

# Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Revolutionary Thinker

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a groundbreaking 18th-century philosopher, writer, and composer. His writings on politics, education, and society had a profound impact on the development of modern thought and continue to be studied and debated today.



## Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions Book 48) by Robert Wokler

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
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Screen Reader	: Supported



## Early Life and Education

Rousseau was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1712. His father was a watchmaker, and his mother died when he was ten years old. Rousseau was raised by his father and an aunt, who provided him with a basic education. At the age of sixteen, Rousseau left Geneva and traveled to France, where he worked as a tutor and secretary.

In 1742, Rousseau published his first major work, a treatise on music entitled *A Dissertation on Modern Music*. The treatise was a critical success, and it helped to establish Rousseau as a leading figure in the French Enlightenment.

## **Political Philosophy**

Rousseau is best known for his political philosophy, which he developed in his two major works, *The Social Contract* (1762) and *Émile, or On Education* (1762). In these works, Rousseau argued that all humans are born free and equal, but that they are corrupted by society. He believed that the best form of government is a democracy, in which all citizens have a say in how they are governed.

Rousseau's political philosophy was highly influential in the development of the American and French Revolutions. His ideas about natural law, the social contract, and the general will continue to be debated and discussed today.

## **Educational Philosophy**

Rousseau was also an influential figure in the development of educational philosophy. In his book *Émile, or On Education*, he argued that children should be educated according to their natural inclinations. He believed that children should be allowed to learn through experience and observation, rather than being taught through rote memorization.

Rousseau's educational philosophy has been highly influential in the development of progressive education. His ideas about child-centered learning and the importance of experience continue to be used in schools around the world.

## Legacy

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the most important thinkers of the 18th century. His writings on politics, education, and society had a profound impact on the development of modern thought. He is considered one of the fathers of the Enlightenment, and his ideas continue to be studied and debated today.

## Further Reading

- Cranston, Maurice. *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.
- Starobinski, Jean. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.



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