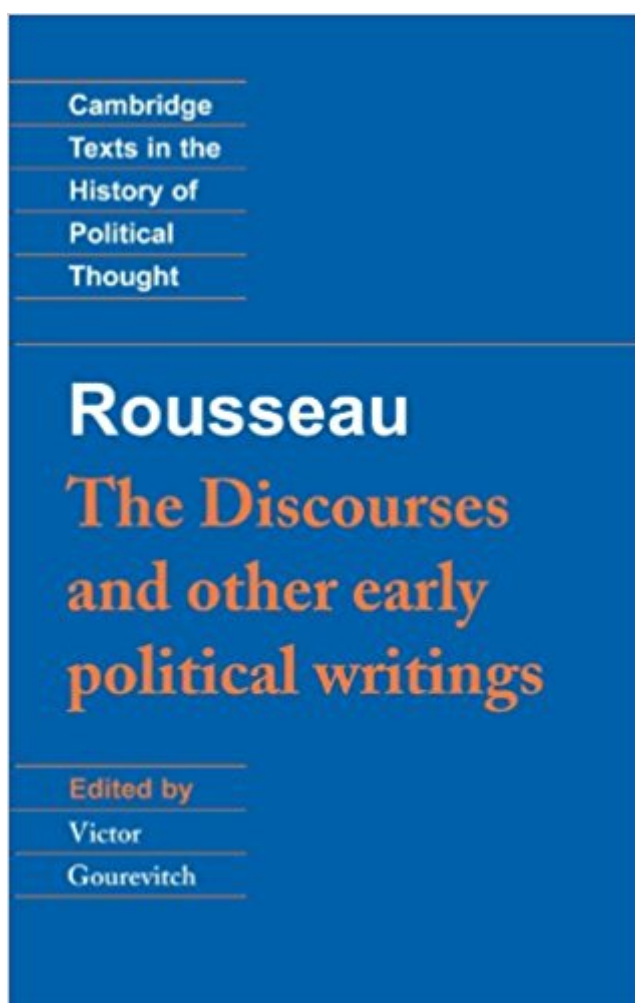


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Rousseau: 'The Discourses' And Other Early Political Writings (Cambridge Texts In The History Of Political Thought) (v. 1)



Synopsis

The work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is presented in two volumes, which together form the most comprehensive anthology of Rousseau's political writings in English. Volume I contains the earlier writings such as the First and Second Discourses. The American and French Revolutions were profoundly affected by Rousseau's writing, thus illustrating the scope of his influence. Volume II contains the later writings such as the Social Contract. The Social Contract was publicly condemned on publication causing Rousseau to flee. In exile he wrote both autobiographical and political works. These volumes contain comprehensive introductions, chronologies, and guides to further reading, and will enable students to fully understand the writings of one of the world's greatest thinkers.

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"...Gourevitch serves Rousseau and hence students very well." Pamela K. Jensen, Review of Metaphysics

The work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is presented in two volumes, together forming the most comprehensive anthology of Rousseau's political writings in English. Volume I contains the earlier writings such as the First and Second Discourses. The American and French Revolutions were profoundly affected by Rousseau's writing, thus illustrating the scope of his influence. This volume contains a comprehensive introduction, chronology and guide to further reading, and will enable

students to fully understand the writings of one of the world's greatest thinkers.

Love reading Rousseau. Without making this an analysis of his works I will just state that anyone who wants to understand where some of the roots of our liberties and freedoms come from MUST read this.

This is the best translation of Rousseau that I have ever read. The translation for this series genuinely reflects Rousseau's humor and sarcasm, making the political philosophy a joy to read. Highly recommend this series!

This is a solid translation. It contains the two critical dialogues of Rousseau's early career, as well as other minor works that reveal more corner of Rousseau's ever-interesting imagination. Furthermore, the work is supplemented by a great introduction, both on the themes of the work and on its terminology. Indeed, the volume contains a sort of glossary before the translations, speaking to each of the most important words within these works. One complaint: I don't like the physical, material aspect of this translation (or Cambridge in general). These sharp blue books have a tough and unyielding 'soft' cover, which really makes holding the book open difficult.

good classic writings of a very important person in our history.

Too many writings on it.

B1 refers to the 'the Discourses', B2 refers to the "Social Contract" by Rousseau "Man are born free, but everywhere they are in chains." What a glorious line! Who would not want to shake off the chains and be free? The question is, what kinds of freedom is Rousseau talking about, and where is the source of the evil chain? Rousseau talks about two kinds of freedom, the freedom to act and the freedom to enjoy the fruits of action, both of which serve the goal of the preservation of life. The freedom to act is called "free will"; it differentiates men from animals and is directed by one's desires. In the state of nature, the "free will" of men allows them to find creative sources of subsistence as the environment changes, and each is free to enjoy the fruits of their labor because he has labored independently. In civil society, however, men must labor together and share their produces. Under these new conditions, "free will" will lead men to excessive desire which result in the usurpation of the others' freedom to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The loss of the freedom to

enjoy puts the life of every member of the society under danger, and hence, in the civil society, "free will" has contributed negatively to its goal of the preservation of life. The chain of life, therefore, is in fact "free will", which was beneficial for the preservation of life in the state of nature, but detrimental to this goal in the civil society. Hence, for the civil society to achieve its end of preserving life, each individual must give up their "free will" and succumb their freedom to act to the general will of the society.

Survival-the Goal of Life Rousseau frequently repeats that preservation of life is the most fundamental goal of man's actions. He writes, "Man's first sentiment was that of his existence, his first care is that for his preservation." (B1, p161) And, "His (man's) first law is to attend to his own preservation, his first cares are those he owes himself..." (B2, p42) As the first "care" and "law" of life, and the "first sentiment", the desire for survival is the singular progenitor to all other desires in life, and in the state of nature, will always trump all other interests in life. One might say that there are higher goals in life beyond mere survival. Indeed there are, however, if one does not survive, those higher goals of life could not exist either. The mechanism by which men strive for survival is to act according their "free will". Rousseau writes, "I see in animal nothing but an ingenious machine to which nature has given senses in order to wind itself up and, to a point, protect itself against everything that tends to destroy or to disturb it. I perceive precisely the same thing in the human machine, with this difference that Nature alone does everything in the operations of the Beast, whereas man contributes to his operations in his capacity as a free agent..." (B1, p140) Here, Rousseau again emphasizes that the "ingenious machine" of animals and men share the goal of protecting their beings, however, the means to achieve this goal is different in that man are equipped with a different mechanism, their free will, to achieve this end. This different mean will turn out to be men's advantage of animals in survival.

Free Will-the Advantage On the same page as the previous quote, Rousseau goes on to point out the disadvantage the Beast, which does not have free will. He writes, "...as a result the Beast cannot deviate from the Rule prescribed to it even when it would be to its advantage to do so... Thus a Pigeon would starve to death next to a Bowl filled with the choicest meats, and a Cat atop heaps of fruit or of gain, although each could very well have found nourishment in the food it disdains if it had occurred to it to try some..." (B1, p140) The Pigeon could not adapt to new environments as conditions changed since it has been programmed to act in only one way. This restricts Pigeons to places where they can find certain kinds of food. If their population grows to the extend that their restricted locales can no longer supply all the Pigeons with sufficient food, many pigeons will die away; if a natural disaster destroys all their habitats, then all pigeons will have to face death. On the other side, since men have "free will", they are not limited by their current conditions. Unlike the pigeon, the savage man could eat whatever he comes across

and learn what food is beneficial or poisonous through experience. Rousseau writes, "Men...raise themselves to the level of the Beasts' instinct, with this advantage that each species has but its own instinct, while man perhaps having none that belongs to him, appropriates them all, feeds indifferently on most of the various foods which the other animals divide among themselves, and as a result finds his subsistence more easily than can any one of them." (B1, p1350) The freedom must not only be limited to what kinds of food savages could eat but also their flexibility regarding lodging, sleeping and everything else that contribute to their survival. This flexibility allows men to survive anywhere and during any environmental changes; it consequently allows men to spread their seeds to the whole world. This is how "free will" contributes to the preservation of lives, and one must not misunderstand preservation as static-preservation is both directed toward those who are living and those who are young and those who have not been borne. Human's unique ability to preserve itself insures that it can grow and multiple.

Free Will and Desires

Free will allows men to out-survive other animals, but free will itself is not an action but a process; it is the specific acts that a man wills that allow him to adapt. To will one action instead of another is to prefer one solution above another, and to have preference is to have desires for one thing more than another. For the purpose of the preservation of life, in the state of nature, a man must desire for what is to his survival. Hence, the goal of desires is to direct one's actions to what is beneficial for his survival. (Animals also have desires, however, the difference is: while both a man and a cat desire to eat, only the man can desire about how to eat.) Rousseau writes, "I could...show that in all Nations of the world, progress of the Mind proportioned itself exactly to the needs, which Peoples received from Nature, or to which circumstances subjected them, and consequently to the passions, which inclined them to satisfy these needs." (B1, p142) These "passions" of men, are the desires of men. Hopefully, through the "progress of Mind", a man can learn more and more about what is to beneficial for his survival needs through experiences and make better actions based on free will. There remains, however, a gap between desire and what is beneficial for the body. There is an apple, but how will a person actually learn that he should desire the apple? This takes place with the mechanism of pleasure and pain, which God equipped man with. Although Rousseau does not talk about it directly, but for his system to work, pleasure and pain must be the markers of experiences, distinguishing between what is good for one's survival and what is not. For example, when a hungry man eat three apples after he has not eaten for three days, his agony of hunger will decrease; he has learnt that apples will make him feel less pain, and hence, the marker of pleasure is mentally attached to the image of an apple. Rousseau writes, "The passions, in turn, owe their origin to our needs, and their progress to our knowledge." (B1, p142) Indeed, the real form of this knowledge is

an index mental association between events and pleasures and pain. Pleasure as the indication of goodness works out very well in the state of nature when everyone only has command over the limited goods which he gains through his own labor, however, the indications cause troubles in the civil society. The Change A change in environment and condition brings upon a challenge never before faced by men-their independent labor can no longer guarantee their survival. It might be that the weather used to allow hunting during all seasons, but suddenly winter turned dreary and cold and hunters must hunt enough during summer so that there would be enough food reserved for winter. This doubling of work, sadly, was too much work for one man. Forced by their memory of hunger from the last winter, the hunters begin working together with one another. They must now act uniformly. Maybe one wants to hunt at 5pm and the other wants to hunt at 4pm, but there can only be one time. Hence, the two have succumbed their original freedom and force to their union. As Rousseau writes, "Now, since men cannot engender new forces, but only united and direct those that exist, they are left with no other means of self-preservation than to form, by aggregation, a sum of forces that might prevail over those obstacles' resistance, to set them in motion by a single impetus, and make them act in concert. (B2, p49) This decision to bind together, like every other decision man makes, was based on man's ability to choose based on desires his "free agent".

The Problem From the perfect state of natural freedom, man freely chose to form society after they have been forced by necessity to abandon their old way of independent life. This lose of independence, however, is horrible because it made it easy for one group to usurp another's freedom to enjoy his labor. Rousseau writes the misery of the civil life, "Now, I should very much like to have it explained to me what kind of misery there can be for a free being, whose heart is at peace, and body in health. I ask, which of the two, Civil life or natural life, is more liable to become intolerable to those who enjoy it? Almost all the People we see around us complain of their existence, and some even deprive themselves of it as far as they are able, and the combination of divine and human Laws hardly suffices to stop this disorder..." (B1, p150) This misery arises out of cooperation, but cooperation itself is not misery. Maybe one person before the union liked to hunt at 5pm and the other wants to hunt at 4pm, but the necessity for them to choose one time is not bad because that is a necessary cost for them to work together, and if they did not work together, both would die of hunger. The problem is with free will. Although free will was fully beneficial in the state of nature, but back then, everyone was independent, and one's freedom to enjoy the fruits of labor is guaranteed. Now, a man's free will is still acting according to the signals of pleasures and pain, however, the fruits of people's laboring is no longer free from the intervention of others, or, in another word, some are now able to interfere with other's fruits of labor, and they will interfere for the pleasures of

life. Free Will is Detrimental to Life in The Civil Society

In the state of nature, every savage was fully independent and gained what they needed for the preservation of their lives, however, in the state of civil society, no one is independent anymore, and all must work together for common survival. As people work together, there must be a leader who will give directions when there is no time for voting, and this leader will have more power than others in the group. This power might include control over members' money/goods contribution (tax) to the group and the management of the distribution of group's produces of labor. The leader, however, still has his free will, which follows the signals given off by desires and pleasures. In one case, the leader perhaps has great liking for eating apples, so he tries to get as many apples as he could. As he acts according to his free will, he takes away from his members the apples that actually resulted from their labor. Although in the short term the leader is happy, but not only has he deprived others of their necessities of life, he has also endangered his own future necessities which might be deprived by future leaders who might usurp his power. Anger arise amongst people, and the group is ruled by force, Rousseau writes, "Besides, regardless of how they painted their usurpations, they realized well enough that they were only based on a precarious and abusive right, and that since they had been acquired solely by force, force could deprive them of them without their having any reason for complaint." (B1, p170)

A community where everyone tries to use force to cheat as much as he could out of the public coffer is bound to be detrimental for the preservation of life, which desires were suppose to serve for in the first place. Desire is achieving the opposite of its true ends because free will was only appropriate for the state of nature. In the natural state, one could only get as much apple as one's labor could obtain, and the danger was always not getting enough rather than too much, therefore, desires were designed to direct people to get as much apples as possible while they could. In the civil society, people can get the fruits of others' labors if they are in a power position to do so, and hence, the constant drive for satisfying desires became hurtful for all. Desires and free will are therefore the cause of the misery of civil life. Rousseau writes of this misery, "Without needlessly drawing out these details, everyone must see that since ties of servitude are formed solely by men's mutual dependence and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to subjugate a man without first having placed him in the position of being unable to do without another; a situation which, since it does not obtain in the state of Nature, leaves everyone in it free of the yoke, and render vain the Law of the stronger." (B1, p159)

What makes the problem of desire even worse is that when men came to work together, they begin to see differences between each other, and these differences contribute to who must lead and who must follow. With experience, one learns that those who lead obtain more plentiful shares of goods and even get to take away goods

that in fact belong to others; everyone, therefore, driven by the desires for pleasures, wants to have the qualities which will make him a leader either by force or eloquence. This competition only intensifies people's desires since now their desires are not only driven by thoughts of pleasure but also fears of the pains of deprivation if he does not win. Rousseau gives a poetic description of the first signs of jealousy and competition, "Young people of the opposite sex live in adjoining Huts, the transient dealings demanded by Nature soon lead to others, no less sweet and more permanent as a result of mutual visits. They grow accustomed to attend to different objects and to make comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and beauty which produce sentiments of preference." (B1, p165) The result of these all, of course, was intensified subjugation that goes against the preservation of life. People all made the right choice to join the civil society, it was an act of necessity, but now, the necessity has harmed them. One might hope that in the civil society, men will learn through experience that what is truly in the long term beneficial to them, and their desires then could change. But physical pleasures and pain which direct desires are by nature short-sighted-they were developed in the age which Rousseau describes as when men could only make direct correlations for simple things that quickly show result. The only solution is to strip away the free will of men.

General Will The savage men were free and happy, but to survive in the new conditions of life, men must make their biggest adaptation yet, and that is to get rid of their free will; the goal of this is to free everyone's fruits of labor from usurpations. Men must let go of the idea of making decisions for themselves individually, and endow with all their powers the public as the only source of power. The group must still act uniformly, because only through the collective efforts of all could anyone obtain the necessities of life, however, the decisions of the group must be made by all its members rather than a particular man or group of men. Individual freedom will merely be a nice relic to be treasured. Rousseau writes, "Each of us puts his person and his full power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole." (B2, p50) Granted, it will be impossible to change what man desires, but the goal is to build the civil society with laws such that individuals would not gain the power take more than what his labor truly deserves. These laws must represent the general interest of the whole people. As Rousseau writes, "But when the whole people enacts statutes for the whole people it considers only itself, and if a relation is then formed, it is between the entire object from one point of view and the entire object from another point of view, with no division of the whole. Then the matter with regard to which the statute is being enacted is general, as is the enacting will. It is this act which I call law. (B2, p67) To have an effective civil society is to have one body with one voice, the unity of the civil society must be preserved in its true form for there to be laws that are

truly just-laws that truly take away all the selfish desires of men inherited from an older age and guarantee the preservation of life. Despite good wishes, it is very easy for the civil society to fall into the dangers of promoting particular interest with the guise of general interest. To distinguish the false general will from the true ones, there are two questions to consider. One question is what is the interest of the whole, and the other is how to best achieve the interest of the whole. For the first question, the interest of the whole must be the same for all or the actions or laws must not hurt anyone for the benefits of others; it is precisely because people all have the same fundamental interest or all expected to share equal benefits of society that they formed together into the civil society. For the second question, people do not all have to believe in the same method to achieve of the society's common goal. The following example is when a particular interest goes against the interest of the whole. If all the women in the country, supposing that there are more women than men, decide that the nation must change all men's bathrooms into women's bathrooms because women need more space for toileting, they could certainly win a majority vote. This, however, does not reflect the general interest because the resources of the nation belong to all its members since everyone has contributed their share to the nation's prosperity. Women, by acting according to their desires for big bathrooms, have taken away the fruits of the men's labor. Rousseau writes, "...if individuals were left some rights, then, since there would be no common superior who might adjudicate between them and the public, each, being judge in his own case on some issue, would soon claim to be so on all, the state of nature would subsist and the association necessarily become tyrannical or empty" (B2, p50) These women have reserved some rights that they should have given up, and although their law might make their lives easier, but men will one day rise up with their pent-up anger, and the world shall become "tyrannical" and "empty". A law regarding traffic rules, on the other hand, should certainly be decided by majority choice. If 51% of the nation believes that it is better to drive on the left side of the road and 49% think the right side is safer, then the majority action must be obeyed because the intent from both sides is to guarantee safety. Additionally, "The general will would always result from the large number of small differences". There will always be small differences of interest. For example, some people will want to start working at 8 and others at 9, and if one time must be picked, some are going to be happier than others, however, both are general will, because each person is still been awarded the produces of his labor, and the fundamental interest of survival is preserved for all. Rousseau writes, the duty of his social contract is: "To find a form of association that will defend and protect the person and goods of each associate with the full common force, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nevertheless obey only himself and remain as free as before." Rousseau has fully achieved this end. In the civil society, one

will be as free as before in two ways. First of all, although the individual no longer has free will, there arises a new individual that is whole of the civil community. To say that this individual is free does not mean that the will of each element within it is undertaken, but rather that the will of the community is guaranteed. Through the will of the community, which treats all its elements equally, the people of the community gain the preservation of life, which was always the goal of free will. Secondly, the loss of individual free will is compensated by the preservation of the individual freedom to keep the produces of one's own labor, and this freedom is just vital as free will was. Alas, "Man were born free, everywhere they are in chains" ! To conclude, the chains of life is not the social orders which men must follow in order to preserve their lives. If this is any chain, this is the happy necklace that proudly shines the glory of commonwealths. In fact, free will is not the chain either-it is also glorious and wonderful for it is the singular mechanism which allowed men to adapt to environments and prosper everywhere. The chain lies in the misapplication of free will, which could only be corrected by subjugating the individual will to the public will, lest the goal of preserving life, the goal of freedom itself, is unfulfilled. Some might argue that this essay does not give enough considerations to how the modern way of life might play under Rousseau's system. Surely, many people today in developed nations no longer worry about the preservation of life, but are busying themselves with trying to earn millions of dollars, however, the situation now is fundamentally the same as in a world with less economic developments which Rousseau was writing for. A nation should still act according to the general will, and the people should still never let their free will infringe upon others' freedom to enjoy the products of their own labor. When some pursue excessively particular interests, others might not be deprived to death in the society, but they will be driven by the emotions which grew out from the need for self-preservation to revolt and fight against the corrupting authorities.

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