

Paper on
Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

DETAILS : 6-7 pp. length; 1.5 space in *Times New Roman* 12-pitch font. (Do not inflate the paper to make it seem longer than it actually is.) Worth : 30 points.

DUE : **Monday, April 22, by 1 p.m.** (in my mailbox, in CH 300). Submit a hard copy (unless otherwise agreed on beforehand).

INSTRUCTIONS: Choose one of the following nine passages as a focus for your paper; or, select another passage from Rousseau's work that "speaks" more to you. (If you choose the latter option, you must provide a short explanation for your choice and get approval from the professor before you begin.) The aim of the paper is not only to explain the passage, but also to situate it in the larger context of Rousseau's work (both the *Social Contract*, and the *Second Discourse* – see Abramson for this), and to reflect on its claims in a more personal way as a human being and citizen in the 21st century. Organize the paper in any way that works for you, but make sure that it has focus and unfolds in a clear, orderly fashion. Of course, you will want to cite (i.e., refer to) and to quote other passages from Rousseau's work, in order to support, clarify, or challenge Rousseau's claims in your passage, or to support your interpretation or claims. Moreover, you should make use of Abramson's chapters in the same way, thus demonstrating that you have read and thought about them as well.

The page numbers below refer to the (blue book) Gourevitch edition. However, you should be able to find the passages in other editions as well, by going to the appropriate book, chapter, and (most likely) paragraph in each case. Be sure to include a Bibliography or Sources page at the end of the paper, in proper format. And give it an interesting and informative title. Use abbreviations in the text, such as (SC, I.3.4, p.42 [= *Social Contract*, book I, chapter 3, paragraph 4, page 42]) or (A, p. x [= Abramson, page 254]).

Be sure to review the "Paper-Writing Advice" sheet (in BB/Assignments), and fix the things noted as needing correction in your previous papers. Of course, contact the professor if you have questions:
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Excerpts from J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (ed. Gourevitch, vol. 2)

OPTION #1

I.6, pp.49-50: [1] I assume men having reached the point where the obstacles that interfere with their preservation in the state of nature prevail by their resistance over the forces which each individual can muster to maintain himself in that state. Then that primitive state can no longer subsist, and humankind would perish if it did not change its way of being. [2] Now, since men cannot engender new forces, but only unite 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. [3] This sum of forces can only arise from the cooperation of many: but ... This difficulty ... can be stated in the following terms. [4] "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." This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract provides the solution.

OPTION #2

I.7, pp.52-53: [7] ... each individual may, as a man, have a particular will contrary to or different from the general will he has as a Citizen. His particular interest may speak to him quite differently from the common interest; his absolute and naturally independent existence / may lead him to look upon what he owes to the common cause as a gratuitous contribution, the loss of which will harm others less than its payment burdens him and, by considering the moral person that constitutes the State as a being of reason because it is not a man, he would enjoy the rights of a citizen without being willing to fulfill the duties of a subject; an injustice, the progress of which would cause the ruin of the body politic. [8] Hence for the social compact not to be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the following engagement which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body: which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free; for this is the condition which, by giving each Citizen to the Fatherland, guarantees him against all personal dependence; the condition which is the device and makes for the operation of the political machine, and alone renders legitimate civil engagements which would otherwise be absurd, tyrannical, and liable to the most enormous abuses.

OPTION #3

I.8, pp.53-54: [1] This transition from the state of nature to the civil state produces a most remarkable change in man by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and endowing his actions with the morality they previous lacked. Only then, when the voice of duty succeeds physical impulsion and right succeeds appetite, does man, who until then had looked only to himself, see himself forced to act on other principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although in this state he deprives himself of several advantages he has from nature, he gains such great advantages in return, his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas enlarged, his sentiments ennobled, his entire soul is elevated to such an extent, that if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him to beneath the condition he has left, he should ceaselessly bless the happy moment which wrested him from it forever, and out of a stupid and bounded animal made an intelligent being and a man. [2] Let us reduce this entire balance to terms easy to compare. What man loses by the social contract is his natural freedom and / unlimited right to everything that tempts him and he can reach; what he gains is civil freedom and property in everything he possesses. ... one has to distinguish clearly between natural freedom which has no other bound than the individual's forces, and civil freedom which is limited by the general will, and between possession which is merely the effect of force or the right of the first occupant, and property which can only be founded on a positive title. [3] To the preceding one might add to the credit of the civil state moral freedom, which alone makes man truly the master of himself; for the impulsion of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom. ...

OPTION #4

I.9, p.56: [7] ... the right of every individual has over his own land is always subordinate to the right the community has over everyone, without which there would be neither solidity in the social bond, nor real force in the exercise of Sovereignty. [8] ... a comment that should serve as the basis of the entire social system; it is that the fundamental pact, rather than destroying natural equality, on the contrary substitutes a moral and legitimate equality for whatever physical inequality nature may have placed between men, and that while they may be unequal in force or in genius, they all become equal by convention and by right. [FOOTNOTE: Under bad governments this equality is only apparent and illusory; it serves only to maintain the

poor in his misery and the rich in his usurpation. In fact the laws are always useful to those who possess something and harmful to those who have nothing. Whence it follows that the social state is advantageous for men only insofar as all have something and none have too much of anything.]

OPTION #5

II.3, pp.59-60: [1] ... it follows that the general will is always upright and always tends to the public utility; but it does not follow from it that the people's deliberations are always equally upright. One always want one's good, but one does not always see it: one can never corrupt the people, but one can often cause it to be mistaken, and only when it is, does it appear to want what is bad. / [2] There is often a considerable difference between the will of all and the general will: the latter looks only to the common interest, the former looks to private interest, and is nothing but a sum of particular wills; but if, from these same wills, one takes away the pluses and minuses, which cancel each other out, what is left as the sum of the differences is the general will. [3] If, when an adequately informed people deliberates, the Citizens had no communication among themselves, the general will would always result from the large number of small differences, and the deliberation would always be good. But when factions arise, small associations at the expense of the large association, ... The differences become less numerous and yield a less general result. ... [4] It is important, then, that in order to have the general will expressed well, there be no partial society in the State, and every Citizen state only his own opinion. ... if there are partial societies, their number must be multiplied, and inequality among them prevented, ... These are the only precautions that will ensure that the general will is always enlightened, and that the people make no mistakes.

OPTION #6

II.11, pp.78-79: [1] If one inquires into precisely what the greatest good of all consists in, which ought to be end of every system of legislation, one will find that it comes down to these two principal objects, *freedom* and *equality*. ... [2] I have already said what civil freedom is; with regard to equality, this word must not be understood to mean that degrees of power and wealth should be absolutely the same, but that, as for power, it stop short of all violence and never be exercised except by virtue of rank and the laws, and that as for wealth, no citizen be so very rich that he can buy another, and none so poor that he is compelled to sell himself: Which assumes, on the part of the great, moderation in goods and influence and, on the part of the lowly, moderation in avarice and covetousness. [Footnote: Do you, then, want to give the State stability? bring the extremes as close together as possible; tolerate neither very rich people nor beggars. These two states which are naturally inseparable, are equally fatal to the common good; ...]

OPTION #7

III.6, p.96: [8] One essential and inevitable defect which will always make monarchical government inferior to republican government is that in Republics the public voice almost never elevates to the highest places any but enlightened and capable men who occupy them with honor; whereas those who succeed in monarchies are most often nothing but petty bunglers, petty knaves, petty schemers, whose petty talents, which at Court give access to high places, only serve to show the public their ineptitude just as soon as they have acceded to these high places. The people is much less often mistaken in this choice than the Prince, and a man of true merit in a [royal] ministry is almost as rare as a fool at the head of a republican government. ...

OPTION #8

III.15, pp.113-14: [1] As soon as public service ceases to be the Citizens' principal business, and they prefer to serve with their purse rather than with their person, the State is already close to ruin. Is there a call to battle? they pay troops and stay home; is there a summons to Council? they name Deputies and stay home. Finally, by dint of laziness and money they have soldiers to enslave the fatherland and representatives to sell it. ... [3] The better constituted the State, the more public business takes precedence over private business in the minds of Citizens. There even is less private business, because, since the sum of the common happiness contributed a greater share to each individual's happiness, he needs to seek less of it in his personal pursuits. In a well-conducted City everyone flies to the assemblies; under a bad Government no one likes to take a step to go to them; because no one takes an interest in what is done there, because it is predictable that the general will not prevail in them, and finally because domestic concerns are all-absorbing. ... As soon as someone / says about affairs of the State *What do I care?* the State has to be considered lost.

OPTION #9

IV.1, pp.121-23: [1] So long as several men united consider themselves a single body, they have but a single will, which is concerned with their common preservation, and the general welfare. Then all of the springs of the State are vigorous and simple, its maxims are clear and perspicuous, it has no confused, contradictory interests, the common good is everywhere fully evident and requires only good sense to be perceived. Peace, union, equality are enemies of political subtleties. Upright and simple men are difficult to deceive because of their simplicity, they are not taken in by sham and special pleading; they are not even clever enough to be dupes. When, among the happiest people in the world, troops of peasants are seen attending to affairs of State under an oak tree and always acting wisely, can one avoid despising the refinements of other nations which make themselves illustrious and miserable with so much art and mystification? ... [4] But when the social knot begins to loosen and the State to weaken; when particular interests begin to make themselves felt, and small societies to influence the larger society, the common interest diminishes and meets with opposition, votes are no longer / unanimous, the general will is no longer the will of all, contradictions and disagreements arise, and the best opinion no longer carries the day unchallenged. ... IV.2, pp.122-23: [1] From the preceding chapter it is evident that the way in which general business is conducted provides a fairly reliable indication of the current state of the morals and the health of the body politic. The more concord reigns in assemblies, that is to say the closer opinions come to unanimity, the more the general will also predominates; whereas long debates, dissensions, disturbances, signal the ascendancy of particular interests and the decline of the State.