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ROUSSEAU ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Rousseau on International Relations, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and David P. Fidler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), lxxvii + 214pp., £30.00 H.B.

For those who have paged through Rousseau's writings in search of his views on international affairs, *Rousseau on International Relations* edited by Stanley Hoffmann and David P. Fidler will be particularly welcome. Hoffmann and Fidler have compiled the key documents of Rousseau's writings that pertain to international affairs. They have written an introduction that compares Rousseau's 'realist' philosophy with that of other international relations theorists, in particular, the 'idealist' Immanuel Kant.

The issues raised by Rousseau in his essay 'Abstract and Judgement of Saint Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace' (1756) are particularly relevant in regard to the question of European identity and unity. It is one of the great ironies of our time that contemporary Europe appears to be following the vision of Saint Pierre, whose idealist views, as Rousseau reminds us, were once ridiculed.

Though he raises doubts about the prospects of perpetual peace and European federation, Rousseau does not at all oppose the effort: 'If... (Saint Pierre's) project remains unrealised, that is not because it is utopian; it is because men are crazy'. (p. 88) Rousseau thus argues that there is no fundamental reason why such a federation should not come about, assuming that all leaders do think through their 'true interest' (p. 87) rationally. Even the technical complexities that European federation would involve are not entirely insurmountable, and the benefits would be great for all. As he puts it, 'all the alleged evils of federation, when duly weighted, come to nothing'. (p. 85)

At this point in his argument, Rousseau does not appear to be as categorically opposed to efforts to achieve European federation as realists such as Kenneth N. Waltz have argued.[1] Rousseau's dialectics—the interaction between theory and the actualisation of theory—appear a bit more subtle. The possibilities of a European confederation leading to a more unified federation could be achieved by a common threat coming from outside Europe, for example. As Rousseau put it, 'There is no power in the world now capable of threatening all Europe; and if one ever appears, Europe will either have time to make ready or, at the very worst, will be more capable of resisting him when she is united in one corporate body than she is now, when she would have to put a sudden end to all her quarrels and league herself in haste against the common invader'. (p. 84)

On the other hand, realists do have a point in arguing that many factors work

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against a federal project, and hence they have given greater emphasis to the negative side of Rousseau's argument. Without a common enemy or cause, it is dubious that European states will unite. Rousseau finds it dubious that the princes of sovereign states will submit to arbitration before a higher authority; he argues that state ministers will oppose federation, for they are 'in perpetual need of war'. (p. 93) As state leadership seeks to sustain itself in power (and as leadership actually *prefers* a system of interstate rivalry to a system of perpetual peace), leaders will thus resist the establishment of any system of peace. The fundamental dilemma is that state leaders are ultimately unable to compromise their sovereighty as true compromise itself would eliminate their very reason to be. Under *these* circumstances, the violent revolutionary means needed to achieve European unity would not justify the end result, and may not at all guarantee that the 'war to end all wars' will ultimately bring perpetual peace.

Although realists can accordingly argue that the odds appear to work against the peaceful establishment of European unity, the point is that the goal itself should not be entirely dismissed as utopian. It may thus not be entirely necessary for one state to force itself upon the others in order to achieve perpetual peace—there are other alternatives. From this perspective, the question of the possibility of European federation then becomes one of a dialectical interaction between intra-European state aims and external inter-state relations.

At this point, Hoffmann and Fidler's effort in the introduction to the book to contrast Kant's idealist position with that of Rousseau's realism is important. As Europeans have experienced the very wars and revolutions that Rousseau had forewarned might re-occur in the name of European unity, the dominant European powers in the post-World War II era may have transcended the 'need for war' as a means to sustain state elites in power. Here, out of a revulsion to the horrors of war and the technologies of mass destruction, the birth of European democracy and rise of 'interdependency' has helped to create the mutual interests necessary to establish democratic federations linking European and American democracies. These common idealist 'interests'—combined with common political and economic interests—will help push European states toward unity.

From Rousseau's perspective, however, the question to be raised is to what extent is this alliance among 'democracies' really due to common ideological beliefs, free trade and common interests. For Rousseau, trade among nations may breed conflict, not consensus. From Rousseau's perspective, the push for a peaceful transition to European unity and the alliance with the U.S.A. can be explained, in part, because of the 'realist' pressures of the Cold War. Now, however, that the Soviet empire has fragmented, will European states necessarily pursue complementary interests among themselves, and in conjunction with the U.S.A. without a common interest in defense? Again, as pointed out above, the identity of Europe now depends upon the dialectical interaction between intra-European state aims and external inter-state relations.

One must question the 'either/or' nature of Rousseau's thought and his refusal to accept a mix of international and territorial state organisations. As Hoffmann and Fidler point out in their introduction, Rousseau implies that international organisations would not really be necessary if inter-state relations, based on largely autonomous, self-sufficient national communities, were perfect. On the one hand, Rousseau is correct to point out that international organisations and

international law cannot succeed if the major and significant minor state actors do not back collective goals. On the other hand, Rousseau appears to neglect limited and specific areas in which international organisation can be effective, even if such organisations are not universally sufficient.

As the bipolar U.S.-Soviet confrontation collapses, and as a more polycentric world develops, both Rousseau's realist 'balance of power' considerations (p. 85) and international organisational aims must thus become more complementary if a modicum of peace is to be established. States may ultimately find it in their collective interest to accept more intrusions upon their individual sovereignty to help establish a more polycentric global equilibrium and to develop wider linkages between Europe and external regions, such as the emerging states of the ex-U.S.S.R. This effort need not be ruled out *a priori* as realists tend to do.

Ironically, as Europe attempts to pursue the path toward peaceful federation as outlined by Saint Pierre (and Kant), the newly emerging territorial states arising from the ashes of the ex-U.S.S.R., as well as those arising from the former Yugoslav federation, appear to be moving more in the way Rousseau would expect. One must thus question whether Rousseau's utopian vision of rustic national self-determination and of regional, self-sufficient 'national' states can ever be plausible in a global system of political-economic interdependency and mutual—but highly uneven—strategic vulnerability.

As the ex-Soviet republics and Yugoslavia continue to break up into a smaller and questionably more efficient state units, the question becomes as to what is the appropriate balance between 'interdependence' and 'self-sufficiency'? Even Rousseau's native Switzerland has applied for membership in the European Community—in fear of exclusion from the latter's vast market potential. And despite their hopes for political 'independence', states breaking off from Soviet control may also look toward Germany and the European Community for political and economic—if not strategic military—supports. This could raise tensions with the 'new' Russia if the U.S.A., Germany/Europe and Russia cannot forge a firm entente, and particularly if a unified Germany (which could also seek greater independence) cannot sustain a balance between its Atlantic and eastern interests.

In conclusion, though the book could have included some brief excerpts from Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and other works which are applicable to IR theory, Hoffmann and Fidler's edition brings out some of Rousseau's best observations. Their introduction will help to bring Rousseau's ideas back into the scholarly and real world debates.

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NOTES

1. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 185. Waltz argues that 'the idea of a voluntary federation, such as Kant later proposed, could keep peace among states, Rousseau rejects emphatically'.