the detrimental effects of inequality like others have done, she was able to pinpoint the reasons why inequality should be significant in our society, which is what her research would concentrate on.

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Theory of Inequality and Its Effect on Society: A Critical Examination

Individuals are created equal, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and equality only exists in its most basic form (Rousseau (2007). However, when he traced the origins of inequality, he claimed that men are physically and fundamentally different. Thus, we are presented with two ways to understand the true meaning of Rousseau. In what way can a man who was once equal suddenly lose his equality? We disagree with his first premise, which holds that all men are created equal. All men are unique from birth, regardless of how similar they may appear; hence, their DNA and IQ will vary. They are not equal since they have different ways of thinking. One of them may be smarter than the other in some way. In his writings, Rousseau explained inequality by demonstrating how individuals who were initially healthy, good, and roughly equal to one another became sickly evil, intelligent, and highly unequal when they entered society. This helps to clarify the extent to which Rousseau opposes modernity and civilization.

According to Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, the worst problem in contemporary society is its tremendous disparity. (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 1999:219) Humans had the ability to be perfect in order to escape the state of nature, but in the process, they created an imbalance between demands and civilization's inability to meet them. Civil society members were badly unequal and unhappy as a result of the increasing desires brought about by civilization (Gaubu, 2003:45). So, according to Rousseau, society was terrible and corrupt. The contemporary civilization and the state of nature are clearly at odds with one another. Humans have limitless needs, according to the economist. Because men are inherently curious, they are always eager to learn more. If man had remained in the condition of nature, he would not have gained any further knowledge. Even if a man had not set off a piece of land for himself, men would surely have realized that they are not equal. In a free world, people need to be allowed to move about regardless of their socioeconomic

status or sexual orientation. This will lead to further human advancement. I do, however, still believe in Rousseau's theory of social equality, which holds that all members of society should have equal access to opportunities.

In contrast to Rousseau's explanation for the origins of inequality, property and society have only improved our standard of living. Man just needed to eat, sleep, and have sex in its natural state. But as cooperation and civilization developed, men developed new desires that governed their lives and made them reliant on others. Rousseau believed that modern inequality was rooted in this unnecessary need (Simon, 2014:39). This illustrates that while disparity has facilitated advancements in development, legislation, and living conditions, it cannot be totally eradicated from society. Since the natural state did not permit human evolution or bring out the best and worst in people, we cannot say that it is the best. Humans must evolve because only change is constant. Human development and potential would not be realized if all men had equal access to opportunities and living conditions. Several social classes will be established as a result of this development. Envy, greed, poverty, corruption, and destitution can evoke the best and worst in people.

Rousseau attempts to demonstrate that the current moral disparity resulting from a man-to-man agreement is a fabrication and has nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of man. In assessing natural law, Rousseau argues that it is crucial to take into account human nature and how it has evolved over time to create modern man and modern society. In order to do this, he begins with an idealistic view of nature that predates civilization and the development of reason. The biblical story of human origin and evolution is ignored as Rousseau attempts to conjecture or envision what man may be like at this point. In his analysis of man's physical and mental characteristics, he finds that he is an animal like all others, motivated by two primary motives: self-preservation and pity; the only thing that really makes him different from the animals is his perfectibility, which is the only real quality that makes him unique and is essential to the process Rousseau describes. In his natural state, man has few needs, little sense of right and wrong, and no social interaction, but he is content. However, because of his perfectibility, which allows him to adapt to and be shaped by his environment, the human race is not static. Naturally, natural disasters like earthquakes and floods force people to live everywhere on Earth, necessitating the acquisition of languages and other skills. As the human intellect develops, man begins

to have a variety of new demands as he grows more socially conscious.

The evolution of reason and society are related, but this relationship is a bad one. With males starting to live in communities, amour-propre (self-love and self-esteem) replaces pity and self-preservation. Men compare themselves to others as a result, believing that they need to control others to be happy. The establishment of property and the division of labor were the first steps toward moral inequality. The affluent are able to control and exploit the poor because of property. The rich deceive the poor into forming a political party in an attempt to put an end to the dangerous and unstable relationships between the rich and the poor, which first creates a warlike condition of armed conflict. The poor consider that this development will ensure their freedom and safety, but in fact, it only reinforces the existing relations of dominance by enacting laws that create inequality. When physical inequality is replaced by moral disparity, which is now more or less unrelated to the fundamental character of man, Rousseau highlights the various stages of society.

Rousseau's social contract opposes liberalism, which has the individual's individuality at its core and supports collectivism or communitarianism instead. He sees society as increasing in inequality from the deception of the wealthy to its final stage, tyranny, or the unjust domination of everyone by one man. This development is not inevitable, but it is very likely to occur. A social contract proposed by the wealthy from a political social order aims to resolve the terrible conflict in the transition from the state of nature to civil society. The main idea of such an argument is that society as a whole usurps a person's capacity to exercise independence or free choice in the context of the social compact through a variety of actions. However, this analysis ignores both Rousseau's historical context and the fundamental goal of his writing, which was to explain how a man, who is by nature an individualist, can simultaneously want the security and benefits of living in a civil society and be able to do so without having to give up his freedom. Rousseau presents a beautiful natural state and places all the blame on social structures, the state, education, and cultural organizations. The rich are misleading the poor with this deal, leading them to believe that they will be protected and their freedom will be preserved by approving the establishment of a political society. Rousseau's argument about inequality has left us with a paradox.

Society is to blame for all of our issues; civilization's progress is the cause. Even Rousseau's radical stance

has flaws that affect all of our rights to the public will. How do we know that the collective will is always the right and authentic will? Rousseau rarely acknowledged that the unbridled power of the public will may lead to absolutism in the community. According to a saying, total power corrupts entirely. Critics assert that "it is always right to grant the phase when we ask for a solution because the general will is always the disinterested will of society for the common good." The interests of the entire community may not always be served by the communities. The latter only takes into account the common interest and is the sum of the individual wills; however, if the pluses and minuses of the same will are subtracted, they cancel each other out. This is often a stark contrast. Humans are naturally self-centered and can only consider their own needs before acting. It may be for certain individuals, particularly those who are forced to give up their rights, but it is most definitely not for everyone. Any demand for something in return is nullified once freedom is abandoned, along with all rights.

The idea that the general will is the common good of all men is actually what protects the individual because, according to Rousseau, the individual and the collective are inextricably linked and cannot be separated without returning to the state of nature. However, in the sense that every man has the ability to have a specific will that is incompatible or even at odds with the general will that he possesses as a citizen, Rousseau did acknowledge the existence of such individual (private) wills (Appadorai, 1974:27). All of the philosophers who examined at the underlying principles of society have felt the need to go all the way back to the state of nature, but none of them have done so. Rousseau asserts in *The Confessions* that his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* is the work in which his views are most boldly and audaciously expressed (Rousseau, 2007:4). He picks up on the issue of the state of nature and responds to Hobbes and Locke, who both made the idea the focal point of their political teachings. Rousseau accepts Hobbes' anti-Aristotelian claim that humans are not political animals by nature, and he rejects Hobbes' description of the state of nature, arguing that Hobbes and others are projecting onto natural man the vices and psychological traits of man already present in society. In contrast to Hobbes' claim that the state is a battle of all against all, Rousseau believed that man was inherently good in this pure state of nature because he was self-sufficient and nature provided for his needs, with his wants never surpassing his needs (Bloom, 1987:23). Rousseau believed that man was an immoral, even foolish, animal in his natural state

rather than the magnificent savage that is popularly believed, and that he lived alone and rarely depended on women to raise his children.

Rousseau acknowledges that man does not always know what he wants or what is best for him in order to aid in the formation of the social contract. He thus needs the direction of experience and wisdom in the form of these organizations. If this is done, public illumination leads to the union of will and understanding in the social body: the whole is raised to its maximum power and its components are made to work perfectly together. There must be a legislator for this. Rousseau thus portrays a figure who is not a descendant of popular sovereignty and is therefore neither superior (a master) nor inferior to the community; he attempts to determine the collective will by influence and, consequently, by deduction that is solely motivated by the preservation of individual liberty and freedom. In addition to all of these, we might grant man moral liberty, which is the only thing that truly makes him the master of himself. Following a law that we establish for ourselves is liberty, while merely he is a slave. Rousseau does not deny the individual the right to free will; in fact, he considers that man will use the same free will that he uses to make individual decisions to choose the general will in the social contract. Rousseau contends that justice develops through the concept of the civic state, so that man forms a civil community or state and learns to respect the freedom of others living in that community, which is self-protective; this moral intelligence man develops is more advantageous to individual freedom and autonomy than his very same (absolute) freedom in the state of nature.

5. Conclusion

Given that he was concerned not only with happiness or unity but also with the vital nature and role of ethics within the conduct of politics, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made an extraordinary attempt to secure individual freedom in an attempt to create a rational social environment, and as a result, his philosophy reached its pinnacle. Many of Rousseau's concepts were put into reality during the latter, worsening stages of the revolution. According to Rousseau, the primary goal of the state is to free the individual from the ambiguities, contradictions, and hypocrisies of conventional society and even civil society after the contract. The state is regarded as the source of community, freedom, and morality. Hobbes' and Locke's ideas in *The Leviathan* and the two treatises on government are very different from Rousseau's. He made an attempt to grasp human nature, which is akin to comprehending man in his unadulterated

natural state. He seeks to show how individuals have changed over history and how it has influenced society presently. In his first analysis, Rousseau looks at man in his natural state. In accordance with Rousseau, following a natural experience, he projected that the basis of inequality lay in a social compact between people. Before the development of private property, which brought about inequality and required the establishment of an organized or civil society, his state of nature initially guaranteed the freedom and a pleasant living for the residents. He understood that property was the source of injustice and inequality, which ultimately led to a person losing his freedom. Rousseau believed that the two concepts of pity and preservation are what drive man in his natural state.

Rousseau proposed that in order to restore man's freedom and liberty in civil society, property had to be governed by the general will, which was the universal law. He considered participation and people sovereignty to be fundamental elements of liberty, and he held that both the state and the individual were simultaneously sovereign and necessary for the establishment of a just social and political system. All things considered, Rousseau was promoting a simple and unrestricted way of life for everyone, one in which there would be no hardships, no war, and no need to worry about hunger or suffering. Since we live in a world full of advancements in the twenty-first century, we have progressed far beyond that, and living a life that is similar to how it was originally lived in the state of nature will not work in our modern society. Therefore, property and society have encouraged human inequality in addition to enabling a greater standard of life. However, in contemporary societies, inequality is the consequence of human development, which has corrupted man's character and made him subject to property and norms, both of which encourage a new, unwarranted kind of inequality called moral inequality. Rousseau's thesis remains relevant today. It remains the sole source of support for the state's survival and the creator of the goals it can pursue. In order to accomplish this, this article shows that inequality is a reality in our society and cannot be eradicated because it has led to the establishment of an orderly society through the enactment of laws. Eliminating cruelty, educating the oppressed, and acting based on human reason rather than our emotions are all necessary to prevent abuse and the negative consequences of inequality.

References

- Appadorai, A. (1974). *The Substance of Politics*. Oxford University Press.

- Barnes, J. (1995). *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*. Oxford University Press.
- Birdsall, N. (2001). Why Inequality Matters: Some Economic Issue in *the Journal of Ethics And International Affairs* 15 No. 2.
- Bloom, A. (1987). *Rousseau in History of Political Philosophy*. Eds, Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey.
- Conyers, J. (2002). *Racial Inequality: Emphasis on Explanation Western Journal of Black Studies*, 26 No. 4.
- Gaub, O. (2003). *Introduction to Political Theory*. Macmillan India Limited.
- Gregory, C. (2000). The Survival Of The Fittest and the Origin of Social Darwinism. *Journal of the History of Ideas*. University Of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ukpokolo, I. (2015). *Methodology of Research and Writing In Philosophy A Guide*. Kairos Publishing
- Johnson, B. (1946). *Rousseau's Critique*. Yale University Press.
- Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (1999). *A History of Political Thought: Plato To Marx*. Prentice Hall Limited.
- Neuhouser, F. (2008). *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love*. Oxford University Press.
- Rousseau, J. (2007). *Discourse On Inequality* Translated By G. D. H. Cole. Academy Of Dijon.
- Simon, S. (2014). "Evaluating the Social Contract Theoretical Ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau: An Analytical Perspective on the State and Relevance to Contemporary Society" *Africa Journal of Political Science and International Relation*. Vol 9.
- Slomp, G. (2000). *John Locke and the Political Philosophy Of Glory/* Macmillan Press.
- United Nation Refugee Agency. (1991). *The Relevance of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Wadsworth
- Voegelin, E. (1999). *History of Political Ideas: The New Order and Last Orientation/*University of Missouri Press
- Woolner, T. (2009). "To What Extent Can Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract and John Berger's Be Said To Show Democracy As The Best Political Model For A Society" *Leading Undergraduate Work In English Studies* 1 No. 2.