

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought

Lecture Outline: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part I

- Dates: 1712 Birth (Geneva)
1750 Wins prize from Academy of Dijon for *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*
1755 *Discourse on Origin of Inequality* published
1762 *On the Social Contract* and *Emile* published; both are condemned and ordered to be publicly burned in Geneva and France; French govt orders his arrest
1778 Death (refuge near Paris)

I. Background

- A. Personal: born a citizen of Geneva; gave up citizenship; his books often banned there
- B. Range of intellectual competence: social and political theory, music, novels, pedagogy, autobiography
- C. Paradoxes of his life and thought: radical/conservative; Enlightenment/critique; holistic community/total isolation

II. Rousseau's thought as a response to other thinkers we have read

- A. Social contract (Hobbes, Locke)
- B. Republicanism (Aristotle, Machiavelli)
- C. Critique of inequality

III. Rousseau's philosophy of history

- A. Critique of progress (in *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*)
- B. His method and sources: conjectural history based on historians' & travelers' reports

IV. Human Nature

- A. Independence/self-sufficiency
- B. Two basic drives
 - 1. Self-preservation
 - 2. Pity
- C. Free will
- D. Perfectibility

V. Historical narrative of the development of inequality

- A. Rousseau's state of nature has a long history
- B. Gradual process of development from state of nature to social state
 - 1. Brute animality
 - 2. Golden age of moderate sociability: no relations of dependence
 - 3. Agriculture and metallurgy: corruption, inequality, dependence emerge
 - 4. Landholders trick the poor into agreeing to 'right' of property