

Tracing the People in Rousseau's *Of the Social Contract*: A Republican Promise Not Fulfilled; or, on the Nation as a Ticking Timebomb...

Summary

In his *'Of the Social Contract'*, Rousseau offers a theory to create a free and stable republic where laws are made by 'the People', who thereby achieve republican freedom. While the People is a crucial concept, Rousseau uses this word ambiguously and refers to four different conceptions. One of these is 'the nation', on which Rousseau again holds an ambiguous view. Meanwhile, his reliance on these nations has great (and avoidable) consequences for his goal of republican freedom, as it leaves room for exclusion and oppression, causes his pessimistic outlook on the preservation of the state and obstructs him to envision fortifying external relations. Furthermore, his trust in national myths conceals more promising means to maintain liberty.