The Political Philosophy of Rousseau

Steven B. Smith
PLSC 299/649; HUM 326
Monday 3:30-5:20
Spring, 2018

Description:

Over the past three hundred years, Rousseau has meant many different things: he is widely regarded as an important source of inspiration for the French Revolution, as an advocate of radical democracy, and as perhaps the most powerful critic of the moral and psychological injuries of class and inequality. But these descriptions – certainly true enough – capture only a part of the picture.

This course will provide a sample of the many different faces of Rousseau: his educational treatise (Emile), his statement on the role of the arts in society (Letter to D'Alembert), his major piece of philosophical history (Discourse on Inequality), and his final statement on the philosophic life (The Reveries of a Solitary Walker). We will also listen to his opera, Le Devin du Village.

We will also examine some major interpreters of Rousseau such as Leo Strauss, Isaiah Berlin, Ernst Cassirer, and John Rawls.

Our questions will be: Who was Rousseau and how did he shape our views not only on democracy and equality but on a range of domestic institutions from childhood to love, marriage, and the family? As a composer and playwright, we will consider Rousseau's views on the responsibility of the artist to society and ultimately what did Rousseau understand by philosophy and the relation of the philosophical life to the life of the citizen?

Texts:

Rousseau, Emile or on Education, trans. Allan Bloom
Rousseau, Politics and the Arts, trans. Allan Bloom
Rousseau, Major Political Writings, trans. John Scott
Rousseau, Reveries of a Solitary Walker, trans. Charles Butterworth

All books have been ordered through the Yale B&N

Requirements:
Students will be required to write two (10-12 page) papers over the course of the semester or a single (20-25 pages) essay due at the end of term. Students planning to use the seminar to write a senior essay will need to conform to the requirements of their department in consultation with the instructor. Graduate students will be expected to write a single research paper due at the end of the semester on a topic to be approved by the instructor. All students are required to attend class regularly and to engage in intense discussion.

**Academic Honesty and Integrity:**

You are expected to cite clearly in footnotes the source of any specific language or ideas that are not your own and to provide a full bibliography of your background reading and sources with each of the two papers. Guidelines can be found in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available online. Keep careful track of the sources of your ideas, and do not hesitate to ask for advice if you are uncertain about how to acknowledge your intellectual debts.

**Course Outline:**

Week One: Introduction to Jean-Jacques

Week Two: Bourgeois and Citizen

   *Emile*, Book I

Week Three: The Education of the Senses

   *Emile*, Book II-III

Week Four: The Religion of the Heart

   *Emile*, Book IV

Week Five: Emile and Sophie

   *Emile*, Book V

Week Six:
The Solitaires

Week Seven: “Here is your history”

Second Discourse, “Letter to Geneva” and Part I

Week Eight: Civilization and its Discontents

Second Discourse, Part II

Week Nine: Politics and the Arts

Letter to D’Alembert

Week Ten: The Philosopher's Life

Reveries of a Solitary Walker (I-V)

Week Eleven: The Philosopher's Life Examined

Reveries of a Solitary Walker (VI-X)

Week Twelve: Rousseau Reconsidered I

Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History; Steven Smith “Rousseau's Rousseauean Moment”

Week Thirteen: Rousseau Reconsidered II

Ernst Cassirer, The Questions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Isaiah Berlin, Freedom and its Betrayal; Jacob Talmon, Totalitarian Democracy

Chronology:

1712: Born in Geneva on June 28; mother dies days after childbirth and is brought up by an aunt and his father, Isaac.
1722: Father leaves Geneva after disagreement with authorities; JJR lives with relatives and is apprenticed to an engraver.

1728: JJR leaves Geneva; meets the twenty-nine year old Mme de Warrens and converts to Catholicism.

1730-32: Visits Switzerland; lives for a time at Neufchatel; works transcribing musical scores.

1742: Visits Paris where he presents a new system for musical notation; meets Diderot and other members of the Parisian literary world.

1743-44: Works as Secretary to the French Ambassador to Venice.

1745-49: Returns to Paris; begins lifelong relation with Thérèse Lavasseur; first of five children left at Foundling Home; contributes essays on music to Diderot’s *Encyclopedia*.

1750: Publication of *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (*First Discourse*) and wins first prize from the Academy of Dijon.

1752: Completes opera *Le Devin du Village* (*The Village Soothsayer*) that is performed at Fountainbleau for Louis XV.

1754: Reconverts to Protestantism in order to reclaim Genevan citizenship.

1755: Publication of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (*Second Discourse*); also publishes *Discourse on Political Economy* for the *Encyclopedia*.

1756-57: Moves to The Hermitage, the estate of Mme d'Epinay, an aristocratic patron; begins relation with Mme d'Houdetot, the sister-in-law of Mme d'Epinay; quarrels with Diderot and d'Alembert after the latter’s article proposing a theatre in Geneva.

1758: Publishes *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre*.

1761: Publishes novel *Julie or the New Heloise* that becomes an immediate international success.

1762: Publishes *On the Social Contract* and *Emile*; the books are condemned and an arrest warrant is issued for the author.

1763-65: Settles in Neufchatel near the Swiss border; renounces Genevan citizenship; drafts constitution for Corsica; writes his *Letters Written from the Mountain* responding to critics of the *Social Contract*.
1766-67: Accepts offer from David Hume to come to live in England; quarrels bitterly with Hume and returns to France under pseudonym Jean-Joseph Renou; begins work on the Conessions; publishes his Dictionary of Music.

1770-72: Gives first readings of the Conessions; publishes Considerations on the Government of Poland; begins work on another autobiographical work Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques.

1776-78: Works on Reveries of a Solitary Walker; moves to Ermenonville outside of Paris at the invitation of the Marquis de Girardin.

1778: Dies on July 2, five days after his sixty-sixth birthday.

1794: JJR’s remains are transferred to the National Panthéon in Paris.

**Additional Readings:**

**Editions:**

The standard edition of the works of JJR is Oeuvres complètes ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond (Paris: Pléiade, 1959-95); 4 volumes.

Correspondance Complète de JJR, ed. Ralph Leigh (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1965-87); 46 volumes

The Collected Writings of Rousseau, ed. Christopher Kelly and Roger Masters (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990 – 2010); 14 volumes

**Biographies:**

The best study of JJR’s life still remains his Confessions

Cranston, Maurice: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1712-1754

The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1754-1762

Damrosch, Leopold: Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius

Guéhenno, Jean: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2 vols)

**Critical Studies:**

Althusser, Louis: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and History

Charvet, John: The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau

Cranston, Maurice and Peters, Richard, ed. Hobbes and Rousseau
Gauthier, David: *Rousseau: The Sentiment of Existence*
Gildin, Hilail: *Rousseau’s Social Contract: The Design of the Argument*
Kelly, Christopher: *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One’s Life to the Truth*
Meier, Heinrich: *The Happiness of the Philosphic Life*
Marks, Jonathan: *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*
Melzer, Arthur: *The Natural Goodness of Man*
Miller, James: *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy*
Neuhauser, Fredrick, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love*
Orwin, Clifford and Tarcov, Nathan (eds): *The Legacy of Rousseau*
Riley, Patrick (ed): *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*
Schwartz, Joel: *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*
Starobinski, Jean: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*
Shklar, Judith: *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory*
Trachtenberg, Zev: *Making Citizens*
Williams, David Lay: *Rousseau’s Platonic Enlightenment*
Wokler, Robert: *Rousseau on Society, Politics, Music, and Language*
Zaretsky, Robert and Scott, John: *The Philosophers’ Quarrel: Rousseau, Hume and the Limits of Human Understanding*