17.03. Introduction to Political Thought
Lecture Outline: Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Part I

Dates: 1712 Birth (Geneva)
1750 Wins prize from Academy of Dijon for Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts
1755 Discourse on Origin of Inequality published
1762 On the Social Contract and Emile published; both are condemned and ordered to be publicly burned in Geneva and France; French govt orders his arrest
1778 Death (refuge near Paris)

I. Background
   A. Personal: born a citizen of Geneva; gave up citizenship; his books often banned there
   B. Range of intellectual competence: social and political theory, music, novels, pedagogy, autobiography
   C. Paradoxes of his life and thought: radical/conservative; Enlightenment/critique; holistic community/total isolation

II. Rousseau’s thought as a response to other thinkers we have read
   A. Social contract (Hobbes, Locke)
   B. Republicanism (Aristotle, Machiavelli)
   C. Critique of inequality

III. Rousseau’s philosophy of history
   A. Critique of progress (in Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts)
   B. His method and sources: conjectural history based on historians’ & travelers’ reports

IV. Human Nature
   A. Independence/self-sufficiency
   B. Two basic drives
      1. Self-preservation
      2. Pity
   C. Free will
   D. Perfectibility

V. Historical narrative of the development of inequality
   A. Rousseau’s state of nature has a long history
   B. Gradual process of development from state of nature to social state
      1. Brute animality
      2. Golden age of moderate sociability: no relations of dependence
      3. Agriculture and metallurgy: corruption, inequality, dependence emerge
      4. Landholders trick the poor into agreeing to ‘right’ of property