



The Social Contract

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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One of the towering figures of the Enlightenment was Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose works were essential to the ideological developments of the 18th century. The prestige of French literature in the 18th century resides especially in its revolutionary character; while the writers of the previous century used to support the social order through their works and showed sympathy and even attempted to explain the political order of the time, in the 18th century, art, literature, philosophy and science all contribute actively and fiercely to the fight against the absolutist monarch and his regime. While this was a current manifesting all throughout Europe, there were differences in practice, especially between close countries (as was the case of England and France).

Rousseau's life can best be described as a constant conflict, whether it was conflict with his wife, his employers, his colleagues and even his friends. However, such situations led to the birth of masterpieces which have been influencing the advancement of critical thinking up to the present day. The roots of his personality may be found in his childhood, as the death of his mother and the fleeing of his older brother left him with a father who impressed upon him the love for studying and reading but could not cover for the other needs of a child. Thus, the absence of a family would affect his later relations with people, and it would even compel Rousseau to abandon all his five children in an orphanage, an ironic fact given that he published a treaty on education.

It's quite likely that Rousseau realized the nature of the battles he fought. In fact, towards the end of his life, whether he was motivated by repentance or simply a need to advance his work, he provided his readers with explanations of all his actions and ideas. The "Confessions" were published after his death, and it is now considered by many to round his life's work into a single opus.

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