

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Social Contract

by Jean Jacques Rousseau

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was a French philosopher who was an influential figure in the Enlightenment. His political philosophy of social contract had a significant impact on the French Revolution. In this excerpt from On the Social Contract published in 1762, Rousseau argued that people are by nature good. However, to protect themselves from the evils of society, they must form an association whose goal is to protect the common good for all. In this regard, the common will supersedes the will of each individual.

Primary Source:

Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains...The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.”

This is the fundamental problem of which the **Social Contract** provides the solution. The clauses of this contract...properly understood, may be reduced to one—the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community; for... “each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole...”

In order then that the social compact may not be an empty formula, it **tacitly** includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be **compelled** to do so by the whole body... the general will alone can direct the State according to the object for which it was instituted, i.e., the common good. . . .

Glossary:

Social Contract: agreement among members of society to cooperate for the benefits of all

tacitly: implied without being stated

compelled: forced