

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought

Lecture Outline: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III (ch. 1-7, 9-10), Book IV (ch. 1-2, 7-9)

I. The legislator (Bk II, ch 7)

- A. Role of legislator
 - 1. To give men laws
 - 2. Answer to following problem: “men would be, prior to the advent of laws, what they ought to become by means of laws” (164)
- B. Qualities of the legislator: extra-constitutional, quasi-divine, foreign
- C. Methods of the legislator to persuade “an emerging people” to appreciate “the sound maxims of politics and to follow the fundamental rules of statecraft” (164)
 - 1. Neither force nor reasoning
 - 2. Rather, “compel without violence and persuade without convincing”

II. Civil Religion and Patriotism (Bk II, ch 7; Bk IV, ch 8)

- A. Role of civil religion: like Machiavelli, sees religion as instrument of politics, to cultivate love of and loyalty to the state
- B. Toleration of “religion of man” so long as consistent with “religion of the citizen”
- C. Content of civil religion
 - 1. Characterizes it as “purely civil profession of faith” and “sentiments of sociability”
 - 2. “Dogmas” of civil religion include opposition to intolerance, happiness of the just, punishment of the wicked, and sanctity of the social contract and of the laws
- D. Problems
 - 1. Deliberate deception at the foundation of the state
 - 2. Who is to judge the legitimacy of the legislator’s methods?

III. Sovereignty and Government

- A. Sovereignty is “the exercise of the general will”(Bk II, ch 1)
 - 1. Inalienable: legislative power belongs to the people alone and cannot be represented
 - 2. Indivisible
- B. Government is intermediate body established b/w subjects and sovereign and charged with execution of the laws (Bk III, ch 1)
 - 1. No contract b/w a people and government but a trust
 - 2. Form of government can be monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy
 - 3. Proponent of direct democracy?

IV. Rousseau and liberalism

- A. Different conceptions of liberty: Locke v. Rousseau
- B. Rousseauian critiques of liberalism
 - 1. Desire for harmony of public and private selves
 - 2. Critique of inequality
 - 3. Importance of sense of belonging
- C. Liberal critiques of Rousseau: betrayal of liberty?

V. Rousseau’s Legacies

- A. Themes taken up by French Revolutionaries
 - 1. Absolute sovereignty of the people
 - 2. Idea of the completely unified people
 - 3. Politics of virtue and simplicity; clear maxims, simple mores
- B. Democratic theory: importance of participation, focus on common good, deliberation