

Week 5

How to remain free yet live in a state: Rousseau's proposal

- *Why are men in the state of nature so good?*
- *Why did such good people have to create an oppressive state?*
- *How to recover the loss of liberty that individuals enjoyed in the state of nature?*
- *The rights of the sovereign: are any rights left to individuals?*
- *How to find the general will of the people?*
- *The government: how to protect the people from it?*
- *Why is the citizen's direct political participation so important for Rousseau?*

Rousseau's Aims (1712- 1778)

- Political philosopher
- Locke suggests that individuals who enter political society, retail significant natural rights and liberties – including those of property and transfer their other rights to political authority only conditionally.
 - When entering a political society – individuals must accept some restraints on their freedom and must give up some rights
 - Must abide and execute political decision making
 - In return for security, impartial legislation and administration of justice in a political society
 - This suggests that individuals must give up their primary political and order maintaining natural rights
- Rousseau argued for a system of government in which the sovereign body gails all of the natural political rights of individuals
- Influenced by Locke and Hobbes – and their abstract views of human psychology (wants, needs, desires)
- Rousseau presents a tendentious description of existing political structure and governments
- His view of the desirable society and political organisation is, none the less, very distinct from Locke and Hobbes.
- Utopia blueprint for constitutional reform – morally improved and politically organised society

- When Rousseau was young he experienced tension between poorer citizens and the wealthy families that ruled the state – small scale violence and threat of civil war

State of Nature - why are men so good in it

- Philosophy and poetry – characterised by morally innocent, essentially good social convention
- Desires of a ‘natural’ man do not go beyond immediate physical wants – which he has the capacity to satisfy in nature (independent of other humans)

Private property – source of all social ills

- In nature there is no concept of ‘private property’
- Argues that both psychological and legal or moral grounds for conflict are lacking
- The beginning of political society begins with private property
- As human needs expanded, so did specialisation of labour – this introduced the concept of property
- Property needs to support of justice, the rules of justice were introduced as moral norms (later legal laws)

The oppressive state

- It was economic inequality among men which led to the need for political or state organisation.
- The rich (in order to protect themselves) sacrificed their freedom to the sovereign who is to give them security
- The search for security through the state
- Both Hobbes and Locke argue from the horrors of inconveniences of the state of nature to the obvious benefits of a political society
- Rousseau argues the benefits of the natural state and the horrors of a political society – the loss of liberty that comes with exiting the true state of nature
- A step from nature to the political society is a ‘fall into the abyss’ of moral duplicity, depravity and loss of independence and freedom
- The rise of industry and production generates new needs and wants
- The development of civil society leads to the loss of human self-sufficiency and independence - which is a hallmark of human freedom in the state of nature

Freedom and the state

- Concept of human freedom
- No longer free; does not have the power to do what he wills or wants
- To be free; means to be in a position to satisfy ones genuine and true wants/not those imposed by various interest groups or society
- Unimposed wants; Rousseau makes freedom an openly normative concept
- To be free; humans need to be authentic or to express authentic human wants (what does it mean to be authentic)
- According to *second discourse*, modern political society deprives an of his authenticity (genuine wants and need) – in this way, deprives him of freedom
- Stresses no way of regaining authenticity in modern society
- Humans develop fake ‘human’ wants and needs based on social values
- The social contract – informs the reader about how to create an authentically free citizen through systematic education and how such citizen could create a state of free men.
- According to Rousseau – family, force or master/slave relationship cannot provide the source of legitimate political power
- His state of free men is created through a social compact/contract
- Locke/Hobbes were content with a state which protects each of its subjects or citizens – the state as a protection agency, in return for protection they give some citizens freedom
- Rousseau – citizens should remain free as they would be in a state of nature
- The sovereign is the indivisible whole of all citizens – this body has a common self

The rights of the sovereign are any right left to the individuals?

- The process of the transfer of rights in Rousseau’s contract resembles that which Hobbes had already outlined
- Rousseau’s sovereign – resembles Hobbes (an artificial power that has a will of its own)
- Rousseau’s sovereign is made of all citizens and cannot be a single person/representative assembly
- Sovereign only considers general interest and works only for the common good
- If the populace is swayed by a group or faction, then there is no general will and only private opinion of the group *the general will is the will of a whole
- The state (in Rousseau’s account) is regarded as the all-powerful.