

Discuss the ideas about the responsibilities of the individual that these three examples might be used to illustrate.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote 'The Social Contract', published in 1762 and from which the passage for this TMA is taken. He was against the monarchy's 'Divine Right' to rule and believed that the People, or sovereignty, had to be the legislative authority and obey the law because they felt they should not because they are forced to. 'When as 'subjects', we obey society's laws, we 'the people', are really only just obeying ourselves as sovereign 'citizens'¹.

Rousseau believed that the people, under general will, would vote for laws they believed necessary and would be incapable of breaking them because they deemed these laws morally correct. As all people are members of the state they share sovereign power by means of voting. Therefore when a law is proposed, it is the decision of the general will, i.e. the majority of the people, whether it is accepted or rejected. Because individuals do not vote for their personal advantage but for the good of the people, if their individual opinion is in the minority they accept that they would not be free because their opinion would not be the general will, which is what they want. For this type of state to survive, it must be small enough for everyone within it to take part in the decision-making, all issues must be fully discussed without any interference from outside and each individual must exercise their social conscience. To achieve this social freedom people would have to abandon

personal freedom, which would be very difficult as they are instinctively selfish.

"The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons" is a painting by Jacques-Louis David completed in 1789. It is a large oil on canvas measuring 3.25mts x 4.22mts in the Neo-Classical style and was painted for an exhibition at the Salon in Paris. This painting falls into the genre of history paintings, its theme is of a moralizing nature. Another of David's painting, "The Oath of Horatii" painted in 1785, 'depicts patriotic duty as being more important than family love: the three Horatii brothers are shown promising their father to kill their enemies, the Curatii of Alba, even though the latter are related to the women folk of the Horatii. The women are shown mourning their losses in a corner'². In "The Lictors His Sons" Brutus' responsibilities lay heavy on his shoulders. Having overthrown the Monarchy and establishing a Roman Republic, Brutus' sons are involved in a failed plot to restore the monarchy. Brutus has to make a decision on the fate of his sons and condemns them to death.

The painting depicts a scene at the home of Brutus as his sons' bodies are returned after their execution. There are in effect two paintings here. On the right we have the bright colourful figures of the females who are unhappy and grieving, and on the left, separated by a large column and a chair, the dark introspective figure of Brutus and the Lictors. Our view, is directed to the women in mourning and to the vanishing point which is just

above the left shoulder of the taller of the woman in red. The colour and tonal range are both wide; the bright warm colours of the women contrasts with the dark dull colours of the men on the left. Light floods the female figures from the left but only highlights the body of one of the sons and the feet of Brutus which are taut and with clenched toes. The females seem to be sharing their grief whilst Brutus is alone in his own thoughts, separated from the rest of the room by means of turning his back on them. Whilst studying this painting, I am struck by the thought that Brutus is wondering what he has done to both his family and the state. Obviously not wanting to return to life under rule by the Monarchy, he has had no choice in committing his sons to death. Brutus makes a decision for the good of the people – the general will. However as an individual this must go against his particular will, wanting his sons to live, and against the will of all – his family who want sons and brothers to live. His political duty, general will, is in opposition to his particular will and his duty to his family.

Romanticism originated in the late 18th century and emphasised imagination, strong emotions, rebellion against social conventions and freedom from classical correctness in art forms. It also characterised an appreciation of nature, of emotions over reason and placed an 'emphasis upon imagination as a gateway to transcendent experience and spiritual truth'³. Caspar David Friedrich was a painter in this style whose painting "Wanderer in a Sea of Fog" was completed in 1818. Oil on canvas, it measured 98.4cms x 74.8cms and was possibly commissioned for hanging in a domestic situation. It has a

narrow colour range consisting of mainly browns, greens and blue/whites but its tonal range is wide – light in the top half and dark in the bottom half of the painting. This gives a feeling of depth and contrast. By following the lines of the rock on which the male figure is standing we see the vanishing point just in front of his right shoulder. As the viewer, I am behind the figure and am not able to see any facial expression and so am unable to gauge his mood. With his back turned to me, effectively keeping me at bay, I have the sense that he wants his own space and wants to keep me away from his thoughts. The man appears to be absorbed in the vista in front of him which is partly hidden by the fog. What does the misty vista reveal to the man? I feel the painting suggests, by means of the vast horizons, that we should look into ourselves, 'and our own resources of feeling and thought in order to discover meaning'⁴.

These three examples define the responsibilities of the individual in contrasting ways. Rousseau believed people should ignore the individual will and that by being noble and good, they would obey the general will which is their will anyway. David's painting of Brutus was 'seen as a representation of a kind of political heroism in which the best interests of society are put before those of the individual'⁵, whilst the individual in Freidrich's painting is thinking of himself before anything else. I suggest that people have a right to live as they wish so long as it is within the principles and laws of the society or state in which they live. No individual's rights within that society can override the rights of the society as a whole, whilst any changes to the

laws must be made as a group in a consensual and democratic way.

Individuals have a responsibility to respect and nurture the rights of others whilst the society in which they live also has a responsibility to protect their rights to freedom within that society.

Word count 1166

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