

Reading Questions: Rousseau II, *Social Contract*

1. What question does Rousseau plan to address in the *Social Contract*?
2. How is the family related to political society according to Rousseau?
3. Why does Rousseau conclude that agreement provides the only basis of legitimate authority?
4. What act is the “true foundation of society?” What is the role of unanimity vs. majority vote in this act?
5. What problem does the social contract provide the solution to? How does the social contract solve it? These are challenging questions, particularly the latter. Give them careful thought.
6. What are the terms of the social contract? What do we surrender? What do we gain? Does it sound like a good deal to you?
7. How does Rousseau define the following terms: republic; state; sovereign; people; citizen; and subject?
8. What “remarkable change” does transition from the state of nature to the civil state cause in human beings?
9. What is the difference between natural and civil liberty? What is “moral liberty”?
10. What tension arises between the private will of the individual and the general will he has as a citizen? What injustice can this cause? What is the solution to this injustice, and why does Rousseau say that this solution means only that someone doing injustice “will be forced to be free?”
11. What does Rousseau mean when he calls the sovereign’s will “general?” What is the aim of the general will?
12. Rousseau claims that “the object of the laws is always general.” What does he mean by this?
13. Who is the legislator and what is (are) his role(s) according to Rousseau?
14. What is the difference between the general will and the will of all? Why is the will of all fallible but the general will not?
15. What degree of equality does Rousseau think is needed in a legitimate government? Why?
16. To what does Rousseau refer to when he speaks of the “government?” What is the relationship of the government to the sovereign?