**Question: Discuss Rousseau’s views on Equality.**

**Answer:** In his works, Rousseau discusses two types of inequality: natural, or physical inequality, and ethical, or moral inequality. Natural inequality involves differences between one human's body and that of another—it is a product of nature. Rousseau is not concerned with this type of inequality because he claims it is not the root of the inequality found in civil society. Instead, he argues [moral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) inequality is unique to [civil society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society) and is evident in differences in "wealth, nobility or rank, power and personal merit." This type of inequality is established by convention and is therefore preventable. It is not inherent to humans but rather that it occurs due to socialization and improper use of reason.

Rousseau's arguments about equality are framed within his understanding of the Social Contract. He differs with Hobbes in his view of human nature, and sees primitive society, or the "state of nature," as one where cooperation and harmony were prevalent, and equality existed among men. For Rousseau, man in his state of nature was essentially like other animals, driven by two key motivating principles: pity and self-preservation. He existed without the concepts of good and evil, right or wrong, had few needs, and was essentially happy. This equality, although a natural right of man, could not survive for long.

People started moving from one place to another, making contact with other people, and forming small groups or elementary societies, leading to the creation of new needs, and man begin to move out of the state of nature toward something very different. Language was developed, which in turn contributed to the development of reason. With the establishment of civil society, and especially through the institution of [private property](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_property), which Rousseau views as the original source and basis of all [inequality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_inequality), property ownership and wealth - with its direct relation to political influence or public esteem – started determining the level of freedom or unfreedom for the individual, and society became unequal. This inequality was moral inequality – the unnatural form of inequality created by human beings.

Because the institution of society could not be reversed—man could not revert to a state of nature—society found itself in a position of conflict: man was irrevocably social and innately equal. Rousseau presents the project of reconciling these two aspects of man’s nature through the formation of political and social conditions in which man’s sociability would not go against his natural right of equality. For Rousseau himself, this meant equality before the law and the right to make the law by all those who are subject to it – in other words, the ideal of democracy. Rousseau resolved any tension between equality and liberty by distinguishing the concept of natural liberty from that of moral liberty. In civil society, man gives up his natural liberty in favor of an unnatural, moral liberty. Rousseau believed that when humanity was most free, individuals were most equal. Democratic society, according to Rousseau is the closest form of government to man in his state of nature. As opposed to monarchical or aristocratic governments, in a democracy, citizens are subject to the law and not to other men.

To conclude, Rousseau firmly held that man was naturally good and was corrupted only by his own delusions of perfectability and the harmful elements of his capacity for reason. Inequality was not natural to him, and it resulted out of from existing social arrangements and hierarchy. The remedy was to arrange an ideal, egalitarian society around a social contract which emerged out of the good of the community and the welfare of the whole.