

**Political Science 399: Seminar in Political
Theory**

Rousseau and Modernity

This course offers an in-depth examination of the merits and limits of the critique of modernity of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This critique both anticipates and informs the work of his many theoretical successors, including Marx and the tradition of critical theory, broadly understood to include both Habermas and Foucault. Thus to understand the critical-theoretical tradition it helps to understand Rousseau. But Rousseau's thought also entails what might be called an anticipatory critique of that theoretical tradition, one which implies that none of its representatives has adequately plumbed the depths of the modern condition -- or even more, that their thought is part of the modern problem rather than a contribution to its solution. In the light of what some have argued is the exhaustion of the tradition of critical theory, we would do well, then, to return to Rousseau.

Our "return" to Rousseau begins with his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, published in 1755. What we find is at once an enormously insightful, provocative description of the modern obsession with individual reputation and power (*amour-propre*) along with the vanity and hypocrisy that inevitably accompanies it, and a deeply problematical account of the origins and development of that inflamed *amour-propre* which appears to rule out the possibility of overcoming or even ameliorating it. In his *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau responds, in effect, to that objection by describing the kind of education (or what we would call "socialization") that would enable individuals to be free from (unhealthy) *amour propre* and thus to live more authentic and fulfilling lives. Here the (phylogenetic) account of the "development" of civilization from the "state of nature" to modernity in the *Discourse* is replaced by an (ontogenetic) account of the development of the individual from infancy through adulthood, one which modifies the theory of human nature -- and thus the account of *amour-propre* -- in the earlier work and that is -- despite its limits -- remarkably consistent in many respects with both contemporary cognitive developmental theory and contemporary psychoanalysis. *Emile* deals at length with the largest possible questions about the human condition: What is human nature and how can it be determined? What are the fundamental human passions and what is their right relationship to reason? What is the proper relationship between human desires and human powers? What sort of education -- in the broad sense, once again, of socialization from infancy to early adulthood -- is most conducive to developing this relationship? Can this ideal form of education properly prepare individuals to participate in politics, i.e., are the requirements of individual development and the requirements of citizenship compatible or incompatible? These and many other related questions are explored in *Emile*, all of which will be explored in this course.

The *Discourse* (Cress translation) and *Emile* (Bloom translation) are the only required texts for this course, and both are available at the university bookstore in Student Center East. Students have the option of writing one term paper of 15-20 (double-spaced typed) pages on any topic related to the issues raised in the course, or of writing two shorter papers of 8-10 (double-spaced typed) pages on more structured topics that I will assign. Students who choose the first option must submit a brief, 1-2 page proposal outlining their topic no later than Thursday of the 8th week of the semester (October 16). The due date for that paper is the last day of class,

Thursday December 4. The due dates for the two papers written by those who choose the second option are October 16 and December 4. In addition, seven brief (1-2) response papers on different parts of the text are required of all students. They are due, respectively, on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th, and 14th Thursdays of the semester. Regular attendance is also required; only two unexcused absences will be permitted without penalty. Finally, students are expected to come to class having *completed the required reading* for that session and being prepared, therefore, to ask questions and make comments during class. In short – as is always the case – you will only get out of this course what you are prepared to put into it.

Week 1	Introduction: Rousseau and Modernity
Weeks 2-3	Required: <i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , Translator's Introduction and pp. 1-92.
Week 4	Required: <i>Emile</i> , Translators Introduction (pp.3-28); Preface (pp. 33-35)
Week 5	Emile as Infant: Governing (Education for and by) Nature Required; Book I (pp. 37-74)
Weeks 6-7	Emile as Young Child: Governing (Education for and by) the Senses Required: Book II (pp. 77-163)
Weeks 8-9	Emile as Older Child: Governing (Education for and by) Utility Required: Book III (pp. 165-208)
Weeks 10-11	Emile as Adolescent, Part One: Governing (Education for and by) the Passions Required: Book IV (pp. 211-260)
Weeks 12-13	Emile as Adolescent, Part Two: Governing (Education by and for) Faith and Friendship Required: Book IV (pp. 260-355)
Weeks 14-15	Emile as Young Adult: Governing (Education for and by) Sex and State Required: Book V (pp. 357-480)

Tuesday 2:00-4:30

1115 BSB

Office Hours:

Thursday 1-3 and by appointment

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