

*How are 'force', 'right', and 'freedom' related in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy?*

In the Social Contract Rousseau discusses the best way to run a state and uses philosophical arguments to argue his case. He also uses the ideas of force, right and freedom to support his argument. He feels we require a civil state, as opposed to living in the state of nature, as 'it substitutes justice for instinct....and gives his actions a moral quality' and describes the civil state as having 'transformed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man' (Unit, p109).

He believed that it is not right that you should obey someone just because of force and that for the state to be run properly the power it has must be legitimate. He says 'authority is legitimate if the person (or institution) possesses the right to command others' (Unit, p.97), in other words, authority cannot use naked force to command obedience. He also believed that 'to be legitimate, the authority the state has over the people must come from the people themselves, and not from a single person such as the king.' (Unit, P.97)

In order to prove the point that might does not equal right, that is that 'because you can force me to obey you, is it right that I should obey you?' (Unit, p100), Rousseau uses the example of 'The strongest is never strong enough to be master all the time, unless he transforms force into right and obedience into duty....Force is a physical power; I fail to see what morality can result from its effects.' (Unit, p100), in other words, unless the authority is legitimate and the people feel obliged to obey, rather

than forced to obey, when the authority is absent, the people 'will not necessarily obey' (Unit, p100).

Rousseau defines the fundamental problem of the best way to run a state as how the people can live in the state and still remain free, and he goes on to suggest that the solution is to 'find a form of association', i.e. the state, in which individuals 'while uniting with all.....obeys only himself and remains as free as before' (Unit, p103). This can be achieved adopting what he calls the general will, by every individual wanting what is best for the state, as opposed to wanting what is best for themselves, their particular will. By adopting the general will, the authority of the state becomes legitimate, as both the individual and the state want the same things, therefore no-one is forced to obey anyone else, they are actually obeying themselves.

Rousseau also argues that we will obtain civil liberty by adopting the general will, as opposed to having only natural liberty and limited freedom by following our particular will. He uses the example of a brigand exercising his particular will and force to show that by acting on particular will instead of general will, although the brigand can get what he wants, he is infringing on someone else's freedom, and although he has 'natural liberty' he does not have 'civil liberty'. Civil liberty only comes from adopting the general will, that is the will of the majority, and only by doing this can we remain as free as in the state of nature. Rousseau realises that some people will still act on their particular will, however he argues that it is acceptable to do this in circumstances where others freedom is not being affected, in other words, in matters that only affect themselves.

Rousseau puts forward several reasons why people should obey the general will and benefit from living in a civil society. He argues that by the particular will, people are just slaves to their desires, and act only on appetite; therefore they are not really free. However, by obeying the general will and acting on reason, people become free, as their will is the same as that of the state, and therefore the state is legitimate. In this way, we obtain moral liberty: 'it substitutes justice for instinct in his behaviour and gives his actions a moral quality they previously lacked' (Unit, p.111). Rousseau argues that by obtaining moral liberty it 'makes man truly master of himself' (Unit, p.111) therefore being free, and this freedom is also gained by obeying laws made by the general will: 'obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is liberty.' (Unit, p.111).

*How might these same concepts be used in the interpretation of Jacques-Louis David's painting, The Death of Socrates?*

The concepts of force, right and freedom are depicted in David's neo-classical history painting *The Death of Socrates*. David painted this painting in 1787, a time when revolutionary ideas inspired by Rousseau were sweeping France.

David's painting shows Socrates sitting on his bed in prison about to drink the hemlock which will ultimately kill him. He is situated slightly right of the centre of the painting, with his disciples all around him. Socrates, although an old man, has the body of a much younger man, and is depicted as a hero. He is also swathed in light, while all the others are in shadow; this shows him as god like, and very alive, the light defining his muscle tone and strength, even though he is soon to die. Socrates looks happy, while his disciples are weeping and full of despair, their gestures conveying utter misery and hopelessness.

There are broken chains on the floor and also on the bed, indicating that Socrates has broken free of the chains the Rousseau claims every man is in living in a society whereby illegitimate power must be obeyed. Socrates was born free, but due to his philosophical beliefs he ended up in chains, and now he would rather die than refute his beliefs and obey the authority. Freedom of thought was very important both to Socrates and Rousseau, and David has conveyed this in the painting by portraying Socrates as the central character.

Plato, who was not present at this time, has been included in the painting. He is seated at the foot of Socrates' bed, deep in contemplation and unable to watch Socrates drink the hemlock. David has given importance to the handing of the hemlock to Socrates by drawing our eye to it using perspective lines which are converging on it, and by positioning it in the exact centre of the composition.

The broad tonal range, from the bright, white robe and light skin tones, to the bright red of the figure holding the cup gives contrast to the painting, possibly indicating right and wrong, freedom and chains, morality and immorality, and legitimacy and illegitimacy of authority. The background however is slightly muted, with more sombre tones, making the figures at the front of the picture plane stand out.

Socrates had strong beliefs about how a society should be run, and he, like Rousseau, believed that 'might does not equal right' (Unit, p.100). Rousseau's argument that 'To give in to force is an act of necessity, not of will' (Unit, p.100) reinforces this

idea, and David's portrayal of Socrates acceptance of death in order to obey only oneself further reinforces this argument.

David and Rousseau shared the same beliefs with regard to force, right and freedom; David expresses these through his painting, portraying Socrates as refusing to obey illegitimate authority, showing that force cannot be used to make people obey you, and that Socrates can only obtain freedom by death.