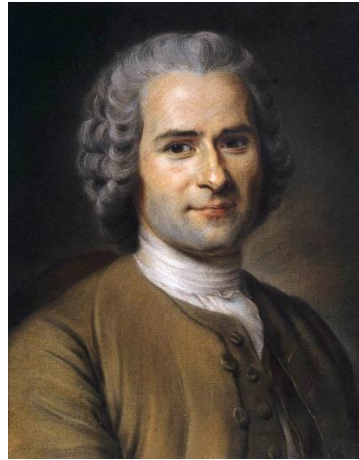


Wollstonecraft v Rousseau – Are women and men equal?

Name: _____



Instructions:

Read the statements by European Enlightenment philosophers Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Working individually, answer the document questions then compare and contrast their views by answering the summary questions. Note: These are composite quotes take from different sources written by the philosophers.

Questions:

1. What topic are Wollstonecraft and Rousseau discussing?
2. What is Wollstonecraft's view of the divine right of husbands?
3. Why does Wollstonecraft believe humanity will be better off if men and women are treated equally?
4. What is Rousseau's view of equality between men and women?
5. How are the ideas of Wollstonecraft and Rousseau similar and different?
6. Would you rather live in a world governed by the ideas of Wollstonecraft and Rousseau? Explain.

[Source: Text and Questions courtesy of Dr. Alan Singer, Hofstra University, NY 2021].

Mary Wollstonecraft

Till women are more rationally educated, the progress in human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks . . . The divine right of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger . . . It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness . . . It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world. . . . How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, who might have practiced as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads surcharged with the dew of sensibility, that consumes the beauty to which it at first gave lustre.

Jean Jacques Rousseau

“Women have ready tongues; they talk earlier, more easily, and more pleasantly than men. They are also said to talk more; this may be true, but I am prepared to reckon it to their credit; eyes and mouth are equally busy and for the same cause. A man says what he knows, a woman says what will please; the one needs knowledge, the other taste; utility should be the man's object; the woman speaks to give pleasure. There should be nothing in common but truth. . . The earliest education is most important and it undoubtedly is woman's work. If the author of nature had meant to assign it to men he would have given them milk to feed the child. Address your treatises on education to the women, for not only are they able to watch over it more closely than men, not only is their influence always predominant in education, its success concerns them more nearly, for most widows are at the mercy of their children, who show them very plainly whether their education was good or bad”.