

Back to the West: Rousseau's *Confessions*

Dr. Theresa Thompson
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Change is in the air...

- ❑ **Apparent stability of the scientific method**
- ❑ **Pure Science**
 - ❑ **Geology & astronomy**
 - ❑ Geologic Time
 - ❑ Astronomical Time: Speed of light $c = 299,792.458 \pm 0$ km/s
- ❑ **Applied Science: Britain and Industrialization**
 - ❑ Transformation in how passage of time is perceived. People begin to behave and organize themselves in new ways.
 - ❑ Labor & wage-earning hours
 - ❑ Revolution in the way clocks and watches are made.
 - ❑ Railroads must run on time
 - ❑ Prime Meridian: what time is it?
- ❑ **Karl Marx: birth of historical materialism**

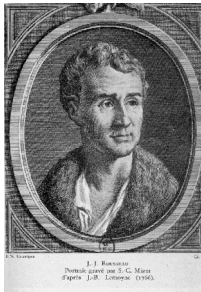
Scientific Facts Conflict with Christian Dogma

- ❑ **Geological time v. Biblical time**
- ❑ **Darwinian Evolution v. Creationism**
 - ❑ Natural selection is the preservation of favorable, beneficial characteristics in the population and the elimination of the unfavorable characteristics.
 - ❑ Natural Selection is entirely dependent on chance.
- ❑ **Astronomy: we aren't the center of God's universe?**
- ❑ **Christian Divine Revelation v. German "higher criticism"**
 - ❑ Not a single "divine revelation: Higher criticism is "the study of the sources and literary methods employed by the biblical authors."
 - ❑ Example: Genesis 1 & 2; Codex v. scrolls
 - ❑ Christian approach was "the discipline and study of the actual wording" of the Bible; a quest for textual purity and understanding of God's intentions for humans.
 - ❑ One Major Problem: translation.

Societal Shifts

- ❑ **Evangelical Temperament: “circulating library morality” in England and America**
 - ❑ “loan” out middle-class work ethic; respectability, virtue; humanitarianism; conformity, insularity...to the world!
- ❑ **Political / Social Economies: England and America**
 - ❑ Self-help v. charity: Malthus & population control?
 - ❑ Rise of middle class; Factories and slums; Agrarian poverty; “the woman question”; Reading public & the presses; Expansion of suffrage
- ❑ **Utilitarian spirit: England and America**
 - ❑ Principle of Utility: Greatest happiness = greatest good.
 - ❑ Education reform; political economy; laissez faire; sacredness of property; socialism

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)



- ❑ **The Social Contract: Argues maldistribution of property creates evil in the world.**
 - ❑ Questions concepts of material & intellectual progress & the morality of a society in which commerce & industry are regarded as the most important of human activities.
- ❑ **The real purpose of society should be to nurture better people.**
 - ❑ Society and its institutions make us worse because they corrupt us. (p. 673)
 - ❑ Advancement of art and science does not make us better or happier, it only makes governments more powerful, & oppresses individuals.
- ❑ **Always situates himself in the natural environment.**

Confessions

- ❑ **Confession Genre: Type of autobiography (real or fictional) revealing intimate / hidden details of subject’s life.**
 - ❑ **Confronts issue of the feeling individual asserting its own truth in the authenticity of an existence in harmony with itself. (p. 664)**
 - ❑ **Attempts to write about his passions in a moral way.**
- ❑ **So *Confessions* traces Rousseau’s psychological development: “man in the truth of nature.”**

Individual Authenticity

- ❑ Unique because he only needs to know his own conscience. (664)
- ❑ “I felt before I thought: this is the common lot of humanity” (666).
- ❑ “How could I become wicked, when I had nothing but examples of gentleness [...]” (667).
- ❑ Conscience and “the great moral lesson [...]” (670, 677).

Moral Passion

- ❑ “[...] for I had found in the pain, even in the disgrace, a mixture of sensuality which had left me less afraid than desirous of experiencing it again [...]” (668).
- ❑ “I want nothing but unadulterated pleasures...” (669).
 - ❑ “My passions have made me live,...” (676).

Women and Imagination

- ❑ Romantic love
 - ❑ “I only felt the full strength of my attachment when I no longer saw her” (670).
 - ❑ Union should not devolve into mere sensual pleasure. (671)
- ❑ Imagination colors the world (674).
 - ❑ Natural world : he can identify with it and make it over again through imagination
