

TMA 05 Art History and Philosophy

Question

‘[T]he feeling of another person should never be imposed upon us as a law’ (Casper David Friedrich, in Block 3, p.194).

In an essay of 1200 words, consider the following questions:

- 1 In your opinion, is this view consistent with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ideas as expressed in *The Social Contract*?
- 2 Consider what evidence there is in Jacques-Louis David’s paintings to show whether David would have agreed with Friedrich’s statement.

Question 1

In this essay I will answer two questions that relate to Friedrich’s quote, ‘[T]he feeling of another person should never be imposed upon us as a law’. Question one will answer; in my opinion is Friedrich’s view consistent with Rousseau’s ideas from *The Social*

Contract. Question two considers what evidence there is in David's paintings to show whether he would have agreed with Friedrich's statement.

Rousseau was a French philosopher who in 1762 published his book *The Social Contract*. In his book he asks the question of how should a state be run? What is the correct way? Rousseau was a strong believer in freedom. However he did not believe man should live in the 'state of nature' as '...stupid, limited animal[s]' (Block 3, 2003, p109). He thought that '...as we are naturally free people, we are right to obey the state *only if* it does not detract from our freedom.' (Block 3, 2003, p99) In other words we can obey the laws of the state and yet still retain our freedom. He explains this can be achieved if, what the state wants is the same as what the individual wants for.

The evidence is so far agreeable with Friedrich's quote; it appears too that this is also what Rousseau believes. However in my opinion I believe that Rousseau's ideas expressed in his book are in fact inconsistent with the quote.

Rousseau conceived the idea of individuals will, and the different types of will an individual is likely to have. These include will, which is an individuals '...goal or desire,' (Block 3, 2003, p104). A particular will, which is likely to be selfish or advantageous and will of all '...a motley collection of different goals and desires,' (Block

3, 2003, p104). The final will Rousseau formulated was the general will. ‘...a group taken as a whole rather than as a collection of individuals.’ (Block 3, 2003, p104)

Rousseau’s general will is where I believe problems arise. He thought voting would be the best way to assure that individuals get their voice heard. However Rousseau states that there is only ever a single correct answer to a problem. So what if people disagreed with one another? This would be likely in a large state. If that situation arises Rousseau thinks that there will then be a reason ‘...to force them to adopt the general will,’ (Block 3, 2003, p133). Friedrich’s quote ‘[T]he feeling of another person should never be imposed upon us as a law’ (Casper David Friedrich, in Block 3, p.194) is therefore the opposite to what Rousseau seems to be suggesting to us in his *Social Contract*.

In conclusion, I found that in my opinion Rousseau’s ideas as expressed in *The Social Contract* are inconsistent with Friedrich’s statement. Although at first glance Rousseau appears to agree with Friedrich, he later changes by bordering on totalitarianism.

Question 2

In this essay I will be observing three of Jacques-Louis David's paintings to see if they convey the message of whether David would have or wouldn't have agreed with Friedrich's statement.

In the painting *The Oath of the Horatii* the arrangement of the figures is grouped into three sets. The group of soldiers on the left of the painting are the three Horatii. Each has an arm outstretched to the swords in the centre of the painting, those are held by the man in the centre. Behind him at the right of the painting is a group of three women and two children, their faces and poses display exhaustion. The most striking colours in this painting are the red shawls over the shoulders of the man in the middle and the silver of the three glistening swords he is holding. The viewer's eyes are instantly drawn to them. This is the intention as he is the most important person in the painting due to the fact that he is anointing them. Coincidentally the lines of perspective converge to the point that is at the base of his left wrist, the hand that holds the swords.

I believe that from evidence taken from this painting, David would not have agreed with Friedrich's quote. This painting is set in Ancient Rome, a society that was oppressive, and did not encourage freedom of speech. This painting is highly political and displays severity due to the subject matter. It has three soldiers taking an oath upon swords, which are used to kill. I do not consider that these are the same views as Friedrich's, as displayed in his statement.

In the painting *The Death of Socrates* there are figures, both in the foreground, where there is ten and the background where there is three. In the right hand side of the painting there is a group of five men huddled together. They display the looks of horror and anguish. Closer to the centre is a man sat on a bed, this is Socrates. His left hand points dramatically upwards while the other reaches for a cup. Next to him, sat lower is Plato. He grips Socrates thigh in distress. Left of Socrates is another man who faces away from him but reaches out his arm, which holds the cup; his other hand covers his face. Further left still, sat at the end of the bed on a stone is another man. He appears calm, lowers his head and closes his eyes. Directly behind him is an additional distressed man under the archway and three other men in the background. The lines of perspective converge above the head of the man sat at the end of the bed. The most striking colour in the painting is the red worn by the man holding the cup. This is important because within the cup lies hemlock, the substance that will be drank by Socrates, therefore the red symbols death. Another important colour is the white worn by Socrates. This symbols his innocence against his crimes. There is light imminentating high up on the left, receding down over the men and illuminating Socrates. In particular his forehead, upper arm and torso are highlighted.

This painting depicts Socrates last moments before his death. Socrates was tried and found guilty and condemned to drink hemlock. With him in his cell are Plato and his disciples.

I believe that the narrative moment David chose to depict is significant because it symbolizes the restraint of France under a monarchy, trying to break free and become republic. At this time in France in 1787 *The Assembly of Notables* were formed. This is a further example of David's frustration. The evidence in this painting suggests that David would have agreed with the statement made by Friedrich.

The final painting I have chosen is David's *The Death of Marat*. It shows Marat, laying in the bath with his body slumped towards us. In his left hand he holds a note and in the other he holds a quill. Below his collarbone is the neat wound from a knife. This knife rests on the floor next to him for the spectator to see. The most striking colour in this painting is the white of Marat's body. The darkness of the background furthermore helps to distinguish him. The lights sweeps in from the above right, in doing so it catches the sheets in which he rests and also his face, shoulders and parts of his arms. David has depicted Marat as a hero; he casts him in rays of light and even rids him of his unsightly leprosy to make him more appealing.

David who was a supporter of Marat wants the viewer to imagine a hero. So essentially this painting is intended for propaganda. I think that this propaganda painting is David's way of trying to force people to feel a certain way to by conveying an image that is inaccurate. Therefore this does not convey the message of agreeing with Friedrich's statement.

In conclusion, I weighed up the evidence from *The Oath of the Horatii*, *The Death of Socrates* and *The Death of Marat* and I found two of them to be highly against Friedrich's statement.

Word Count 1190

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AC4, Band 2

AC4, Band 3

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