

Biography of jean jacques rousseau

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“ When a man dies he clutches in his hands only that which he has given away during his lifetime.

” Jean Jacques Rousseau is considered to be one of the foremost philosophers of his time. His ideas have influenced modern philosophical knowledge, his most influential work being “ The Emile.” He believed that “ Conscience is the voice of the soul; the passions are the voice of the body.” Born to Isaac Rousseau and Suzanne Bernard in Geneva on June 28, 1712 Rousseau was the younger of two boys. He was reared mostly by his father as his mother passed away shortly after giving birth to him, and his elder brother ran away from home. It was this time spent with his father that Rousseau received his first exposure to different schools of thought reading both Greek and Roman literature.

“ Rousseau traced his love of republican Rome to the reading of Plutarch that he and his father used to do. This love, along with the idolization of his native Geneva, provided the inspiration for many of his political ideas.” He was later appointed apprentice to an engraver whom he believed to be dictatorial and brutal. In his desperation to be liberated from this bondage, Rousseau fled after seeking the help of a Catholic priest. The latter had instructed him to meet Louise Eleonore, Baronne de Warens, who then sent Rousseau to Turin, where he converted to Catholicism in April of 1728. “ It is doubtful that Rousseau had any deep spiritual involvement in this process; he was more anxious to retain others’ interest in him.

” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) In turin Rousseau held various short-term jobs; while employed in one of said jobs, he framed a servant girl, declaring that it

was she instead of him who had stolen a ribbon. It is said that “ This wicked deed preyed on his mind for the rest of his life.” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) In 1729, Rousseau returned to Eleonore’s residence, “ initiat[ing] a strange alliance between a 29-year-old woman of the world and a sensitive 17-year-old youth.” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) It was these thirteen years under her guardianship that Rousseau’s frame of mind was greatly influenced by Eleonore. Later when Rousseau was twenty-one years old he became her lover, although he appeared not to enjoy the seemingly incestuous relationship, which ended several years later. It wasn’t until 1742 that Rousseau moved to Paris, deciding to pursue a career in musical composition.

After the success of his opera, *Le Devin du Village*, Rousseau swiftly terminated his musical career not caring for the fame that accompanied it. Here he met a linen-maid named Therese Levasseur who quickly became his lifelong companion. The two had five children together, all of whom were abandoned at a Parisian orphanage to Rousseau’s later guilt and shame. During his stay in Paris, Rousseau formed a personal acquaintanceship with philosophers Condillac and Diderot. It was while on his way to visit the latter that Rousseau came upon the prize essay question of the Academy at Dijon that asked people whether they believed advancements in the sciences and arts had improved morals.

“ Rousseau saw this and was so overwhelmed by a flood of insights evoked by it that (he said) he spent the rest of his life trying to put into words what he had seen in one hour.” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) To answer the question posed by the academy, Rousseau responded with a resounding no, declaring <https://assignbuster.com/biography-of-jean-jacques-rousseau/>

that “ societies in which the arts and sciences flourished more often than not saw the decline of morality and virtue.” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) His prize-winning essay was one of the foremost portrayals of Rousseau as a counter-Enlightenment ideologist. “ Published in 1750 under the title Discourse on the Sciences and Arts. He was poised to begin a new career as social critic, moralist and philosopher.”(Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) Soon Rousseau would turn his back on Parisian society.

After writing an essay on social issues, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, he withdrew to the countryside to further reflect on his new ideas to his friends’ dismay. It was during this time that Rousseau reverted to his Protestant faith, reclaiming his Geneva citizenship. His succeeding work “ Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” was passionately dedicated to his hometown. “ During the next six years, Rousseau wrote the bulk of his greatest work: his masterpiece of educational theory, Emile; of political theory, The Social Contract; and best-selling novel, La Nouvelle Heloise, in addition to smaller pieces such as: the Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theatre, the Letter to Voltaire on Providence, and the Moral Letters.” “ Catastrophe befell Rousseau in 1762 after the publication of Emile.

“(Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) Religious leaders deemed a portion of it, “ Creed of a Savoyard Vicar,” unacceptable. Rousseau, fearing imprisonment, to fled Paris in June 1762. The years after were unsettled, however most of them were spent in various parts of Switzerland. “ During this time Rousseau wrote extensively in defense of himself and his work, including his Letter to Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris in 1763.” After becoming very ill in 1767, Rousseau returned to France, staying far from public scrutiny.

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He married Therese, and the two lived in Grenoble. In 1770, public opinion began shifting and Rousseau returned to Paris “ very much a celebrated figure and object of curiosity, even though he was banned from writing and speaking on controversial matters.”(Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) In June of 1778, Rousseau passed away in Ermenonville, preceding his wife by twenty-two years. “ After his death, Rousseau’s grave on the Ile des Peupliers at Ermenonville became a place of pilgrimage for Parisians and Rousseau was embraced as one of the great sons of France.”(Rousseau, Jean-Jacques) His ideologies and theories later influenced modern philosophy and he has since been known as one of the greatest and most original philosophers of his time. “ His political writings have become part of the permanent Canon of works in political theory, and he has had an imponderable effect on sensibility and attitudes.”(Rousseau, Jean-Jacques)