

## Rousseau's Political Philosophy

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 GO 351, Spring 2010  
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 Office Hours: Monday 10-12, Tuesday 10-12

### Course Description:

This course will be entirely devoted to a close examination of some of the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau is acknowledged as one of the pre-eminent thinkers of the modern period, perhaps of all time. Though there is some scholarly consensus about his seminal importance, there is extensive disagreement about Rousseau's teaching on fundamental questions about human nature and the just political order. Rousseau's thought seems to be defined by a series of polarities: the quiet independence and self-sufficiency of natural man versus the dignity and virtue of the republican citizen; the solitary life versus the communal, political life; and a defense of cosmopolitan benevolence versus a defense of national particularity. These are just a few, and they have caused many readers (including some of his contemporaries), to claim Rousseau was hopelessly confused or just plain sloppy. We shall take Rousseau at his word however, and begin with the assumption that there is an order to the whole of his thought. As he stated in a letter, "The majority of my Readers must often have found my discourses poorly structured and almost entirely disjointed, for want of perceiving the trunk of which I showed them only the branches. But that was enough for those capable of understanding, and I never wanted to speak to others." We shall therefore undertake the difficult task of understanding Rousseau's "system."

Rousseau's thought has much to teach us on its own terms, but it is also critically important for understanding the Enlightenment thinkers whom he challenged and subsequent thinkers who were greatly influenced by him. Rousseau is one of the first figures of the so-called Enlightenment to register a vigorous dissent from some of its key principles. And he also profoundly influenced nineteenth century currents of thought such as nationalism, romanticism and historicism. To understand Rousseau then will also assist us in understanding some of his predecessors and descendants.

### Required Texts:

*The Discourses and other early political writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge)

*Emile*, ed. and trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books)

*Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, ed. Allan Bloom (Cornell)

**\*\*Cheryl Glenn and Loretta Gray, *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition (Wadsworth Cengage Learning)\*\***

### Course Outline:

Introduction to course: 1/25

#### I. Virtue, History, and Human Nature: *The Discourses*

A. *First Discourse*, On the question, "Whether the restoration of the Sciences and Arts has contributed to the purification of morals?"

1. 1<sup>st</sup> D, Forward, Preface, begin Part I (1/27)
2. 1<sup>st</sup> D, Part I (2/1)
3. 1<sup>st</sup> D, Part II (2/3)

## 4. Preface to Narcissus (2/8)

Preface of a Second Letter to Bordes

B. *Second Discourse*, On the Origins and Foundation of Inequality among Men1. 2<sup>nd</sup> D, Epistle Dedicatory, Preface (2/10)2. 2<sup>nd</sup> D, pp. 101-126 (2/15)3. 2<sup>nd</sup> D, pp. 126-141 (2/17)4. 2<sup>nd</sup> D, pp. 141-160 (2/22)5. 2<sup>nd</sup> D, pp. 160-end (2/24)**II. The Politics of Education:** *Emile*A. *Emile* Bk I(3/1)B. *Emile* Bk I(3/3) **First Paper Due**C. *Emile* Bk II(3/8)D. *Emile* Bk II(3/10)**SPRING BREAK: MARCH 13 – MARCH 21**E. *Emile* Bk III(3/22)F. *Emile* Bk III(3/24)G. *Emile* Bk IV (3/29)H. *Emile* Bk IV(3/31)I. *Emile* Bk IV(4/5)J. *Emile* Bk V (4/7)K. *Emile* Bk V (4/12)L. *Emile* Bk V (4/14)**III. Political Applications:** *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*

## A. LD, appendix and pp. 3-27 (4/19)

B. LD, pp. 27-57 (4/21) **Second Paper Due**

## C. LD, 57-75 (4/26)

## D. LD, pp. 75-113 (4/28)

## E. LD, pp. 113-139 (5/3)

**Final Exam: Thursday, May 13, 9:00am-12:00****Course Requirements:**

Quizzes and Reflection papers, 10%

Essay #1, 25%

Essay #2, 30%

Final Exam, 35%

*Reflection Papers:*

In an attentive reader, the act of reading evokes a response. A response can take many different forms. Some readers underline key passages. Some write comments in the margins. Some take notes a separate sheet of paper. All of these are ways of carrying forward your inquiries. In this course I will be asking you to pursue yet another method: reflection papers. These short papers (two pages) are an extension and heightening of the more casual and distracted responses which you may now give to the things you read.

In preparation for class, you should commit to paper your thoughts about the text (or a portion of the text) and the questions that arise from it. This should be more than some scratchy, abbreviated notes intelligible only to you; however, this is not a polished essay. You have the leisure to explore, inquire, question, and wander. By wandering, I do not mean aimless wandering. Since our discussions in class will be guided always by two questions, your reflection papers should be so guided: what is the author saying? Is it true? Sometimes it will take all of your effort to figure out what the author means. Other times you will want to take a step back and evaluate the claims made in the text. These are distinct questions, but in pursuing one, the other should always be kept silently in mind.

*Essays:*

These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly.

*Final Exam:*

This will be a comprehensive, essay exam taken during the exam period.

*General Expectations:*

**You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right.** Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

You will be attentive in class and always display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others. You will take your share of responsibility for the quality of class time, coming prepared to discuss the assignments thoughtfully.

**No laptops are permitted in class unless you have a medical problem that prevents you from taking notes by hand.**

*Attendance:*

**Attendance is mandatory. There is no such thing as an unexcused absence.** All absences must therefore be cleared ahead of time. If you must miss class, you remain responsible for all the material covered that day. After one unexcused absence, each subsequent absence will bring your final grade down by one half of a letter grade.

*Academic Honor:*

**I take violations of the honor code very seriously. At minimum, plagiarism will merit a “0” for that assignment, with failure for the course likely. In cases that I deem particularly egregious, I will seek to have you suspended or expelled from Skidmore College.**

Reprinted below is the section on academic integrity violations from the Student Handbook.

## Academic Policies

The Skidmore pamphlet on "[The Ethics of Scholarship](#)" defines some of the positive reasons why an academic community needs to observe the highest principles of intellectual honesty. These expectations include the bond of trust among faculty and students, without which there can be no truly educational enterprise; the need for students to embrace the rewarding struggles inherent in challenging intellectual endeavors; the excitement of mastering research and discovery processes in various disciplines; and the rewards of becoming a genuine participant in the larger community of scholars past and present. The academic Honor Code requires students to attend closely to such issues as the following:

1. Plagiarism is representing the work of another person as one's own: for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else. Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgment, submission of another student's work as one's own, the purchase of prepared research or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources; the appropriate ways of acknowledging his or her academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness; and the consequences for violating the Skidmore Honor Code. The Integrity Board and the Board of Appeals will not regard claims of ignorance, unintentional error, or academic or personal pressures as adequate defenses for violations of the Honor Code.
  - a. Minor plagiarism offenses: for example, failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a few phrases, sentences, or an idea (though not an idea of importance to the thesis or central purpose of the paper or project).
  - b. More serious plagiarism offenses: for example, failure to acknowledge the quotation or paraphrase of a few longer, paragraph-length sections of a paper; failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a major idea or the source(s) of important pieces of evidence or information; or the source(s) for an ordering principle central to the paper's or project's structure.
  - c. Major plagiarism offenses: for example, failure to acknowledge the source (quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) of major sections or passages in the paper or project; the unacknowledged use of several major ideas or extensive reliance on another person's data, evidence, or critical method submitted as one's own; and work borrowed, stolen, or purchased from someone else.
2. Cheating on examinations by giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include collaboration of any sort during an examination (unless specifically approved by the instructor); collaboration before an examination (when such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the instructor); the use of notes, books, or other aids during an exam (unless explicitly permitted by the instructor); looking upon someone else's exam during the examination period; intentionally allowing another student to look upon one's own exam; discussing test items during the exam period; and the passing of any exam information to students who have not yet taken the examination. There can be no conversation while an examination is in progress. Any

prohibited or unauthorized interaction (e.g., talking or other communication) between students while an examination is in progress may constitute "cheating," regardless of the content or intent of the interaction.

3. Multiple submission of substantial portions of the same work for credit, without the prior explicit consent of the instructor(s) to whom the material is being (or has been) submitted.
4. Forging another person's signature or name on academic or other official documents (e.g., the signing of a faculty advisor approval, the misuse of attendance sign-up sheets, the mishandling or misappropriation of registration materials or other official documents).
5. The deliberate destruction, damaging, or theft of another's work or working materials (including lab experiments, computer programs, term papers, works of art, or other projects undertaken for academic purposes).
6. The effort to remove uncharged library materials from the library, defacing or damaging library materials, intentional displacement and hoarding of materials within the library for unauthorized private use, and the abuse of reserve-book privileges. These and related offenses constitute an abuse of the College community's central resource for the advancement of learning. The College may treat the failure to return materials to the library in a timely fashion, when other members of the Skidmore community need these materials, as an academic integrity infraction.
7. Computer abuse and fraud includes the abuses defined in these guidelines under "plagiarism," "multiple submission," and "alteration." The College expects members of the Skidmore community to observe the highest standards of academic and social integrity as they use computers for class, office, and individual projects. Such offenses as computer plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, entry into another person's computing directory, data theft or unauthorized alteration, inappropriate use of the electronic mail, and other malicious or dishonest computer activities will be treated as serious infringements of integrity. Consult the "[Code of Ethics for Academic Computing at Skidmore College](#)."

The College recognizes the following EDUCOM policy statement:

Respect for intellectual labor and creativity is vital to academic discourse and enterprise. This principle applies to works of all authors and publishers in all media. It encompasses respect for the right to acknowledgment; the right to privacy; and the right to determine the form, manner, and terms of publication and distribution. Because electronic information is volatile and easily reproduced, respect for the work is especially critical in computer environments. Violations of authorial integrity, including plagiarism, invasion of privacy, unauthorized access, and trade secret and copyright violations, may be grounds for sanctions against members of the academic community.

8. Software piracy: The College forbids the unauthorized duplication or use of copyrighted software. Even if a program does not contain copy protection to prevent unauthorized duplication, it is illegal to copy commercial software for your own use or use by others.

Likewise, knowingly accepting or using copies of "pirated" software violates the Skidmore College Honor Code.

9. Unauthorized collaboration (closely related to plagiarism or cheating): Student collaboration on projects, papers, or other academic exercises regarded as inappropriate by the instructor(s). Although the most common faculty assumption is that work submitted for credit is entirely one's own, standards on appropriate and inappropriate collaboration vary widely among individual faculty members and each discipline. Students who want to confer or collaborate with one another on work receiving academic credit (for example, homework assignments, lab reports, exam preparations, take-home exams, research projects, essays) should be certain of the instructor's expectations and standards.
10. The misrepresentation or purposeful mishandling of material or fabrication of information in an academic exercise, academic process, or assignment (for example, the falsification of experimental or computer data, the construction of false documents or the misleading alteration of documents, the false or misleading citation of sources, the purposeful mishandling or misappropriation of registration materials).
11. Altering material without the instructor's knowledge and consent in negotiation for a higher grade.