

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ROUSSEAU'S *DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGINS OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN* AND CONCEPTS IN PERSON-CENTERED COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT. *In his second discourse, Jean Jacques Rousseau claims that human beings were most happy and free in their instinctive natural state and that social institutions are responsible for the corruption of humankind. For counselors and their clients, the goal is to maximize this original human nature through person-centered psychotherapy, that encourages the concepts of self-actualization, autonomy, and empathy.*

BIOGRAPHY

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was born in Geneva, Switzerland. He was a philosopher and writer whose works had tremendous influence in the areas of literature, existential philosophy, education, psychology, and political ideology. "Together with Montesquieu, Hume, Smith, and Kant among his contemporaries, Rousseau has exerted the most profound influence on modern European intellectual history" (Wokler, 1995, p. 1). Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men*, also known as the second discourse, was one of his most important written achievements that also include *The Social Contract*, *Emile*, and his autobiographical piece, *The Confessions*.

Although Rousseau's influence on psychology is less known, he was a great supporter of personal exploration and emotional expression and gave much credence to subjective experience and freedom (Abelson, 1968). He himself possessed some eccentric behaviors, possibly due to pervasive episodes of rejection and feelings of paranoia. "But it is Rousseau's explicit contention that the strangeness of his life and personality is precisely what made it possible for him to uncover the strange hidden truth about human nature" (Melzer, 1990, p. 1).

ANALYSIS

Jean Jaques Rousseau's second discourse asserts that the primary source of evil among civilized human beings is inequality. In this discourse he sets out to find the source of inequality primarily through analyzing the evolutionary process of the civilized individual. As Rousseau retraces the steps from the savage to the civilized individual, he discovers that it is the origin of society that is fundamentally responsible for the corruption of human beings.

Rousseau believes that human beings are naturally good in that they are spontaneously compassionate to others and possess an absolute love of self. Natural man, defined by Rousseau as the original and savage being, exists as one with the world in a state of equilibrium. This being is solitary, healthy, happy, and free (Cranston, 1983). By nature, this individual has an inner source of satisfaction that arises out of an independent and self-sufficient existence (Melzer, 1990).

Natural man has no society, ownership of property, or division of labor. The person is happy and free because he or she is not dependent on anyone else for his or her livelihood, whereas the civilized person is. The natural being is economically independent, has few needs, and no moral problems. According to Rousseau (1755), natural man exists as one with the world and is prevented from doing evil because of the "calm of the passions and the ignorance of vice" (p. 99).

In order to analyze the origins of civilization, there must be an explanation of the elements of a civil society. The author has sifted out three major components of the discourse that Rousseau regarded as fundamental in the development of civilization. They are socialization, competition, and politics.

Socialization occurred with the emergence of nascent society, the time natural man experienced a departure from solitude and an introduction to cohabitation. Families emerged from this as did the development of settlements and domiciles. As communication and language progressed, so did the process of socialization. It was from these advances that communities began to form.

Although families were, in a sense, considered "little communities," it was not until other families saw the need to have settlements that property was introduced. This took the form of residences, farmlands, and even tools. The "right to property" was the catalyst for the second element, competition. Competition not only led to ideas of possessiveness and materialism, it also produced much fighting, which further created a division of labor. With additional increases in socialization, competition encouraged people to develop desires to be superior, a concept Rousseau refers to as *amour-propre* and explained later in the article.

The third major element in the origins of civilization is politics. Politics arises from a quest for power and is created as a result of the fighting competition generated. Those who dominated became the rulers, which led to divisions in society, such as strong-weak, rich-poor, and master-slave.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVILIZED MAN

The introduction of socialization, competition, and politics had a tremendous effect on humankind. A question of whether the civilized person can be truly happy was reflected in these elements of civil society and eventually led people to develop the characteristics of pride, dependency, conformity.

Pride: The civilized person tends to live in the opinions of others, evident in the occurrence of what Rousseau referred to as *amour-propre*, or pride (Cranston, 1983). However, this is not pride in the positive sense. *Amour-propre* refers to a reflective arrogance that is in part responsible for human inequality. Pride did not exist in the state of nature because natural man did not have any need to reflect in comparison to other individuals (Wokler, 1995). As society continued to develop, natural man gradually lost his sense of internal satisfaction in place of pride. He discovered the need to value the opinions of other social beings.

Rousseau (1755) explains:

Each began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself; and public esteem came to be prized. He who sang or danced the best; he who was the most handsome, the strongest, the most adroit or the most eloquent †became the most highly regarded, and this was the first step towards inequality and at the same time towards vice. (p. 114)

Pride not only leads to relationships of unequals, it also brings about a competition for control and superiority among individuals. Socialization becomes characterized by superior-inferior relationships as pride continues to be a source of prejudiced and critical opinions and feelings, causing continual strains in human relationships (Dent, 1989). Since pride is in part an antecedent for decline in human relationships, genuine happiness is difficult to achieve with others. The opinions of others become a source of anxiety (Starobinski, 1988), as civilized beings essentially derive their sense of existence externally and learn to rely less on their own internal sense of happiness. Pride causes them to be dissatisfied with themselves and their luxuries, always wanting to be better and have more.

Dependency: A second characteristic of the civilized person is dependency. Natural man was interdependent with the world. In contrast, the civilized person depends on others. Rousseau saw this dependency as very unworthy for human beings. It is appropriate for individuals to be interdependent with others as this contributes to individual growth. However, Rousseau objects to relationships where self-worth is assessed in terms of submission to others (Dent, 1992, p. 88).

The dependency Rousseau speaks of is a factor for injustice. This injustice is "the most immediately intelligible and powerful of Rousseau's accusations against civilized humanity" (Melzer, 1990, p. 59). Injustice and oppression divide civilization, producing artificial inequalities such as wealth, supremacy, and social class. Civil society, due to pride and competition, accelerates the progression of such inequalities because these individuals have a perpetual and seemingly endless desire to accumulate these unnatural possessions.

Further, Rousseau sees oppression as a corruption of the soul. This very idea introduces a psychological dimension to the discourse, apart from the political and societal issues. Rousseau argues that the human soul or personality of natural man was naturally unified. This counters the classical philosophical and theological contention that it is "composed of two disparate and possibly antipathetic elements: reason and passion" (Melzer, 1990, p. 20). However, Rousseau maintained that human emotion is the single and natural element of the soul. It is his perspective that through feeling, not reason, an individual has a deeper and more natural sense of existence and is able to move closer to self-actualization (Melzer, 1990). Reason is a response to oppression and continues to drive people into unequal relationships. Individuals become more alienated, moving further away from human emotion and the unified personality.

Conformity: The third characteristic of the civilized person is conformity. Conformism is the "tendency of the individual to let himself be absorbed in the sea of collective responses and attitudes, with the corresponding loss of awareness, potentialities, and whatever characterizes him as a unique and original being (May, 1983, p. 107). Individuals are inclined to rely on groups as civilization grows more complex. A gathering of individual alliances result from the need for security. While competitive society becomes increasingly advanced, the conflict between dependency and dominance proliferates, promoting an unjust relationship that the helpless has with the controlling. People, whether weak or strong, will desire to conform to the dominant group.

For Rousseau, the state or government is the primary group created by the people as a response to dependent and conformist behavior. Although this criticism had tremendous impact politically that followed for several generations, its influence on the psychology of individuals is just as important.

TRAITS OF NATURAL MAN

Three primary traits which Rousseau ascribes to natural man are self-love, freedom, and pity. It is through these natural human traits that the counselor can begin to see similarities with the person-centered concepts of self-actualization, autonomy, and empathy.

Self-love/self-actualization: Prior to amour-propre, earlier defined as an arrogant sense of pride, there is amour de soi, translated as self-love (Cranston, 1983). For Rousseau (1755), self-love is the "sole motive of human action" (p. 111). It is an inherent and constant impulse that preserves, protects, and maintains one's welfare and life (Wokler, 1995; Dent, 1989; Cranston, 1983).

Melzer (1990) provides another view of Rousseau's concept of self-love:

Observation seems to show that we seek, for example, the health and good condition of our bodies, and more generally, the preservation of our lives not merely as a blind reflex, not from fear of death, not out of love of †pleasure, but from an attachment and affection for ourselves. (p. 36)

Melzer further notes:

... in the fundamental inclination of "self-love," the self one truly senses and loves is not one's actual, individual self with all its peculiarities and defects, but one's perfected nature, one's essence as a human being, which calls to and attracts one. In other words, the classical conception of "self-preservation" involves "self-actualization": one seeks not merely to avoid dying, but to live, to be, and more, to be fully, which means to be entirely the kind of thing that one is, to actualize all of one's potentials, to fulfill one's nature, to realize completely, the Idea, the formal and final cause that is the ground of one's being. (p. 37)

This idea of self-love is very similar to the person-centered theory which states that self-actualization is rooted in the biological nature of the organism and is universal to humankind (Rogers, 1963; Patterson, 1985).

Rogers (1977), in his observations of many different species, concluded:

Whether we are speaking of this sea plant or of an oak tree, of an earthworm or of a great night-flying moth, of an ape or a man, we will do well to recognize that life is an active process, not a passive one. Whether the stimulus arises from within or without, whether the environment is favorable or unfavorable, the behaviors of an organism can be counted on to be in the direction of maintaining, enhancing, and reproducing itself. (Rogers, 1977, p. 239)

Just as Rousseau (1755) felt that self-love is the "sole motive for human action" (p. 111), Rogers (1977) believed that the "substratum of all human motivation is the organismic tendency toward fulfillment" (p. 242). Individuals not only maintain themselves biologically, they also enhance themselves psychologically by engaging in self-exploration, increasing self-awareness,

and finding personal meaning in their lives. In order to do this one must learn to rely on the internal self, developing trust in the inner organismic processes (Rogers, 1977).

The process of person-centered counseling can empower individuals to strive towards self-actualization by providing the conditions that make such growth possible. A counselor who conveys genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding creates an atmosphere of self-exploration (Rogers, 1961). Such a climate stimulates people to trust, accept, and depend on themselves, traits Rousseau pictured in the original being. Like natural man, individuals have a growth tendency towards self-actualization, the inclination to achieve his or her potential.

It can be concluded then that self-actualization is an inherent trait and represents the ideal psychological characteristic for all humankind. Moreover, there are traits that self-actualizing individuals have in common with natural man: a feeling of closeness to nature, an unconditional self-regard, an inner freedom, and an indifference to material comforts (Rogers, 1961, 1977). The goal of psychotherapy, then, is to help people develop their own potential for self-actualization.

Freedom/autonomy: Rousseau asserts that natural man possessed the natural trait of *liberte'*, or freedom. Freedom is an individual's natural possession of self-sovereignty (Dent, 1992). The original being lived in the absence of authority and had both the insinctual power and free will to choose a path towards self-preservation. This theory as well as the notion of natural man as an isolated, solitary, and self sufficient individual has many psychological implications.

The immediate implication pertains to the value of independence. Rousseau's natural man is able to experience the total environment and rely on it in a harmonious and well balanced way. This individual is naturally capable and responsible for every aspect of his or her life, one who is truly self-reliant. This is similar to the person-centered concept of autonomy. Personal autonomy is gained through several objectives that correspond to those natural man possessed: gaining an awareness of experience, developing an internal sense of evaluation, and acquiring a sense of personal responsibility (Gilliland, James, & Bowman, 1989).

On the contrary, Rousseau's portrait of the socialized person is one who possesses a low level of experiential awareness and a poor internal sense of evaluation. Behaviors, feelings, and attitudes are determined by society and not the individual. Autonomy is a very difficult thing to achieve for those who conform to others.

The idea of natural man as a solitary being also has great influence, not necessarily on isolated living, but on the inclination towards introspection. Natural freedom values one's individuality, inner self, and intimate and emotional world (Melzer, 1990).

Carl Rogers (1967), on the experience of learning to be free, describes individuals who "accept and even enjoy their own feelings, who value and trust the deeper layers of their nature, who find strength in being their own uniqueness, [and] who live by values they experience" (p. 43). Rogers further states that as a person becomes "more self-aware, self-accepting, and self-expressive, less defensive and more open, he finds that he is at last free to change and grow and move in the directions natural to the human organism" (p. 50).

Pity/empathy: Rousseau stated that natural man possessed the virtue of pity. Pity is a natural and intense feeling of concern as well as aversion at seeing another member of the same species suffer or experience distress (Wokler, 1995). In addition, natural pity is the foundation of morality and the source of other significant attributes such as kindness, generosity, and mercy (Starobinski, 1988; Cranston, 1983).

Rousseau (1755) explains:

It is very certain that pity is a natural sentiment which, by moderating in each individual the activity of self-love, contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species. It is pity which carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. (p. 101)

What is more interesting is how this natural pity is relevant to the person-centered concept of empathy. For natural man, a similar process of identification occurs as one fully understands the distress that another goes through. The feelings of suffering are very familiar because of similar experiences of being hurt or in pain. As a result, this individual is better able to recognize and respond in a spontaneous and compassionate manner to the feelings of others. Natural man empathetically shares the suffering of the individual and attempts to help by alleviating the distress as if the pain was his own (Dent, 1989).

In describing Rousseau's concept of natural pity, Dent (1989) observes its relevance in how individuals value each other. Pity creates an equal bond between people, one that does not involve power or control. Furthermore, this bond can only exist between people who are free and open to one another. A compassionate response, for example, is one's direct and internal self-expression. Therefore, "the bond of mutual recognition of value is the disclosure of each our own proper inward desire and disposition. Thus, to value others is, in fact, inherent to the nature of our own selfhood" (p. 138).

The helping relationship may in fact have its roots in the natural virtue of pity. Empathy is similar because in order to manifest pity and provide help, natural man must identify with the pain that his fellow man has. Likewise, the counselor must accurately understand the client's experience and further be able to communicate this understanding as a way of helping (Rogers & Stevens, 1967).

Although the source of this concept may be natural, empathy involved in the counseling relationship is much more involved. The counselor not only communicates awareness to the person, he or she can also reflect meaning in the client's experience. Furthermore, Rousseau described pity as spontaneous, whereas empathy is an acquired skill involving "intense, continuous and active attention to the feelings of others" (Rogers, 1951, p. 29).

Though the extent of empathy may be greater than that of pity, each is based on an intense experiential understanding that one has for another. Moreover, the help that follows such understanding is equally essential. Most significantly however, whether it is spontaneous pity or accurate empathy, is that each conveys the value of importance that one individual has for the other.

CONCLUSION

This article describes related concepts between Jean Jacques Rousseau's philosophy of natural man and Carl Roger's theory of person-centered psychotherapy. It is important to note the similar foundation in each of their theories: that people are essentially good (Rogers, 1961; Rousseau, 1755). Rousseau, even in 18th century Europe, did not feel the solution was for people to return to isolated living, requiring only the basic needs for survival and existence. Rather, he supported the restoration of original nature in a way that promoted emotional expression, self-exploration, and individuality.

The author's interpretation of the discourse says there is a call for people in today's society to maximize original human nature as much as they can, in order to be truly happy and free as Rousseau describes. Yet, for Rousseau, individuals cannot truly be happy and free unless they

are in their natural state. Person-centered theory does however correspond to the virtues that natural man possessed and is a way people can fully obtain self-love, personal freedom, and natural pity. The implications for person-centered counselors are merely to bridge Rousseau's natural man with our clients. This can be done by understanding these closely related concepts of nature and empowering our clients to move towards self-actualization, allowing them to feel autonomous, and providing accurate empathic understanding.

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