**Student Study Guide for Rousseau’s The Social Contract**

Book I

**Chapter 1 – The Subject**

What does it mean: “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”?

Are women included in this statement?

What does it mean: “Those who think themselves masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they.”?

In chapter 1, Rousseau explains his view about the relationship between force (might) and moral and intellectual justification (right). What is his view and how does he justify his position?

Why, for Rousseau, is the social order NOT a natural right?

**Chapter 2 - First Societies**

What is the relationship between family and state? What is the limit to the analogy?

According to Rousseau, Grotius, Hobbes, Caligula, and Aristotle all share a common view or theory: what is it? (What other philosophers that we have read share a similar view?)

What refutation does Rousseau give to Aristotle and Company?

Why does Rousseau mention “King Adam” and “Emperor Noah”?

**Chapter 3 – Right of the Strongest**

There are expressions of the notion of “might makes right” in Plato’s Republic (Glaucon), Machiavelli, and Locke. Articulate each of these three different positions in terms of the notion “might makes right”.

What arguments does Rousseau put forward in Chapter 3 to refute the idea that “might makes right”?

What is the difference between obedience and duty?

**Chapter 4 – Slavery**

How does Rousseau refute the justification of slavery based on …

Providing Security

Inferiority of the masses

Spoils of War

How are these three justifications for slavery and exploitation of people manifest in American society today? How do these justifications for slavery apply (or not apply) to animals? Which one of these three is used most commonly by Sea World to justify it’s use of Orcas in shows? (“It’s for their own betterment”).

The first sentence in Chapter 4 makes three claims. Articulate and explain the reasoning behind each of these claims.

Rousseau argues that security alone is not adequate justification for government. What is his reasoning behind this claim?

In what way would Ivan Karamazov be in strong agreement with Rousseau’s arguments in Ch. 4?

In Chapter 4, Rousseau says, “Men living in their primitive condition on independence have no intercourse regular enough to constitute either a state of peace or a state of war.” How would Hobbes and Locke view such a claim?

What is Rousseau’s understanding of war? How does Rousseau’s understanding of war spoils differ from that of Machiavelli? (p. 57)

Articulate the logical argument Rousseau employs to refute the claim of masters to their “right” to own slaves.

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**Chapter 5 – Original Covenant**

What is the relationship, for Rousseau, between slavery and governance? (see also Ch. 6)

At the conclusion of Chapter 5, Rousseau raises the problem of the majority versus the minority. To what degree is he in harmony with Locke’s understanding of the function of the majority? To what degree is he in conflict with Locke’s understanding of the function of the majority?

**Chapter 6 – Social Pact**

3. Restate, in your own words, what Rousseau sees as the “fundamental problem to which the state holds the solution”.

What is the difference between “natural freedom” and “civil freedom” for Rousseau? (p. 60)

What does Rousseau mean by his definitions of each of the following terms: city, state, sovereign, power, citizens, and subjects?

2. What do people get once the social contract is broken?

**They regain their natural freedom**

**Chapter 7 – The Sovereign**

Using yourself as a concrete example, in what ways are you a “member of the sovereign body in relation to individuals”? In what way are you a “member of the state in relation to the sovereign”? How are these different?

What would Rousseau say about:

Luke 4:5 – 8: that all governments are controlled by Satan

Matthew 22:15 – 22 that people should pay their taxes to the government

I Peter 2:13 – 21 - That people should obey all authority and count it blessing when they are unjustly persecuted

What would Rousseau say about:

Murder? Targeted political assassination? The difference between them?

Speed limits, in terms of the private will

**Chapter 8 – Civil Society**

5. What, for Rousseau, constitutes the difference between possessions and property?

What is the relationship between natural and civil liberty? (In 12 words or less)

**Chapter 9 – Property**

What is Rousseau’s view of the Spanish claim to the Americas?

6. What does Rousseau see as the benefit of encouraging private home ownership?

What would Rousseau think of the principle of “eminent domain”? (You may have to look it up.)

Book II

**Chapter 1 – Sovereignty: Inalienable**

What does Rousseau mean when he says “power can be delegated but the will cannot be”?

If an entire people submits completely to the will of a ruler, what is the result? Is this an appropriate way to describe Japan at the end of WWII?

**Chapter 2 – Sovereignty: Indivisible**

What does Rousseau see as the potential problem with Montesquieu’s separation of branches of government?

What accusation does Rousseau make against Grotius and Barbeyrac? (In your own words.)

What does Rousseau mean when he says “… it is not the people who hand out embassies, professorships, and pensions”?

**Chapter 3 – Can the General Will Err?**

Can the general will be illegitimate? Can the General Will make bad decisions?

What is the difference between the “will of all” and the “general will”?

While factions (“sectional associations”) often pull away from the unity of the state, when is it that they become a serious threat to society?

What would Rousseau say about the American two-party system (of Democrats vs. Republicans)?

**Chapter 4 – The Limits of Sovereign Power**

The main conflict presented in Chapter 4 is between what and what?

According to Rousseau, would it be legitimate to place a higher tax rate on millionaires than on the poor? Explain your answer.

In what sense does the Social Contract generate equality?

**Chapter 5 – Life and Death**

Rousseau argues that in a well-governed state there are few punished because:

According to Rousseau, what gives states the right to impose the death penalty other than the sovereign will?

According to Rousseau, who has the right to pardon those who break the law?

According to Rousseau, what are laws, really?

Can the sovereign be racist, sexist, or classist? (Explain your answer)

**Chapter 6 – On Law**

As Rousseau defines them, what is the difference between “rules, decrees, and legislation” vs. “laws”

According to Rousseau, who makes laws?

While rules may be made for groups in society, Rousseau is clear that rules cannot legitimately be made for whom?

Rousseau argues that “all legitimate government is ‘Republican’” – what does he mean by this?

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**Chapter 7 – The Lawgiver**

In your own words, what is the difference between a lawgiver and a prince?

What does Rousseau say is a problem in terms of communication faced by Lawgivers?

Since the Lawgiver cannot appeal to the people through force, how must they usually communicate the value of their laws?

What does Rousseau think of the founders of Judaism? Of Islam? (and why…?)

**Chapter 8 – The People**

Other than the will of the sovereign, what must the wise Lawmaker take into account when crafting the laws for the state?

What does Rousseau mean when he says, “Most nations, like men, are teachable only in their youth; with age they become incorrigible.” And do you think this is true for both people and nations?

What actually CAN reset the clock or revitalize the vigor of a nation’s government?

What is the result of imposing good, fair, and just laws (or a Constitution) on a nation before the people [say they] are ready?

**Chapter 9 – The People (Continued)**

What does Rousseau mean when he says “The more the social bond is stretched, the slacker it becomes.”?

Why specifically does government become more burdensome as its administration enlarges?

For Rousseau, size matters. Explain this.

**Chapter 10 – The People (Continued) [Continued]**

Rousseau measures the health of a state by two factors. What are they?

What other measures might be used to assess the strength of a state?

Why can’t a mathematical optimum formula for an ideal ratio of land to population ever be established?

What is ironic about Rousseau’s closing comments about Corsica at the end of Chapter 10?

**Chapter 11 – Various Systems of Law**

What is “equality of power” and “equality of wealth” for Rousseau (how does he define them)?

What does Rousseau think should be done about the inevitability of abuses of power and wealth?

Rousseau argues that a society’s constitution and institutions are often derived from (or based on) two things. What are these two things?

What conditions lead to the deterioration and collapse of the state (in ***this*** chapter)?

Book III

**Chapter 1 – Government**

For Rousseau, what constitutes the fundamental difference between legislative *power* and executive *power*?

What is the purpose of Government?

How does Rousseau define “the magistrate”?

What is the potential danger Rousseau notes for states with large populations?

What is the outcome of a state where the will of the Prince dominates the will of the sovereign?

While it is necessary that governments have their own ethos, ego, and sense of what is what danger do governments pose to society?

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*Chapter 2 – Constitutive Principles of Different Forms of Governments*

Chapter 3 – Classification of Governments

(presented in the Unit 2 Introduction along with Aristotle, Bk, IV, parts 1 – 2)

*Chapter 4 – Democracy*

*Chapter 5 – Aristocracy*

*Chapter 6 – Monarchy*

*Chapter 7 – Mixed Forms*

*Chapter 8 – All Forms of Government do not Suit All Countries*

**Chapter 9 – The Signs of a Good Government**

(Read the Footnotes!)

Rousseau’s distinction between subjects and citizens is parallel to which philosophical position or view of human nature?

Rousseau’s distinction between subjects and citizens is roughly parallel to what political division in the U.S. today?

For Rousseau what are the TWO basic (foundational) qualities on which government can be set?

For Rousseau, what does change in population demonstrate about the quality of government?

Although Rousseau prefers peace to war (or false peace, anyway), fundamentally for him, the true key to human security is…. What?

**Chapter 10 – The Abuse of Government and Its Tendency to Degenerate**

For Rousseau, what is the ongoing dynamic between Government and the Sovereign?

Give a historical example of what Rousseau describes as the “contracting” (or “contraction”) of the Government.

What are the two different ways in which the state can dissolve – and how are they different from the state “contracting”?

To which philosopher is Rousseau paying tribute in his taxonomy in Chapter 10? (p. 133)

What is an “ochlocracy”?

How does Rousseau define and distinguish between a “tyrant” and a “despot”?

**Chapter 11 – The Death of the Body Politic**

What would Rousseau predict about the future of the US Government?

Review: What is (for Rousseau) the difference between “legislative power”, “law”, and “rules”?

Why is it that when laws become “weak with age”, it is an indication that the state is dead?

**Chapter 15 – Deputies or Representatives**

How does the use of money for Rousseau foreshadow or signal a coming enslavement of citizens?

Speculate: why does Rousseau argue that “compulsory service” is less contrary to liberty than is taxation?

According to Rousseau, what is the cause of voter apathy?

How do harsh climates affect political realities?

Why does Rousseau say peoples of the modern world are slaves?

**Chapter 16 – That the Institution of Government is Not a Contract**

What does Rousseau mean when he says “to undertake to obey a master would be to return to absolute freedom”?

Why can’t the executive be contractual?

For Rousseau, what is the true (should be) function of the executive

**Chapter 17 – The Institution of Government**

How does the establishment of law differ from the execution of law?

Chapter 18 – The Means of Preventing the Usurpation of Government

What is the difference between an executive as a master and as an office?

Once government is established, for Rousseau what is the point at which Government can and SHOULD be changed?

On page 147 Rousseau describes a Prince who uses fear via popular sentiment to maintain an appearance of tacit consent from a silenced sovereign. What term does Aristotle use to describe such an individual?

What are Rousseau’s views on secession?

Book IV

**Chapter 1 – The General Will is Indestructible**

What evidence or example does Rousseau give in this chapter to suggest that modern society is corrupting?

What error does Rousseau say political theorists make in their analyses?

List the sequence of events that happens once the social tie becomes frayed:

Once the government intimidates all opposition voices, is the general will dead? Explain.

Ideally, when things are going well in a society, what is the proper question to ask when legislating, voting, or making political decisions?

**Chapter 8 – The Civil Religion**

What reason does Rousseau give for why there were not international wars of religion in the ancient world?

Which religious group caused the first set of problems in the ancient world by not accepting the power of their conquerors’ deities?

What was the radical (and, for Rousseau, problematic) innovation made by Jesus in political history?

Which of the non-Biblical readings that we have had most agrees with this assessment of total separation?

What perpetual conflict does Rousseau argue was established by Christianity and why was it socially corrosive?

On p. 181, Rousseau distinguishes between three types of religion, the third of which he says is “so manifestly bad that the pleasure of demonstrating its badness would be a waste of time.” What is this third type and what makes it so bad, for Rousseau?

Give the characteristics of “religion of the man” versus “religion of the citizen” (p. 181)

What does Rousseau see as one the benefits of the “religion of the citizen”?

What does Rousseau see as one of the problems of “religion of the citizen”?

Give and American example of the “religion of the citizen”.

What is one of the benefits of what Rousseau calls “the religion of humanity, or Christianity”?

What is one of the problems Rousseau sees in the Christianity of the Gospel?

In your own words, why does Rousseau say a perfectly Christian society could never happen?

Which of the Biblical passages that we have read best agrees with Rousseau’s most damning criticism of Christianity: that “True Christians are made to be slaves.”

Rousseau holds that the Fall of Rome was brought about by…

[Discuss the role of Christianity in the Byzantine empire]

Overall Rousseau’s general view of religion (not just Christianity) in relation to the state comes closest to that of:

What is ironic about Rousseau’s singular “negative dogma” which he prescribes as part of the basic civil religion?

Explain what Rousseau would say about role of the state and religion in terms of gay marriage.

**Chapter 9 - Conclusion**

Should this book be required reading in AP Government classes across the US – why or why not?