

PS 154 – Romanticism and Revolution: The Political Philosophy of Rousseau

The world has not seen more than once or twice in all the course of history... a literature which has exercised such prodigious influence over the minds of men, over every cast and shade of intellect, as that which emanated from Rousseau between 1749 and 1762.

– Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (1861)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a native of nearby Geneva, was one of the deepest and most influential critics of the Enlightenment, and of the liberalism and capitalism that we have inherited from it. He is also one of the most complex thinkers of the modern age, standing at once on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, appealing to ancient thought and practice while at the same time paving the way toward postmodernism, and appearing to be both a profound champion of democracy and a precursor to totalitarianism. This course will examine this intriguing thinker through a study of the *First and Second Discourses*, *The Social Contract*, and *Emile*.

Course Format and Requirements:

By far the most important requirement of the course is that you complete all assigned readings *carefully and before class*. Rousseau's writings are as powerful and inspiring as any works of philosophy, but many of them are also – by design – difficult to penetrate and to see as a whole. For that reason, you should take the time to read the material slowly and carefully, taking notes about what seems important or intriguing and about what you don't fully understand. These notes will also help immensely in generating useful and stimulating class discussion.

The class will be conducted in seminar format, and you should plan on participating every single day. High-level participation requires that you grapple with the central ideas and arguments of the readings ahead of time, and bring to class any questions or confusions you might have. Note that class participation is not simply a “fudge factor” in determining your grade; a key component of the course is learning to articulate your thoughts/questions and to engage in our conversation about the issues at hand. You can expect to be called on if you do not volunteer. For those who feel nervous about talking in class, I encourage you to come see me early on so that we can develop strategies for effective participation.

Attendance is required; more than two absences will affect your participation grade, and absence from more than a third of the classes will automatically result in a failing grade. Students arriving late will generally be counted as absent.

The written requirements of the course include one short response paper (2-3 pages, double-spaced), one medium-length paper (5-6 pages), and a choice between a longer final paper (8-10 pages) or a comprehensive final exam.

For each of our class sessions, one or two students will be responsible for writing a 2-3 page response paper; this student will also help to lead class discussion that day. While your essay should show that you have understood the material, please resist the temptation to simply

summarize the reading. Instead, explore a specific idea that intrigues you, find a genuine puzzle in Rousseau's argument, or devise a question that does not have a readily apparent answer. Above all, you should have a clear *thesis*, and you should consider *counter-arguments* to that thesis. For example, if you're criticizing Rousseau, you should construct and respond to a strong defense of his argument, and if you're defending him, you should construct and respond to a strong criticism. (If you can't imagine a serious counter-argument to your thesis, then your thesis is probably trivial.) Response essays are due at the beginning of class and will not be accepted late.

The medium-length paper will be analytical in nature and won't require any research beyond the course readings; it will focus on the *Discourses* and/or *The Social Contract*. The paper will be due in class on Thursday, June 10; topics and guidelines will be handed out on Monday, May 31. Late papers will be penalized by 5 percentage points for each day they are late.

The longer, final paper too will be analytical in nature, but you will be responsible for devising your own topic. If you choose to write this paper instead of taking the exam, you must submit a short (1 page) paper proposal by Monday, June 21, and meet with me to discuss it, and the paper will be due on the same day as the exam (June 30).

The final exam will be comprehensive and will consist of short answer and essay questions.

All written assignments will be given a numerical grade on the following scale:

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	59 and below

Grades will be determined as follows:

Response paper	15 %
Medium-length paper	25 %
Final paper or final exam	35 %
Class participation	25 %

Tufts University's policy on academic honesty will be strictly adhered to. For more information on plagiarism and the proper citing of sources, see:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/writingresources/plagiarism.asp>

Required Texts:

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

Course Schedule and Readings:

- 5/19 Introduction
- 5/20 *First Discourse* and “Preface to *Narcissus*” (pp. 2-28, 92-106)
- 5/21 *Second Discourse*, Preface, first half of Part 1, Notes 9, 16 (pp. 124-44, 197-204, 218-21)
- 5/24 *Second Discourse*, second half of Part 1, Note 15 (pp. 144-60, 218)
- 5/27 *Second Discourse*, Part 2 (pp. 161-88)
- 5/28 *Social Contract*, Book 1 (pp. 39-56)
- 5/31 *Social Contract*, Book 2 and Book 4, chapters 1-2 (pp. 57-81, 121-25)
Paper topics handed out in class
- 6/2 Excursion to Charmettes
- 6/3 *Social Contract*, Book 3, chapter 15, and Book 4, chapter 8 (pp. 113-16, 142-51)
- 6/4 *Emile*, Preface and Book 1 (pp. 31-74)
- 6/7 *Emile*, first half of Book 2 (pp. 76-124)
- 6/10 *Emile*, second half of Book 2 (pp. 124-63)
Papers due in class
- 6/11 *Emile*, Book 3 (pp. 164-208)
- 6/14 *Emile*, first section of Book 4 (pp. 211-55)
- 6/16 *Emile*, middle section of Book 4 (pp. 255-315)
- 6/17 *Emile*, end of Book 4 (pp. 315-55)
- 6/21 *Emile*, first section of Book 5 (pp. 356-406)
- 6/24 *Emile*, middle section of Book 5 (pp. 406-50)
- 6/25 *Emile*, end of Book 5 (pp. 450-80)
- 6/28 Review
- 6/30 **Final Exam**