

Reading Questions: Revolutions II, the French Revolution

1. How does the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen describe rights? What are their characteristics? What is the implication of describing them this way? For what purpose does the Declaration enumerate them?
2. What is the law, according to the Declaration? How does this conception compare with Rousseau? How is it similar and how different?
3. What does Sieyès mean when he says that the Third Estate is “everything?” What implication does he draw from this for the place of the other two estates (the nobility and the clergy) in French society?
4. How does Sieyès define *nation*? Is the nobility part of the nation according to him? What would Rousseau say about his reasoning on this point?
5. Who reigns in France according to Sieyès? Why?
6. How does Robespierre conceive of virtue? What does his conception of virtue have in common with Rousseau?
7. What circumstances does Robespierre say make it necessary for the friends of liberty to make use of “terror” and to wage a war of “liberty against tyranny?” Do you agree with him that violence or terror is justified in order to found a just social and political order?
8. What is the difference between the “moderate man” and the “man of violence” according to Bentham? What does this difference have to do with natural rights? What do you think about his accusation that the latter sort of person “set[s] up his will and fancy for a law before which all mankind are called upon to bow down at their first word?”
9. Why does Bentham equate living without government to living without rights? What connection does he form between law and rights? What, ultimately, is Bentham’s problem with natural rights?
10. Does the Declaration make future generations and governments the “slaves” of its authors?