



The Social Contract: Or Principles of Political Right

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) political philosophy heavily influenced the French Revolution, as well as the American Revolution and the overall development of modern political, sociological and educational thought in particular through his book "The social contract", published in 1762. This monumental work is part of the family of older, major writings on social contract theory by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704). Rousseau compares the social contract to an "act of association" whereby there is reciprocal commitment between the state and the individual. The individuals as citizens share sovereign power, but as subjects put themselves under the laws of the state. Rousseau also defines government as one of the principal actors: it is an intermediary body between the subjects and the state with the main tasks of executing the laws and preserving civil and political freedom. Rousseau's social contract was an idea in advance of its time and continues to attract the interest of social scientists, and new interpretations of the social contract are being developed, such as in game theory. For all Rousseau's fame, it is ironic that "The social contract" was banned at the time of its publication, both in Geneva and France (admittedly for religious reasons) and that Rousseau had to flee to avoid arrest.

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