

POSC 260/350

“A SAVAGE MADE TO INHABIT CITIES”:

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ROUSSEAU

Professor Laurence Cooper

Spring 2020

****SPECIAL ONLINE EDITION****

I. Purpose and Scope

Human beings are a natural species, but we are not simply natural. We are formed by history, by politics, by culture, by experience. We are possessed of—we are possessed *by*—passions and appetites which are unlike those of any other species both in their content and in their intensity. Perhaps, then, we are no longer natural at all. But maybe nature still speaks to us, still provides some kind of direction—or *would*, if only we knew how to consult it. This promise, or something like it, animates Rousseau’s thought, particularly the books we’ll be reading in this course. In the *Discourse on Inequality* (aka *Second Discourse*) Rousseau undertook his most direct and scientific pursuit of nature. In *Emile*, which he considered his greatest and best book, he gave his most comprehensive articulation of what it might mean for human beings to live according to nature, no matter how great the distance we have wandered away from nature.

Speaking of distance—

II. How This Course Will Work

In his thought Rousseau was both enormously ambitious and rigorously realistic: he sketched what human beings *might* be, and he took account of what we *tend* to be, and why. In the spirit of Rousseau’s ambition, we will attempt to make this class as perfect as can be. We will attempt to hold class synchronously as much as our technology will allow. In the spirit of Rousseau’s realism, we will be prepared to adapt as necessary. What matters most is that everyone understand, in real time, exactly what we’re trying to do.

Accordingly, we will begin the course by attempting to execute **Plan A**, which would have us meeting synchronously, via Zoom, every Tuesday and Thursday from 1:15 to 3:00 Central Time. Classes will be held in my personal Zoom room. All you need to do is click on the following link: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx If all goes according to plan, this same link will work every time. Simply click on it every Tuesday and Thursday at 1:15 CST.

If Plan A proves unfeasible, which is possible (some say likely), we will move to **Plan B**. But please take note: Plan B includes a range of possibilities, depending on whatever it is that has

made Plan A inoperable. For example, perhaps we'll be able to meet synchronously, but not for the full class period. Or perhaps we'll be able to meet synchronously, but only in groups of four or six. Or perhaps we won't be able to meet synchronously at all. To the extent that we are forced to sacrifice synchronous sessions, we will make up the difference by (1) me posting a recorded lecture and (2) you responding, in writing, to a question I'll pose. If I do record lectures, they will be for your use only: they may not be shared with others via the internet.

With such a broad array of possibilities, we will need to be nimble and, most of all, we will need to be in close and regular contact. When I want to communicate with you as a group, I will use Moodle. Therefore, **you should check Moodle daily**.

This concludes the special instructions regarding the online nature of the course.

Here now are the ordinary course requirements, which are the same as they would have been if we were meeting in person:

The most important course requirement is that you read all assigned texts **closely and before class**. The *Discourse on Inequality* and *Emile* are challenging books, but they are also exceedingly rewarding—and quite often gripping and stirring. Each, in its own way, is a kind of thought experiment. In the *Discourse* Rousseau tries to think himself back, or in, to nature. The result, in part, is a narrative about primordial, savage natural human beings and the long, slow trek to becoming what we are now. In *Emile* Rousseau meticulously imagines what it would mean for a human being to be natural amid civilization even though civilization is itself unnatural and denaturing. (When I say that Rousseau *imagines* what it would mean to live naturally, I don't mean to say that he dreams or conjectures. He insists that in this book he articulates human nature and proves humanity's natural goodness.) *Emile* is a strange book—by turns philosophic discourse, fictional narrative (including a love story), and educational handbook. It partakes of multiple genres and thus belongs to no genre at all. This creates special challenges. But it also presents us with singular riches.

As determined by a vote of the Carleton faculty and ratified by the Board of Trustees, all Carleton courses this term will be mandatory S/CR/NC. Please know, however, that I will take "S" and "CR" seriously. You'll need to *earn* a passing grade. Here's how:

Students taking the course as **POSC 260** will be required to write three 5-7 page papers. These papers will be due on Friday, May 1, Friday, May 22, and Monday, June 8..

Students taking the course as **POSC 350** will be required to write a twenty page seminar paper, due on Monday, June 8. Topics should be approved by me by Monday, May 18 (preferably earlier).

Students in **both groups** will be expected to participate fully in the seminar. This means attending all synchronous sessions or, if we are not able to meet synchronously, submitting reader's responses as directed by me.

III. Office Hours

Unless otherwise indicated, I will be available for “drop-in” visits in my personal Zoom room on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 3:30-5:30 and by appointment. I will make every effort to ensure that you’ll be able to meet with me as desired.

IV. Reading

The following books are required for the course:

1. Rousseau, *Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, translated by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge University Press)
2. Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, translated by Allan Bloom (Basic Books)
3. Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (Simon & Schuster)—NOTE: *Love and Friendship* is no longer in print but is listed for sale by several on-line used book sellers. If copyright law allows (not yet clear), I will provide a PDF of the required chapters.
4. An additional reading will be sent to you in the mail.

V. Course Schedule

Here is a provisional reading schedule:

First week: *Discourse on Inequality* through the end of Part I; be sure to read Rousseau’s endnotes.

Second week: *Discourse on Inequality*, Part 2; again, be sure to read Rousseau’s endnotes.

Third week through Ninth week: *Emile*. Specific reading assignments will be provided as we proceed through the course.

A word of introduction to *Emile*. This large work is divided into five books. Books 4 and 5, which are longer than books 1-3, are themselves each divided into three discrete parts, meaning that *Emile* as a whole is divided into nine discrete parts. Here is a part-by-part thematic outline of the work:

1. Preface and Book One (pages 33-74): Here Rousseau explains that the subject of his book is the education of a natural man, defines “nature,” offers a brief diagnosis of the ills besetting modern humanity, and outlines principles of early education, especially education during infancy.

2. Book Two (pages 77-163): In this section, which is devoted to the second stage of education (ages two through 12 or 13), Rousseau defines happiness, discusses strength and weakness, explains why ignorance and an inactive imagination are good things for children, advocates “well-regulated freedom” for children, and depicts a proper education of the senses whose aim is to develop the mind without engendering the vices that make civilized people so unhappy.
3. Book Three (pages 165-208): This section, which depicts the education of the pre-adolescent Emile (ages 12 or 13 through 15), offers further reflections on happiness and strength and weakness as well as reflections on sociability (it is in this section that Emile begins to be prepared for his entry into social life); this section also summarizes the principles and the fruits of Emile’s education to this point.
4. Book Four, first part (pages 211-260): Book Four as a whole covers the period of adolescence (ages 15-20). In this part of Book Four Rousseau becomes less novelistic and more philosophically discursive as he addresses the passions (especially the various kinds of self-love) and depicts the moral and historical education designed to produce a “natural man living in the state of society.”
5. Book Four, second part): The topic here is religion. Rousseau relates “The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar, which argues *for* “natural religion” and *against* revealed religion. This may be the most widely read and influential of any of Rousseau’s writings.
6. Book Four, third part (pages 313-356): This section treats the many important issues that, according to Rousseau, arise at the time of sexual maturity. These topics include self-consciousness, taste, friendship, romantic love, and sex education.
7. Book Five, first part (pages 357-406): This part, entitled “Sophie, or the Woman,” presents Rousseau’s views on the differences between the sexes and the proper education of women.
8. Book Five, second part (pages 406-450): In this section, whose plot concerns the courtship of Emile and Sophie, Rousseau discusses such matters as choosing a spouse and the character of a successful courtship (including further reflections on the relations between the sexes). This is also the section in which virtue is given its most extensive treatment.
9. Book Five, third part (pages 450-480): Here, in the culmination of the book, Rousseau presents a summary of his political teaching (the teaching that is articulated at greater length in the Social Contract) and offers further reflections on marriage, virtue, and the character of Emile’s version of the good life.