

On Rousseau and the modern concept of freedom

“The principle of freedom and its corollary, ‘perfectibility,’ . . . suggest that the possibilities for being human are both multiple and, literally, endless. . . . Contemporaries like Kant well understood the novelty and radical implications of Rousseau’s new principle of freedom [and] appreciated his unusual stress on history as the site where the true nature of our species is simultaneously realized and perverted, revealed and distorted. A new way of thinking about the human condition had appeared. . . . As Hegel put it, ‘The principle of freedom dawned on the world in Rousseau, and gave infinite strength to man, who thus apprehended himself as infinite.’ ”

— James Miller (author of *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, 2000),
Introduction to Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Hackett, 1992)