

Introduction

Rousseau is a very different type of philosopher from those we have dealt with up to now in that he offers no justification of existing society (indeed the opposite) and condemns most aspects of civilisation including the arts and the sciences. He offers no easy solution or way out of the human predicament but simply poses the problems and points to possible ways a solution might be discovered. However, he is not really optimistic about his own contribution and admitted that he, himself, could not live in the sort of system he had devised for others. Although Rousseau has inspired many modern critiques of society (especially socialist) and was much quoted during and after the **French revolution**, he is not a typically modern thinker in that he questions the idea of progress which so dominated 18th and 19th century thought. In any case his scepticism about progress might now appear more relevant than hitherto. Rousseau was, however, an egalitarian and a democrat which gives him a modern feel, but his inspiration came from the virtuous republics of the past and Geneva.

Background

He was born in Geneva, son of a watchmaker turned dancer. He worked for the French ambassador in Geneva but could not seem to stay in any position for long, finally migrating to France where he mixed intellectually with the French intelligentsia, the philosophes, and read and wrote prodigiously on all manner of topics (romances, letters, drama) but realized that to be taken seriously one had to produce some sort of philosophical treatise on the nature of society and government (which he had some interest in from his Geneva background). However, he seemed a bit of a misfit, probably best described as a marginal person. He did not really fit into the salons and sophisticated, fashionable intellectual groups in Paris where he felt ill at ease. On the other hand, nor did he fit in with the common people who could not understand him. Yet he did end up living amongst the ordinary citizens, writing for them but aware they could not understand what he said. His situation led to acute personal problems. He knew his worth and felt it was not recognized by those who counted which led to his anger with the philosophes. Alienated in many ways, he lacked inner peace and harmony which he hankered for yet it constantly evaded him. He was a genius, verging on insanity at times and led no ordinary life. Living with a variety of women, he admitted to many immoral acts and probably felt ashamed he gave away his children to an orphanage. Nevertheless, he always felt that deep down he was good. He refused to take royalties for his works (which might have alleviated his penury and those who looked after him). However, it would seem that geniuses seldom manage their own practical lives very well. Why his personal background is important is that (according to John Plamenatz):

“Nobody who spoke so often of man in the abstract gives so strong an impression that he is speaking always of himself”.

Indeed, much of his method appears as introspection and generalizing from his own personal feelings although this was couched in the philosophical language traditional at the time.

It is also worth noting the importance of Geneva. He often writes with Geneva in mind (the preface to the Discourse concerns Geneva). Arguments had taken place in Geneva about the nature of their government. A group which lost the argument had wanted the main legislative decisions to be taken in the “Grand Council” rather than “Little Council” of the city state. This battle seems to have influenced his thinking. Also, the size and type of morality of Geneva appears closer to his best form of society rather than the larger states emerging in Europe with the complexity of large cities and difficulty of people relating to each other as a community.

Methodology

He has been claimed as the great romantic – the beginning of the turning away from enlightenment philosophical rationalism. However, whilst it is true that he disliked the clinical, cold lack of passion of so many enlightenment philosophes and their lack of concern for the ordinary people, it is clear that he is still writing in the same philosophical style i.e. his work is reasoned and not simply based on appeal to emotion or passion. He does not condemn reason as such in the way that Burke and de Maistre do. Although his methodology might be similar to the Philosophes as well as Hobbes and Locke – he uses it for different ends and purposes. He is not the same type of individualist as Hobbes and Locke, nor does he emphasize abstract rights. Unlike most enlightenment thinkers, he does not envisage an inevitably new bright future.

Aims and purposes

Rousseau was trying to make people think in a different and more critical way about the nature of government and society; to make them understand what was wrong with it and what it should be like rather than to legitimize it. He wanted to expose the fraud perpetuated by the seemingly legitimate laws, ostensibly based on consent.

He aimed to show how society moulds man and is to blame for man’s defects and miseries. He also attempts to put forward a new way of thinking about man in society which would allow man to be free and at the same time be under the law and constraints of society. In trying to do these things he has to take on natural law theories of the state such as Locke’s and find another answer to Hobbes’s non-natural law theory. Rousseau thought there was something decidedly wrong with both. Locke, he postulates, ends up justifying inequalities seemingly established in the state of nature and legitimized for all time by the contract (a contract of exclusion which cements dependency), whereas Hobbes’s construction he agrees with to some degree

but will not allow the alienation of power to any one person or group. Rousseau is both a democrat and egalitarian whereas neither Hobbes nor Locke could be described as such.. However, both had commenced their analyses with assumptions that all men were the same and equal in nature. Arguably Rousseau takes the **assumption of equality more seriously** than either and tries to defend it more consistently. Hence he must address the problem as to men being **born free** but finding themselves everywhere in **chains**. However, it is worth noting that he recognizes men are far from equal in talents.

THE DISCOURSE ON INEQUALITY

This could be seen as the first part or introduction to the Social Contract. In this work he is offering a different way of looking at the construction of the state of nature – a device used by both Locke and Hobbes and natural law theorists.

His criticism of Locke is that Locke's "state of nature" is too much like the civil society of the day – with the same moral laws and attributes which the contract merely legalizes. Instead, he presents a hypothetical sketch of what it might have been like based on reasoning rather than historical data. He assumes that early man was an isolated creature rather like an animal – i.e. neither good nor evil. The assumption he makes is that society itself gives rise to morality (i.e. like Hobbes). In this early state, jealousy, envy, domination, vanity and covetousness are not known. However, this does not appear to have been a very desirable state as no speech or moral claims existed at this low level of existence, its only advantage being that man was "at one" with nature and not alienated from himself.

He then postulates that this must have changed as men got more numerous and began to congregate together first in families then in groups of families developing speech, accumulating knowledge, developing common standards and customs although having no fixed laws. If a Golden Age ever existed for Rousseau – this was it – a society where families were self sufficient, hunting and fishing and many other activities being shared in common. There would have been no subordination, very few possessions, no one being the tool or victim of another.

How then did all this end? What went wrong?

It appears that when the economy moved to agriculture, when corn and metals were introduced, then the land became cultivated and divided. This led to growing inequality due to natural differences in strength and intelligence which then led some to prosper and pass on their wealth. A division of labour emerges and some begin to serve or be clients of the rich and others became jealous and envious. People began comparing themselves with others, wishing to be superior. A simple self respect and caring for oneself transformed into vanity, pride and honour. This caused discord, insecurity and violence, dangerous to all but especially dangerous to the rich who suggested that a power be set up over them to govern by laws which would protect

everyone. Foolishly the people as a whole is duped into this conspiracy of the rich and a chance is lost to establish a just and genuine contract of society based on equality and freedom.

The supposition throughout is that this was a rather unconscious development and that there was no natural law and natural right recognized in the state of nature. In this Rousseau follows Hobbes rather than natural law theorists. The implication is that it is civil society itself, i.e. the product of man's consciousness, that brings about notions of morality, vice and virtue and the terrible thing about civilisation is that instead of developing this new opportunity for morality, mankind has, instead, started on a false basis of inequality which has corrupted society from its inception. This inequality has led to vanity and domination on the one side and covetousness and aggression on the other. Yet man was not by nature like this – the way society has developed has made him so. Like Montesquieu, Rousseau thinks man's nature is moulded by his environment and the governmental & social system of which he is part. If this is corrupted from the start it is impossible for men to achieve freedom and personal growth in moral terms. Hence this fraud, this conspiracy, is a sin against mankind, preventing man from achieving his true nature as a moral creature. It is worth noting, however, that Rousseau is very aware that corruption of man's innocence sets in all too easily and that it is difficult to maintain independence, dignity and equality which rest ultimately upon self restraint, good habits and a simple life. Extremes of wealth and luxury appear as the most dangerous corrupting features of the time.

Property

“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground bethought himself of saying “this is mine” and found people simple enough to believe him, is the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, war and murders, from how many terrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind by pulling up the stakes, filling up the ditch and crying to his fellows, “Beware of listening to this imposter, you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all and the earth itself to nobody.”

To Conclude:

As far as history is concerned, Rousseau seems to be of the opinion that there is no natural tendency of society to become what it ought to be – this will take a lot of human ingenuity, thought and endeavour. He is in some agreement with Hobbes that civil society is an artefact of man which creates moral obligations and duties but he does not approve of the conditions of Hobbes's contract i.e. the resultant inequality and all giving up their powers which for him spells servitude.

Rousseau clearly ignores any concept of economic progress. In fact, the division of labour which for Adam Smith had led to prosperity, technological change and improvement in the human condition, for Rousseau had been the cause of disaster. Adam Smith had assumed that one man's gain had not

necessarily been another's loss, whereas Rousseau sees it as leading to inequalities which destroyed man's harmonious relationship with nature, led to complexity, surplus wealth, unnecessary consumption and domination as well as poverty, lack of respect and servitude. Rousseau, in this respect, might be regarded as the precursor of Proudhon but not of Marx who believed in technological progress.

Rousseau also condemned the idea that the growth of the sciences and arts had led to an improved moral state. He postulated that the opposite was true: the arts and sciences develop along with commerce and trade, and the latter simply increase dominance whilst science and arts are produced for the same dominating elite, a minority of consumers. The ordinary people gained little to nothing from all this and have, at the same time, lost an opportunity for freedom and development. This was the major reason why the Philosophes were so annoyed with him. They had all been condemned – including their doctrine of progress. (Voltaire, particularly, disliked him, although Diderot was a friend).

The Social Contract

Colletti points out that Rousseau was the first to recognize the negative quality of Locke's construction of contract (unfortunately Colletti is not quite accurate on Locke's construction because he (Locke) does have a societal contract). However, he is right in seeing that Rousseau aimed to challenge Locke's construction of a negative and limited state. Rousseau's contract, more like Hobbes's, is a more comprehensive construction – which includes the will of every person in a sovereign body which is comprehensive, unlimited & indivisible but for Rousseau it is also inalienable. Rousseau's contract would ensure that each by giving himself up to all would mean that no-one would be under the command of anyone else. The social contract would establish a sovereign society in which everyone had a stake. Power is never alienated from this body. This can be traced back to the Roman Republican conception of the power of the *Populus Romanus* and forward to "We, the People".

The General Will

For Rousseau the social contract is considered to be a chance to establish genuine freedom under the law. When man enters society he should be thought of as giving up his freedom under nature to obtain a better type of freedom. The contract is an act which socializes him as a man and makes him a civil and social animal and a moral agent. In becoming part of a social contract man participates in the **General Will** or the "moi commun". The general will expresses a common interest and a common purpose. It is a will against inequality, all men are equal within it and it represents that part of a man that wills the common good of the whole i.e. that part of man which represents his morality and sense of justice. This will is general because it is the will of man in general, not exceptional or special men. It is also general because it includes that part of each man's will which wills the good of all as distinct from his personal interests, which are different according to different

types of persons. In addition, it is general because it is impersonal, not specific to different persons but the same for all, meaning fairness to all and it expresses itself in the rules of society which apply to every member of society in an identical fashion. In essence, it is the meaning of justice and civic equality.

This conception of the general will involves an idea of the law which is modern rather than feudal. In this sense it is similar to Hobbes, yet it differs in that it adds the concept of the general will as something lying behind all legitimate law and government. Rousseau owes much to Montesquieu here – seeing the General Will as the spirit of the law, and proposing that government must relate closely to it. Rousseau's only legitimate & hence preferred form of government is a **republic** because he thinks of it as the only form which fits the spirit of **equality and virtue**. He ignores Montesquieu's other forms of government taking his inspiration from his description of the democratic republic, with its essence as equality and virtue which had been derived from the city states of the ancient world of which both had considerable knowledge. For Rousseau it additionally recalled the city state of Geneva. However, he does admit that other forms of government could be reasonable provided law is uppermost and the form fits the specific conditions of the environment.

The General Will and private interests.

Rousseau was concerned with how the general will could emerge and be sustained without succumbing to private interests which, if too influential, would undermine justice and equality and hence the generality of the will. The virtuous part of man, which wills the common good and should inform the general will must prevail against the private and discrete interests of man which tend to subvert it. Such private interests were not wrong or immoral as such, but could distort the concept of the common good – as they were private not common interests. Without a fair degree of equality it is clear that the general will would be subverted, hence it is most important that the division between rich and poor should not be so great that the rich could buy the poor and the latter would have to sell themselves. Rousseau never specifies exactly what level of inequality should be tolerated but does not imply that flat equality is necessary. The important point is that huge inequalities of income and wealth will undermine any democratic system, giving power to the wealthy and corrupting the whole so that it reflects only the interests of the rich.

How best to facilitate the emergence of the General Will?

The republic should be small because a large area would mean that the connection between members would be difficult to form and it would collapse into groups – thereby losing unity.

Intermediate factions and groups should not be allowed when essential deliberations take place as this encourages peoples to band together concerning a specific and partial interpretation of the will which would encourage bias. Hence interest group articulation and pluralism are not seen as legitimate. It is worth noting that in the 18th century factions were not

regarded as a good thing (e.g. Burke had to legitimate the concept of "party" given it connoted faction and was hence a boo-word). Rousseau felt that if all got together in a general assembly on the few occasions when basic law needed deliberation, then one would get as close as possible to the general will. No man, he thought, would want to harm himself and therefore, the "moi commun", the "collective I", would not wish to harm the whole. Provided these conditions maintained, the laws which would then emerge would be for the common good allowing mankind to grow in collective moral consciousness. This, in turn, would encourage a harmonious and peaceful order in which each would be content within himself that his moral persona was not in conflict with his self interest.

In this sense, man would gradually improve in a moral sense in that he would be free, obeying only laws which he gave to himself, not forced upon him by others. Hence, he would be free and under restraint at the same time.

This conception of **state implies that it should be a moral entity in itself**, not an abstract entity nor a negative, umpire like construction. But the conditions for its existence appear unreal in that the state must be small and little legislation passed.

Mistakes about the General Will, Majority Rule & Minorities

There is also the problem that people might be mistaken about the General Will. Rousseau's view was that this would not matter as people would gradually learn if they were all genuinely willing the common good. What, however, about those in a minority who disagreed? They, it seems, would have to agree with the majority's decision as majority rule is something there would have been prior agreement on as well as the fact that the minority would be ad hoc and not permanent. If, there emerged a permanent minority it would indicate there was no General Will but two different groups. For Rousseau there can be no divided sovereignty. However, when minorities do have to obey a law they do not favour, the obedience reinforces the collective social cohesion which is in the interests of all. Individuals in this situation would still be free as they would be constrained by a will of which they were an integral part. (Some have interpreted this as forced to be free). The reasoning here is that as part of a social whole one has duties to obey the common rules even if one has not in a particular case voted for them, otherwise those who decided not to obey would be free riders - only obeying when the decision went their way. This would demonstrate lack of public virtue and discipline. Freedom is obedience to laws given to oneself by participating in the willing of them.

A society thus formed by Rousseau's social contract is a tight, closed and organic whole. Judith Shklar says it owed its inspiration to xenophobia – a dislike or exclusion of foreigners – stress being put on unity as against pluralism. The self esteem of the population in this sense is seen to be indifferent to the opinion of outsiders. The economy would need to be rural and a sense of patriotism high. In this sort of community man would fit and not feel a misfit. There would be harmony in society and harmony for man within himself. The whole thing might be a bit static, like Switzerland but it is worth noting that Rousseau did admire Plato, Rome and Geneva. He felt man

would be happier and freer in this type of community, they would respect and care for one another. (However, he, himself, did not last long in Geneva).

Sovereignty, the need for government and the problem of representation

Sovereignty, for Rousseau, is embedded in society, in the people, which includes every man, although not women – Rousseau thought they were rightly subject to men in marriage. Sovereignty was not divisible or alienable. It cannot be given up to representatives or any smaller body. No one could represent anyone else. Interests can perhaps be represented, but not wills. The contract then is about society – it has nothing to do with government per se. In an ideal world there would be no need for government. If men had no other wills than the General Will and always behaved perfectly then government would not be necessary. Unfortunately, men are not like this in reality, they are not angels and they will always have their own self interest, misbehave and sometimes disobey the law. Therefore, there must be magistrates and judges to administer the law and they must be independent. However, their authority comes entirely from the sovereign people – they have none of their own. The power they exercise can be taken away whenever the sovereign people wish. In this respect there is a similarity with Locke – the government is not party to the contract and has no authority independent of the people. But in Rousseau the constitution is devised so that rebellion is not necessary – the government is removed as of right. This is what makes Rousseau a democrat (with the exception of his position on women). Magistrates are seen as trustees and delegated. Ideally they should be chosen by lot rather than election and should not serve for long periods. However, elected system although less democratic than lot systems, could still be regarded as democratic.

Problems in setting up and maintaining such a system.

Rousseau does recognize that it is difficult to stop governments from arrogating power to themselves independently of the sovereign will and if this should happen the contract of society becomes invalid. If people are forced to obey, there is no moral obligation – only a physical one. He also recognizes the difficulty of setting up such a constitution, so he employs the ancient concept of the **Legislator** to help set up laws and maintain the conditions necessary for the Republic to operate. In addition, **education and socialization** would be necessary to transform man's present corrupted nature, and a **civic religion** would be desirable. Despite all this, inherent in this project is the constant **possibility of degeneration** and a feeling that **inequality is somehow natural**, that people do have an urge towards possessions and power. Yet, at the same time, he believes these things must be controlled by human will to maintain justice and liberty and one must constantly strive for just outcomes.

Democracy:

James Mill asserts that Rousseau changed a whole frame of reference concerning sovereignty and the concept of democracy and that in Rousseau

one finds the true essence of democracy. However, Rousseau's concept of democracy is not one which fits modern conditions. Indeed he understood this and disliked modern conditions. His form of democracy had to be personally participatory, no man alienating his freedom and moral autonomy by allowing himself to be represented by another. All representative bodies according to Rousseau would form a will of their own alienated from the General Will of the community and impossible to control. England, he asserted, thought itself to be free, but it was only free at the point of the election – it then fell back into unfreedom. He occasionally tries to think of other ways of getting the popular will implemented e.g. by delegates and referenda but this is still a difficult one to implement in modern society.

Some alternative interpretations:

Judith Shklar: Rousseau as a populist

She draws attention to the possible interpretation of Rousseau as a populist pointing to the hallmarks: that virtue resides uniquely in the people and not in the elite but that the people do need the guidance of educators and a Legislator indicating an authoritarian streak; a sense of conspiracy against the people; distrust of cities, complexity, the intelligentsia; a patriotic stance, nostalgia for a rural past; disgust at present corruption and a call for a return to the people as an act of self purification and devotion.

She admits, however, that populism is a slippery term and not very exact, often a vague way of describing authors who are neither specifically right or left in all respects and are difficult to categorize.

Colletti: Similarity with Marx and Lenin.

Colletti : Notes Rousseau on the division of labour leading to inequality and that popular sovereignty destroys every right of a ruler. He underlines the importance of the inalienable and indivisible nature of sovereignty as a radical critique of existing society as well as the emphasis on direct democracy which in turn eliminates the division between civil society and civil government. The liberal dividing line between state and society has disappeared: the state is the people. This, in his opinion, virtually abolishes the concept of the state. He notes the similarity here with the Marxist concept of the withering away of the state which dissolves the state into the society and thus abolishes the difference between them.

Marx did see the state as a body of armed men alienated from society and the future post revolutionary society as overcoming this alienation. Lenin, in the "State and the Revolution" sees the state as a "commune state" where the community would govern itself, having no armed body of men alienated from society – hence also putting an end to the state as an alienated body. The Marxist concept of a withering away of the state – is viewed as a withering away of alienation and coercion where any line between state and society has disappeared.

On this basis of noted similarity, Colletti says:

“revolutionary political theory as it has developed since Rousseau is already foreshadowed and contained in the Social Contract; or to be more explicit, that in so far as political theory in the strict sense is concerned, Marx and Lenin have added nothing to Rousseau except for the analysis of the “economic bases” for the withering away of the state”.

He additionally draws attention to the anti-parliamentarianism of both Marx and Lenin (parliamentary cretinism and bourgeois talking shops) and Lenin’s principles of proletarian democracy. It is worth noting that Marx, Proudhon and Herzen (the most influential 19th century socialists) recoiled from liberal constitutionalism after the June Days of the 1848 revolution.

Rousseau, for Colletti, is the interpreter of the thoughts and talents of the new man of the Third Estate. In other words he maintains that there is a class analysis here. Rousseau, in this sense, is seen as the origin of the very different type of democratic analysis adopted by subsequent socialists in contrast with the prevalent development of liberal, constitutionalist political thought with its stress on checks and balances, pluralism and representation. However, despite the similarity between Rousseau and many later socialists, it is clear that Rousseau does believe some coercion is necessary in order that laws be kept and therefore coercion can never wither away until all men are angels.

J.L. Talmon: The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy

A somewhat extreme interpretation of Rousseau emphasizing the way Rousseau was used in revolutionary thinking along with other 18th century enlightenment ideas which led to justifying the dictatorial control of the Jacobins and the institution of the “Incorruptibles” to replace the people. This is not, of course, what Rousseau intended, but Talmon is of the opinion that Rousseau’s way of thinking was dangerous and could be seen to lead to this. He is worried about the notion of a general will and that people should will the general will and not their own individualistic wills and also with the idea that if they demur, they err and for their own good they must obey. He quotes statements such as “He who disagrees with the general will renounces his humanity” and worries about the concept of freedom as a capacity for ridding oneself of personal considerations, interests, preferences and prejudices. He dislikes the attempt to educate and prepare men to will the general will without any sense of constraint and to create a new type of man without particular interests (the latter accusation is clearly not true of Rousseau). He asserts that Rousseau advocated that if the people did not will the general will they must be made to do so. The general worry here is the organic unity required by Rousseau, the possible crushing of individuality and the imposition of uniformity as well as the emotional absorption of the individual in the collective order. In addition, the excessive importance given to politics itself and the role of the Legislator to shape the young nation by superior wisdom, is seen as dangerous as well as the condemnation of groups, factions and parties. Talmon views Rousseau’s ideas as susceptible and exposed to unscrupulous use and also in themselves as the basis of totalitarian thought.

This is clearly a much exaggerated and in parts clearly mistaken interpretation, yet there is something perhaps in it – especially on factions and groups. At the basis of this is a concept of left wing totalitarianism as distinct from right wing totalitarianism. Interestingly both Talmon and Polin (in *Lenin and the End of Politics*) see this form of thinking as intrinsically totalitarian.. The conception of freedom appears to give most concern: not freedom to think and act as one will but freedom to will what is the good of all. However, Rousseau also allows freedom to be left alone and to pursue private interests which indicates he does not wish to absorb the individual in the whole but rather to empower the individual within the community. How worrying is Rousseau? It is notable he did not wish to live in his own republic.

I. Honohan:

Honohan sees Rousseau in the ancient tradition of the patriotic republic demanding virtue of the citizens. She points to the continuity from Aristotle and the Romans to Machiavelli and notes the connection with Montesquieu who also drew from these sources but who regarded republicanism as not suitable for his contemporary world. Rousseau, however, is more than just a republican - he is a democratic republican, so one has a mixture of the virtues required of ancient republics (patriotism, solidarity, stoicism, etc.) with a strong belief in egalitarianism and the need for the dignity and independence of every man. Her stress is on the ever present danger of corruption and Rousseau's personal hatred of dependency. Her major criticism is that Rousseau conceived of the general will as unified, that he did not tackle the problem of minorities and deliberately excluded women. Clearly, Rousseau was not a cosmopolitan and his concept of society and state would be inimical to the idea of multi culturalism.

VNP

First seminar:

Why is the *Discourse on Inequality* so important for an understanding of the social contract?

How is Rousseau different from enlightenment rationalism?

What is Rousseau's conception of human nature (to compare with Locke and Hobbes).

Why is corruption ever a danger?

How does the contract in Rousseau differ from Hobbes and Locke?

What differences and similarities can one find in the idea of sovereignty as conceived by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau?

How valid a notion is the General Will?

Why is the development of the arts and sciences inimical to the maintenance of a just republic?

Is Rousseau simply posing some real and present problem about justice and the state?

Has Rousseau got a conception of the state and if so what is it?

To what extent might Rousseau be considered an anarchist?

Why is Rousseau so pessimistic?

Why does Rousseau resort to the Legislator?

Why is the right education so important?

SECOND SEMINAR

Themes:

What is Rousseau's sense, if any, of the political?

What constitutional ideas are present in Rousseau's Social Contract?

What sort of democracy is Rousseau advocating and how possible or practical would it be?

What sort of relevance might Rousseau have for contemporary civilisation?

Interpretations:

Judith Shklar - Rousseau as a populist

Colletti - Similarity with Marx and Lenin.

J.L. Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy

What precisely is Rousseau's notion of the General Will and how valid is it as a notion?

What insights did Rousseau have into the problems of modern society and government?

Is Rousseau not simply posing some real problem about justice and the state?

To what extent is there a connection between Marx, Lenin and Rousseau?

Is there anything in Talmon's thesis that in Rousseau one finds the origin of totalitarian thought?

What sort of relevance might Rousseau have for contemporary civilisation?

Is Rousseau's conception of democracy utopian?