

In Dialogue with Humanity

Rousseau and
The Social Contract

by

Leung Mei Yee

Ho Wai Ming

Yeung Yang



➤ Part I

- Rousseau's life and works

➤ Part II

- The *Discourses* – Critique of society and civilization

➤ Part III

- *The Social Contract*

Part 1

Rousseau's life and works...
and the people who influenced him

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)



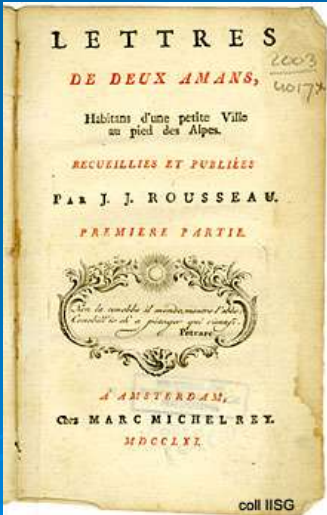
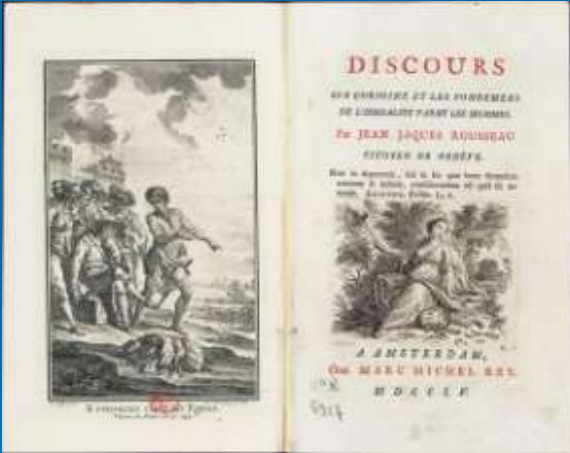
- One of the most influential yet controversial figures of the Enlightenment

- He was the most portrayed character of the 18th century apart from Napoleon.



(Jean-Jacques
Monney)

➤ Best known to the world by his political theory, he was also a well admired composer, and author of important works in very different fields.



Major works

Novels

- *Julie: or the New Héloïse* (1761)
- *Emile: or, on Education* (1762)

Autobiographical works

- *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782)
- *The Confessions* (1782-89)

Essays

- *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750)
- *Discourse on Inequality* (1755)
- *Discourse on Political Economy* (1755-56)
- *The Social Contract* (1762)

Major Works

➤ Letters

- *Letters on French Music* (1753)
- *Letters on the Elements of Botany* (1780)
- *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758)
- *Letters written from the Mountain* (1764)

➤ Music

- Opera: *Le devin du village* (1752)
- *Dictionary of Music* (1767)

- Born in 1712 in Geneva
 - Small Calvinist city-state surrounded by large, predominately Catholic nations;
 - Republic in the midst of duchies and monarchies
- Was brought up by his father since his mother died in childbirth

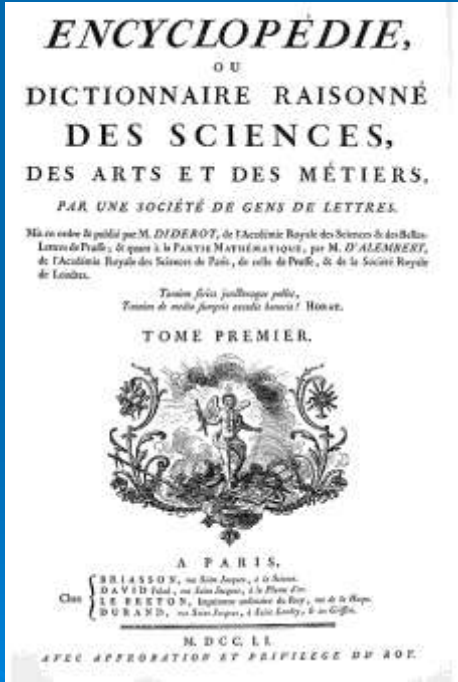


The house where Rousseau was born at number 40, place du Bourg-de-Four

- Left Geneva at the age of 16
- Converted into **Roman Catholic** by the charming Baroness de Warens who took care of his education and became his lover



➤ 1742 Paris, befriended with Diderot, editor of the great French *Encyclopédie*, and entered the circle of *Philosophes* of the Enlightenment



➤ Secretary to French Ambassador in Venice, 1743 – 1744



“Everything depends entirely upon politics...A people is everywhere nothing but what its government makes of it.” (*Confessions*)


- 1750 *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, a prize-essay for the Academy of Dijon, in counter-current to the enlightened opinion on progress and advancement of human culture.

“Everywhere, the arts, letters, and sciences are spread like garlands of flowers round the iron chains by which [man] are weighed down”

- 1752, successful performance of his opera before King Louis XVI. Decline the offer of a lifelong royal pension.



LE DEVIN
DU VILLAGE.
INTERMÈDE,
REPRÉSENTÉ A FONTAINEBLEAU
DEVANT LE ROY.
Les 18 & 24 Octobre 1752. & à PARIS,
PAR L'ACADÉMIE ROYALE
DE MUSIQUE,
Le Jeudi premier Mars 1753.



AUX DÉPENS DE L'ACADÉMIE.
PARIS, Chez la V. DELORME & FILS, Imprimeur de l'Académie, rue du Foin, à l'Image St. Genestive.
On vendra des Livres de Poésie à la Salle de l'Opéra.
M. DCC. LIII.
AVEC APPROBATION ET PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

- 1755 *Discourse on Inequality*
- 1756 – 1762, Retreat to country-side, debates with Diderot, Voltaire and d'Alembert



➤ Fruitful retreat, publication of :

➤ 1761

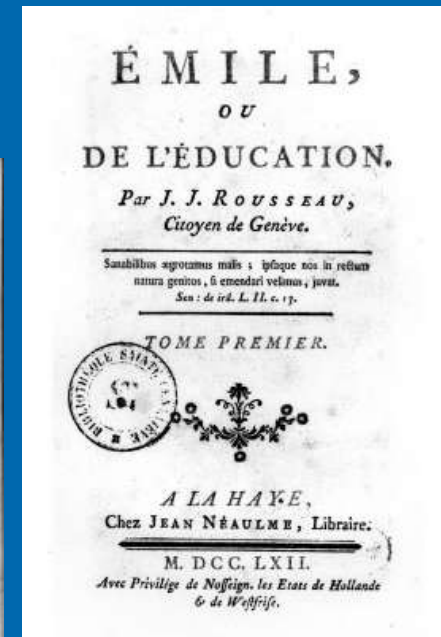
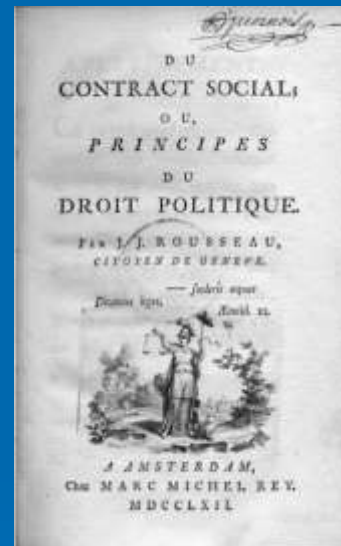
- *Julie, or the New Héloïse*, novel about frustrated love in its conflict with duty

➤ 1762

- *Emile, or on Education* a plan of education according to Nature rather than art
- *The Social Contract*, about how the state could serve as the instrument of freedom instead of destroying it.

Wokler Rousseau, 15-18

- 1762 Suppression of *Emile, or on Education* and *The Social Contract* in France and Geneva; flight from Paris



- 1765 drafted a *Constitution for Corsica*

- 1766 invited by David Hume to England, manifestation of symptoms of paranoia



- 1768 Married Thérèse Levasseur, his companion since 1745
- 1767 Returned to France in hiding. Undertook to desist from publishing his writings



- 1768-1778 Autobiographical writings: *the Reveries of the Solitary Walker, The Confessions*
- 1770 return to Paris
- 1771 Essay on *the Government of Poland*
- 1778 Died at Ermenonville

The tomb of Rousseau
in the Panthéon, Paris



Part 2

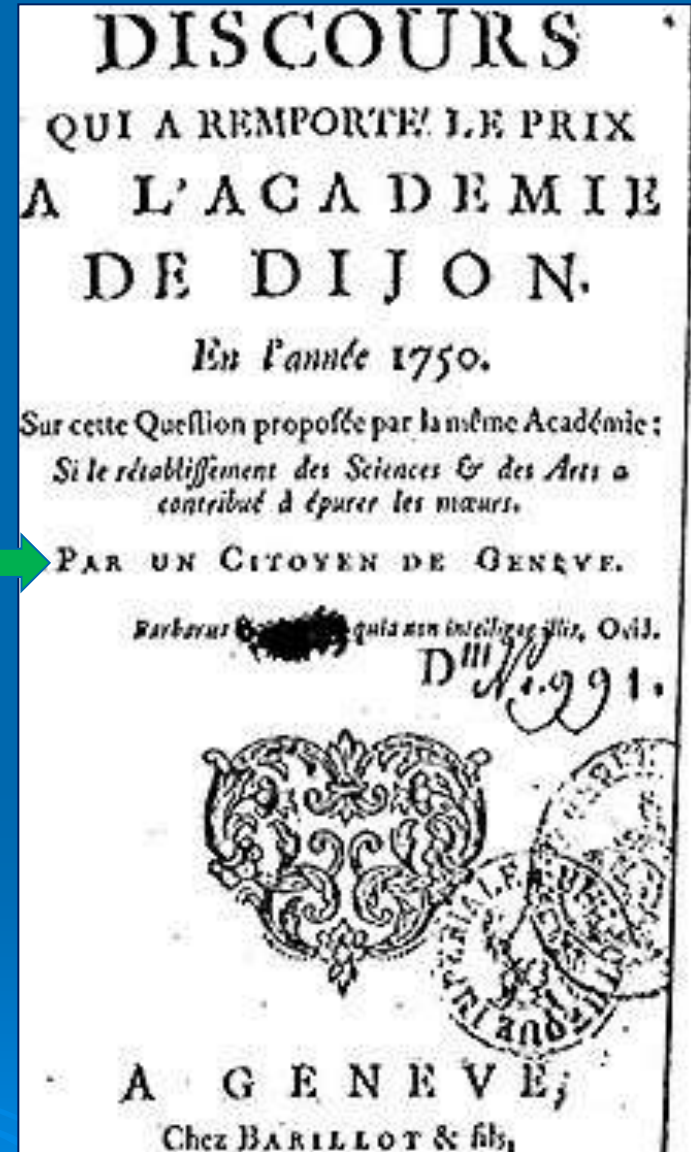
The *Discourses* – Critique of society
and civilization

Enlightenment as an intellectual movement

- Enlightenment: awakening from dark centuries of superstitions and ignorance
- Campaigns against religious idolatry and political injustice
- Belief in Progress: the capacity of mankind's moral improvement by the use of reason and advancement of learning and science

Has the rebirth of the arts and sciences contributed to the purification of morals?

Discourse on the Sciences and Arts (1750)



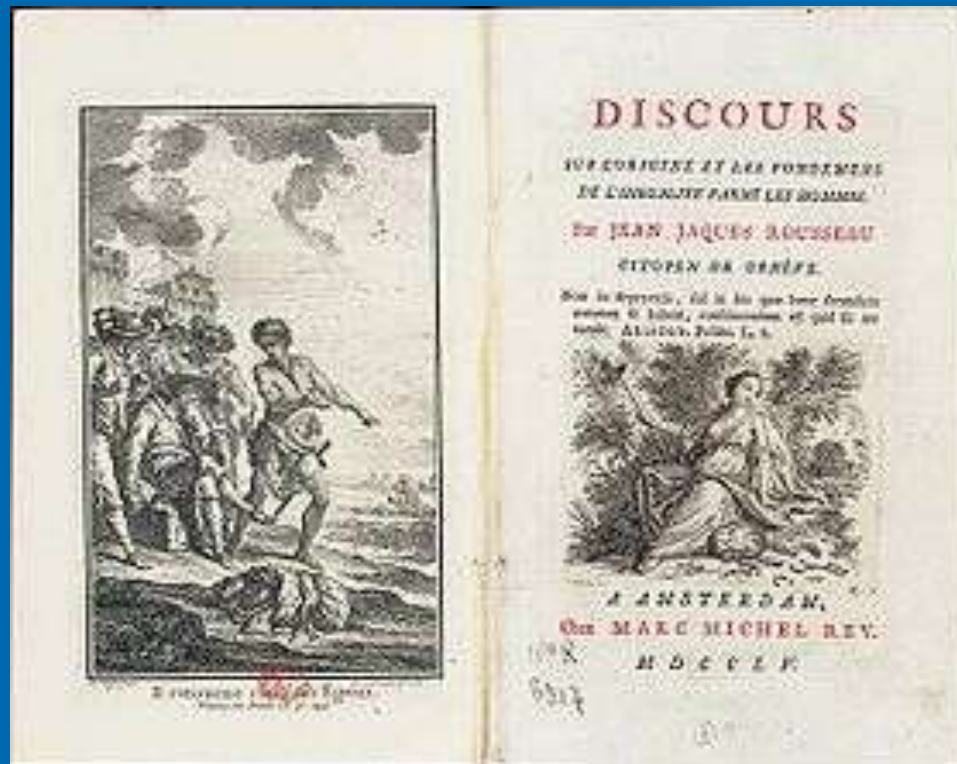
“...one will not find that human knowledge has an origin that corresponds to the idea one likes to conceive achieve regarding it. Astronomy was born of superstition; Eloquence of ambition, hatred, flattery, lying; Geometry of greed; Physics of a vain curiosity; all of them, even Ethics, of human pride.”

Discourses on the Sciences and Arts, Part II

“While our sciences are vain with respect to the objects they pursue, they are even more dangerous in the effects they produce. Born in **idleness**, they feed it in turn; and the irreparable loss of time is the first injury they necessarily inflict on society.”

“The abuse of time is a great evil. Other, even worse evils follow in the wake of the Letters and Arts. One of these is **luxury**, born, like they [i.e. Letters and Arts], of men’s **idleness** and **vanity**. Luxury is seldom found without the sciences and the arts, and they are never found without it [i.e. luxury].”

Discourses on the Sciences and Arts, Part II



What is the source of inequality among men and is it authorized by natural law?

Discourse on Inequality
(1755)

“... wandering in the forests without industry, without speech, without settled abode, without war, and without tie, without any need of others of his kind and without any desire to harm them, perhaps even without ever recognizing any one of them individually, subject to few passions and self-sufficient, Savage man had only the sentiments and the enlightenment suited to this state, that he sensed only his true needs ...”

Discourse on inequality, Part I

“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say, *this is mine*, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors Mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: Beware of listening to this impostor; You are lost if you forget that *the fruits are everyone’s and the Earth no one’s.*”

Discourse on inequality, Part II

“Such was, or must have been, the origin of Society and of Laws, which gave the weak new fetters and the rich new forces, irreversibly destroyed natural freedom, forever fixed the Law of property and inequality, transformed a skillful usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjugated the whole of Mankind to labour, servitude and misery.”

Discourse on inequality, Part II

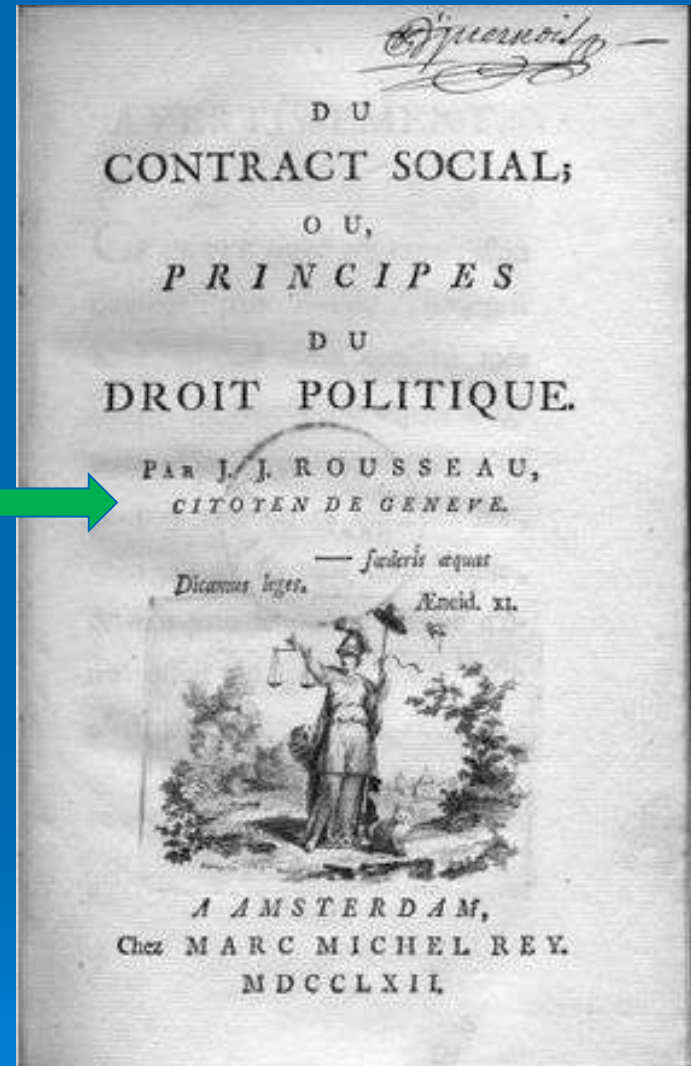
“Let’s us begin by distinguishing the moral from the Physical in the sentiment of love. The Physical is this general desire that moves one sex to unite with the other; the moral is what gives this desires its distinctive character and focuses it exclusively on a single object, or at least gives it a greater measure of energy for this preferred object. Now it is easy to see that the moral aspect of love is a factitious sentiment; born of social practice, and extolled with much skill and care by women in order to establish their rule and to make dominant the sex that should obey.”

Discourse on inequality, Part I

- Criticism from Voltaire:
- ‘No one has employed so much intelligence to turn us men into beasts. One starts wanting to walk on all fours after reading your book.’

Part 3

The Social Contract (1762)



The Social Contract

➤ “An apology of society”

Peter V. Conroy Jr. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

➤ “Major constructive political writings to reduce the inconveniences of politics”

Gourevitch, ‘Introduction’, *The Social Contract and other later political writings*

➤ “A moralist incursion in the field of civil institution”

B. de Jouvenel, *Essai sur la politique de Rousseau*

The Social Contract

- Small treatise: ‘the most systematic of his works, the one which most consistently proceeds in the form of sustained, rigorous argument. It is therefore also in many respects the most difficult.’ (Gourevitch, p. XV)
- So many literary references: Plato, Machiavel, Bodin, Hobbes, Grotius, Pufendorf... (Derathe, OC,CII)
- Four books; the first two more theoretical

Beginning of Book I, *The Social Contract*

- “ I mean to inquire if, in the civil order, there can be any sure and **legitimate rule** of administration, **men** being taken **as they are**, and **laws** as **they might be...**
- Legitimacy of political power
- Civil order according to men as they are (instead of “what they ought to be”)
- Changeable Laws

- “As I was born a **citizen** of a **free State**, and a member of the **Sovereign**, I feel that, however feeble the influence my voice can have on public affairs, the **right of voting** on them makes it my **duty** to study them: and I am happy, when I reflect upon **governments**, to find my inquiries always furnish me with new **reasons** for **loving** that of my **own country**.”

Legitimacy of political power

- Contract: Legitimate political rule is not based on either a divine or a natural title to rule, but on the **consent** of the ruled
- Political right: Not natural right, not by nature but by convention.

- “Man is born free; and every where he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. **How did this change come about?** I do not know. **What can make it legitimate?** The question I think I can answer.” (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 1)

Natural Right: Family

- **Family** – the most ancient and the only society that is natural.
- “... and even so the children remain attached to the father only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved ... If they remain united, they continue so **no longer naturally**, but voluntarily; and the family itself is then maintained only by convention.” (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 2)

Natural Right: The rule of the Strongest

- Unstable – The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master
- Deprived of morality – There is no room for *right*, since it is fully reduced to force and strength
- Master-slave relationship – This is contradictory to nature of human beings

“To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man”

The social contract, Book I, Chapter 3-5

The Social contract

- “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and **protect with the whole common force** the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, **while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.**” (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 6)
- *The Social Contract* provides the solution to this fundamental problem

The Social contract

- There is but one law which, from its nature, needs **unanimous consent**. This is the social compact; for **civil associate is the most voluntary of all acts**. Every man being born free and his own master, no one, under any pretext whatsoever, can make any man subject without his consent... (*The social contract*, Book IV, Chapter 2)

The social contract

➤ Total alienation of each man, together with all his rights, to the community, but by respecting the principles of

➤ Reciprocity

➤ Equality

➤ Freedom

Reciprocity

- The undertakings which bind us to the social body are **obligatory only because they are mutual**; and their nature is such that in fulfilling them we cannot work for others without working for ourselves...the **general will**, to be really such, must be in its object as well as its essence; that it must both come from all and apply to all... (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 4)

Equality: No body has a natural authority on any others

- as each gives himself absolutely, the conditions are the same for all... (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 6)
- As the citizens, by the social contract, are all equal, all can prescribe what all should do, but no one has a right to demand that another shall do what he does not do himself.... (*The social contract*, Book III, Chapter 16)

Freedom: freedom under self-imposed law

- Natural liberty and unlimited right to everything
=> civil liberty and moral liberty
- Man is the true master of himself, not slave of his impulses

➤ What man loses by the social contract is his **natural liberty** and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is **civil liberty** and the proprietorship of all he possesses...we must clearly distinguish natural liberty, which is bounded only by the **strength** of the individual, from the civil liberty, which is limited by the **general will**...

- We might, over and above all this, add, to what man acquires in the civil state, **moral liberty**, which alone makes him truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty... (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 8)

Gain through social contract

- At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a **moral and collective body**, composed of as many members as the assembly contains of votes, and receiving from this act its **unity**, its **common identity**, its life and its will.

(The social contract, Book I, Chapter 6)



Gain through social contract

- Finally, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has. (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 6)



Gain through social contract

- This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of *city*, and now takes that of *Republic* or *body politic*; it is called by its members *State* when passive, *Sovereign* when active, and *Power* when compared with others like itself. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of *people*, and severally are called *citizens*, as sharing in the sovereign power, and *subjects*, as being under the laws of the State. (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 6)

Republic > res publica (public matter)

General Will

The essence of the social compact:

- “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common **under the supreme direction of the general will**, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.” (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 6)

General Will

- “...the general will alone can direct the State according to the object for which it was instituted, i.e., the **common good**: for if the clashing of particular interests made the establishment of societies necessary, the **agreement** of these very interests is what forms the **social tie**...” (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 1)

General Will

- The general will aims at the common good and is hence contrasted with private interest:

“There is often a great deal of difference between the **will of all** and the **general will** ... the former takes private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills ...” (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 3)

General Will

- Freedom or constraint?
- “...whoever **refuses to obey the general will** shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be **forced to be free**; for this is the condition which, by giving each citizen to his country, secures him against all personal dependence.” (*The social contract*, Book I, Chapter 8)

General Will

- Freedom or constraint?
- Law liberate man from the dependence on the will of another, by substituting for it dependence on impersonal necessity (Gourevitch, p. xx-xxi)
- “The worst of law is still preferable to the best master...”

Sovereign/ sovereignty

- A new concept coined in the 16th century against the division of authority in feudalism
- The need of an ultimate authority in the decision-making process of the state and in maintenance of order
- Early theorists: this authority should be exercised by a king/ monarch
- Locke and Rousseau: the state is based on **a formal or informal contract** of the citizens => **popular sovereignty**

Sovereignty

- “What, then, strictly speaking, is an act of Sovereignty? It is **not** a convention between a superior and an inferior, but **a convention between the body [politic] and each of its members**. It is **legitimate**, because based on the social contract, and **equitable**, because common to all; **useful**, because it can have no other object than the general good...” (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 4)

Sovereignty

- The sovereign, having no other force than the legislative power, acts only through laws, and since the laws are nothing other than authentic acts of the general will, **the sovereign can act only when the people is assembled.** (*The social contract*, Book III, Chapter 2)
- Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all. (*The social contract*, Book III, Chapter 15)

Sovereignty

Sovereign vs. Government


- “The moment the people is legitimately assembled as a sovereign body, the jurisdiction of the government wholly lapses, the executive power is suspended, and the person of the meanest citizen is as sacred and inviolable as that of the first magistrate; for in the presence of the person represented, representatives no longer exist.” (*The social contract*, Book III, Chapter 14)

Sovereignty

- Sovereign vs. Government
- “This does not mean that the commands of the rulers cannot pass for general wills, so long as the Sovereign, being free to oppose them, offers no opposition. In such case, universal silence is taken to imply the consent of the people.” (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 1)

Sovereignty

➤ Sovereign vs. Government

“...for, seeming to avail himself [the prince] of his rights, he finds it very easy to extend them, and to prevent, under the pretext of keeping the peace, assemblies that are destined to the re-establishment of order; 

.../...



Sovereignty

- “With the result that he takes advantage of a silence he does not allow to be broken, or of irregularities he causes to be committed, to assume that he has the support of those whom fear prevents from speaking, and to punish who dare to speak...” (*The social contract*, Book III, Chapter 18)

Sovereignty

- Sovereign vs. Government
- “If then the people promises simply to obey [the imposed particular wills], by that very act it dissolves itself and loses what makes it a people; **the moment a master exists, there is no longer a Sovereign**, and from that moment the body politic has ceased to exist.” (*The social contract*, Book II, Chapter 1)

Rousseau hat mich zurecht gebracht ...

Ich lerne die Menschen ehren ...

Rousseau has corrected me ... I learned to honor
man ...

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), unpublished remarks on his
Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime
(1762)

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