

## **To Persuade Without Convincing**

### **Rousseau's Doctrine of "Soft Power"**

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Perhaps there is no term in politics as prodigious as the concept of power – both, in terms of the complexity of its connotation and usage, and because it exerts a profound influence on the thinking and behavior of individuals and groups. This explains why power has steadfastly been present in the works of all great political thinkers from Plato until today. The term power has been discussed from various aspects: What constitutes power and what is it based upon? How should it be used and when, to what ends? And most importantly, should power be utilized to preserve a good regime or to curb a bad rule?

These questions have been pondered frequently by thinkers and commentators of classical, medieval, and modern political thought. Greek thinkers perceived political power (and politics in general) as a manifestation of grand philosophical ideals that should translate into just conditions that promote human happiness. For Romans thinkers, political power was a necessary tool to facilitate the reign over, and preservation of, vast territories and it was carried out through proper laws and systems of administration in order to keep at peace many dissimilar nations and groups. Medieval thinkers understood power as an inseparable from god and religion, which paved the way for connecting worldly affairs (including politics) with divinity, which eventually bred absolute church authority. Modern thinkers, in their search to liberate human actions from religion and philosophy and their associated ideals, have given an entirely different meaning to power. It is now the space by which the state and its subjects, citizens rather, interact and influence each other. This necessitated transforming power into a legitimate authority and requires a differentiation between conditions in which power is the end goal and when legitimate authority is the means to achieve that end. Thus, power has become the asset that enables its holders to influence others so they may obtain their desired outcome – which can be realized through different means such as compulsion, rewarding, or allure.

This article discusses power and how it can be converted into authority as delineated in J. J. Rousseau's writings. It focuses on the traits and qualities Rousseau assigns to the Great Legislator – an aspect that is generally overlooked – particularly his talent to apply soft techniques in founding and running a state. These techniques are expressed in the Social Contract where the Legislator is depicted as a force that resorts neither to coercion nor to reasoning, an agent who utilizes authority of a different order, capable of constraining without violence and persuading without convincing.