Read, comment, and grade this sample student essay. You may use the track changes function in Word to make comments in the margins, or simply write a longer comment at the end of the paper, or a combination of both. Don't feel that you need to demonstrate to us everything you know about writing. We are more interested in what you would do to be helpful to the student. How, in short, would you help this student improve the essay? Write as fully as you wish, but don’t let this assignment consume you, so restrict yourself to 30 to 45 minutes to complete the task.

The sample was written in response to what follows: The first half of this course has been concerned with the questions and problems of bourgeois society as simultaneously a form of social emancipation and “glittering misery.” Choose two different authors we have read—Rousseau, Smith, and either Kant or Constant—and analyze how they understand bourgeois society, its crisis, and the possibility of and obstacles to preserving an indeterminate future for humankind. Strive to break out of the model of a reductive compare and contrast essay by exploring how the authors take a complementary approach to similar issues or how the analysis of one thinker deepens or complicates the analysis of another.

The Crisis of Bourgeois Society and Social Freedom

Throughout history, society has undergone numerous important transformations. The earliest form of society was made up of hunters and gatherers in the state of nature who faced issues such as competition with other animals for resources. As time progressed, the issues which society faced changed along with it. Those living in bourgeois society, beginning in the 17th century, were no longer concerned with the primitive issues of the state of nature nor many of the issues faced by those living in medieval society.

Important distinctions exist between bourgeois society and the forms of civilization which came before it. Constant’s “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared With That of the Moderns” is almost entirely dedicated to exploring those distinctions with a focus on the ancient versus the modern conception of freedom. In fact, he begins the piece with the declaration that he wishes to “submit for your attention a few distinctions, still rather new, between two kinds of liberty...The first is the liberty the exercise of which was so dear to the ancient peoples, the second the one the enjoyment of which is especially precious to the modern nations”. Constant goes on to draw on different elements of antiquity described by Rousseau in his Second Discourse and offers his critique of Rousseau's approach as well as a new perspective on freedom.

Constant and Rousseau take different approaches in exploring freedom before bourgeois society. Rousseau chooses to explore the meaning of freedom in what he calls the state of nature. He hypothesizes that the state of nature was inhabited by man in the savage form, that is, only concerned with himself and his well-being. The state of nature has no society. Man does not interact with other men very often and is for this reason not concerned with neither the well-being or the opinion of other men. The natural man is therefore, most concerned with self-preservation. The caring for others, or as Rousseau calls it, “*amour propre*” does not develop until the rise of society. The natural man is therefore only concerned with the well-being of others if the well-being of others benefits him. This creates a kind of oxymoron in which man's unsociability results in him being sociable.

Moreover, the state of nature also has no government. There is no collective body or single power which rules over man other than himself. He is left to his own capabilities to compete with other animals for resources and most importantly he is dependent on himself for his own survival. This independence, combined with the aforementioned complete disregard for the opinions of others comprises Rousseau's definition of freedom in the state of nature. Freedom in the state of nature is the freedom of the individual.

Constant is much less concerned with analyzing freedom in the abstract state of nature and instead chooses to analyze freedom in the realm of the ancient civilizations. He asserts that, “The aim of the ancients was the sharing of social power among the citizens of the same fatherland; this is what they called liberty” (317). The reason, he thinks, we cannot apply the principles of the ancient form of freedom to modern society is because the differences between our societies are too great. To begin with, since the root of freedom in antiquity lies within the equal sharing of power and responsibility between citizens, it is important to note the rather large difference in the size of the ancient states compared to that of the modern states described by Rousseau and Constant. Athens was one of the larger states in antiquity boasting a population of roughly 140,000 and a land area of at its height circa 473 BC. Even though the population was 140,000, only about 40,000 land owning men possessed suffrage. So when speaking of the impact of the individual on society in antiquity, society was governed by less than a third of all its citizens. Since, modern states are much larger not only in area but also in population than those of the ancients, it is impossible for personal will to have the same level of impact in modern society as in antiquity.

The ability of personal will to affect changes in government is also not the only source of happiness in modern society. In fact, individual independence is the cornerstone of bourgeois society. This is much different from the individual independence described by Rousseau in the state of nature where the individual does not rely on others for anything. Constant describes individual independence as the ability to think and act independently. While in modern society man still cares about the opinion of others, this new form of individual independence was the catalyst for arguably the biggest contribution of the bourgeoisie to humanity, the Renaissance.

Through this statement, Constant not only expands on his previous point but also points out the most important nuance concerning the relationship between individual liberty and political liberty: when individual liberty is given up for the promise of political liberty, the essence of freedom itself is lost. Freedom in bourgeois society is not bound to a contract, it is not having to choose between political and individual liberty. True and perfect freedom in modern society is the ability to have both political and individual liberty.