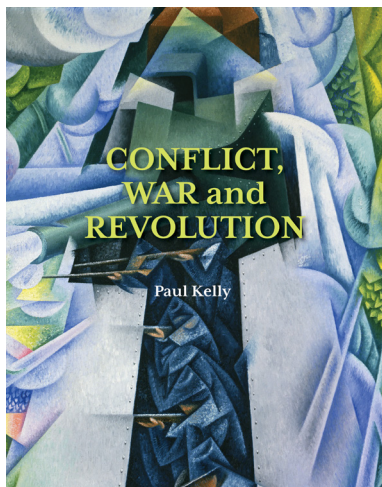


Rousseau – The threat of the international order

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Chapter 7 from



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CONFLICT, WAR and REVOLUTION

LSE Press

Suggested citation: Kelly, Paul. (2022) '7. Rousseau – The threat of the international order', in Paul Kelly, *Conflict, War and Revolution: The problem of politics in international political thought*. London: LSE Press, 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.cwr.g>



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CHAPTER 7

Rousseau

The threat of the international order

In Rousseau's writings, and his influence on international thought and theory, the central concept is sovereignty and its political and international implications. Rousseau focuses on the idea of popular sovereignty, that is, how the concept of sovereign power can be maintained and exercised collectively by a free sovereign people who remain free citizens. In this respect, it is a criticism and a development of the concept as deployed by Hobbes or by Locke.

Rousseau is critical of the concept of state sovereignty as a distinct juridical or law-like entity. Instead, he argues that sovereignty is a power of a people acting in accordance with a general will. In order to be a sovereign people, the citizens need to think of themselves as more than a multitude or collection of individuals trying to secure and protect their private interests. To maintain that idea of a sovereign general will, the people need a strong conception of identity, and to avoid the corrupting power of commercial society and cosmopolitan engagement.

Rousseau's arguments are a precursor of an inward-looking nationalism and anti-cosmopolitanism that has seen a recent recurrence in anti-globalisation movements, political and economic nationalism, national solidarity and the rise of identity politics.

How to cite this book chapter:

Kelly, Paul. 2022. *Conflict, war and revolution: The problem of politics in international political thought*. London: LSE Press, pp. 213–260.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.cwr.g> License: CC BY.

My purpose is to consider if, in political society, there can be *any legitimate and sure principle of government, taking men as they are and laws as they might be.* (Rousseau, *The Social Contract*)

Not that long ago, political thinkers and pundits were claiming that the world was entering a new period in which markets would slowly overtake the power of states and we would move into a new global civilisation. This optimism partly followed the collapse of really existing socialism in the USSR in 1991 (Fukuyama 1992). But it had a much deeper root in an amalgam of ideas that had circulated since World War II and which came to fruition in the idea of neo-liberalism or globalisation. These two ideas are not identical, because there have been 'left theories' of globalisation (Held 2005), but they overlap considerably. Both see the extension of global markets and the integration of trade, finance and communications as the irrevocable direction of historical progress.

The neo-liberals, drawing on the ideas of thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek (Hayek 1944; 1960), argue that the market is the only appropriate explanation and system for delivering human well-being, and that it must be protected from distortions created by state activism in the marketplace. Since the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA, this neo-liberal orthodoxy has resulted in pro-market policies of privatisation in domestic politics and the trade liberalisation increasingly breaking down economic borders and culminating in such wider areas as the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the single market of the European Union. The process of economic integration accelerated as national borders ceased to be barriers to trade in goods or obstacles to the mobility of capital, while in the case of the EU labour could also move across borders. With the subsequent reforms of Deng Xiaoping and the marketisation of the Chinese economy, from the 1990s onwards the triumph of globalisation appeared to have established itself as a global phenomenon, independent of any particular ideological configuration of the state.

The rise of China in the globalised economic order is one of the most striking features of contemporary politics. It challenges one of the fundamental premises of classical liberal free trade theories, but not neo-liberal globalisation. Since the time of Adam Smith (Smith 1776) through to the classic account of Hayek (Hayek 1960), the connection between soft or constitutional government and open markets has been asserted as the condition of economic growth and well-being. Indeed, some commentators have even argued that there is an historical necessity such that opening markets must result in opening political society, and open political societies requires open or free economies. In this account, Smith and Hayek have uncovered the laws of history. The experience of China and contemporary Singapore have become challenges to this simplistic argument. More recently, some thinkers have begun to doubt that the necessity ever made sense, and argue that neo-liberal progressivism was

always more of a faith than a reality (Gray 1998; Streeck 2016). In his book *False Dawn* (1998), John Gray aims his fire at the political economy of globalism. More recently, he has set his sights on the associated progressive optimism of those who claim that history is delivering the Enlightenment hope of a more humane and pacific world order (Pinker 2011; 2018) or (to use the phrase of Martin Luther King, repeated by Barack Obama) claim that ‘the arc of the universe is long but it bends towards justice’.

Not only has this neo-liberal and Enlightenment optimism been subject to criticism but most recently it has faced a major historical as well as political challenge from the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent rise of economic nationalism and populism – as a result of the economic response to 2008. The ‘austerity’ agenda in Europe and the attempt by states to prioritise securing global finance has culminated in major challenges to economic globalisation. The Brexit referendum in 2016 and the election of President Donald Trump (with his ‘America First’ agenda) saw a significant rise in economic nationalism. Countries began retreating from the global order of neo-liberalism in favour of emphasising borders, immigration controls, tariffs and trade wars amongst great powers – precisely the mess that characterised the inter-war period and which inspired the realist critique of idealism by the historian E.H. Carr (Carr 1939). In the UK, the immediate impact of the Brexit process was a withdrawal agreement limiting cooperation and ending the free movement of goods, services and people within the European single market. As political thinkers confronted this historical ‘U-turn’ in the progress towards a globalised world, they started to see some seeds of this collapse within the very processes of neo-liberal globalisation (with its emphasis on the free movement of capital, goods and labour) and not just the post-2008 austerity agenda. Gray and Streeck argue that globalisation undercuts the cultural presuppositions of the economic order it arises from. And along the way it unleashes political demons that challenge the dominance of western Enlightenment values and progress celebrated by thinkers such as Steven Pinker (2018).

In this context, the ideas of the 18th-century French polymath Jean-Jacques Rousseau emerge as extraordinarily prescient. The 18th century saw the consolidation of European power following the chaos and religious wars of the 17th century, with the rise of the major European powers and empires and the intellectual ferment of the European Enlightenment. Rousseau was part of the enlightened intellectual culture, but he was also one of its most profound critics – understanding the inherent contradictions in the society and intellectual culture of Europe between the end of the European wars of religion and the French Revolution, with its assertion of liberty, equality and fraternity, and the rights of man and the citizen.

Rousseau is one of the most profound critics of social contract theory, whilst also being one of its great exemplars, alongside Hobbes and Locke. He is one of the seminal theorists of liberty at the same time as being considered by some

to be a proto-totalitarian (Talmon 1986). And he is undoubtedly a major theorist of democracy. He wrote on many subjects from the origin of languages to botany, and was a significant novelist and writer of operas, as well as making major contributions to western political theory by revolutionising familiar concepts such as sovereignty, the individual and democracy. For our purposes, as an international political theorist, he provides one of the most radical critiques of the international state system that, as we saw, is a legacy of Hobbes. And in doing so he opens up an anti-cosmopolitan theory of international politics that both asserts the primacy of the individual whilst also inspiring the communitarianism and nationalism that has shaped the ongoing struggle between political and economic nationalism, on the one hand, and justice and the universal claims of individuals, on the other.

Throughout this book we are addressing new paradigms of politics that shape the way we think about the international realm. Rousseau is just as original as other thinkers, but he is also closely intertwined with the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. So these three chapters can be connected in a way that is different from others in this book. The link is the concept of sovereignty that is central to all three thinkers, as well as the individualist account of sovereign power. But, for all this overlap, and to the extent to which Rousseau is deliberately addressing Hobbes's arguments (as well as those of Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke), he is also criticising the account of sovereignty and its implications in the international sphere. Hobbes leaves open questions about the international realm either as a society or as an antagonistic system of competitive states, and Locke leaves open the right of individuals to exercise their private right towards illegitimate powers. By contrast, Rousseau is very clear about the kind of international realm that emerges from state sovereignty or close alternatives such as national sovereignty that so preoccupy the rhetoric of international politics in the 21st century. Whilst it is always important to remember historical distance and Skinner's (1998) 'myth of prolepsis' (seeing later ideas pre-empted in an earlier age), when one looks at Rousseau's account of the logic of the state system and his assault on the alternative of global cosmopolitanism, it is almost as if he were participating in the debate about the future of globalisation or the terms of contemporary international political theory (Brown 2002; Caney 2005).

The life and writings of an 'extraordinary thinker'

Like Augustine, Rousseau is also the author of a work called *The Confessions* (Rousseau [1770] 1953) and, like Augustine, he makes his own psychological formation one of the cornerstones of his philosophical and social theory. Rousseau underwent a conversion to Catholicism and then a form of reconversion to his previous Protestant faith. So the issue of introspection and

self-formation echoed Augustine's own struggle for true self-understanding, and thus their similarities should perhaps not be surprising. However, there the similarities end. Rousseau's philosophy is centred around the claims of the individual as an autonomous being of equal value with other autonomous individuals, a fact that bears some resemblance with the contractarian individualism of Hobbes but which also could not be more different. Rousseau's thought is about the quest for individuality, and, as his late and posthumously published works *The Confessions* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* show, this was not just a philosophical endeavour but a personal one, making his autobiography peculiarly important to his thought in a way that is not true for many thinkers of the Enlightenment period.

Jean-Jacques was born in Geneva in 1712 to a modest family, although his mother came from a former patrician family. His mother died following the birth and he was brought up by his father who was a watch-maker – a skilled artisan. The Geneva of Rousseau's birth had since 1541 been the home of Calvinism. Jean Calvin (1509–1564) was one of the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation and the founder of the Presbyterian strand of Protestantism that contrasted with the Anglicanism of the Church of England or the Lutheranism of Germany and northern Europe. Calvin, who had originally been trained as a lawyer, was deeply influenced by Augustine and his views of predestination. Whilst his theology shaped the tradition of Presbyterianism and independent congregationalist Church governance that inspired the Puritans of England and subsequently New England, he also had views on the Church as a full political society, which he realised in the city of Geneva. Geneva was not simply a free imperial city but a Presbyterian polity following structures of government that Calvin set out in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Calvin 1531). Whilst it served as a manual of reformed theology, this text also set out an account of Christian liberty and the structure of the Church. Whilst it offered a democratic form of Church government, it also undermined the idea of categorically separate spheres of life. The civil powers of the government of Geneva were integral to the powers of the reformed Christian community of Geneva – there was no separation between Church and state, even in the attenuated form that existed under the 'two powers' (*regnum*, or the right to exercise political force, and *sacerdotium*, or priestly power) of medieval Catholic political theory.

It was into this strictly governed moral, political and legal order that Rousseau was born. However, in the 250 years between Calvin's *Institutes* and Rousseau's birth, much of the original democratic structure of Church and political life had been replaced with a more oligarchic version of government, which located more and more authority in the hands of a smaller group of leaders. The Petit Conseil, which exercised real executive power, comprised 25 members. As with many republics, the ideal and the reality remained in considerable tension. That said, the ideal of a free political community was to remain central to Rousseau's political thought.

Rousseau had no formal education, but was introduced to reading the classics (especially Plutarch) by his father. Following a violent quarrel, his father was forced to flee Geneva, and Rousseau was sent to live with a pastor named Lambercier, who is most famous for introducing Rousseau to corporal punishment. He was subsequently apprenticed to a master whose brutality caused Rousseau to run away and begin the itinerant lifestyle that was to be his destiny. An early and influential experience came when Rousseau was adopted by Madame de Warens, the widow of a Catholic convert. Madame de Warens took him into her home and eventually her bed. Under her influence, he became a convert to Catholicism, following a period of domestic service in Turin. His time as a domestic servant was not happy and helped shape his lifelong aversion to relationships of dependence and domination. However, his time with Madame de Warens was happy and, apart from other comforts, gave him access to a considerable library that enabled him to cultivate his broad and prodigious intellect.

After a decade under her care, Rousseau launched himself into French literary society and started to make friends with many of the leading figures of the time. In 1742 he befriended Denis Diderot (1713–1784), co-founder of the *Encyclopedie*, which was to play such an important role in French intellectual life in the period prior to the French Revolution. Between 1743 and 1744 he also served as a secretary to the French Ambassador to Venice. In 1745 he also began his lifelong relationship with Thérèse Levasseur, the woman who was to bear him five children, all of whom were quickly dispatched to orphanages. Thérèse was uneducated but loyal and accompanied Rousseau for the rest of his days, eventually becoming his wife.

However, it was Rousseau's literary output on which his contemporary, and subsequent, reputation depended. Although he is now known as a great political theorist, his early works were on music and musicology, subjects on which he contributed to the *Encyclopedie*. His interest in music was not just theoretical; he earned money as a copyist of musical manuscripts and he wrote an important opera, *Le Devin du Village* (1752), which gained considerable fame. His philosophical fame began when he entered a prize essay competition hosted by the Academy of Dijon on whether the development of the arts and sciences had been morally advantageous ('Has the restoration of the sciences and arts tended to purify morals?') – the idea being to celebrate the progress of Enlightenment. Rousseau's prize-winning *Discourse on the Arts and Science* (1749) takes the contrary view, arguing that the advancement of science and knowledge offered by the Enlightenment had actually led to moral corruption and weakening of civilisation and culture. That essay won first prize and its eventual companion, the *Discourse on Inequality* (Rousseau 1755), won second prize in a later competition. Both mounted an attack on the political ideas of the Enlightenment period as exemplified by Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes and Locke. The 1750s saw the culmination of his major political writings with the

essay *The Social Contract* and *Emile*, a treatise on education and self-culture. He also published a novel, *Julie: The New Héloïse*, which became the most popular French novel of its time.

Yet, as his philosophical career flourished, another aspect of his character was to emerge at the same time, namely his almost paranoid sensitivity, one of the less attractive aspects of his character. Rousseau began significant intellectual feuds with the likes of Voltaire, or his former close associates such as D'Alembert and Diderot. These degenerated into actual feuds, which, coupled with his paranoia, required him to flee Paris and then France. He was primarily concerned that those like Voltaire were determined to destroy his reputation. His worries were not wholly baseless, as the banning and public burning of *The Social Contract* and *Emile* (by the Catholic authorities in Paris and the Calvinist authorities in Geneva) confirmed that he was at serious risk. As a fugitive from justice, Rousseau moved to Neuchatel in Switzerland and then in 1766 to England under the protection and support of the Scottish philosopher David Hume. Rousseau settled in Wootton in Staffordshire. Hume was justly famous for his generosity and equanimity, but Rousseau became convinced that Hume was in league with his persecutors, much to Hume's disappointment and pain. Throughout this period, Rousseau continued to write, although not necessarily publish, and he completed his political theory with the application of a regime of equality to different types of society in *The Constitution of Corsica* (Rousseau 1765) and *The Government of Poland* (Rousseau 1771). Both of these works show that Rousseau's philosophy of the general will was no mere utopia but the basis of an egalitarian regime that could exist under certain social conditions. These works also demonstrate that the challenges to a free political community were external. They emphasise the extent to which international relations was an intimate part of his political thought and not simply a further implication of an essentially domestic view of politics, as had been the case with Hobbes.

After the unfortunate break with Hume, Rousseau eventually agreed not to publish further and was able to return to France in 1767. He spent the rest of his life, with Thérèse, studying botany and composing the late autobiographical works such as *The Confessions* (1770) and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1776–1778). His work had always had an autobiographical tone, even when this was partly obscured, as with the 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar' in *Emile*. These last works are essential to understanding Rousseau's conception of the individual and his struggle for autonomy that is one of his great legacies to later thought. In 1778 Rousseau suffered a stroke and died.

His subsequent legacy, as an influence on the Romantic movement through artists such as Wordsworth and Goethe, was complicated by the legacy of the French Revolution. Rousseau's undoubtedly revolutionary thought was quickly co-opted into the actual Revolution when his body was transported to Paris in 1794 and interred in the Pantheon. Many of the leading figures of the Revolution (such as Robespierre) had been influenced by Rousseau's ideas, and he

was claimed by many factions such as the Jacobins and eventually Napoleon Bonaparte. For subsequent thinkers, this association with a revolution that he did not predict, and which occurred more than 10 years after his death, has coloured his reputation. For thinkers of a conservative disposition, Rousseau is indelibly tainted by the Revolution's excesses, and he was even co-opted by some authors as a founder of the anti-liberal tradition that led to totalitarianism in the 20th century (Talmon 1986). Even some iconic 20th-century liberals such as Isaiah Berlin, who does not go as far as Talmon, nevertheless saw Rousseau's account of 'positive' freedom as a precarious basis for liberal freedom (Berlin 1998). That said, perhaps the most important English-speaking liberal philosopher of the 20th century, John Rawls, took surprising inspiration from Rousseau, especially with respect to the place of a liberal just state in the international order – a philosophical problem that brings us back to the challenges of globalism and economic nationalism.

How should one read Rousseau? One can take a number of perspectives on his work. For some he is a philosopher, but with a curious style. Rawls makes the point that Rousseau's style is something that persists even when he is read in translation (Rawls 2008, p. 192). This is partly the result of the autobiographical and self-exploratory dimension of his thought, even in his most philosophical writings, such as the *Discourses* and *The Social Contract*. But Rawls insists that underlying that personal style there is the familiar logical structure of argument that one would expect from a philosopher; one just needs to read him carefully. However, that is not the only challenge, as, like many great thinkers, Rousseau's works do not all seem to be consistent. For example, he offers a penetrating critique of the social contract tradition of Hobbes, Locke and Pufendorf in the *Second Discourse*, whilst also offering one of the classic social contract theories in another book. Perhaps we should not expect consistency across texts and see each one in its own right. But, given Rousseau's tendency to contextualise his own thinking through engagement with contemporary debates, such as those around the *Plan for Perpetual Peace of the Abbe St. Pierre* (Rousseau 1756), or their interconnection in his autobiographical narrative, it is not wholly persuasive to see each work as an historically discrete artefact, and not part of a single mind engaging with itself and the world.

A further challenge, which I will state and leave unresolved, is the problem of irony in his work. Judith Shklar famously argues that his social contract theory is not to be seen as a philosophical system, even one buried beneath a personal style, as her Harvard colleague Rawls claimed. Instead, Rousseau is an ironist and a utopian, holding up a mirror to the world to challenge what it can be (Shklar 1985). This relieves Rousseau of the demands of rigorous consistency and allows for an ambiguity about which of those positions he states he also actually endorses. At the same time, it makes him a more important, striking and original thinker. Rousseau's ambiguity is precisely what renders his challenge to Hobbes and the juridical contractarians so forceful, precisely because it introduces the element of real-world ambiguity that abstract rationalism tries

to eradicate in its search for certainty and precision: a certainty and precision that the real world of politics can never provide.

The Enlightenment and the 18th-century international order

The period of just over a century between the publication of Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Rousseau's *Social Contract* was an extraordinary time of intellectual and political ferment. It is the high point of the European Enlightenment, which saw the extraordinary development of science and philosophy that became the self-satisfied subject of the Academy of Dijon's essay competition. For all its ferocity, the Thirty Years War brought an end to the major religious wars that had marked the century from the European Reformation of Luther and Calvin to the time of Hobbes and the end of the English Civil War. Although it by no means turned Europe into a land of peace and stability, it did allow for the cultural and political rebuilding that ensured the subsequent growth of philosophy and modern natural science.

The publication of Isaac Newton's (1642–1727) *Principia Mathematica* in 1687 transformed the new science of Galileo and his peers into the modern system of physics that was to dominate until the early 20th century. Newton's mathematical model of the solar system (as the universe) and his derivation of the basic laws of physics, were seen as huge cultural moments that lifted the veil of creation and revealed a rational order to the universe that could be comprehended in a relatively few simple equations. Newton was also one of the inventors of calculus (along with Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), with whom he competed for the honour), which provided the mathematical notation by which his laws could be expressed and proved. Modern science has many sources but with Newton a recognisable model of scientific enquiry was developed that would shape the way in which all future claims to knowledge could be vindicated.

Rationalism associated with Leibniz had earlier roots, yet drew its support from the abstract and deductive example of Newton's mathematical physics, as opposed to the empiricism of the English philosopher John Locke, who sought to vindicate Newton's abstract theories by comparing them to human experience and which influenced later Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume (1711–1776). The conflict between the relative claims of rationalists and empiricists was to dominate Enlightenment philosophy as well as science. Yet, in both cases the model of science as experimental and rational distinguished it from the previous world of religious authority, now associated with the old order of conflict and ignorance. Enlightenment became a new religion, but one liberated from the narrow authority of priests and authorities. And it was this ethic of Enlightenment that shaped the intellectual culture of the early 18th century and its dominant political philosophy, as much as its physical science.

Enlightenment political thought – Pufendorf and Montesquieu

The dominant political philosophy of the late 17th and early 18th centuries was shaped by the new Enlightenment confidence in reason and in reason's claim to provide not only the basis of knowledge but the basis of obligation and law. This is most clearly exemplified in one of the most significant political philosophers of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Samuel von Pufendorf. Unlike Hobbes or Locke, he is now only read by specialist historians of thought. Although Hobbes had begun the modern social contract tradition and the juridical account of sovereignty (see Chapter 5), his subsequent legacy in Europe was mostly as a materialist metaphysician, whose political theory was overshadowed by the much more influential theories of Locke (see Chapter 6) and Pufendorf, although both took some inspiration from Hobbes.

Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694) was a German legal theorist who held a series of academic posts across the various principalities that made up 17th-century Germany. He wrote a major commentary on the work of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), the Dutch jurist and a contemporary of Hobbes, which was to serve as one of the foundation texts of international law. He distilled his basic response to Grotius's teaching into *De Officio Hominis et Civis (The Duty of Man and Citizens)*, a 1679 book that was to become one of the most important works of legal and political theory in the 18th century. It influenced Rousseau and Immanuel Kant and many of the American Founders. As an academic and a systematic writer (unlike Hobbes, Grotius or Locke), Pufendorf provided the intellectual curriculum for the study of international law and public law. Like Grotius and Hobbes, Pufendorf derives the idea of sovereignty from the pre-social rights of individuals who constitute themselves as a body politic or political community through a contract or binding agreement that transfers right from the individual to the state as a territorially constituted political entity, and it is through the combination of private possession of property that the territoriality of political communities was created. This emphasis on property, territoriality and sovereignty was either missing or only immanent in Grotius and Hobbes, but it became central to the ideas of Pufendorf. As with Hobbes and Pufendorf on the sovereign state, so both Pufendorf and Locke deploy the concept to pre-political property rights to explain territoriality, as a juridical notion derived from a transfer of individual rights.

The idea of a political community as a juridical entity derived from a pre-political natural law was to shape much of the political language of the 18th century, including the growth of international law as a way of regulating the relationships between juridical states. Unlike in Pufendorf's work, the place of international law in Locke's theory is obscure, albeit not wholly absent (Chapter 6; Kelly 2015). Yet, whilst dominant, natural jurisprudence was not the only significant language of political thought in the early 18th century. Natural jurisprudence had always speculated about the historical origin of political

communities and states. Given that Pufendorf and Locke acknowledged significant sociability in their view of the state of nature, in contrast to Hobbes, with property, trade and money exchange, it was only natural that historical and developmental theories would arise explaining the historical as opposed to juridical origins of society, government and moral practices. The Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius had begun his account of a law of nature by noting that society was always present, a fact reinforced in the ‘discovery’ of new worlds, where some version of society was always encountered, even if, as in the Americas, this was often disparaged as primitive. For Grotius, this natural fact became the basis for his philosophical speculations on the conditions of sociability. For later natural historians of society in the 18th century, such as Montesquieu (1689–1755), the fact of different versions of ‘society’ became the basis for historical and anthropological speculation about the natural history and difference of societies. Montesquieu’s works the *Persian Letters* (1721) and his magisterial *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) marked a significant departure from the natural jurisprudence of Locke and Pufendorf and were to have an equally important influence on Rousseau and his immediate context.

The *Persian Letters* are written as the correspondence between two Persian travellers in Paris and their Persian home. They allow Montesquieu to reflect on French politics and the rise of political absolutism from the perspective of outsiders. They are both a warning and a brilliant critique of the political absolutism of the French monarchy and the philosophical defence of absolutism in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. The wonderful parable of the Troglodites, a people who are pure egoists with no social motives, is a brilliant critique of Hobbes’s state of nature. The Troglodites’ indifference to each other and their inability to cooperate lead not to a leviathan but to their dying out in a plague, because they are unwilling to take the advice of physicians. (This story takes on a peculiar poignancy as I write this in the UK’s Covid–19 pandemic.)

Montesquieu’s *Letters* also use the idea of the ‘harem’, which is riven by favouritism and intrigue as a model of the dangers of absolutist despotism, a recurring concern of his writings. The *Persian Letters* are part satire of the French monarchy and aristocracy, but they are also a reflection on a type of government that he sees as prevalent in different political cultures – such as those of the Ottoman, Persian and Chinese Empires. In doing this, Montesquieu helps himself to a lot of what has become known as ‘colonialist’ and ‘orientalist’ prejudices about these complex cultures (Osterhammel 2018). The ideological and cultural privileging of different civilisations was to become a central element of political thinking in the later 18th and 19th centuries, with the growth of modern trading empires.

The theme of absolutism is also important in Montesquieu’s account of different types of government in his major political work *The Spirit of the Laws*, in which the concept of ‘laws’ is interpreted very widely to include morals, mores and cultural norms, as well as municipal laws and constitutions. Montesquieu

sought to root the 'spirit' or the differences in these sources of authority in such things as national character, religion, culture, geography and climate. In this way, he explained why different regimes of law develop in different places and why these regimes are peculiarly suited to different contexts. Such materialist reductionism is taken up by later thinkers to argue for the appropriateness of Protestant forms of Christianity in northern Europe and Catholicism in southern Europe. More controversially, it was used to 'justify' why slavery is a necessary solution to the problem of labour in some climates, and also 'appropriate' for some peoples. Montesquieu does not defend racial slavery, but his arguments open theoretical opportunities for those who do precisely that in the racial theories of the next century.

Montesquieu's typology of political constitutions and regimes, particularly his preference for the balance of powers he finds in the British constitution (which of course is not a written constitution) was to provide many targets of criticism in Rousseau's account of sovereignty in *The Social Contract*. But, alongside his accounts of regimes, Montesquieu also claims that the rise of commercial societies that elevate the idea of 'luxury' and trade between states has a long-term pacific impact. Princes come to compete over luxuries and not through battles and military honour, while the interconnection of states is boosted as a result of trade and capital mobility. The idea that trade tends to encourage peace has become a platitude of international thinking from the 18th century to the present. It became one of the pillars of classical liberal political economy, although it should be noted that Adam Smith was much more sceptical about trade and peace. Whereas Smith was sceptical about the tendency of commercial societies towards cooperation and pacific relations, Rousseau was an even more forceful critic than Smith. He saw commercial society as one of the major negative threats to the modern state system and this is a good starting point for our discussion of his international political thought.

The European state system during the Enlightenment

The Westphalian settlement of 1648 marked the end of the confessional wars of the previous century and a half that had scarred northern Europe, but it certainly did not bring a period of stable peace to the subsequent century spanning the time from Hobbes's *Leviathan* to Rousseau's *Social Contract*. What emerged was a period of conflict and struggle for dominance amongst the new powers of the European continent, and eventually the extension of those European disputes to the wider world through the European empires. The conflicts that persisted retained a confessional element, not least in the struggle between England and France (and, following the unification of England and Scotland in 1707, between Britain and France). Yet, religion was quickly displaced by national and imperial interests, as witnessed in the complex struggle between two Catholic powers France and the Habsburg Holy Roman Empire in the War

of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714). Whilst the Treaty of Westphalia is supposed to have ushered in a new world of sovereign states, these states were anything but equal in power, whatever their juridical claims to authority. In the years immediately following Westphalia, the dominant powers were France (under the Bourbons) and the Holy Roman Empire (under the Habsburgs), each positioning for dominance on the European mainland. Alongside these were mercantile powers such as the Dutch Republic, which increasingly saw its interests lying in its extra-European empire. From the fall of the Commonwealth at the end of the Civil War to the subsequent fall of the Stuart Restoration in 1688, England was a peripheral power, only occasionally intervening on the European mainland. Yet, within a short time, by the end of the 17th century, it was to amalgamate with Scotland and emerge as a significant naval power, displacing the position of the Dutch and challenging the French.

The War of the Spanish Succession arose out of a dispute between the Bourbons and the Habsburgs over the claim to the Spanish throne, but it was primarily viewed as an opportunity for one of their empires to establish pre-eminence on the European mainland. The war involved alliances that engaged all of Europe's powers. It was a major and vicious struggle ranging from set-piece European battles such as Blenheim, where the British general the Duke of Marlborough was victorious, to protracted campaigns in the North American colonies between the British, French and Native American allies, and naval battles in the West Indies and the East Indies involving the Dutch versus Britain. By the end of the struggle, France had been contained behind secure borders; the Dutch had been significantly weakened and were being replaced as an imperial and naval power by the British; and the Spanish were reduced to an insignificant European power, although they retained their empire in the Americas.

The redrawing of boundaries and alliances, as well as the positioning of major land powers or naval powers such as Great Britain, established a precarious balance between the main blocs, with the great powers as its guarantors. The concept of the balance of powers was to become an important feature of thinking about international politics in the period leading up to Rousseau's major writings. These powers were protective of their spheres of influence and they exercised some dominance in the politics of the minor allied powers. For many smaller principalities and states, their sovereignty was at best conditional, to the extent that David Hume (1752) saw similarities with the politics of Thucydidean Greece, where Athens and Sparta served as the dominant powers. The European powers of the 18th century also developed a sophisticated military technology and accelerated the development of modern military organisation that was to shape the 18th and 19th centuries. However, at the same time, war remained a brutal and vicious activity with an enormous cost in terms of lives and treasure.

In addition to wars across central and western Europe and in the European colonial possessions, other struggles continued to challenge the boundaries of Europe as both a political and civilisational conflict. The Reformation had

internalised military conflict within Christianity between Catholicism and the new Protestant states and republics in a way which finally defeated the idea of Christendom as a political entity. Nevertheless, the challenge posed to Christian Europe from the Ottoman Empire as a last great Islamic political power continued until 1683, when the Siege of Vienna was lifted by Polish and Habsburg forces under the command of the Polish King John Sobieski. The subsequent withdrawal of Ottoman forces from the Danube opened a new period of regime change and state building in central and eastern Europe, although the Ottomans continued to dominate south-eastern Europe for the next two centuries. The external cultural challenge and military threat of the Ottoman Empire thus remained even in the new order of western powers and sovereign states and continued to inspire many thinkers to canvass schemes for perpetual peace. These aimed not simply to eradicate war but also to reorient the focus of conflict from internal territorial disputes within Europe to external and civilisational threats (Hinsley 1962 p. 34).

Plans for developing a lasting peace and international federations to consolidate the position of the major powers became an important new body of political literature that was to shape Rousseau's intellectual world, notably the *Perpetual Peace* (1712) of the Abbe St Pierre (see the next section). Such schemes of federation, with great powers enforcing a guarantee of peace amongst states, were an increasingly common feature of late 17th- and early 18th-century political thinking. Whilst Hobbes's theory of the distinct sovereign state was possibly appropriate for an island kingdom with clear territorial boundaries (ignoring for the moment the complex relationships with Scotland and Ireland, which do not feature in Hobbes's thought), it was more controversial on the European continent, where even the major powers had contested and permeable borders. In this context, the problem of sovereignty was always a claim within a context of proximate and contesting sovereignties, so that the idea of an international system or even federation was always part of Continental thought about the emergence of modern sovereign state.

The final significant feature of the international politics of Enlightenment Europe was the rise of new powers, notably the rise of Great Britain as a major naval and imperial power in the period following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. However, in terms of its impact over the next three centuries, perhaps the most important new power in European politics was the rise of Prussia. Prussia developed from a minor principality, focused on the Baltic Sea and operating in the shadow of the much larger Kingdom of Poland–Lithuania, to a major military power, whose influence and might was still in its greatest period of expansion during Rousseau's lifetime. Under its Hohenzollern rulers, and exploiting a unique tax system to sustain its considerable army, it became a population in service of a military, almost along the lines of the Spartans. The aristocratic military officer class commanded a peasant conscript army that was larger as a proportion of the population and better equipped and disciplined than rival states could manage. Hence, Prussian military and political

power was out of all proportion to its population size. As Prussia expanded its influence and territory in conflict with the Austrian Empire and moved against Poland, its military ethos was also complemented by an interest in high culture and Enlightenment thought. This was especially true during the reign during Rousseau's lifetime of Frederick the Great (r. 1740–1786), who was a significant patron of the arts, a musician and a correspondent of Voltaire.

Frederick the Great (1712–1786) was only one further example of the contradictions at the heart of the Enlightenment, between the progress of science and culture on the one hand, and the advance of war, conquest and its inevitable devastation on the other. These twin developments were to shape Rousseau's own ambivalent view of Enlightenment culture and the political theory that was associated with it, namely the sovereign state governing amongst rival sovereign states.

*Plans for perpetual peace and the reality of war –
Rousseau on St Pierre*

An extraordinary passage from the opening of Rousseau's *The State of War* gives one of the most memorable depictions of the horrors of war in western political theory:

I open the books on rights and morals, I listen to the scholars and legal experts, and, moved by their 'thought-provoking' arguments, I deplore the miseries of nature, I admire the peace and justice established by the civil order, I bless the wisdom of public institutions, and I console myself for being a man by viewing myself as a citizen. Well instructed as to my duties and happiness, I close the book, I leave the classroom, and I look around me. I see poor wretches groaning under an iron yoke, the human race crushed by a handful of oppressors, a starving mass of people overcome by pain and hunger, whose blood and tears the rich drink in peace, and everywhere the strong armed against the weak with the formidable power of the laws.

One can but groan and be quiet. Let us draw an eternal veil over these objects of horror. I lift my eyes and look off in the distance. I see fires and flames, countrysides deserted, and towns sacked. Wild men, where are you dragging these poor wretches? I hear a horrible racket. What an uproar! What cries! I draw near. I see a scene of murders, ten thousand men slaughtered, the dead piled up in heaps, the dying trampled underfoot by horses, everywhere the image of death and agony. This then is the fruit of these peaceful institutions! (Rousseau 2011, p. 255)

Here Rousseau also gives an extraordinary depiction of the experience of many students of political thought confronting the vast chasm between the

philosophical studies about states, duties, war and law and the reality of the phenomenon. It serves as important illustration of the tension at the heart of Rousseau's work between his philosophical ambition, engaging with the theories of major thinkers, and his sense of the reality that these theories are supposed to address: the vast personal gap between Rousseau as philosopher and as citizen and historical witness.

At the centre of his most political writings from the 1750s are a number of short works that are consumed by the challenge of the international relations in the modern sovereign state system as defined by Hobbes. Hobbes's political theory does not address the international realm except in passing. It leaves floating a possible implication about whether a further level of contract amongst states might help to eradicate the problem of war between them. Just as the circumstance of war in his original position was the motive to create the sovereign, so could the same conditions obtain amongst states with the continuation of war, beginning a second logic of an international social contract? This is precisely the idea that inspired the development of plans for 'Perpetual Peace', such as that of the Abbe St Pierre in the 18th century. The combination of the logic of Hobbesian sovereignty and St Pierre's writing inspired Rousseau in his most direct reflections on the problem of sovereignty and international politics. During 1756 he wrote two works on St Pierre, although they were published at different times, as the *Abstract of the Project for Perpetual Peace by the Abbe St. Pierre* (1761), which gives an account and makes little commentary, and *Judgement of the Plan for Perpetual Peace* (1782), an analysis and critique of St Pierre's work. During the mid-1750s, Rousseau also wrote *The State of War*, possibly as an unused chapter of *The Social Contract*. This work clearly engages with Hobbes and with the optimism of St Pierre and those who sought to address the horror of war by creating an international federation of states.

Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre (1658–1743) authored one of the first formal plans for perpetual peace, an early version of which was first published in 1712. He has had an influence on later schemes for creating international agreements and organisations to prevent war, right up to the 20th-century League of Nations and the United Nations. He proposed a confederation of sovereign European states that bound themselves under a common law forgoing the right to war and submitting disputes to arbitration by a senate of the league, whose decisions were sanctioned by the major powers. Although all members of the league were considered 'equals', clearly some were more than equal in power. The membership of the confederation was to include the European sovereign states but also nearby powers such as Muscovy (the emerging Russian Empire) and 'the Turk' (or Ottoman Empire). The purpose of the League was ultimately to remove a state's right to go to war to expand its territory. So its proposed primary benefit to existing major powers was that it would secure their borders and preclude changes to

territory through inter-dynastic marriage and alliance (as, for example, in the War of the Spanish Succession). In turn, this gain would reduce the cost of preparedness for war.

Rousseau's first response was to repeat and outline the main features and benefits of St Pierre's plan in the same way as the student in the opening passage from *The State of War*. However, the more he considered this proposal, the more his judgement was to become harsher. He came to see that not only was the strategy of perpetual peace 'utopian' but it was impossible given the nature of the Hobbesian state system. The book thus became a critique of the 'horrible system of Hobbes' (Rousseau 2011, p. 257). The book is a rejection of Hobbes's claim that war is the natural condition between individuals that can only be resolved by the creation of the sovereign state. Hobbes's account of the state of nature confuses 'natural man' with the idea of man as he exists within civil society, already corrupted by that society. In the natural condition there is no need for war, which is not a 'warre of all against all' but a relation of state power to state power, with each posing a threat to each other because of its efforts to secure and protect its territory and status:

I therefore call war between one power and another the effort of a mutual, steady, and manifest inclination to destroy the enemy state, or at least weaken it, by all means possible. This inclination put into action is war properly so called; as long as it remains in a state of inaction, it is merely the 'state of war'. (Rousseau 2011, p. 264)

Rousseau's characterisation of the modern state is similar to that of 'offensive realists' like John J. Mearsheimer (2001). States pursue their interests through competition across the board, whether through restricting trade, disrupting international cooperation, or initiating direct military conflict. Within Rousseau's account of civil society, the leaders of the incumbent regime (whether a prince or a republic) are compelled to act by the system – because they will either seek to aggrandise power or be subjected to another's power. This exposes the paradox at the heart of Rousseau's rejection of St Pierre's plan. The very conditions that give rise to the desire for peace and the avoidance of war (namely, the regime of sovereign states seeking protection through advantage) is precisely the reason why such a league could never persist. The dynamic of the state system is inherently one that motivates non-cooperation and non-compliance. In this way, despite offering one of the most striking accounts of the horrors of war, Rousseau leaves us with the prospect of a permanent 'state of war' as the consequence of the state system, and not the state system as the solution to the problem of war. This is Rousseau's most striking statement of an 'offensive realist' position. But, as one would expect with him, it is not his final word or a rejection of the idea of the sovereign state as such, as the next two sections show.

The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and the 'evil contract'

Like the *First Discourse*, Rousseau's short book *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, was written for a prize competition organised by the Academy of Dijon. It is a complex essay that covers a variety of issues and introduces ways of theorising that were to become important for subsequent political philosophy. Hugely pregnant with ideas, not all of which were original to Rousseau, it raises much that can be challenged and criticised. Much larger books have been written about how to understand this short book. Although I treat the work here as a critique of the social contract tradition (which it is), it is also much more than that, both within Rousseau's 'philosophy' and in subsequent political philosophy, the philosophy of language and historical anthropology. In the introduction, Rousseau distinguishes between natural and moral equality:

I conceive of two kinds of inequality in the human species: one that I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature and consists in the difference of age, health, bodily strength, and qualities of mind or soul. The other may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention and is established, or at least authorised, by the consent of men. This latter type of inequality consists in the different privileges enjoyed by some at the expense of others, such as being richer, more honoured, more powerful than they, or even causing themselves to be obeyed by them. (Rousseau 2011, p. 45)

At the outset, Rousseau rejects Hobbes's discussion of equality of natural power and turns Locke's concept of consent to work against the idea of freedom. Whatever else Rousseau is doing, he is clearly critiquing the social contract tradition.

Natural humans and the state of nature

In the classic social contract theories, the state of nature is used to identify the problem that motivates the creation of society and political authority. Humanity's inherent nature is the source of failings that only civil society can compensate for. By contrast, Rousseau argues that Hobbes's account of the natural condition is nothing of the sort. Instead, it is a characterisation of traits that only arise in civil society as if they were natural and pre-social. Rather than being egoistic, appetitive, glory-seeking and diffident creatures in the state of nature, Rousseau depicts a very different individual when all the consequences of socialisation are stripped away:

I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but all in all, the most advantageously organised of all. I see him satisfying his hunger

under and oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal; and thus all his needs are satisfied. (Rousseau 2011, p. 47)

Not only is the picture of humanity here very different from that of standard state of nature arguments, but a person's relation to nature as well as their own nature is also very different. A key feature of classic social contract theories is competition for resources in order to secure self-preservation, yet here we see limited natural desires that are fully satisfied. Natural humanity lives in circumstances of material abundance and therefore would have nothing to compete over. An individual's body is acclimatised by use so that they can achieve many things that modern people could only achieve with tools and artifice. The individual is physically robust or they would have succumbed to nature in infancy – survival of the fittest, an idea that influences later theories of evolution. The primitive idea of natural adaptation is reflected in the way in which females are suited to carrying young so as to be free to seek sustenance and shelter whilst suckling. Rousseau also suggests that many issues that limit life and create health problems are the result of poor living, excess indulgence or lifestyle in 'civilised' society. The absence gives reason to think that natural humanity is no less healthy, or more likely to lead a stunted life, than those in civil society. In most respects, human beings in the natural condition are similar to other animal species – Rousseau even draws parallels with the orangutan of Sumatra and African gorillas (Rousseau 2011, p. 106). Human nature is not just the animal physicality he describes but also the potential to form ideas and the faculty of 'self-perfection'. Human will and the passions contain the sources of humanity's decline from the nobility of their savage state. Knowledge derived from the senses is something we share with animals – e.g. the smell sense of a predator. When this is coupled with the will, we create conceptions of need and the consequent desires. Admittedly, in the natural condition these are primitive desires:

The only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a woman, and rest; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger. I say pain and not death because an animal will never know what it is to die; and knowledge of death and its terrors is one of the first acquisitions that man has made in withdrawing from the animal condition. (Rousseau 2011, p. 54)

The repudiation of the natural fear of violent death is a clear denial of the most important motive in Hobbes's state of nature: to seek peace and leave the natural condition. To fear death, one needs a conception of the self and a sense of either its persistence outside of time or its termination in the face of eternity. Thoughts like these involve complex concepts that a natural human being or an animal would have no need for, because what purpose would complex and abstract thought serve in a world of minimal needs and abundant supply? Language itself is not something that solitary natural humans would acquire, and without language the capacity to reason would also be absent.

In a brief discussion of language, Rousseau makes some profound claims that contradict standard models of language learning, such as those privileging ‘ostensive definition’ of the sort found in St Augustine or John Locke (which privilege naming). Rousseau characterises language as public practices constituted by rules of grammar, and thus not a private cataloguing of the world of objects. This turn to language is not simply a digression. Rousseau’s account of the state of nature may well draw on experience of so-called primitive societies from travel writers and missionaries or biological speculations about evolution, but it is primarily a hypothetical thought experiment taken to its logical conclusion by trying to distinguish and subtract all those things that are a product of sociability. If humans in nature have no need for sociability (except in the most animal respects), then not only will they have no need for language and rational thought or concern for consequences but they will also lack such moral concepts as the capacity to judge ethically and the ability to discriminate between good and evil or virtue and vice. The natural condition is a pre-moral state because there is no prospect of conceptualising moral experience, even if humans have the basis of a moral psychology.

Rethinking self-interest: amour de soi-même and amour propre

Whilst humans in the natural condition are primitive, they are not solely animal. There are elements of human psychology that are natural but which only become significant in the emergence of society and in the growth of inequality that follows. Central to human nature is the possibility of perfectibility, understood as the capacity to learn and to improve from learning. In the natural condition there is little occasion for learning; nevertheless, the capacity enables humans to develop strategies to avoid pain and to accommodate risk. However, this is not all. Humanity also has the natural sentiment of pity, which is exhibited in the basic capacity of man to shed tears at suffering and pain – why else, Rousseau asks, would we have tear ducts? Pity is the natural ability to recognise pain and to share in it imaginatively by recognising its occurrence in others. He argues that even the most resolutely egoistic theories of human psychology (such as Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* (1714)) still acknowledge the effect of pity on the hardest hearts. Rousseau’s objective is not to develop a full account of morality but to recognise that our natural psychology is more complex than simplistic theories of rational egoism suggest. The rational egoists, such as Hobbes, assume that self-interest is uncontroversial, yet Rousseau draws an important distinction within the concept of self-interest or self-concern:

We must not confuse egocentrism [*amour propre*] with love of oneself [*amour de soi-même*], two passions very different by virtue of both their nature and their effects. Love of oneself is a natural sentiment that moves every animal to be vigilant in its own preservation and that, directed in

man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Egocentrism is merely a sentiment that is relative, artificial, and born in society that moves each individual to value himself more than anyone else, that inspires in men all the evils they cause one another, and that is the true source of honour. (Rousseau 2011, p. 117)

All men have a natural desire for survival and to overcome the pain of cold and hunger; they also like pleasure, albeit simple self-referential pleasures. When this is coupled with pity, they have a motive to identify with and feel a repugnance towards pain and suffering. But in nature they have no sense of self with respect to others, because that requires a sociability that is not natural. Once social relations develop, then the sense of self as deserving of recognition emerges, and this is *amour propre*: a sense of what our due is and what we are denied by others or by institutions and social structures.

The *amour propre* concept plays a complex role in the *Discourse*. Whilst Rousseau undoubtedly blames this egoistic conception of self-worth for the growth of vice and inequality, this idea is also at the heart of the claim for equal recognition that he defends throughout his works. It is his own sense of wounded *amour propre* that is revealed in the passages about his time in domestic service in his autobiography *The Confessions*. It is also this sense of what is one's due from others that shapes the emergence of unequal social relations that is institutionalised in the social contract theories he is criticising. The noble savage in the natural condition has no reason to compare himself with others and has only the capacity to see and experience the world through their senses, so the status of others is completely mysterious to them. Yet, this sense of others in comparison to oneself is the primary product of society and the fundamental relationship that underlies moral and political concepts. Once we lose our natural innocence and leave the state of nature, our *amour de soi-même* quickly gives away to *amour propre*.

Contract, coercion and consent

However, given the sufficiency of the state of nature and the apparent perfection of the state of nature with relative abundance, why did we ever leave it? And how did the society that tyrannises us and feeds our *amour propre* originate? The final part of the *Discourse* provides an account of the natural history of society and the emergence of government that is not wholly consistent with the picture of natural man and the state of nature. For Rousseau, civil society is the source of humanity's loss of innocence and explains the subsequent rise of depravity and loss of liberty that culminates in the tyranny of modern governments. They create the inequality of power, status and esteem that exists between rulers and ruled. These fundamental social divisions are in turn the source of so-called virtues that compel governments towards conflict and war

and hence explain the perilous state of international affairs. All of this has its fundamental source in the 'evil contract' we enter into when we consent to our own domination.

The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say, 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared, had someone pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellowmen, 'Do not listen to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one!?' (Rousseau 2011, p. 69)

Before all coercion could be brought to bear to sustain regimes of property or personal wealth, humanity must either recognise the claims of private property or not. They might support such claims because of reciprocal advantage, or simply by accepting that our betters have a right to exclude us because we are poor or lesser in some way. It is complicity in acknowledging those structures of inequality that ultimately gives force to the moral language of rights and claims, which in turn can then be backed up with sanctions. If no one recognised those claims, then there would just be force or violence, and the minority would always be subject to the majority. The 'evil' of civil society is that it tricks the majority to subordinate themselves to the interests of the minority.

However, before that confidence trick can be fully played against the many, the advance of society must have already progressed quite far. Accordingly, a speculative history of the growth of society forms the remainder of the book. Once Rousseau turns to why society arises, it is pretty clear that his hypothetical account of the state of nature is not the whole picture. His move does not reinstate the claims of the classic contract theorists, Hobbes, Pufendorf and Locke. Instead, Rousseau argues that individual self-sufficiency is shown to be limited by the challenges posed by nature, and the discovery of ways to overcome competition from other animals. Humans have the capacity of perfectibility so they learn how to overcome competition from animals and enhance the limitations of their bodies by the use of tools. Over time, humans also learn the benefits of limited cooperation following procreation, and so family relations start to emerge. Once this tendency to cooperation has begun and there is a move away from a solitary existence, language and communication develop. With that, further forms of social organisation and burden-sharing begin, as well as the development of concepts that differentiate between humans such as higher, stronger, quicker. These differentiations are then coupled with *amour propre* to become the basis of self-esteem, as well as inaugurating a social division of labour. This process of differentiation takes a long time and in its earliest forms is relatively benign.

Yet, its darker side emerges with the acceleration and institutionalisation of different statuses that follows from the discovery and deployment of technology:

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts whose invention produced this great revolution. For the poet, it is gold and silver; but for the philosopher, it is iron and wheat that have civilised men and sealed the fate of the human race. (Rousseau 2011, p. 75)

Technology is the acquisition and deployment of expert knowledge to transform the world, such as the ability to work metals and the expert knowledge that allowed crop rearing. This is important not simply because it unlocks the potential to transform the world to serve human purposes; for Rousseau, it introduces a transformation of social relations between the holders of knowledge and those who serve it. This is not just the division of labour that Adam Smith marvelled at. It is the division of society that would ultimately end in the class society that exercised Marx and subsequent socialists. Technology has a deeply mixed reputation in modern thought because it both liberates and tyrannises at the same time. Rousseau draws on this ambivalence in his conjectural history of human domination. Agriculture is a strong example, since it clearly requires special knowledge. Similarly, metallurgy involves finding and refining ore, as well as working it into useful tools. In both cases, the technology implies a social organisation of labour that brings with it differentiations such as master and labourer, owner and worker, expert and non-expert.

All of these relationships give rise to differentiations of status that in turn are institutionalised into social classes and stratification, which overcome the simple bases of social organisation such as those based on family relationships. Expertise becomes a basis for social differentiation and domination by the wise, replacing forms of hierarchy based on age and experience. In the next stage, a governing class emerges by exercising control over expert knowledge because they can control the knowledge class. So there is differentiation within differentiation by those who are able to manipulate the metallurgical experts via the creation of expertise in deploying their knowledge, such as using weapons against the weapon makers, or co-opting them into collaboration against others. At each stage, some form of self-subordination continues the substitution of natural liberty to these social tyrannies, but in each case it remains the logic of self-esteem, pride and *amour propre* that is central to this history of the rise and arbitrary concentration of power. This logic of expertise slowly transforms itself into hereditary power as functional skills in working metals or deploying weapons transform themselves into the skills of deploying servants, who in turn identify themselves with extended families and powers. For reasons of efficiency, functional leadership gives way to hereditary leadership and power, which suggests that hereditary monarchy is a relatively late human invention. Alongside these developments in power relations there is the development of

moral and political concepts that legitimates what are arbitrary social relationships. As status, wealth and power become ever more centralised, increasing inequality in the forms of government with unified and personal sovereignty, such as that held by the French monarch, becomes institutionalised. For Rousseau, this speculative history culminates in a new form of equality to replace the natural equality of the innocent noble savage. But in this case the equality is not noble. Rather, it is the ignoble equality of equal subjection to the tyranny of political rule.

In the ambiguous ending of the *Discourse*, Rousseau leaves us with a picture of the modern state as one where natural freedom has been replaced by domination. Natural innocence has been corrupted by the pervasive quest for status and honour, a distortion that is only possible because of the extension of inequality and domination, which enough people believe (falsely) that they benefit from. This quest for status is further extended in the international realm, where sovereign princes seek esteem and recognition through the unending quest for territorial expansion and power. Classic social contract theories presuppose this inequality in their accounts of the state of nature, and then attempt to rectify it by seeking consent to precisely the corrupt and dominating social relations that created this state of nature in the first instance. Yet, all the while, a return to natural innocence is not an option, because once the technological bases of social and political differentiation have emerged, the knowledge of that cannot be unlearned. So, does this leave us with the pessimistic conclusion that man is 'everywhere in chains' and humans are condemned to endure their loss of freedom and innocence? As always with Rousseau, the answer is never quite so simple.

The Social Contract

Rousseau is deliberately paradoxical in his political theory. He is both one of the most profound critics of social contract theory and one of its most important or classical theorists, regularly placed alongside Hobbes and Locke in the syllabus. Yet there is more. Not everyone who reads the complex argument of *The Social Contract* agrees about what they are reading. Is the work an answer to the challenge of the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*? Is it a social contract theory at all? Should we read it as a utopia (Shklar 1985), that is, an ideal thought experiment that is designed to show how our politics fails to live up to its potential? Perhaps Rousseau is seeking to show that freedom and sovereignty are incompatible and we can have one or the other but not both. Or is Rousseau offering us a model of the sovereign state that could be realised? These questions matter a good deal. If Rousseau had stopped with the *Discourse* and *The State of War* he would have made a sufficiently interesting contribution to international political thought by offering a critique of the Hobbesian sovereign state. In the rest of this section and the next, I will argue that in fact

Rousseau's *Social Contract* does offer an account of the sovereign state that he thought could and should exist in the world. It is one that has significant implications for international relations, and for international political theory. Here I take Rousseau at his word, whilst acknowledging that this is a risky strategy.

The Social Contract and the general will

'Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains' (Rousseau 2011, p. 156) – so opens Book 1, Chapter 1 of *The Social Contract*. This is one of the most striking claims in modern political theory. It both sets out the agenda of *The Social Contract* and links the argument to that of the *Discourse*. The noble savage in the natural condition is barely limited in satisfying their minimal wants, and (most importantly) is not subject to the domination of another person. Only with the emergence of social cooperation and civil society does nature give way to the interference of others and our concern for our status in the eyes of others, as the claims of our *amour propre* begin to have force. The *Discourse* ends with the institutionalisation of domination as we become subject to political rules, and also dominated by social mores and standards that reinforce our inequality in the eyes of others. The challenge for Rousseau is whether domination becomes the normal condition of civil society or whether it is possible to be free, whilst still benefiting from society. Before tackling that question, it is necessary to explain Rousseau's concept of freedom or liberty.

His conception of freedom or liberty is not stated in a distinct chapter (as with Hobbes in *Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter XXI). Instead, it is dispersed across all his writings; indeed, his life could be conceived as one long argument for liberty, according to *The Confessions* (Rousseau [1781] 1953). Whether there are two or many conceptions of liberty in his work, Rousseau's position is undoubtedly distinctive and influential. It can be distinguished from Hobbesian negative liberty theories, which reduce freedom to the absence of impediments to action (such as locks and chains). Equally, Rousseau's view is distinct from classical republican theories, which focus on the idea of membership of a political society that is not dominated by an external power. In so far as Machiavelli has a republican theory of freedom, it is a social theory of freedom and, therefore, individual liberty is an implication of membership of a non-dominated political society (unless, of course, you are a slave or a woman). Rousseau's conception is similar to the 'republican' conception of freedom (Pettit 1997; Skinner 1998), yet it differs importantly in being focused on the individual. For Rousseau, individuals are free when they are autonomous or self-governing; that is, when they can act in accordance with decisions and rules that they have set by themselves. They are free from distortion by internal desires as well as by societal forces, or by indirect coercion from the society in which people are forced by popular opinion to live or act in a certain way. Central to Rousseau's argument is the idea of a self that is independent from social conventions and

expectations, and the view that obstacles to freedom consist in much more than physical restrictions on action. According to Rousseau, we can be forced to conform, by our upbringing and education, by morality, by social status and by economic factors like poverty or our social class. Poverty does not simply deny people the opportunity to act by restricting the resources available to them; it also shapes our desires and our wants and limits us in aspiration as much as opportunity. As we shall see later, we can also think we are free when we are not, and this is one of the most controversial aspects of Rousseau's thought.

One simple implication of Rousseau's concept of freedom, which is manifest in the short chapters of Book I, is that it is incompatible with the standard arguments from the social contract tradition for the origin of political domination and state sovereignty. No argument that depends on force, conquest or intergenerational agreements can legitimately place a person under the rule of another, nor can freedom be consistent with the idea of alienating our natural liberty in return for security, peace or order. Of course, Hobbes thought natural liberty was greatly overrated and would be happily sacrificed for peace and security, but Rousseau disagrees. A world of Hobbesian subordination is not only risky in the event of the sovereign turning out to be a brutal tyrant; even benign subordination is the denial of all that makes human life bearable and distinctive. A life of subordination is intolerable for Rousseau as a philosophical claim and as a lived reality. He introduces the idea of man's (regrettably Rousseau does tend to mean 'man' and not 'mankind' as a generic category including women) alienation from his true self and from the world, an idea that was to have a significant influence on the young Marx.

In the opening chapters of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau does not deny the idea that some form of Hobbesian or Grotian initial agreement might create the institution of political domination, but this would not only be another example of imposed slavery; it would also not create a genuine people or a body politic. Rousseau clearly identified as inadequate the idea of a multitude gathered under a particular ruler – something familiar from Machiavelli's *The Prince*. He maintains that this remains a mere aggregation of individuals and is not a genuine association or people. So, his fundamental argument against the classical contract tradition is that it does not give rise to a genuinely political society: a people. An association is a people who come together as free individuals, and who retain that freedom whilst constituting a new kind of political community a body politic. In this way, Rousseau's conception of a sovereign people cannot involve the idea of alienating freedom. Nor can it be a completely artificial creation that is distinct from, and dominates, those who have created it – as is the case with Hobbes's state 'leviathan' looming over civil society, as depicted in the 1651 frontispiece of his book.

That said, Rousseau does retain the idea of an original agreement or contract as the basis of his new form of association, which suggests that a people might emerge out of a multitude that was held together and developed over a long

period of time, seeing this as a solution to the problem of coordinating self-preservation. Unlike the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau does not offer a speculative history of the state. Instead, he moves directly to the point at which an association is constituted, leaving aside whether this happens in an existing multitude or amongst individuals newly thrown together. On one level, none of this matters because Rousseau is not explaining where the state came from; he is concerned with the possibility of legitimate rule amongst a free people. Yet, his argument is also not simply an abstract philosophical one. He intends the idea of a free people to be something that could exist in the world as more than a utopia, so the terms of the agreement are important. He concludes:

in giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one. And since there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right that he would grant others over himself, he gains the equivalent of all that he loses, along with a greater amount of force to preserve what he has.

If, therefore, one eliminates from the social compact whatever is not essential to it, one will find that it is reducible to the following terms. *Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.* (Rousseau 2011, p. 164)

At the heart of Rousseau's argument is a simple idea, namely that, if everyone subjects themselves to the domination of everyone else, so that they become dominator and dominated at the same time, then the two statuses cancel each other out – and all domination disappears in a new association of equals governing and being governed at the same time. Central to this idea of a free association is Rousseau's idea of the general will. This is a notoriously elusive concept but it is also his answer to the question of what the sovereign is. The sovereign is the general will: sovereignty exists only when a general will exists because it is a permanent property of a people, as opposed to an aggregation of individuals or a multitude. Only as long as a people has a general will can the people exist as sovereign. Consequently, sovereignty cannot be alienated or transferred to an agent, as Hobbes and Locke claim. To alienate sovereignty is to destroy it. One consequence of this radical claim is that many of the so-called political entities that exist in the international domain are not sovereign states, whatever else they may be. Whilst Rousseau does not explicitly identify the concept of the state and that of the sovereign, as Hobbes does, it is not clear whether he thinks there can be states without sovereignty. If there are such non-sovereign states, then they are diminished things and they have no normative claim to recognition.

The idea of the general will is the solution to the problem of an association as a free people but what exactly is the general will? Rousseau's complex answer

to this question is the point of the main body of *The Social Contract*. The most important element of the argument is that it is the source of legitimate rule within a properly constituted people, so there can be no law or political right without the existence of the general will. Yet, if it is a feature of the people properly constituted, it must have some origin in the individuals that makes up the people, consequently the first place to look for the general will is with the individuals who comprise the people. The individuals who constitute themselves into a free association governed by a general will must themselves be able to will that general will. And they must be able to distinguish willing the general will from other kinds of willing. Rousseau's discussion of willing the general will involves distinguishing that will from a private will or from an aggregate or majority will. This involves focusing on the *content or object* of the general will and not a procedural or formal feature of the general will, such as the universalisability test of Immanuel Kant, who builds on Rousseau's insight. Each individual has their own will as the source of action they wish to bring about. That can be wholly private since a person can will the satisfaction of a peculiar desire that they may have but others do not share. So, a private citizen in a democracy who also happens to be a university professor might will that the state provide public support for universities. They may claim that this is a public good and others benefit, but it remains a private act of will because they are ultimately willing the satisfaction of their own particular desire. A private or personal interest is not the general will.

Similarly, a majority might will something that is an aggregation of particular wills because it just happens that a lot of people share the same desires – a majority might will the reduction of taxes as a result of a lot of individuals making judgements about their personal financial positions; this would not be a general will. A majority will is not the general will, so Rousseau believes that the majority will can be trumped by a minority who nevertheless will the general will – on the grounds that the majority is willing as an aggregation of private wills, whereas the minority is willing as engaged citizens and not private individuals who just happen to want the same thing. An example might be where a majority wills to deprive a minority of some of their rights. Of course, this latter claim does seem to beg many questions. It transfers the issue about what it is to will the general will into the question of what it is to will as a citizen. Rousseau does not offer a formal test of the general will, and so we have to search for some examples of what might satisfy that test and he does provide some guidance:

- The general will cannot be represented, so any collective decision that hands political authority to another class, person or body cannot be an example of the general will.
- Similarly, the general will cannot be divided or led to the destruction of the state or body politic; consequently, an act of secession, fragmentation or subordination cannot be an example of the general will. Given that Rousseau

- is rather sceptical about the realm of international affairs, this condition might even preclude the sharing of sovereignty under a treaty, as required by modern examples such as the European Union or the International Criminal Court – two highly controversial examples of pooling sovereignty.
- More speculatively, the general will is exhibited in rules and laws that are designed to sustain and protect an association of equals such as equality before the law, and the conditions which sustain that status as political equals, which might include social and economic provisions that prevent dependency and ward off relationships that undermine the commonality necessary for equal citizenship. Judgements about the equal protection of the laws are controversial, but one obvious sign that a general will is indeed general is the absence of any reference to a particular group or to a good or benefit that only advantages some particular individuals or groups of people.

Because the general will is not simply the majority will, we cannot rely on majority decisions to reveal that will, although Rousseau devotes much attention to how it might work in terms of decision rules. Since the general will cannot be represented and neither can it be alienated, that decision process has to be participatory. Consequently, many contemporary commentators have thought of Rousseau as an early proponent of participatory democracy, whereby the interplay of public deliberation and decision-making gives rise to a popular will, free of factions and divisions. His claim that the general will, by definition, cannot be wrong also lends some support to this line of argument as a deliberative decision. Because it is the outcome of a constitutive process, the general will is not the sort of judgement that can be wrong. It is not simply a collective judgement of a matter of fact, such as how best to maximise national income or to defeat an epidemic. Yet some political judgements such as how to secure a state do involve matters of fact so the deliberative model is not a perfect fit. The discussion of the institutions of a free people with a general will soon elides into a discussion of the form of government, which Rousseau is clear is a categorically separate matter from the nature of sovereignty. But, before turning to government, one final element to Rousseau's argument about the general will must be noted.

Rousseau acknowledges that a free people is made up of individuals who have private as well as public and general interests that they can will. Some of these private interests (such as self-preservation and protection) are natural and important, whereas others might challenge the supremacy of the general will. So how does he deal with this potential division in the soul? Firstly, the primacy of the general will suggests that in the original constitutive act our natures change and the priority of individual motives gives way to a new citizen identity. Consequently, we might describe Rousseau's original contract as a 'conversion contract' because the people who emerge from it are transformed into new people, in the same way that it is claimed people who undergo religious conversion (like St Paul) are changed. Precisely how and why this should

happen remains a mystery. Yet, Rousseau also suggests that the original agreement does not work by magic, and our private or sectional wills remain operative and sometimes conflict with the general will. When this happens, the law of the state can compel us to act in accordance with the general will, but this creates one of the great paradoxes of Rousseau's argument:

Thus, in order for the social compact to avoid being an empty formula, it tacitly entails the commitment – which alone can give force to the others – that whoever refuses to obey the general will, will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free. (Rousseau 2011, p. 167)

Freedom is constituted by the general will, so if we will an action contrary to the general will we are willing our own unfreedom and we can be made free by the law of the state. This paradoxical statement has proved deeply controversial. Whilst many would agree that the state can compel us to act in our own interest, and prevent us from hurting ourselves or our long-term interests through ignorance, Rousseau goes further in claiming that such coercion is not just good for us but actually makes us free.

Government, the Legislator and the constitution

The problem of the general will persists throughout the remainder of the book but that discussion can be divided into two – namely, the institutional manifestation and conditions of the general will and the social and economic conditions needed, which are discussed in the next section. The institutional conditions introduce a further controversial dimension of Rousseau's argument in the person of the Legislator. The discussion of the Legislator continues the account of the general will but it shifts the attention to the constitution and institutions that sustain a general will as opposed to the content of it. He introduces the Legislator in the following terms:

Discovering the rules of society best suited to nations would require a superior intelligence that beheld all the passions of men without feeling any of them; who had no affinity with our nature, yet knew it through and through; whose happiness was independent of us, yet who nevertheless was willing to concern itself with ours; finally, who, in the passage of time, procures for himself a distant glory, being able to labour in one age and obtain his reward in another. (2011, p. 180)

And:

The Legislator is in every respect an extraordinary man in the state. If he ought to be so by his genius, he is no less so by his office, which

is neither magistracy nor sovereignty. This office, which constitutes the republic, does not enter into the constitution. It is a particular and superior function having nothing in common with dominion over me. (2011, p. 181)

Rousseau speaks of the Legislator having godlike properties. However, the comparisons to the near-mythic status of Lycurgus (the lawgiver for Sparta) or Solon (the lawgiver for Athens) should not mislead, as the substantive point is familiar in more modern examples. The most important point is that the Legislator is the source of the constitution whilst not being an active part of the state or sovereign. In this way, they stand outside the state, in the same way that the Founders of the U.S. Constitution are outside the constitution itself. (In the USA, the original intent of the drafters of the Constitution is given an almost sacred status by some conservative jurists such as the Federalist Society.) Or perhaps they resemble Mustapha Kemal in the Turkish Republic, where his lead and influence were seen as outside the constitution of the state but the constitution derives its standing from such a figure. By being outside the constitution, the Legislator can give a constitution whilst not being involved in its interpretation or application; that task remains for the magistrates in Rousseau's theory, or judges in modern constitutions, whose power is constituted and also circumscribed by the constitution. By legislating and departing from the scene of politics, the Legislator cannot act contrary to the general will, because they cannot take sides or prefer a particular view or party. Yet, the most important function of the Legislator is that they can become an impartial or extra-political focus for the identity and character of a people, and in so doing provide content to the general will.

So, one further answer that Rousseau gives to the question 'what is the general will?' is what is prescribed by the constitution, which gives the transgenerational character to a people. Allegiance to the constitution derived from the near-sacred character of the Legislator is reinforced by the way in which the Legislator is regarded, and the way in which the constitution shapes the character of the citizen – thus ensuring the stability of the people overtime. Stability arises from the moral socialisation of people into allegiance to the institutions of the state. But for this path to succeed the state must be constituted in a way that gives priority to the constitution as the institutionalisation of the general will. There cannot be opportunities for factions or parties to emerge in Rousseau's general will. This is a challenge for Rousseau because he also thinks that an elective aristocracy is the best form of government for a free state.

Elective aristocracy might be thought to mirror the form of representative democracy that emerged in the 19th century, but Rousseau is not sympathetic to the British constitution that so impressed his predecessor Montesquieu. To prevent parties or factions, his constitution precludes intermediate associations between the people and the government, which would provide the social basis of differentiation and faction. Any group that limits or selects membership

within the body politic is inimical to the general will and must therefore be abolished or proscribed. This rules out churches, guilds, trade unions, societies, fraternities, and institutions like universities unless they are vehicles of the sovereign. Especially controversial in his own lifetime were his views on religion, which resulted in his being condemned by both the Catholic Archbishop of Paris and the Calvinist authorities in Geneva and his subsequent flight from France. The chapter on 'The Civil Religion' (Book IV, Chapter VIII) makes the case that a religion or public doctrine is an important mechanism for educating and socialising citizens and for holding together a body politic as a single transgenerational entity but, in arguing for the value of religion on sociological or political grounds, he explicitly rejects the claims of Christianity as a candidate for a civil religion.

Rousseau distinguishes three basic types of religion: the religion of man, the religion of the citizen and the religion of priests. The religion of man is, according to him, the essential doctrine of Gospel Christianity. It is concerned solely with the meaning and direction of the individual's life, and so has no political significance. He suggests that this was the position of the early Christians in the Roman Empire until their numbers became significant. The religion of the citizen is the pagan religion of the ancient world, which is confined to a political society. The gods here are purely local, yet devotion to them sustains the moral and cultural ties that enable citizens to love, serve and ultimately die for the republic. The religion of the citizen is different from the religion of man or primitive Christianity because it is not reductively individual or universal. That universal aspect of Christianity becomes problematic when it is linked with the third type of religion, that of priests. Once a priestly caste exists within a political society – and Rousseau acknowledges that this is something Catholic Christianity shares with Japanese Shintoism or Tibetan Buddhism – there is a rival hierarchy and society within the state, which nurtures difference between believers and unbelievers, as well as an alternative claim to authority and rule. In this respect, Rousseau's hostility to priestly religion echoes that of Hobbes in *Leviathan*, Part IV.

Rousseau's argument against intermediate associations and churches has made him subject to the charge of 'totalitarianism' by some later scholars, since it is precisely this subordination of everything to the state or the party that is the hallmark of a totalitarian state. The constitution succeeds by becoming a focus for the attention of citizens in deciding how to act in ruling themselves or choosing their magistrates; it also shapes their idea of themselves as a free people. Whilst freedom is a virtue of citizens and not simply of republics, Rousseau links the republican ideal with his commitment to individuality by suggesting that the character of the genuinely free person is achieved in a life lived with others, as part of a free people. This communitarian dimension of freedom is further developed in Rousseau's account of the sociological and economic conditions of a free people.

The conditions of a free people

The constitution is one source of the uniformity that is necessary to ensure the triumph of the general will over particular interests on the part of citizens. But Rousseau was also concerned that the constitution needed to be set in an appropriate social context, one that would ensure social uniformity and undermine factions and parties. The structure of society embodied by the political constitution is designed to make people citizens, but this cannot be done if they are geographically dispersed over very large areas. The size of a political community is important in terms of binding together a single people. Rousseau is clear that not all existing 'states' can be sovereign peoples because some are simply too large, and in those circumstances empire is as much political development as one can expect. A free society requires the sort of identification that is only possible amongst those who actually do interact and identify as fellow citizens, or at least could do so in certain circumstances. A free sovereign people must therefore be small and concentrated, as in his example of the island of Corsica. Most of the 'states' of Europe of Rousseau's day would fail this test and could not sustain a stable state. However, size is not the only geographical constraint represented by the example of Corsica. The territory of a sovereign people cannot have natural features or barriers that subdivide a people and create the potential for local identities to divide a group. In this way, Rousseau pre-empts a concern of many modern nationalists, who argue for secession and self-determination because of geographic barriers between them and the wider society of which they are a part. Corsica has the advantage of being a modest-sized island, which creates a strong bond between those who share the island and those inhabitants from Italy or France. Rousseau also has in mind the cantons of Switzerland and his own city of Geneva. They are not islands, but nevertheless they have strong natural physical boundaries formed by mountain ranges and lakes. States that extend beyond such natural boundaries and a small size are soon corrupted and become despotisms.

Geography is not everything. The economic and social character of the society has to sustain relationships of rough or approximate equality if people are to see themselves as sharing a common fate and common responsibility. The biggest threat to such rough equality is the challenge of commercial society. This aspect of Rousseau's argument connects with his account of the sources of war and his rejection of the benefits of commercial society championed by earlier thinkers. For instance, Montesquieu had argued that the preoccupation with luxury would lure a ruling class away from war and conquest and that trade would create transnational bonds of interdependence. For Rousseau, however, both of these features of commercial society are threats to freedom and independence. The growth of a commercial class or traders would not only undermine rough material equality but create factions and divisions in society. Rousseau's argument echoes the experience of Thucydides' Athens, where

family and commercial ties undermined the cohesion of the Athenians and encouraged political adventurism over the protection of the sectional interests in the polis. In Rousseau's Europe, most disputes between states had their source in struggles to dominate and control trade, or to secure and sustain colonies and colonial benefits. A free society cannot have colonies that remain subordinate to the mother country and trade. And the protection of trade is a perpetual source of international conflict and also division within a state.

The Social Contract concludes with an indirect response to the challenge of St Pierre's *Plan for Perpetual Peace*. Instead of seeking a federation of states sanctioned by the large military powers, Rousseau claims that sovereignty is achieved by autarky or the withdrawal, as far as possible, from international relations. Free states should be relatively self-sufficient and willing to defend themselves from external threats and attacks. Otherwise they should be indifferent to international affairs and seek isolation and self-sufficiency, as opposed to cooperation. The more states seek to integrate and cooperate, the less likely they are to be free. Although his kind of freedom may come at an economic cost, Rousseau is absolutely clear that economic inequality is perhaps the greatest threat to freedom amongst individuals and within societies, a lesson that is being rediscovered in the writings of the contemporary economist Thomas Piketty (Piketty 2013; 2020).

Rousseauan international relations – Corsica and Poland

In 1764 the island of Corsica requested France for assistance in its struggle for independence from Genoa. Rousseau was approached for help in drawing up a political plan for the Corsican nation, which was subsequently published as the 'Constitutional Project for Corsica' (Hoffman and Fidler 1991). A short time later, the Polish Count Wielhorski sought Rousseau's advice on a plan for Polish independence from Russia. Rousseau's contribution, completed in 1772, became the *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (Hoffman and Fidler 1991). Both requests are a testimony to the impact of *The Social Contract* and to the fact that Rousseau's ideas were not considered to be hopelessly idealistic or utopian. Neither work is a constitution of the sort one might hope from a Rousseauan legislator, yet they reinforce arguments that are familiar from *The Social Contract*, in which Rousseau had already mentioned Corsica in his discussion of the right size of a free state or people. What is interesting about them is not simply that they illustrate his views on the social, economic and cultural conditions of a free state and people; they also provide the best evidence of his views on international relations and the problem of war and conflict in the European state system. Whilst the modern state system is the source of international conflict and war, the state (properly understood as a free people or a people under a general will) is the solution to that war and conflict. Unlike Hobbes or even the later thinker Immanuel Kant, Rousseau does not see that

solution in terms of extending the architecture of juridical sovereignty into an international federation or plan for perpetual peace. He sees peace as achieved through the rejection of any cosmopolitan idea of an order of rightly constituted states. In contrast to a cosmopolitan order, he posits a series of militant republics or national communities, which look inward for legitimacy and stability and which challenge the international realm as a source of corruption and disorder.

So Rousseau encouraged the Corsicans to turn their geographical independence to their advantage by seeking economic and political self-sufficiency or autarchy, and also taking cultural independence as a basis for separation from the corruptions of international society. The familiar idea of society as a source of corruption is contrasted with the authentic (albeit hard and hand-to-mouth) existence of independent farmers and fishermen on the island of Corsica. Independence is not achieved by claiming recognition in the world of affairs but by cultivating the resilience of an independent people, indifferent to the struggles of others. Rousseau offers a warning example of the Swiss, who as independent farmers and citizen soldiers were corrupted by the engagement of Swiss mercenaries in international affairs and the subsequent impact of wealth and luxury in corrupting their martial independence:

these rustic men, whose knowledge at first did not extend beyond themselves, their mountains, and their huts, learned to know other nations by defending themselves against them; their victories opened the neighbouring frontiers to them; their reputation for bravery gave princes the idea of employing them. They began to pay the troops they had been unable to conquer; these worthy men, who had so well defended their own liberty, became the oppressors of the liberty of others.

... Imperceptibly they were debased, and were no longer anything more than mercenaries; a taste for money made them feel poor; contempt for their way of life gradually destroyed the virtues that same life had engendered. (Hoffman and Fidler 1991, p. 152)

Corsica can avoid this because it has the advantage of being an island; the crucial point is not just geographical separation but economic and cultural independence.

This argument is further emphasised in the *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. Unlike Corsica, Poland was a large continental territory with a proud national history and a 'home' territory that had been fought over by large and militarily powerful neighbours: Prussia, Russia and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. (Indeed, beginning in Rousseau's lifetime and finishing 17 years after his death, between 1764 and 1795, these three powers completely carved up the Polish lands between them, abolishing its state.) Given Rousseau's views about the size of political communities, Poland was obviously unpromising as a free people. Nevertheless, Rousseau thought there were ways in which a free

Poland could assert its national independence. He emphasises a number of things that were considered important by later movements for national liberation in the 19th century. He encourages the rejection of cosmopolitan fashion and language and emphasises the value of national dress, styles of address and institutions. The education of Poles should focus on their national history and achievements as well as its literature and language – ideas that were to be celebrated by Romantics in the early 19th century. Yet the real challenge comes from Rousseau's account of what Polish freedom and independence would involve. As a large but dominated state, he argues that Polish national freedom is not best achieved by asserting itself on the international stage but rather by forgoing those opportunities for competition that it is ill-suited to win. Again, by seeking self-sufficiency and avoiding luxury and wealth, the Poles can make themselves less attractive to external exploitation and also free themselves from the ties of commerce and trade that undermine national authenticity. Rousseau offers an argument familiar from later nationalist leaders that to attain national freedom it is worth forgoing the wealth and the goods celebrated by others. The most striking feature of his suggestions for Poland concerns its military organisation and strategy. Rousseau follows the usual republican argument about citizen militias being preferable to standing armies. He too says that military organisation is a bond of peoples as common citizens. However, he differs strikingly in his view of the military tactics that should be employed by this citizen militia:

I should like them above all to practice for lightness and speed, learning how to break off, disperse, and regroup without difficulty or confusion; to excel in what is called guerrilla warfare, in all the manoeuvres appropriate to light troops, in the art of inundating a country like a torrent, or striking everywhere without being struck, of continuing to act in concert though separated, of cutting communications, of intercepting convoys, of charging rear-guards, of capturing vanguards, of surprising detachments, of harassing large bodies of troops ... and learn ... to conquer and destroy the best-disciplined armies without ever joining battle and without leaving them a moment's respite. (Hoffman and Fidler 1991, pp. 188–189)

For an author who emphasises the pith of war, Rousseau comes close to describing the form of guerrilla war that Goya celebrated in *The Disasters of War*, his etchings of the struggle against the Napoleonic forces in Spain a generation later. Whilst the Poles would never defeat the Russians or the Prussians in a formal conflict, their struggle should reflect their national advantage of character in conducting a conflict on their own terms and raising the cost of invasion and domination to an unsustainable level. In arguing for national struggle for survival, as opposed to wars for territorial aggrandisement (which had been important in Poland's past history), Rousseau introduces a new dimension to

the consideration of war. He does not develop this further but it becomes an important part of 19th- and 20th-century discussions of wars between nations and peoples, confirming the vicious picture of conflict that he described in the opening section of *The State of War*. His argument for independence and national self-determination, as a rejection of the Hobbesian state system, with its perennial wars between powers, concludes with a picture of the free people as a fiercely independent military power that prefers to avoid conflict and international relations, whilst it is prepared to defend itself to the last and with all its resources. For those who seek to characterise Rousseau as a moralist who subverts Hobbes's theory of sovereignty for his account of a free people bound by a general will, he concludes with a dark vision of a world in which free peoples struggle to assert themselves from powers that are inimical to national independence.

Rousseau's complex legacy

Whilst scholars are keen to categorise Rousseau's legacy for international relations (Doyle 1997, pp. 136–160; Hoffman and Fidler 1991), he remains an uneasy fit for the usual categories of realist or idealist. He is definitely not a liberal (although see Rawls 1999 below). Indeed, it is precisely this studied ambiguity that makes his work so interesting, challenging and important. Many major political concepts emerge from his thought in a new light, such as sovereignty and liberty. His critiques are never simply for or against, as we find with other thinkers discussed in this volume. He reshapes Hobbes's concept of sovereignty and Locke's concept of liberty in new and insightful ways. In doing so, he never wholly rejects them, so we end up combining the juridical idea of sovereignty from Hobbes with an ethical dimension that Hobbesian realists thought they had been liberated from. Similarly, he links freedom with an approach that becomes communitarianism in the hands of later philosophers. And, whilst he emphasises the social conditions of group and individual freedom, he remains enough of a moralist for his impact on the subsequent development of nationalism to be both sociological and ethical: a tension that has remained at the heart of subsequent theories of nationalism. Rousseau's immediate impact was coloured by his appropriation by the Jacobins during the most violent periods of the French Revolution, and all subsequent interpretations have had to wrestle with that. In the 20th century, that issue has been a source of contestation amongst those who have seen Rousseau as a source of liberal values of freedom and solidarity.

Totalitarianism and nationalism

Political theory always reflects the climate in which it is written and this is as true of philosophical analysis and construction as it is of historical scholarship

and writings about past political and international thinkers. How that past is interpreted, and how thinkers are categorised in terms of the big debates, is an undoubted fact and concern for subsequent scholars and students who seek to implicate or liberate thinkers like Plato, Marx and Hegel from responsibility in the horrors of totalitarianism, Hitler's death camps and Stalin's Gulags (Popper [1945] 2011). The post-World War II period saw the development of theories such as totalitarianism by political thinkers such as Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1951). The concept began as reflections on the experience of Nazism and its death camps and quickly incorporated Stalinism as a further iteration, as the Cold War engulfed political thinking from the late 1940s. Although Rousseau was not originally considered a 'totalitarian' in Karl Popper's work or Arendt's oeuvre, it was not long before his writings were incorporated into the pre-histories of the main ideological opponents in the Cold War. This process was either relatively crude, as in the case of Jacob Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Talmon 1986), or more nuanced, as in the case of Isaiah Berlin's essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (Berlin [1958] 1998).

Talmon provides a subtle reading of Rousseau at the same time as he also offers the most Procrustean interpretation of Rousseau's general will and his claim that one can be forced to be free. Talmon linked these ideas to the claims of modern totalitarian states through a simple genealogy that saw the extreme coercion of Stalinist class politics and purges as inherently part of trying to achieve the collective freedom of the proletariat. By implication, they also became an excuse for the acute suffering of the present as a condition of later collective liberation.

Isaiah Berlin also explored the coercion implied by the general will and realising one's true interests only by acting according with the law, and distinguished it from the gap between people's felt interests and the empirical frustrations that are created by external impediments. Berlin's account focused on distinct concepts and traditions of 'positive and negative' liberty. His original 1958 lecture became one of the major texts of post-war liberal political theory. It presents itself as a conceptual distinction, but, in reality, it is also the categorisation of distinct traditions of thought about freedom. By implication, although not expressly stated, Berlin also thinks there are good (negative) and bad (positive) versions of the language of liberty. Negative liberty can be traced to Hobbes and consists in the absence of restraints on action, whereas positive liberty, traced to Rousseau, consists in having a free will. For Berlin, the problem with positive liberty theories is that they open themselves to a capacious account of the obstacles to a free will – these can be real things, like the absence of education, but they can also involve the absence of false consciousness, something that can only be removed by the direction of a vanguard party leading a whole people to see their true and objective class interest.

Whilst coercive class politics was one of the more obvious threats within Berlinian positive liberty theories, it was not the only danger that arose from

Rousseau's account of the general will. Talmon and Elie Kedourie also saw Rousseau's account of the conditions of the general will as resulting in a dangerous ideological nationalism (Talmon 1981; Kedourie 1960). Rousseau was not the only source of nationalism and Kedourie was not so simplistic as to lay all the flaws of nationalist politics at his feet. Nevertheless, he makes the case that Rousseau's account of the conditions necessary to sustain a general will, and therefore a free political community, quickly transform themselves into the basis of an ideology of nationalism – the claim that in principle the state and the nation should coincide and be self-determining. In Kedourie's view, this was what inspired President Woodrow Wilson's destruction of the great multinational empires of Austria–Hungary in Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East at the end of World War I. In the former Ottoman lands, this unleashed generations of Arab nationalism and instability in the multi-ethnic and multinational states of that region. Similarly, nationalism created the disorder of interwar central Europe and national grievances fuelled the rise of Nazism during the interwar period. Debates about the concept of the nation between functionalists (Gellner 1983) and ethno-nationalists (Smith 1986) take us far beyond the ideas of Rousseau himself. Yet, the basic functionalist view is that nations arise with the modern state as the mechanism to sustain and reproduce state power, rather than being founded on an historically primordial conception of a people. This does reflect Rousseau's view of the conditions of the general will and his attempts to institutionalise that in Corsica and Poland.

Where Rousseau's ethical ideal of a free people has played more of a role is (surprisingly) in the thought of Isaiah Berlin and some of his students on the compatibility between nationalism and liberalism. Berlin's support for Zionism and the state of Israel as an ethical as well as political project meant that he thought a simplistic opposition between liberalism and nationalism was incorrect. It masked a reality in which a broadly liberal conception of national identity was not only possible but where (properly understood) any viable regime needed a conception of national identity to bind its people in a common ethical community. Berlin's thought on liberalism and nationalism has had an impact on his students such as Yael Tamir and David Miller, who have subsequently developed sophisticated theories of national identity (Miller 1995) and liberal nationalism (Tamir 1993) in books of the same name. Neither thinker provides interpretations of Rousseau. However, they both explain and justify the ethical value of national identity in Rousseauian terms, as the conditions of a free people. Their works, and those of other liberal nationality theorists, have been a significant source of theorising about self-determination, secession (Buchanan 1991) and territoriality (Moore 2015). But the turn towards national self-determination has also reopened a perennial issue raised by Rousseau – and that is the balance between the claims of ethical communities and those of cosmopolitan theories of universal rights that discard the notion of ethical community as a fundamental property altogether. This issue replays in moral and political

theory, in the struggle between national economies and globalisation in the world economy.

Justice versus globalism – Rawls and Rousseau

Given the multivalent character of his writings, Rousseau's legacy in international relations is ambiguous. Yet, in contemporary international political thought the most surprising resurgence of Rousseauian ideas, about an ethically sanctioned autarky as opposed to liberal cosmopolitanism, is within liberalism itself. It follows the publication of John Rawls's *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999). Rawls is the undeniably dominant figure of late 20th-century English-speaking political philosophy and his work is known widely beyond the usual disciplinary boundaries of academic subjects. Yet, the Rousseauian turn in his thought came as a surprise to many of his early students and followers. They had tended to see Rawls's views on justice as embodying a global cosmopolitanism. This view was an extension of a naïve reading of Rawls's argument as simply grounded in Kant's ethical theory. (In fact, Kant's political theory is much less universalist than Rawls's work, and is itself indebted to Rousseau (Flikschuh 2000).) In order to understand that view of Rawls, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of his theory of justice as fairness.

When first published in 1971, Rawls's massive book *A Theory of Justice* was hailed as a rebirth for classical political philosophy, after several decades in which logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy had cast doubt on the possibility of there being any more major works of moral or normative political theory. Yet, it is very clear that Rawls's book is anything but an analysis of the concept of justice. Instead, he follows a tradition, going back to Cicero, that sees justice as the first virtue of social and political institutions, and consequently an account of justice as a theory of a just society or 'scheme of social cooperation'. In place of the reigning utilitarianism of much English-speaking political theory, Rawls recovers the idea of the social contract as a way of representing a just political order – following the tradition of Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. The premise of Rawls's theory is similar to Rousseau's, in assuming the equal standing and value of all persons, and that the task of a theory of justice is to create a scheme of social cooperation between free and equal subjects who nevertheless disagree about ultimate ends or 'conceptions of the good'. In this way, equality and the distinct value of persons is an ethical commitment, and not simply a methodological device, as it is in Hobbesian contract theory. Yet, if individuals are free and equal, and we cannot assume that they already share a single conception of the common good, how can we explain a scheme of social cooperation that recognises that fundamental equality of status? Central to Rawls's idea of justice is the concept of fairness and he famously describes his theory as 'justice as fairness', using the analogy of a game.

The argument proceeds along the following lines. We begin with the idea of reasonable disagreement that characterises modern societies. We do not all share the same values or views about how society should be organised – there are atheists and Catholics and liberals and conservatives. We cannot just pick a set of ultimate values as the basis of social cooperation. Why would a Catholic accept a scheme chosen by atheists and vice versa? If we cannot begin with the end of social cooperation, can we focus instead on some rules that do not presuppose, or are neutral between, various ultimate ends? Rawls's intuition is that we can, as long as those rules are seen as fair, just as in a game we can accept the outcome even if we lose, as long as the rules by which that outcome is determined are fair.

The rest of the argument of *A Theory of Justice* is about explaining and defending how the rules that would be required to make a scheme of cooperation are fair, and showing how those rules are to be derived. To answer both of these questions, Rawls deploys the idea of a social contract. Firstly, as with Rousseau, it is used to present a just political order as a scheme of cooperation that would be agreed between free and equal subjects. Secondly, it is used as a decision procedure for deriving the principles of a just order. Because Rawls does not assume natural equality in the same way as Hobbes, or posit any initial simple equality of wealth and resources, he conceives of individuals being free and equal through the idea of an equal set of primary goods. These are rights, liberties, income, wealth and the social bases of self-respect. The idea is that these are goods that we all want, whatever else we might want, because they make possible the equal chance of leading valuable lives for each of us. This equal treatment is ensured by these primary goods being distributed according to two principles of justice and these are that:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls [1971] 1999, p. 53)

These principles are ordered in 'lexical priority' (in the same way words are ordered in a dictionary) so that the distribution of basic liberties in the first point cannot be traded against inequalities of wealth, welfare or status. Much of the debate on Rawls's theory concerns these distributive principles, but we are still left with a question about their derivation and status as fair principles, and not simply the political prejudices of a privileged Harvard professor. To resolve this problem, Rawls deploys the second social contract argument in this theory, namely the original position and the veil of ignorance.

The 'original position' is a hypothetical thought experiment that represents a fair initial agreement between equals, and therefore one that can be the basis for a fair scheme of social cooperation. Representative individuals have to choose those principles that should regulate the terms of cooperation between them. Each individual is assumed to be motivated to seek the best outcomes for herself or himself. Rawls assumes modified rational egoism for his account of individual psychology in the original position. However, if we are each motivated to seek our own advantage, then we will exploit our unequal bargaining positions, and surely this could not give us fairness. To address this, Rawls introduces the idea of a 'veil of ignorance', as a result of which the participants in the original position are denied knowledge about the particularities of their own identities such as their age, gender, endowments, skills, and conception of the good (religion, morality, political beliefs). They are also denied information about the particularities of their society, their social position within it, and the level of development of their society. Deprived of such information about ourselves, we cannot make choices that advantage ourselves over other individuals. If we cannot advantage ourselves, we will chiefly choose equality. Where we do choose inequality, we will only allow it in cases that benefit the worst-off individual, should I turn out to be that person. Again, this concept of the original position as a model of a fair scheme of social cooperation has inspired a whole cottage industry of scholarship. But, for our purposes, the most interesting discussion of Rawls's theories has been about what its implications are for international or global justice.

A Theory of Justice says surprisingly little about the international domain, because it deliberately addresses the subject of justice in a closed domestic society. This did not stop scholars considering the application of Rawls's method to the wider world. Just as one could ask why Hobbes's social contract does not apply immediately to the whole world, so one might argue the same of Rawls: why is there not an original position from which the principles of justice can be justified globally? This question was taken up most famously by Charles Beitz in his book *Political Theory and International Relations* (Beitz 1979). Beitz argues that Rawls's model applies in the international realm for two reasons. Firstly, the global distribution of resources is arbitrary and so a matter of justice in the same way that the individual distribution of natural abilities is arbitrary. Secondly, international trade and connectivity create a single scheme of social cooperation, and therefore raise claims of justice. Whilst this international cooperation is not complete (since not every country trades with every other and some countries such as North Korea self-isolate), in general in the modern world there is enough cooperation to create this single scheme. Therefore, by analogy, Rawls's approach can be generalised.

The challenge for Beitz is whether the global original position is a second level of contract between states, or whether it should be a single initial global agreement. In later writings, Beitz eventually adopts a cosmopolitan view of the

initial global original position, such that all the elements of social justice apply universally. In this respect, his position mirrors that of Thomas Pogge (Pogge 1989), who argues that it is individuals' fundamental capacities that make them participants in the relevant context of justice, and not their membership of states or political communities. This global cosmopolitanism denies the ethical significance of states or associations, and it has become the basis of much contemporary international political theory. But it was rejected by Rawls in his last major work, *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999), where he criticises these cosmopolitan readings of his theory and re-emphasises the Rousseauian tenor of his theory.

The Law of Peoples is an explicitly Rousseauian text. Rawls begins the work with an acknowledgement of Rousseau's thought, exemplified in the opening epigraph of this chapter, as a model of the kind of realistic utopia he is trying to justify. A realistic utopia is supposed to take human beings as they are and conceive of 'institutions as they might be.' This is not an acknowledgement of humanity's flawed nature, as one might imagine from standard realist theories like Hobbes or Machiavelli, but rather a Rousseauian acknowledgement that mankind's moral properties of freedom and equality are realised in a particular form of association, such as Rousseau's social contract or a Rawlsian just scheme of social cooperation. What international institutions there might be are then going to be shaped by the priority of these 'well-ordered' and just peoples. It is important to note that Rawls is concerned with 'peoples' and not with the standard units of international politics such as states or nations. States and nations might be well-ordered societies or regimes of justice, but they are not so by definition. Therefore, it remains an open question how far Rawls intends *The Law of Peoples* to apply to existing states and nations. In this way, his argument mirrors Rousseau's with respect to the European state system of his own day.

The second important Rousseauian element of *The Law of Peoples* is how different it is from the idea of 'justice as fairness' within a scheme of cooperation. The fundamental issues of justice are addressed within single schemes of cooperation amongst a people in each society. Consequently, there is no difference principle or redistribution between peoples in the international realm, and it is this that has upset most of his followers. How could a theory of justice not apply to the egregious inequalities that exist between rich and poor countries? Although Rawls does not put it this way, social justice seems to be essentially a domestic matter. And, given the hypothetical nature of the agreement amongst well-ordered peoples, the work to achieve social justice is done at the primary agreement stage. This, of course, leaves open the question of unequal natural assets amongst political societies. Yet, because Rawls is not attempting to vindicate the actual state system, he ignores those inequalities, and partly explains them away on the grounds that the wealth of nations is mostly accounted for in terms of their intellectual capital and social choices. At the second level of agreement between just, liberal peoples, the outcomes are rules for governing

the interrelations of just societies and their coordination and process for resolving disputes. He lists eight principles of justice that shape relations amongst free and democratic peoples:

1. Peoples are free and independent, and their freedom and independence are to be respected by other peoples.
2. Peoples are to observe treaties and undertakings.
3. Peoples are equal and are parties to the agreements that bind them.
4. Peoples are to observe a duty of non-intervention.
5. Peoples have the right to self-defence but no right to instigate war for reasons other than self-defence.
6. Peoples are to honour human rights.
7. Peoples are to observe certain specified restrictions in the conduct of war.
8. Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavourable conditions that prevent their having a just and decent political or social regime. (Rawls 1999, p. 37)

These principles are more or less those listed in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795), which speaks of republics in light of Rousseau's ideas of free autonomous communities bound by a general will. The main lesson of *The Law of Peoples* is that it obligates just peoples to recognise the equal status of other just peoples in an engagement. But this is not all there is to Rawls's *The Law of Peoples*. The second section concerns non-ideal theory, or what happens when just regimes confront regimes that are not just. This is an issue that was particularly pressing given the claims of many 'liberals' and supporters of human rights to use military power to promote their values. If there is a just order and some regime refuses to implement it, then why is this not a legitimate basis for intervention? For Rawls, this is both a theoretical question, given that some regimes might approximate being well-ordered without being fully liberal, and it was a political challenge in the late 20th century, when liberal ideas potentially had the unchallenged power of western military might behind them. (That situation did not endure into the 21st century.)

Rawls seeks to shift the discussion in international theory from the idea of justice in the international realm to one of toleration. The virtue of toleration is useful because it recognises the claims of individuals and societies to pursue goals and values that are unjust or wrong to liberals, but it does not respond to that by proposing the eradication of those others's goals and values. Europeans learned to live with each other by tolerating religious difference (*cuius regio, eius religio*), so that Protestant and Catholic states stopped using religion as a basis for war, without conceding the truth of their own confession. The precise measures of tolerance that are appropriate depend on the character of non-liberal societies. Rawls sets out a hierarchy descending from reasonable liberal peoples, through decent societies (those who have a decent consultation

hierarchy, i.e. have a good government but are not democratic), to outlaw states, burdened societies and benevolent absolutisms. The point of the hierarchy is to show that there are many ways in which political societies can depart from a liberal ideal without warranting external intervention and reform.

Although Rawls's *The Law of Peoples* seems to have moved quite far from Rousseau, the fundamental moral of his position is clearly Rousseauian. What Rawls sees as justice, and Rousseau sees as living as free equals, requires individuals to constitute themselves as a community under a general will and with the passion and commitment to defend that ideal. Like freedom for Rousseau, justice cannot be imposed from outside a state – it must be willed into existence by a people, and without that it disappears. Rawls had served as an infantryman in World War II, and he retains Rousseau's scepticism about war, force and violence. He also takes Rousseau's view that apparently benign motives, such as willing peace and justice in the international realm, can quickly be perverted in the context of international politics to achieve quite the reverse. So, whilst Rawls alludes to Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, his own view of international political theory is actually much closer to the scepticism of Rousseau's response to Abbe St Pierre.

Conclusion

Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke are the three great thinkers of the modern sovereign state and the international system of states that arises from it. Yet, whilst they use superficially similar concepts (such as the state of nature, individual, sovereign, and state of war), they are radically different in the way they substantiate these concepts. Rousseau deliberately subverts Hobbesian concepts and his contract method by setting his thought in a unique political context of modern European history, and showing that this context shapes the relationships that Hobbes describes as abstract philosophical and juridical relationships. Rousseau also subverts Locke's idea that individuals possess rights and duties that can be asserted against others outside of a political community. To liberate these concepts from their particular context is the radical strategy of Rousseau's writings: a strategy so radical for some of his readers that it is considered a departure from the realism at the heart of Hobbes's politics, or the idealism and moralism at the heart of Locke's. Yet, Rousseau does not think that he is rejecting the possibilities of real politics in favour of utopianism. Individual freedom and political rule are compatible, but rendering them so is a profound ethical and political challenge.

Rousseau makes the radical claim that sovereignty is an ethical achievement, only possible amongst a people bound together by a general will. Similarly, individual liberty or freedom is only possible in a people bound together by a general will. Freedom is only achieved in a community of a certain kind, sovereignty is manifested only by a community of a certain kind, and not all political

entities are free peoples of the relevant sort. In introducing this radically new idea of a free people as an association of free individuals constituted by a general will, Rousseau introduces a new political idea that remains both inspiring and challenging to this day. It reappears in some form when political communities seek to protect their independence by taking a stand against the impact of alien powers from beyond the political, economic and cultural borders of their political community. This is an anti-cosmopolitan stance that unites many of those on both the political right and political left (Deneen 2018).

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Essential reading

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- There are numerous equally good translations of Rousseau's *Political Writings*; this is the version referred to in the text and to which page numbers correspond).

Secondary reading

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Suggestions for finding open access versions of Rousseau's texts

Online Library of Liberty, maintained by the Liberty Fund

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/person/jean-jacques-rousseau>

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