



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S THOUGHT ON POLITICAL ETHICS AND ITS MEANING

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Abstract:

As one of the most influential philosophers of the 18th century, Rousseau's goal, expressed in many of his works, was to find a way to build a moral social community, a just order that would gradually eliminate selfishness and division among the present human beings. "*Rousseau maintained the belief that human beings in society were selfish and hopelessly divided - even among themselves, and his desire was to put an end to this condition, to channel their instincts, aggression, and competition into a social harmony*". The goal of "*re-establishing*" society was shared by many philosophers, but according to Rousseau, it could not be achieved if it was left to the institutions of law or government. Rousseau requires that the natural self must be replaced by the collective self, the individual will by the common will and political goals are inseparable from morality. The goal of the social contract, according to J.J. Rousseau, is that people living in a good social order will become a "more virtuous" entity, not simply "*better*". Rousseau's thoughts on political morality have had a particularly great influence on the French Revolution. Up to now, in the context of a world with many conflicts, wars and riots, J.J. Rousseau's thoughts on political ethics suggest many valuable issues, especially when applied to political practice. That is the motivation for the author to study Rousseau's political ethics.

Keywords: Rousseau; political ethics; justice; social contract

1. Introduction

The research is based on a number of documents related to Rousseau, focus on the work Social Contract with the political ethics issues.

Firstly, *Rousseau - A Guide for the Perplexed* by Matthew Simpson, Continuum, 2007. The work does exactly what its title suggests: it focuses on analyzing ideas that may confuse readers when they first approach J.J. Rousseau's works. Unlike most, this work affirms that there are basic unifying themes in J.J. Rousseau's political philosophy, which

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is the natural goodness of human beings that is not broken, a moral order with a broad orientation to bring justice and freedom to each person. M. Simpson praises Rousseau's ideas on political ethics, he writes: *Regardless of whether the social state that J.J. Rousseau describes is realized or not, his ideas have had a great impact on later thinkers such as I. Kant and K. Marx. In addition, J.J. Rousseau was honored by the leaders of the French Revolution.*"

Secondly, *Rousseau's Social Contract - An Interpretative Essay* by Lester G. Crocker, Western Reserve University Press in 1968. The work evaluates Rousseau's main idea in the Social Contract as seeking a way to build a common moral social community to transform society, promoting moral freedom in the sense of "each person obeying only his own will" instead of stopping at liberating people from tyranny. According to G. Crocker, Rousseau always believed that people were being "degenerated" and hopelessly divided. Finally, evaluating the influence of J.J. Rousseau, the author reminds readers about fairness and honesty: "It is dangerous and unfair to judge Rousseau not by what he wrote, but by the nightmares in history" (p.145). Rousseau's political influences on French practice bear the strong imprint of ideas about a common moral community, the whole people enforced the laws they themselves established under the guidance of Robespierre. However, Rousseau's influence should not be judged solely by what it brought about in practice.

Last, *Starting with Rousseau* by James Delaney, Continuum, 2009. This is a publication that summarizes the thoughts of J.J. Rousseau in the context of the Enlightenment era of the 18th century. Whether or not you agree with the specific details of J.J. Rousseau, according to the author, the general goal that J.J. Rousseau aimed for was a noble goal: liberating people on the moral level, bringing about a state of radical freedom. With J. Delaney's explanations, it shows that the values that Rousseau left behind are not just slogans like "liberty - equality - fraternity" or preached. Rousseau gives us hope for ourselves and human moral progress in the face of the shortcomings of the times. Therefore, although Rousseau's publications were burned by the French government and many places to prevent their influence on the people, they still had a strong influence on the French community spirit and led to the French Revolution. This is a very worthy argument for the author to use as a basis to continue to study Rousseau's political ethics more deeply. Referring to and analyzing the political philosophy of J.J. Rousseau, according to the author, J.J. Rousseau's political thought is special "because it is based on the concept of the general will, and the state is a unified entity, which makes people question its practicality"ⁱⁱ.

3. Material and Methods

The results of this article are drawn based on analysis, comparison, and evaluation of documents then draw out the basic issues in Rousseau's political ethics.

Basically, the author used a dialectical materialist worldview and materialist dialectics to conduct his research, particularly adhering to some principles:

ⁱⁱ James Delaney. (2009). *Starting with Rousseau*. Continuum publisher. p.135.

First, the principle of objectivity. The results of the research honestly reflect Rousseau's theory on political ethics in some of his documents and of some other researchers, contrasting scientifically, up-to-date, and in the spirit of respect for history.

Second, the principles of comprehensiveness and historical perspective. The research analyzed Rousseau's theory of on political ethics in relation to other issues such as freedom, equality, state, and law. Assess the values of his thought link to the historical context.

At the same time, the research works also use methods such as analysis and synthesis, interpretation and induction, comparison, contrast, history and logic, systematic approach, etc.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. J.J. Rousseau's thought on political ethics

First, the highest political morality is devotion to the common good on the basis of fairness and patriotism.

Discussing political qualities, before J.J. Rousseau, Ch. Montesquieu emphasized: building a rule of law in an authoritarian regime, only the dominant law is needed to force everyone to obey along with fear. fear is enough, but in democracy, political ethics needs to be built in both the people and the rulers. Political ethics in Ch. Montesquieu's thought is *"love of country and equal love"*. According to him, democracy without virtue has extremely bad political consequences: every citizen is like a slave escaping from a slave owner's house. This thesis was inherited by J.J. Rousseau: *"...a famous author (Ch. Montesquieu) adopted virtue as the principle for the Republic; for all the aforementioned conditions cannot exist without virtue"*ⁱⁱⁱ. In the context of the age of enlightenment, where reason was promoted, used as a model for rationality, irrationality and even, many philosophers believed that with the light of reason alone it was possible to abolish the limitations in those outdated, rusty feudal political institutions. This is shown in the fact that many philosophers support a wise monarchy, that is, kings guided by the wisdom of philosophers. Voltaire is outspoken about this: How can one resist a glorious king, a poet, musician and philosopher. In this way, tyranny was inaugurated as an attempt to realize a better political life in which reason was the most necessary factor. Philosophers hope the state's political decisions will be *"wise"*, rather than sentimental under an absolute monarchy. But in fact, philosophers forget one thing, there is no guarantee that the king acting rationally will create a turning point in creating a sustainable political life, the clearest measure being the support of the people on the basis of the common interests of the community is always guaranteed. In fact, the wisdom of kings was largely aimed at benefiting nobles in a more deliberate, methodical and systematic way.

G. Himmelfarb writes: *"Dictatorship kings are good are rare and even enlightened people may not be able to use power wisely or fairly"* This is a big gap in political life - society. Unlike

ⁱⁱⁱ Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p.149.

most contemporary philosophers, besides the rational element, J.J. Rousseau, with his keen senses, recognized the importance of political ethics associated with education as well as community cohesion in promoting a sustainable society.

Continuing the social contract tradition, however, is not the same as the “*contract versions that once existed - the interpersonal commitment is based entirely on rational calculations in the way that you and I both promise to respect each other's private development space not harming and hindering each other in the goal of satisfying personal interests*”, J.J. Rousseau's version of “*contract*” is a “*version that commits each person's own*” to himself and the commitment between the individual and the sovereign, that will dedicate everything you have to the community and receive equal common benefits. The content “*commit to yourself*” has shown that ethics is important in J.J. Rousseau's “*contract*” project. This “*self-commitment*” is concretized through the contents of the moral requirements of the people in building and maintaining political institutions. A legal and sustainable institution is an institution erected by the people themselves through legislative power that reflects the “*common will*”. Law becomes the “*cornerstone of society, however, building a true legal system requires two key elements, which are legislators who are both talented and virtuous and virtuous citizens, always dedicated to the common good*”. When discussing the legislator, J.J. Rousseau affirmed that the legislator does not have the right to pass laws. The role of the legislator is to propose and orient the masses to pass laws that are suitable for the community and, on the other hand, must lead them to form a community with common morality. Therefore, the legislator must have the talent and virtue to see through the good things in the long run for the community that rarely the people can notice, and at the same time must make the masses see that their benefits lie in the common good, thereby leading the masses to pass the best laws for society and motivating them to comply with the law. This is a difficult task, and as J.J. Rousseau puts it, in reality many lawmakers have had to resort to divine elements such as oracles, erect talking animals, and even use them as a harsh measures to force people to believe according to the law. However, all such actions, if they achieve their goals, will only bring “*to a random collection of disoriented people, but cannot build a sustainable country*”^{iv}. Therefore, a good legislator is very rare, rated by J.J. Rousseau as equal to a god, many times more precious than a king. But even with such a legislator, a people still cannot have a good legal system, as well as a sustainable democratic institution. Whether good laws are adopted and whether they are really effective in practice depends on the people. Making laws is difficult, building a generation of citizens in accordance with the law is even more difficult. J.J. Rousseau writes: “*The intelligent constitutionalist does not immediately start drafting laws; He previously considered that the people who receive the law can adapt to the law of no*”^v.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, J.J. Rousseau believes that the most basic factor to successfully build a democracy is to build citizens with political ethics, in the sense of always being dedicated to the common good. of the community on the basis of fairness

^{iv} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher. p. 112.

^v Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 113-114.

and love for the country. Equity (Equity, Justness or Fairness) means that everyone has equal interests and responsibilities and is treated the same in the same environment, situation or aspect. In other words, equity is the proportionality of the rights and obligations of each individual. Every citizen with political virtue must have the same mindset towards justice; no one wants an unjust society where the benefit belongs to themselves and the harm belongs to others. Even so, when making legislative decisions, people will not make policy decisions that benefit them but harm the rest; on the contrary, all policy decisions are aimed at the long-term common good. To make the right decisions, the people must be intellectual enough to be aware of the common good and virtuous enough to pursue those good in each vote, despite that, sometimes the common good is contrary to their immediate interests.

As researcher D. Wraight observes: *“The legislator is a talented persuader, but he is not an alchemist: the material he aims for must be able to refine itself”*^{vi}. A talented alchemist can convert cheap, basic metals into rare metals, such as smelting lead into gold. However, lawmakers do not have such competence. They cannot *“enchant”* to transform human moral qualities. Each citizen must have a sense of individuality, a sense of community, of immediate benefits, long-term benefits and a sense of self-construction and transformation of qualities through long-term training and education. Rousseau explained: *“For a newly formed people to respond enthusiastically to the wise principles of politics and to follow the basic laws of the nation, efficiency must become the cause; social spirit must be a prerequisite for creating institutions, and people, must be social-spirited people before the law was created and must again be governed by the law”*^{vii}. In his thesis, Political Economy, Rousseau discussed the need for public education not in the conventional sense but for moral and social discipline education, that is, to build a model of civic virtue so that all keep the same mindset when entering social construction. J.J. Rousseau quotes a beautiful sentence from Ch. Montesquieu: *“When a new society forms, the leaders of the republics create the institutions, and then the institutions train the leaders of the republic”*^{viii}. Citizens with sufficient merit contribute to the creation of institutions, which, in turn, will continue to produce better citizens for the next generation, which is the dialectic between cause and effect. That is the reason why in the work *Social Contract*, the author emphasizes: *“Finally, there is a law that is not engraved on stone steles or bronze boards, but in the hearts of all citizens, which is moral principles, customs and public opinion, this is the part that our policies do not know but everything else must depend on it”*^{ix}.

Thus, cultivating a social sense of vision and common moral values is the way to build political ethics, becoming a key factor in creating democracy and a good society. It makes sense for E. Putterman to comment: *“Freedom in the work Social Contract is not*

^{vi} Wraight, C, D. (2008). *Rousseau's Social contract – A reader's guide*. England: MPG Books Ltd, p.84.

^{vii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 84

^{viii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 108.

^{ix} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p.129.

achieved by law... but relies on whether or not the public's ability to make that community free from the love of exercising dictatorship on its members politically"^x. Indeed, a good legal corridor cannot come into being or be useful if citizens do not have the earnest spirit to build and use it. While many political and political-legal sciences focus on the structure of society such as institutions, constitutions and laws, in many different works, J.J. Rousseau always talks about the importance of social spirit, the union of patriotism and love of law by citizens - "Wherever people love their country, respect the law and live simply, the little things are enough to make them happy"^{xi}. This content of Rousseau's thought outlines a close aspect of life - the value of the – ethic that was overlooked in the age of rationality, where the wisdom of philosophers was seen as "panacea for a society in transition". At present, the influence of political ethics on social life is undeniable, in other words it is easy to prove. However, how to promote the influence of political ethics in real social life is not easy. Rousseau's study of thought suggests an approach to exploiting moral values: influence the political virtue of citizens universally rather than individually. In other words, don't call on citizens to be better and more ethical in their actions, but call on society to change. This plan requires a connection to the educational career. It is clear that Rousseau's reason for having two works on politics and education published in the same year made great news for the times. People as citizens, they live in an educational and political environment that is goal-oriented, however, the destination is not stereotypical, only ideal: to best serve the community based on fairness. It is a space for a free and enlightened education. This is essentially why Rousseau's political ethics had a great practical influence on the French revolution of 1789 along with the Jacobins. Of course, this influence will still have much resonance in modern political life, but not because of the actual actions of the revolutionary faction but because of the radicalism it wants to aim for, reforming in a very large aspect for socio-political life.

Second, political ethics is both a product and a measure of good politics

Based on what has been analyzed, we can see that morality is the basis for building good political institutions. On the contrary, the political institutions that J.J. Rousseau built are aimed at serving people's moral lives. This is a prominent feature that makes his political-legal ideology influential not only in political life but also in the moral and spiritual life of French society. The political regime in J.J. Rousseau's ideology towards serving people's moral lives originates from the "social contract option". T. Hobbes's "contract" theory has the sole purpose of being a basis for determining the origin and legality of political and sovereign obligations rather than a means of establishing a moral community. J. Locke and J.J. Rousseau both see the social contract as a means to create a political body, but at the same time associate this means with morality. However, J.J. Rousseau is not completely similar to J. Locke. For J. Locke, political life follows moral life. The structure of civil government is a reflection of the "moral kingdom of God"

^x Ethan Putterman. (2010). *Rousseau's Law and the Sovereignty of the People*. Cambridge University Press, P.10.

^{xi} Jean – Jacques Rousseau, J, J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p. 116.

depicted in his “*natural state*”. Accordingly, the “*social*” created by the contract, on the one hand works to form civil government, but on the other hand to ensure obedience to the “*natural law*” and the “*innate morality*” that exist in the kingdom original nature created by God. On *Second Treatise on Government*, J. Locke wrote: “*The state of nature has natural laws to govern, forcing everyone to comply; and reason – which is this law – instructs the entire human race that all are equal and independent of each other. No one is allowed to harm the lives, health, freedom or property of others, for all are masterpieces of an almighty and infinitely wise Creator; all are servants of an ultimate master, sent into this world by his command and for his work*”^{xii}.

According to J. Locke, our political body has a duty to obey God's will, comply with the laws of self-preservation and protection of others: “*is always bound to its own preservation – and not with the intention of escaping that position*”^{xiii}. At the time J. Locke's social contract took effect, it transformed moral obligations into political obligations, thereby implicitly emphasizing that the rules, institutions, and institutions of the state in political life imply reasonable moral values that people need to adhere to. People sign contracts, they comply with political obligations to preserve the values they possess in their natural state, in accordance with each person's moral instincts. For J.J. Rousseau, he did not envision a moral kingdom constituted as naturally as J. Locke and a model for political life. For J.J. Rousseau, the political order is purely a product of human creation, it is not the offspring of a spiritual kingdom higher than – this point he resembles T. Hobbes. J.J. Rousseau does not believe that humans inherently have “*innate morality*” and that political rules do not imply morally reasonable standards as J. Locke believes. J.J. Rousseau and Mandeville argue that social laws have no moral validity whatsoever, they are nothing but inventions by the devious and the powerful to maintain or achieve Unnatural and unfair superiority over the rest of the fellow. Social virtues do not come naturally, they must certainly be built, forged and matured in connection with appropriate political institutions. In *Emile* or the discussion of education, Emile boy must learn virtue in interacting with others, however, the quality he needs to build is morality towards “*species*”, towards “*the entire human race*”, not just for a specific individual. It's not “*charity*” that underlies morality, for Rousseau it's “*narcissism*”, which is when my soul is so open that I identify myself with my community, with my fellow human beings. In Rousseau's political institution-building plans, individuals committed to participating in the contract must understand the same and achieve such a common mentality. On that basis, J.J. Rousseau has repeatedly affirmed that, through the “*contract*”, people are elevated to the level of citizenship and formed into a unified sovereign agency with supreme power, which is the strong transformation of a set of people into a moral community - “*From a natural state to a civil state, people undergo a great transformation: In their behavior, justice replaces the subconscious, in their behavior there is more morality that was*

^{xii} Locke, J. (2007). *Second Treatise on Government*. (Translated by Le Tuan Huy). Ha Noi: Tri thuc Publisher. p. 36-36.

^{xiii} Locke, J. (2007). *Second Treatise on Government*. (Translated by Le Tuan Huy). Ha Noi: Tri thuc Publisher. p. 36-36.

previously absent^{xiv}. Therefore, according to J.J. Rousseau, in the end, what a legitimate and good institution can bring is not just power and benefits, but moral life for people. And only then will people truly fully and sustainably enjoy the rights and benefits that political institutions bring. That is also the reason why when discussing the task of lawmakers, J.J. Rousseau said that lawmakers must “*mold human beings into an ethical community,*” must always be in a position to transform human nature, reforming each individual^{xv}. It can be seen that the unity between morality and politics in J.J. Rousseau's ideology is the foundation for establishing democracy, thereby promoting people to develop into a more virtuous version, living more “*people, not simply creating conditions for people to achieve a more comfortable and prosperous life*”. He wrote: “*There may be no patriotism without freedom, no freedom without virtue, no virtue without citizens; Make citizens and you will have everything you need; without citizens you would have nothing but humble slaves. Forming a citizen is not a person's job and there needs to be people who educate them from their childhood*”^{xvi}. The construction of political ethics must be linked to a progressive, appropriate educational system.

4.2 J.J. Rousseau's ideological historical significance of political ethics

First, J.J. Rousseau's thought on political ethics promotes a unified relationship instead of division between individuals and communities in creating ideal political life.

On the basis of “*social contract*”, according to T. Hobbes and J. Locke's version, people make their own agreements with each other to escape the evils of their previous lives. For the two philosophers, the solution of building legitimate political institutions is relatively easy, as long as people understand and comply with the principles of politics expressed in legal documents. Therefore, T. Hobbes boldly guarantees “*eternal life*” to the political body, and J. Locke optimistically relies on “*innate morality*” in building political institutions. However, building a political institution, creating a framework for individuals to freely accumulate wealth and achieve a full and wealthy life, is not enough to build a sustainable social life. Because of self-interest, people easily trample on the interests and status of others, people who have wealth and build their luxurious lives on the sweat, tears, and even blood of their fellow human beings, and then the corollary is that people are increasingly divided and unhappy. Clearly, each individual can only achieve sustainable development in a harmonious whole of interests. The common good is considered the denominator for the survival and development of the community. J.J. Rousseau emphasize “*If society is created because there is a conflict between private interests, then once private interests are socially harmonized, they can exist. That is because among the different interests there is still something in common that constitutes a social connection. If there*

^{xiv} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 78.

^{xv} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 108.

^{xvi} Jean – Jacques Rousseau, J, J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p. 113.

is no common point for interests to harmonize with each other, no society can exist. Therefore, it must be based on the common good to manage society"^{xvii}. Dialectical unity between the individual and the community opens up a unified political mindset and goals, on the basis of which political and moral life are closely linked. J.J. Rousseau has affirmed that citizens in democracy must be people who love the law, have the spirit of the law, love freedom and equality, and are positive persistently participate in political life with a mindset towards the common good and a willingness to fight for democracy - "*citizens of democracy must keep in mind every day the famous quote of the virtuous provincial governor: it is better to endure danger and be free than live peacefully in slavery*"^{xviii}.

The authorities themselves must also realize that political ethics is the pillar for all community connections. A. Durant writes: "*Rousseau's project required that each citizen, in addition to reason, possess virtue, "an innate sense of right and wrong; and even this conscience should be warmed by emotion and make a good man rather than a clever calculating man*"^{xix}. Rousseau's view of political virtue is posed as an inevitable requirement of unity between people and rulers instead of division, a view of great value not only for the history of society of the French Republic but also for today's modern society. In his *Treatise on Political Economy*, Rousseau addresses the social division at the root of political ethics, when the problem of bribery has reached its climax where common self-esteem is valued in cash, and virtue is placed on the scale of market prices: these are the most obvious causes of the separation between wealth and hunger, of community interests, of mutual hatred among the people, of indifference to the common cause of the country, about the decadence of a nation and about the weakness of government management.

Are Rousseau's arguments on ethics too difficult to realize? The answer is yes but not impossible. When demanding individual devotion to the common good of the community without constraints in the opposite direction, it is unacceptable. Rousseau built a relationship between "*personal freedom*" and "*community submission*" to create a new social system where political ethics has the environment to exert influence. When law is built by the people themselves, who must obey the law, then both law and democracy will be implemented together to lead to freedom. Self-legislation is the real meaning of a decent political order - "*Because obeying others is slavery, but also obeying what one sets for oneself is freedom*". We see a clear difference between J.J. Rousseau and T. Hobbes and J. Locke. The aim of both seniors was to set before the eyes of the human race the mutual relationship between submission and protection, with the formula generally understood to mean that each accepted to give up a little freedom to enjoy the rest. This prevents things from being fully resolved because the cohesion between the individual and the community is merely based on calculations of immediate and personal interests. It leads to difficulty in reconciling the oppositions that always exist between what the

^{xvii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 86.

^{xviii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 150.

^{xix} Durant, W., & Durant, A. (2015). *Jean Jacques Rousseau*. (Translated by Bui Xuan Linh). Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City National University. p. 389.

individual wants and what the collective demands. Meanwhile, J.J. Rousseau did not entrust all rights to the government like T. Hobbes, nor did he believe that humans were still free after legislative power was assigned to J. Locke's ideological representative. J.J. Rousseau grants legislative power directly and inalienably to the people.

When all people legislate together, the supreme sovereignty is also realized. When people obey the law, they obey themselves, and political morality is enforced in favor of the community without losing the individual.

After all, J.J. Rousseau's concerns about political ethics are only resolved on the basis of people legislating themselves under the guidance of the "*common will*". Law and legislative power are the key to solving the problem of freedom and obedience, between the right and duty to "*to bring justice to its subject*". Therefore, the revolutionary moment that J.J. Rousseau's "*social contract*" creates is a community of common morality, where the consciousness of all citizens reaches a certain development, it is all about the common mission and interests, not about bringing together individuals who pursue their own interests as conceived by J. Locke and T. Hobbes. For J.J. Rousseau, it is the community - not the individual - that plays an important role. Therefore, in *Social Contract*, the act of using collective force to force citizens to submit to the "*of common will*" not only does not deprive individual freedom but rather makes freedom develop in its connotation: master yourself.

More than just reasoning, J.J. Rousseau took his own life, spirit and attitude to life to show the importance of the element of political virtue. Although his life was materially difficult, receiving many offers of help from the aristocracy, even summons and rewards from the king, J.J. Rousseau refused. Accepting a difficult life and not compromising with the feudal government has shown the spirit and resolute attitude of life - "*Incompetent and Incompetent - Majestic and Incompetent*". This is the reason why J.J. Rousseau became the embodiment of virtue and the inspiration for revolution. In the eighteenth century, it can be observed that the respect of the French people for J.J. Rousseau in the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods had a common rationale, namely his conception of political morality. While all are drawn to the power of reason and take self-interest as the driving force of development, J.J. Rousseau has opened an examination of the moral nature of man as the basis of a new science of society. Also discusses ethics but when J. Locke affirms that humans are "*innate ethics*" then "*ethics*" in J. Locke is the result of humans perceiving and following their reason, to protect what they have, as well as not harming other people's similar things ultimately "*is ethical for individuals*" rather than ethical in the sense of "*being dedicated to the common good*" as envisioned by J.J. Rousseau. On the basis of "*personal ethics*", the society that J. Locke established aims to ensure that civil rights are always protected by law, people are free to calculate their own rights and interests. Meanwhile, J.J. Rousseau's political institutions aim to build a community-based citizenry, emphasizing the dedication to serving the common good. This idea of J.J. Rousseau is a very close suggestion to the view of scientific socialism about the role of humans in the cause of socialist construction. To have socialism, there must first be a socialist person, that is, a qualified, conscious person who strives to contribute to the overall development of the community.

In the 18th century, J.J. Rousseau's name, life, personality and works were revolutionary, of course, in the broadest sense of an uncompromising attitude towards the absurd, the unethical. The true revolution does not necessarily lie in the violence of action or language, but in the will to overcome the outdated, irrational order. Indeed, through emphasizing the political ethics necessary for building democracy, J.J. Rousseau prepared the French people for the necessary revolutionary spirit, which is inherently an indispensable element of all revolutions. As V.I. Lenin writes: *"The great revolution was sparked from within the masses themselves and it took many months and years to do so..."* and that the revolution did not arise from the platform but exploded when tens of millions of people said: *"We don't want to live in hunger, we would rather die for revolution"*^{xx}. L. Ward commented: *"It can be said that Rousseau wrote a lot about constitutional issues, but his great contribution in creating the modern democratic era was that he was the first important political thinker to outline psychological characteristics, also known as democratic qualities"*^{xxi}. J.J. Rousseau's influence is therefore especially strong on the petty bourgeoisie and the lower social classes, those dissatisfied with their social status, or those who suffer under the legal system of many privileges, rent, autocratic and corrupt political regimes. They saw him as an embodiment of the people and of virtue. Orwin writes: *"Rousseau laid the foundation of good morality in modern political principles and led the flag of democracy to operate under such principles"*^{xxii}.

Second, Rousseau's ideas on political ethics suggest valuable principles that promote human peace in the current context

In the work *Social Contract*, J.J. Rousseau begins with a famous passage, implying the deepest meaning in the work: *"people are born free but everywhere people live in chains. Some people think they are the boss, but in fact they are more slaves than their servants"*^{xxiii}. In terms of similarities with philosophers of the same time, *"chains"* here are understood as irrational institutions and laws of the state imposed on people as shackles of freedom and equality. However, if we just stop there, we cannot understand the second part: *"who thinks he is the boss, but is actually more slave than their servant"*. In fact, J.J. Rousseau's view of the chains that bind people has a broader meaning: alienation. Human-to-human relationships in the age of reason are revered, people believe that advances in science – technology will bring advancement in life *"ethics"*. In fact, that is not the case, people make efforts to find new forms of social organization and build binding political and legal organizations: between citizens – state, between people – people. Slavery here is still present in relationships between people. The poor still live a life of slavery, losing the right to self-determination for their fate to the rich, and the rich depend on the richer.

^{xx} Lenin, V. I. (2005). *Complete works - volume 36*. Hanoi: Politics – Nation. p. 624.

^{xxi} Ward, L. (2014). *Modern Democracy and the Theological-Political Problem in Spinoza, Rousseau, and Jefferson*. United State: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 85.

^{xxii} Orwin, C., & Tarcov, N. (1997). *The Legacy of Rousseau*. US: University of Chicago. p. 164.

^{xxiii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 57

Whether a person is a servant or a boss, they still do not achieve true freedom, they still have to depend on other groups of people.

To better understand the implications of the “chains” that J.J. Rousseau mentioned, it is necessary to return to the previous two theses – Essay on Science and Art and Essay on the Origin of Inequality. In his first work, J.J. Rousseau showed his concerns about the incompatibility between the scientific and technical progress of civilization and the current state of social morality and inhuman manifestations in relations between people. J.J. Rousseau affirms: scientific and artistic development tends to make people degrade their qualities instead of enhancing their personal morality, and cannot create habits, customs and institutions, better politics, consistent with human nature. The work attacked the aristocracy and the social status quo of France in general and urban Paris in particular through emphasizing the opposition: science and art are increasingly popular and popular, so the life of workers The lower class is more miserable and unhappy. He wrote: “Art, literature, and science, although less autocratic, can contain greater power, wrapping wreaths over the chains that bind people. They stifle man’s original sense of freedom, where he seems to have been born; makes people love slavery in civilized life”^{xxiv}.

Continuing the above view, in the work Treatise on the Origins of Inequality, it is shown that modern society is increasingly increasing the diversity of unhealthy trade relationships, shortening people's lives or destroying their bodies when forcing the majority of workers to work to make a living in a toxic environment. Because to sustain all the servants and homeless people that society creates, it places oppression and destruction on the heads of workers and laborers. He emphasized: “Those are the causes of all misery, in which luxury in the long run engulfs every wealthiest country. Proportional to the development of art and industry, more and more people are pushed into low status, despised, forced to bear the burden of taxes because of that luxury, and have to live through the days of your life through exhausted labor or hunger having to abandon the fields of the homeland in search of bread in big cities”^{xxv}.

J.J. Rousseau's comments on people and society show that behind the “aura” civilization are deviant steps of moral life. The lives of the poor are increasingly tied to unjust institutions that must obey the will of others. The lives of rich people worship personal interests and depend on oppressive and exploitative commercial relationships. Apart from J.J. Rousseau, there do not seem to be many thinkers who pay enough attention to the bond of slavery between people, the negative effects or negative aspects of civilization. In fact, if such issues are not linked to the issue of politics - the rule of law, the political institutions established will not only not help people increasingly perfect their lives and achieve the highest values of Humanity is freedom, but on the contrary, they become tools to continue to promote protect and maintain relationships of human dependence, promote deepening conflicts between rulers and ruled, and chain humanity into eternal slavery. Instead of being freer, people are more enslaved; instead of being

^{xxiv} Rousseau, J. J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p. 140.

^{xxv} Rousseau, J. J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p. 90

equal and living more stably, the gulf between rich and poor is even greater, leading to a life full of uncertainty and misery. After all, the civilization of the era is increasingly detached from morality, pushing people to a situation of “*unethical, cruel, depraved, animalistic, inhumane*”^{xxvi}. What's more, they “*give rise to wars between nations, battles, enmities and killings, shocking nature and resenting reason; along with all the terrible prejudices that view human bloodshed as an honor*”^{xxvii}.

After a clear analysis of the nature of the relationship between people, especially that which has increasingly degenerated under the influence of the age of civilization, and with the desire to seek a form of rule that is both legitimate and consistent with human nature, promoting true freedom and equality, the J.J. Rousseau approached the issue of the rule of law more broadly than other thinkers, while adding an ethical element in solving political and legal problems. As analyzed, the “*chains*” that J.J. Rousseau wanted to abolish were not simply absurd institutions under feudalism like the thinkers of his time, what J.J. Rousseau aimed to resolve was the relationship between people, between politics and morality is associated with the nature of human psychology and the downsides of civilization.

J.J. Rousseau believes that a legitimate political institution is one that is consistent with the nature of human freedom, when all citizens achieve true freedom and equality, without the domination of the will. One group of people over another, this idea of his rose above the common goal of the era to resist the tyranny of feudalism. With such an idea, in his work *Social Contract*, J.J. Rousseau showed that the state and branches of power are only indirect problems, the root cause of all freedom, equality or oppression, Subjugation essentially originates from human will. Therefore, in his ideology of building a legitimate social order, J.J. Rousseau does not simply put the centralized power of the state as a counterweight to the rights and interests of individuals. If what J. Locke expects is a system of institutions effective against abuse of power on the part of the government to protect individual freedom, then J.J. Rousseau aims for a society that no longer has the domination of the will. individual to gain self-interest, all human beings are equal each person participates in the construction and is equally bound to the “*common will*”, complies with and is equally responsible under the authority of the law. On that basis, the oppression of one group of people over another has no conditions to form, only universal justice based on the common will to dominate. Only in such a way will each citizen achieve freedom because they are not governed by any other capricious will, but only follow the will of the entire community. J.J. Rousseau writes: “*The first and last will of every national member is the common will only thanks to that common will that one becomes a citizen and is free*”^{xxviii}. For that reason, J.J. Rousseau rejected any compromise between Enlightenmentism and the political absolutism of J. Locke – who supported constitutional

^{xxvi} Rousseau, J, J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p.88.

^{xxvii} Rousseau, J, J. (2008). *Discourse on the Origin of inequality*. (Translated by G. Cole). United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc. p.69.

^{xxviii} Jean – Jacques Rousseau. (2020). *On Social Contract* (Translated by Hoang Thanh Dam). Ha Noi: The gioi Publisher, p. 210

monarchy. J.J. Rousseau does not completely agree with Ch. Montesquieu's political vision of the rule of law, he believes that the political institution and liberalism that his predecessors established on the basis of "personal freedom" and "running after self-interest" can only lead to a rule of law system that satisfies group interests in which the rich continue to oppress and exploit the poor, society is dominated by hypocrites, money-hungry, bureaucratic and ultimately leads to a degenerate and hollow political culture as he outlined in his previous dissertations. What J.J. Rousseau realized were the limits of reason when used as the basis for all human activities. This is content that shows the critical nature of J.J. Rousseau's thought towards the general direction of the Enlightenment movement, contributing to improving the ideology of the times. J. Rawls commented: "His concerns were broader than those of T. Hobbes and J. Locke. T. Hobbes was preoccupied with overcoming the problem of civil war, while J. Locke's concern was to justify a reconciliation of powers in a mixed constitution. On the contrary, J.J. Rousseau is a cultural and civilizational critic: he seeks to diagnose what are considered the profound evils of contemporary society and expose the suffering they have sown on people"^{xxix}.

J.J. Rousseau expressed deep concern about the value of the human person, but it is not confined to the bounds of civic and governmental freedom. The author worries that human development potential is being contained in an unhealthy dependent environment. In such a situation, even if one tries to keep the government from abusing its power and not violating the freedom of the individual, it cannot help people to be truly liberated. According to him, the shackles of dependence can only be removed when we all share positive moral tendencies in society, not just relying on state institutions and organizational structures. power as many other philosophers envision. Clearly, despite mentioning and explaining many elements in the dialectical relationship to seek a legitimate social order that can protect the rights and interests of the people, but the basic idea in the work *Social Contract* lies in trying to clearly state the legal basis for people to rule themselves, to completely eliminate all forms of coercion that may appear, promoting the values of freedom, equality and people's sovereignty. All the content of J.J. Rousseau's rule of law ideology reflects the belief in human rational capacity and commitment, containing noble human values, and is a great source of motivation for the bourgeois revolutionary movement to explode. At the same time, J.J. Rousseau's efforts in criticizing and supplementing the spirit of Enlightenment not only helped further improve and deepen the revolutionary theory of humanity in the 18th century, but also heralded political issues - rule of law for the 19th - 20th centuries where capitalism replaced feudalism to establish worldwide domination, spreading pain to humanity with longer and bloodier wars than before. J.J. Rousseau's ideology, although not moving towards truly revolutionary methods, seems to foretell the challenges that people face, and at the same time suggest universal approaches to overcome them, all are very thought-provoking in the current world context.

^{xxix} Rawls, J. (2007). *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*. USA: Harvard University Press. P.193.

5. Recommendation

J.J. Rousseau's thoughts on political ethics show us a possible way to build a better political life, not only for a community, a nation but for humanity in general. Within the scope of a national community, following Rousseau's thoughts, we can orient education more strongly to equip citizens with common moral visions. For example, in Vietnam, building a common moral vision on the foundation of President Ho Chi Minh's thoughts and ethics has greatly contributed to uniting and encouraging the Vietnamese people to build a stable political community in the Southeast Asian region. Of course, not every nation has a monument like Ho Chi Minh to carry out the construction of common moral standards like in Vietnam. Here, I just want to use the image of Vietnam to emphasize that establishing a unified community with a common moral vision in a country of hundreds of millions of people is possible. The effectiveness of this work has also been proven through political practice in Vietnam. On a global scale, I believe that Rousseau's idea of bringing about a better world on a common moral basis is possible on this scale. In fact, political communities in each region have shown that they are effective in building regional stability. However, national interests in economic and political aspects are too great. The differences lead to difficulties in achieving common moral visions. I have this opinion, there should be separate organizations on morality, culture, and society in each region to provide guiding opinions and accompany economic or political decisions. These organizations should be non-political, only focusing on common humanistic moral issues to support the direction of decisions in other areas.

6. Conclusion

Rousseau's thoughts on political ethics were built on the foundation of the deviations in the moral life of the feudal society of France in the transition to capitalism. They not only provide correct views on the nature of political ethics, the factors affecting political ethics, but also outline directions for solving political life to become better. Studying this thought of Rousseau, comparing it with the reality of political life in Vietnam, I feel satisfied and deeply understand the arguments that Rousseau presented. Somewhere, I realize that there are positive similarities between the French philosopher and President Ho Chi Minh. Therefore, I want to share this thought of Rousseau associated with the history of France to clarify its value as well as its modernity with friends everywhere, hoping that many different ethnic communities will share and apply it appropriately to bring about a stable and sustainable political community.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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