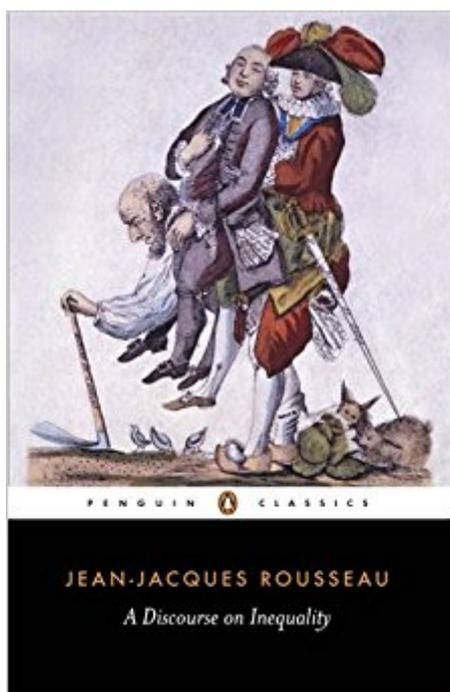


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# A Discourse On Inequality (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

In *A Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau sets out to demonstrate how the growth of civilization corrupts man's natural happiness and freedom by creating artificial inequalities of wealth, power and social privilege. Contending that primitive man was equal to his fellows, Rousseau believed that as societies become more sophisticated, the strongest and most intelligent members of the community gain an unnatural advantage over their weaker brethren, and that constitutions set up to rectify these imbalances through peace and justice in fact do nothing but perpetuate them.

Rousseau's political and social arguments in the *Discourse* were a hugely influential denunciation of the social conditions of his time and one of the most revolutionary documents of the eighteenth-century. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Discourse on Inequality* is one of the most shockingly original writings in the history of thought - so original Samuel Johnson famously argued Rousseau could not have been serious, and many, including admirers, have agreed. Its argument that people are born free and pure only to be corrupted by society flies in the proverbial face not only of philosophy but of civilization itself. It was

all the more shocking during the Enlightenment, when society, not least via Rousseau's many fellow philosophers, was more self-congratulatory than ever. His depiction of our fall from grace is spellbinding and hard to put down; those who think philosophy is dry and boring will truly be surprised. This is essential for anyone even remotely interested in philosophy, politics, or history.

This, the "Second Discourse" of Rousseau, is a must read for anyone interested in Western philosophy, politics or sociology. Rousseau explores the basis of inequality, and divides it into two fundamental elements: Natural Inequality - those components that are God-given, such as size, speed, health, latent intelligence. Societal Inequality - those components that are driven by the drive for more material goods, more control, and leisure. Rousseau notes the general happiness that simplicity brings, and that the evolution of civilization has exacerbated the inequalities of man. Rousseau also presages the writings of Darwin by touching in a scientific way on elements of evolution, social behaviors, and comparison of humanity and various wild species. Fascinating and thought provoking read.

A classic expose of how concentrated wealth oppresses human rights, how property rights led to inequality. It also advances the critical distinction between human nature (self-love and compassion) and a corrupt society's perversion of that nature (egoism). Some parts are not easy reading.

This is a book I picked up and began reading. It was probably the most interesting book I have ever read. It was my introduction to the Classics texts and remains my favorite.

A classic treatise on the emerging social, economic and political inequalities in 18th century France, which would ultimately lead to the French Revolution, the Fall of the French Monarchy and the Emergence of the French Republic.

Rousseau's insights are remarkable. In an age before the sciences of Anthropology and Sociology were even imagined, the author reconstructs the evolution of human culture through the sheer force of his reasoning. The intervening centuries have almost universally validated his ideas. His one shortcoming was not realizing that man is fundamentally a social animal, evolved from a long line of social animals. But that is a fairly minor oversight within the overall scope of the work. Unfortunately, this is a horrible translation. I've read a lot of Penguin Classics and generally find them quite good, but this one is a real struggle. Find a better translation if you can.

A historic document with still validity in our days, where many of the reasons appointed by Rousseau as the causes of the inequality between men, are deeply felt today in our societies. Sure, the limitations of the scientific knowledge at the time (1757), coupled with the intransigence of the Catholic dogmas in what regards some possible evolutionary view, restricts in great measure the range of Rousseaus' thought. In Rousseau's view, these inequalities should be ascribed to the modern spirit of emulation, which distorts the primeval feeling of self-fulfillment found on the very primitive societies of yesterday, where there was happiness among its members, thus turning human happiness today and at the time of Rousseau as a function of one's attainment vis-à-vis the other's, which is something very conspicuous in our lives of today, where we seem to live totally in function of prescribed standards of consumption and leisure. A necessary reading for the student of the social facts.

Man, I love Rousseau, the paradoxes he creates in his delightful, almost breezy musings are just so refreshing to read compared to the dull, monolithic stuff that usually passes for 18th century political thought. This actually reminds me a lot of Heidegger's thinking, where he seems to want you to dive into the things that just don't make sense instead of cheaply skirting around them with analytics

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