

## Can Might Make Right?

One term not usually associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau or his ideas is the adjective “admirable.” An influential enlightenment philosopher, Rousseau promoted ideas which supported and contributed to the anarchy and murders of the French Revolution. Judging from the results of his ideas, it is hard to think that a Christian could agree with him on anything. He supported the basic goodness of human nature, a position diametrically opposed to Christianity. After all, if man is good why would God have sent His son to save him from sin? He also exhibited a low opinion of marriage and children. He had several affairs during his life and abandoned all of his children simply because he did not want to be bothered by them. The Bible condemns both of these actions when it says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14) and “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3a). Lastly, Rousseau held a very low opinion of the Christian faith. In spite of all these contradictions of Christianity, on one issue he powerfully supports the Christian view.

Imagine you are walking down a dark alley in New York City. It is well after mid-night, and you glance about uneasily, looking for suspicious persons. As you near your hotel, a shadowy shape suddenly springs out of a dark doorway and instantly pins you to the ground. You try to struggle free, but the man has hands like a vice, and your efforts are in vain. After binding your hands and gagging you, he starts searching your pockets, looking for your wallet. Does he have a right to your wallet? He obviously has the strength to take it by force, but is it morally right that he should? Of course, our

natural response would be to scream that this is an injustice, but why is it unjust? At this point, Rousseau comes to the rescue with the knife of reason, ready to slice through the darkness of ignorance and reveal why this is so. He says:

If force creates right, the effect changes with the cause: every force that is greater than the first succeeds to its right. As soon as it is possible to disobey with impunity, disobedience is legitimate; and, the strongest being always in the right, the only thing that matters is to act so as to become the strongest. But what kind of right is that which perishes when force fails? If we must obey perforce, there is no need to obey because we ought; and if we are not forced to obey, we are under no obligation to do so. Clearly, the word 'right' adds nothing to the force: in this connection, it means absolutely nothing. *Social Contract*, Book 1; Chapter 3; paragraph 1-2

Rousseau is reducing the opposing argument to absurdity. If might made right, then we would be morally obligated to give our possessions to the first strong man who demanded them. As soon as a stronger person came along, that person would, in turn, have to yield up his possessions. Such a concept of right goes against almost any code of law. As we know from the Bible, stealing is wrong. Thus, the one trying to forcibly obtain our property is at fault no matter how strong he is. We are compelled to conclude that strength is irrelevant to this discussion of what is right.

In this instance, Rousseau's conclusion is consistent with the Bible. Though I disagree with his morals and his assessment of human nature and his opinion of

Christianity, he has still provided a very valuable argument for the truth. Thus, even though I largely disagree with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I hold his position concerning whether might makes right to be quite admirable.