Re-Reading Rousseau in the Post-Cold War World
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Re-reading Rousseau in the Post-Cold War World*

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While the study of world politics before and during the Cold War was dominated by the competing paradigms of ‘idealism’ and ‘realism’, the post-Cold War world requires different approaches. This essay suggests that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings on war and peace may serve as a vantage-point for a paradigm which goes beyond the two orthodox perspectives. It argues that Rousseau is not the unambiguous representative for the ‘realist’ approach that he is so routinely assumed to be. Rousseau developed a unique analysis which accentuates historical change, dialectical paradox and the tendency for interdependence to foster inequality and conflict. This analysis of interstate relations provides a useful starting-point for understanding both the global transformations which are now occurring before our eyes and the many challenges that lie ahead. First, this essay reconstructs from the many scattered pieces which Rousseau wrote about history and world politics a clear and consistent international relations theory. Then, it uses this theory to examine some of the most common assumptions about the nature of the post-Cold War world. It discusses whether the liberal–democratic values of the First World will emerge triumphant in the 21st century; whether the nations of the (former) Second World will experience prosperity and peace; and whether the struggle for liberation and justice in the Third World will finally be crowned with triumph.

1. Introduction
Since its inception after World War I, the academic study of international relations has been dominated by the competing paradigms of ‘idealism’ and ‘realism’ (Carr, 1964; Clark, 1989). The idealist paradigm describes human interaction in terms of reason, justice, freedom and progress. Idealism received a brief renaissance with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was then claimed that the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union removed the major source of world conflict; that the Cold War had been replaced by a new, worldwide consensus based on the values of liberty and popular sovereignty. In the words of Fukuyama (1989, p. 5), this post-Cold War consensus is held to be ‘liberal insofar as it recognizes universal rights to freedom, and democratic insofar as it exists only with the consent of the governed’.

The realist paradigm, by contrast, describes the human condition in terms of passion, power, determinism and constancy. Realist observers note that the end of the Cold War signals the removal of the few, rudimentary principles of interstate conduct that have long imposed a semblance of order on an otherwise anarchic international society. Mearsheimer (1990, p. 5), for example, argues that ‘the prospects for major crisis and war in Europe are likely to increase markedly if the Cold War ends…’.

Elaborating on the market-centered logic of Adam Smith, idealists tend to exaggerate the importance of ideas and transactions; they tend to overestimate the developments which in recent years have eroded state sovereignty in international affairs; they direct their theoretical attention away from the interstate system to the world economy; from geo-strategic concerns to geo-economic issues. Realists, by contrast, echoing the power-centered claims of Thomas Hobbes, stress the continued rel-

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evance of the state and of state sovereignty, and they largely overlook the great importance of ideology and economic transactions in the post-World War world.

However, it is a leap of faith on the part of idealists and realists alike to insist that the collapse of the USSR will realize the dreams of Smith (or Bentham) and the nightmares of Hobbes (or Spinoza), respectively. The post-Cold War world is in need of a new, broad approach which incorporates both the balance-of-power theory of the realists and the division-of-labor principle of the idealists. This article sketches such an approach. It consciously shies away from the overwhelming figures of Hobbes and Smith - whose shadows have long dominated Western international relations theory. It seeks instead to reintroduce the arguments of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). He has been criticized for being a hopeless idealist by some and a bleak realist by others. This essay argues that both views are suspect; that Rousseau offers a unique, alternative approach.3

2. Rousseau’s Pessimism

Although he was a central contributor to the Enlightenment tradition, Jean-Jacques Rousseau did not share the characteristic optimism of other Enlightenment philosophs. He could not help noticing how the realization of the good invariably falls short of the ideal (1756b, p. 369). Indeed, the contrast between the possible and the actual, between intention and deed, repeatedly sent Rousseau into fits of black depression.

This pessimism is, undoubtedly, the main reason why Rousseau has been routinely placed in the realist camp. However, when his argument is more closely explored, it is clear that it does not share the basic ontology of most realists. A ready avenue towards an exploration of Rousseau’s argument is offered by the famous opening claim in The Social Contract ‘Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains’. Rousseau’s attempt to clarify this apparent paradox between liberty and slavery lies at the heart of the two themes which undergird his entire political outlook: his philosophy of history and his theory of a social division of labor.

2.1 Historical Change and the Division of Labor

One of Rousseau’s distinct contributions to social theory is the claim that man is not born with reason; he develops reason, and a corrupted society stunts this development. For Rousseau, then, man is malleable; he is shaped by the society he inhabits.

Two important corollaries flow from this proposition. First, that the corruption of man cannot be explained as an outcome of human nature; it must be explained as a result of an intolerable social situation. Second, that man is rational, but only potentially so.

These corollaries provide the answer to why man (although he is born innocent and free) ends up corrupt and enslaved. The answer lies at the core of Rousseau’s social philosophy, and it hinges on two intimately intertwined components: a philosophy of history and a theory of social division of labor.4 Rousseau’s philosophy of history is most clearly presented in the first part of A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality: his theory of the social division of labor is delineated in the second part of the same Discourse.

Before state and civil society existed, man lived in total freedom and innocence. Rousseau (1755b, p. 201) describes man as ‘satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook; finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast, and, with that, all his wants supplied’. However, over time this original freedom is constricted in response to geographic differentiations and to demographic pressure (Rousseau, 1755b, p. 236; 1765, pp. 307ff.; 1754). Man discovers that cooperation increases efficiency in production; this encourages the creation and accumulation of wealth, which makes life more abundant and comfortable. But cooperation also means the rise of interdependence: as the evolving division of labor changed the state of nature, it transformed man. It increased his knowledge, developed his skills and his reason and encouraged the con-
continued evolution of lasting human relationships (Rousseau, 1755b, pp. 238 f.).

When Rousseau evaluates these two effects of a primitive division of labor, he insists that the benefits of increased material wealth cannot outweigh the costs of social interdependence. As long as men were content with their rustic huts and their primitive clothes made from animal skins, they were happy and free. However:

\[ \ldots \text{from the moment one man began to stand in} \]
\[ \text{need of the help of another} \ldots \text{work became indispensable, and vast forests became smiling fields} \]
\[ \text{which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate} \]
\[ \text{and grow up with the crops (Rousseau, 1755b, pp. 243 f.).} \]

As the development of skills and labor made work compulsory, it robbed each man of his natural liberty, stimulated greed and acquisitiveness, gave rise to the desire for property, to social inequality and to conflict and war. ‘Those who have nothing have limited desires, those who do not rule have limited ambitions’, Rousseau wrote about primitive man. However, as a widening division of labor enmeshed man in a web of social interdependence, it imposed upon him compulsory labor, social responsibilities and material possessions, the satisfaction of which awakened the quest for more possessions and stimulated the vanity and cupidity of man. For ‘The more one has, the more one wants. Whoever has much wants everything’ (Rousseau, 1756a, p. 297).

The introduction of private property constituted a point of no return in human history; it pushed humanity over the edge into civil society and its corrupting interdependence. Rousseau writes in a famous paragraph:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: ‘Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all of us, and the earth itself to nobody!’ (1755b, p. 234).

2.2. Interdependence and Corruption
In this paragraph lies a summary of Rousseau’s answer to the paradox that man is born free, but is everywhere enslaved. It is built around the claim that the historical evolution of a division of labor enmeshed man into intricate and constant obligations which released an insatiable quest for selfish economic advantages. It hinges on an account of an economically conditioned transformation of human qualities and sentiments – all of which natural man had in himself.

Rousseau emphasizes the effect of private property because its introduction tainted all human features with possessive qualities. It infused strength with an element of vanity, skill with competitiveness, love with jealousy, consumption with consumerism. Property robbed men of their ability to distinguish between good and evil, between real and apparent interest. It exacerbated the inequalities which nature had placed in man, rendering them more clearly seen and more deeply felt. It widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak.

The introduction of private property sparked the growth of misery among the poor, envy among the rich, and alienation and conflict among all. It drove man to develop social hierarchies and orders. In a step which marked a decisive stage in human evolution, man developed political institutions backed by law. These institutions consolidated the principle of private property, sanctioned the state of social inequality, protected the wealth and the power of the ruling elite, oppressed the poor majority of mankind, and alienated rulers and citizens alike (Rousseau, 1755b, p. 270). At this point, man left one state of nature, characterized by liberty and peace, and entered another state of nature, marked by oppression and war. He left the innocent state of nature among individual men and entered a corrupt state of nature among nations (Rousseau, 1756a).

2.3 International Relations
On this dark portrayal of greedy rulers and miserable citizens, Rousseau constructs his
vision of international relations. For whereas civil society is regulated by law (albeit the law of the ruling elite), the society of nations is not. In Rousseau's estimation it is not difficult to see 'that, each one of us being in the civil state as regards fellow citizens, but in the state of nature as regards the rest of the world, we have taken all kinds of precautions against private wars only to kindle national wars a thousand times more terrible' (1772, p. 486). This anarchic society of states obeys only the 'right of the strongest'.

Rousseau elaborates on this 'right of the strongest' through an account of Europe's balance-of-power system. 'The powers of Europe constitute a kind of whole', he claims, 'united by identity of religion, or moral standard, of international law; by letters, by commerce, and finally by a species of balance which is the inevitable result of all these ties' (1756b, p. 366). This balance brings a lasting order to the relations between European states. 'Whether we are aware of it or not, the balance continues to support itself without the aid of any special intervention', Rousseau argues. 'If it were to break for a moment on one side, it would soon restore itself on another' (1756b, p. 370).

The European society of states, then, possesses a self-regulating balance-of-power principle which produces a modicum of order. But it does not bring peace. Although it blocks major conquests over the long haul, in the short run it perpetuates instability and aggravation, quarrels, robberies, usurpations, murders, revolts and wars (idem). These cruel plagues occur not in spite of the interdependence of European states, Rousseau explains, but because of it. The integration of the states of Europe has made this region wealthier than other sections of the world and forged a historic 'fellowship far closer than is found elsewhere'. However, this integration has also rendered European conflicts more frequent, more intense and more deadly:

The historic union of the nations of Europe has entangled their rights and interests in a thousand complications: they touch each other at so many points that no one of them can move without giving a jar to the rest; their variances are all the more deadly, as their ties are more closely woven; their frequent quarrels are almost as savage as civil wars.

Let us admit then that the powers of Europe stand to each other strictly in a state of war, and that all the separate treaties between them are in the nature rather of a temporary truce than a real peace (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 369).

3. Key Concepts in Rousseau's International Relations Theory

Rousseau lived the life of the hero of a picaresque novel. This is reflected in a great number of works which encompass a stunning variety of topics. It is also reflected in the great inconsistency of his arguments. Those who search in Rousseau's oeuvre for idealist themes will find them; but not in abundance. Rousseau discussed all the key idealist themes - such as historical progress, human reason, individual liberty, and harmony of interest. However, his discussions often disclosed the social preconditions and the paradoxical nature of these concepts with such acumen that he severely undermined (indeed: deconstructed) them.

Those who search in Rousseau's writings for characteristic realist themes will find them too; and they will find them easily. Assumptions about constancy, human passion, determinism and conflict of interest blaze through Rousseau's many accounts of interstate interaction. Balance-of-power politics is another Leitmotif in his international relations discourse. The realist may see in the presence of these themes a confirmation of his claim that power politics is a constant feature of interstate relations. Rousseau, however, would most likely protest this static vision of human history. His distinct intellectual profile is drawn by dynamic concepts like historical change, interdependence, alienation, and dialectical paradox.

Although realist themes can be found in Rousseau's thoughts, they do not make him a realist. He shares these themes with most other 18th-century theorists. They are the themes of the age, not the themes which made Rousseau unique in the age. He distinguished himself not by his reiteration of these realist themes, but by his transcendence of them. The relationship of Rous-
sean’s international relations theory to the idealist and the realist traditions are indicated in Table I. His concepts of change, interdependence, alienation, and paradox are fleshed out in the following paragraphs.

3.1 On Historical Change

True, Rousseau agrees with the realist claim that interstate relations are characterized by power politics and that they obey the self-ordering principle of balance of power. However, rather than proclaiming these two properties to be universally valid, Rousseau sees them as characteristic of a particular epoch of human development. He cautions that the balance-of-power principle only partly explains the nature of the European interstate system; it accounts for only the mechanical properties of the system. Rousseau finds it necessary also to discuss the system’s historical origins and its path of evolution.

Rousseau argues that the origins of the European state system lie in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). This treaty sanctioned the general acceptance among the 17th-century monarchs of Europe of the principle of the sovereignty of states – ‘a distinction which consists in the ... right of legislation and in certain cases binds the body of the nation itself’ (Rousseau 1755a, p. 289). For Rousseau, sovereignty is the egotistical or self-assertive principle of interstate relations. In his mind, sovereignty plays the same role for relations among states as property does for relations within states.

By signing the Treaty of Westphalia, the monarchs of Europe accepted the principle of sovereignty. They denied themselves the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. Simultaneously, they recognized each others’ right to act solely on the calculus of their own interest. The Treaty of Westphalia, then, not only sanctioned a principle of external sovereignty, it sanctioned a principle of internal sovereignty as well. While the brute power of these rulers within states keeps in check opposed individuals who are constantly at each other’s throats in pursuit of personal gain, no higher authority exists which can regulate the relations among states, Rousseau argues. Interstate relations are therefore characterized by permanent conflict. But since this conflict is based on the participants’ self-interested protection of the principle of sovereignty, a balance of power is ensured which makes it impossible for any individual king to conquer all of Europe and establish a universal monarchy. Comments Rousseau:

If princes who are accused of aiming at universal monarchy were in reality guilty of any such project, they gave more proof of ambition than genius. How could any man look such a project in the face and without instantly perceiving its absurdity, without realizing that there is not a single potentate in Europe so much stronger than the others as ever to have a chance of making himself their master? ... As all the sources of power are equally open to them all, the resistance is in the long run as strong as the attack; and time soon repairs the sudden accidents in fortune, if not for each prince individually, at least for the general balance of the whole (1756b, pp. 370f.).

This self-regulating equilibrium is predicated on the general acceptance of the prin-
ciple of sovereignty. If this principle should erode, the balance-of-power system may collapse.

The development of a monarchical consensus had two lasting implications. First, it increased the power of the monarchs whose armies guaranteed their absolute sovereignty over their territories. Second, it weakened the power of rulers whose authority hinged not on military force and territorial control, but on appeal to normative, universal values – such as the Pope and, more importantly, the holy Roman Emperor. Thus, the Treaty of Westphalia increased the political authority of Germany’s local rulers at the expense of the old, imperial authority. In effect, it dissolved the Holy Roman Empire by granting sovereignty to local German rulers; it gave 300-odd local German autocrats the right to conduct their own diplomacy and make treaties with foreign powers.

After the Treaty of Westphalia, the interstate system of Europe consisted of two sets of states. On the one hand were the region’s few major states whose interaction was regulated by the balance-of-power principle. On the other were the 300-odd tiny German states; they, too, obeyed the balance-of-power principle but constituted a complex political system of their own. This German system exerted a crucial, stabilizing effect on Europe’s few major powers, Rousseau argued. The ‘German Body, which lies almost in the centre of Europe and holds all the other parts in their place, serving still more perhaps for the protection of its neighbours than for that of its own members’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 372).

Two conclusions follow from this discussion of the origins of the European state system. First, Rousseau draws a specific conclusion about the important role of the German states: the ‘German Body’ guaranteed the flexibility upon which Europe’s balance-of-power system rested. It was ‘a rock on which all schemes of conquest are doomed infallibly to break. In spite of all its defects, it is certain that, so long as that constitution endures, the balance of Europe will never be broken’ (idem). The implication of this argument is clear enough: If anyone should manage to unify the German states, this would remove the flexibility from the European state system and its balance-of-power dynamics would cease to work.

Second, a more general conclusion can be derived from Rousseau’s argument: that Europe’s balance-of-power system rested on preconditions which were historically formed. Europe’s interstate system was a temporal arrangement. It has a beginning which can be distinctly determined in time by the formation of the preconditions upon which it depends. It must, therefore, also have an end. The system would cease to operate if its historically defined preconditions were removed.

3.2 On International Interdependence

Rousseau’s conception of international interdependence does not rest on his philosophy of history alone; it also hinges on his theory of an evolving social division of labor. The division of labor has two effects on human society. First, it enhances the efficiency of production, thereby increasing the amount of wealth a society can produce. Second, it involves the dependence of each upon everyone, enmeshing individual social actors into webs of mutual obligations. Interdependence robs social actors of their natural freedom.

In theory, the effects of interdependence are the same for states as for men. In practice, however, men live in civil society where they all have to obey civil law; a kind of equality is thereby imposed upon them, whereas states exist in an anarchical society where they must obey the ‘law of the strongest’. Here interdependence enhances inequality. This robs every state of its ability to act freely. It also entangles the rights and interests of states ‘in a thousand complications; they touch each other at so many points that not one of them can move without giving a jar to the rest; their variances are all the more deadly, as their ties are more closely woven’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 369).

Through a historical sketch of the effects of a social division of labor, then, Rousseau arrives at precisely the opposite conclusion of the liberal Enlightenment philosophers
(Roosevelt, 1990, p. 99). Whereas Adam Smith, for example, argues that interdependence breeds wealth and harmony, Rousseau claims that it creates wealth for the few, poverty for the many, and conflict for all.

3.3 On Alienation

According to Rousseau, the introduction of property in civil society and of sovereignty (its functional equivalent) in the society of states, deprived the rulers and the ruled alike of their ability to distinguish between truth and lies, between good and evil, ‘between real and apparent interest’ (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 389).

In this state of alienation, citizens and rulers are driven by one sole motive: the love of their own well-being or their own private advantage (amour-propre). Citizens are driven by ‘insatiable ambition, and the thirst of raising their respective fortunes, not so much from real want as from the desire to surpass others, inspired all men with a vile propensity to injure one another, and with a secret jealousy, which is the more dangerous as it puts the mask of benevolence, to carry its point with greater security’ (Rousseau, 1755b, p. 249). Rulers are animated by the desire ‘to extend their rule beyond their frontiers and to make it more absolute within them. Any other purpose they may have is either subservient to one of these aims, or merely a pretext for attaining them’ (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 389).

Furthermore, when citizens and rulers are driven by their apparent (as opposed to their real) interest, the sly and artful behavior of one feeds upon that of the other. Rousseau writes that:

... war and conquest without and the encroachments of despotism within give each other mutual support; that money and men are habitually taken at pleasure from a people of slaves, to bring others beneath the same yoke; and that conversely war furnishes a pretext for exactions of money and another. ... In a word, anyone can see that aggressive princes wage war at least as much on their subjects as on their enemies, and that the conquering nation is left no better off than the conquered. ‘I have beaten the Romans,’ so Hannibal used to write to Carthage, ‘send me more troops. I have exacted an indemnity from Italy, send me more money.’ That is the real meaning of Te Deums, the bonfires and rejoicings with which the people hail the triumph of their masters (1756c, p. 390).

3.4 On Dialectical Paradox

Rousseau’s discussion of alienation brings out the final characteristic feature of his international relations theory: his use of paradox. Rousseau presents several of his most important conceptual pairs in paradoxic terms – such as the relationship between individual and state, liberty and slavery, reason and passion. In the relationship between the state of nature and civil society, for example, he argues that only in civil society does man become conscious of himself. This self-consciousness is a precondition for the evolution of human reason and liberty, but it also provides the possibility for unprecedented corruption and degradation. By Rousseau’s account, it was this latter development which did, in fact, occur: the development of self-consciousness degenerated into pure, private advantage (amour-propre). Man became sociable, but also egotistical. And once in society he exercised not his morality but his power. In a word, by discovering and exercising his freedom man enslaved himself.

To escape the horrors of perpetual war – a condition which for Rousseau is the hallmark of society but which in all essential respects corresponds to Hobbes’s state of nature – man created government. However, by imposing order on the domestic level, man recreated and magnified the problem at the international level. He created an interstate system whose members are willful, sovereign units in close juxtaposition. In interstate relations the amour-propre (manifest in the insistent sovereignty of each and in the resultant insecurity of all) is more inflated than it could ever be in domestic politics. Individual citizens still retain some of man’s natural compassion. The state, however, possesses no compassion at all (Hoffmann, 1963, p. 38). As a consequence, international politics is riddled with contradictions between rhetoric and action. ‘Consider our fair speeches and our abominable acts’, Rousseau writes:

... the boundless humanity of our maxims and the boundless cruelty of our deeds; our religion so
merciful and our intolerance so ferocious; our policy so mild in our text-books and so harsh in our acts; our rules so beneficent and our people so wretched; our government so temperate and our wars so savage; and then tell me how to reconcile these glaring contradictions; tell me if this alleged brotherhood of the nations of Europe is anything more than a bitter irony to denote their mutual hatred (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 369).

States have no clear rules to guide their interaction, writes Rousseau. So ‘in the absence of any sure clue to guide her, reason is bound in every case of doubt to obey the promptings of self-interest – which in itself would make war inevitable, even if all parties desired to be just’ (idem). Agreements between states are based on self-interest, are maintained by chance, and ‘must inevitably fall into quarrels and disensions at the first chances that come about’. To the extent that a public law emerges from this, it is ‘a mass of rules which nothing but the right of the stronger can reduce to order’ (idem).

No individual state can exempt itself from this law. All states are driven by it to make themselves as strong and secure as they can. However, when each state seeks to increase its own security by enhancing its strength, it only renders all surrounding states more insecure. Each of these states ‘feels weak so long as there are others stronger than itself. Its safety and preservation demand that it make itself stronger than its neighbours. It cannot increase, foster or exercise its strength except at their expense’. In one sense, there is a ‘union of the nations of Europe’. However, the imperfection of this association makes the state of those who belong to it worse than it would be if they formed no community at all (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 368).

4. Rousseau on War and Peace

Rousseau submits that states’ efforts to maximize sovereignty are, ultimately, the cause of war. War can be abolished only if all states renounce the principle of sovereignty and create a higher, federal body. The only way to reconcile the dangerous contradictions between states ‘is to be found only in such a form of federal government as shall unite nations by bonds similar to those which already unite their individual members and place that one no less than the other under the authority of the law’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 387). Since sovereignty is for relations among states what property is for relations within states, Rousseau provides the same solution for international and for domestic conflict: the establishment of a social compact.

Rousseau elaborates upon this international compact in two essays: A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe and Judgement on Perpetual Peace. The first essay purports to explain the argument of Abbé Saint-Pierre; the style and terms, however, are unmistakably Rousseau’s. It claims that since all men possess the faculties of reason and all men strive to realize freedom and right, it should be possible to duplicate the logic of the social contract established between men within a state and establish another contract between states. Most particularly, this should be possible in Europe, whose inhabitants possess so many other common traits in customs, religion, letters, language, laws, and trade. This contact would remove states from the bellicose state of nature in which they presently find themselves. Once established, the princes and peoples of Europe would immediately realize the difference between their real and their apparent interest. They would find the advantages of a European federation ‘im- dense, manifest, incontestable’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 374).

The second essay, which is Rousseau’s critique of Abbé Saint-Pierre, relies on the theory of alienation to identify the Abbé’s key problem: the erroneous assumption that man is rational and good in civil society. The Abbé imagined that once the kings of Europe had considered his argument, they would agree to it. Rousseau, however, doubts that a federation of Europe can be realized in this way. The plan is impractical, not because the Abbé’s scheme is not good, but because it is too good and sensible for alienated man to appreciate (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 396). If the project remains unrealized, ‘it is not because it is utopian; it is because men are crazy, and to be sane in a
world of many men is itself a kind of madness’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 387).

Saint-Pierre’s project will remain unrealized as long as man remains incapable of recognizing the difference between real and apparent interest (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 389). A federation of Europe can never come about through a spontaneous agreement between rulers. It can only be realized through force. The only way to establish a lasting peace through a federation of Europe is to conquer the entire continent militarily and rob all its rulers of their sovereignty by the force of arms. Once this is achieved, the victor can create a European federation by replacing the disparate sovereignties with a single, supra-national body with immense powers and with ‘teeth’ (Rousseau, 1756b, p. 374).

To prove that this is not inconceivable, Rousseau recalls an earlier attempt to do this. King Henry IV of France and his trusted minister, duc de Sully, made a plan for a Christian Commonwealth in the 1590s. They had made immense, protracted, and detailed preparations to implement this plan when Henry IV was assassinated in 1610 and the effort collapsed.

Saint-Pierre wanted to revive the policy of Henry IV and to create a Christian Commonwealth through peaceful means. However, the Abbé made two mistakes. First, he had no theory of alienation; he was naive in thinking that the kings and ministers of Europe would accept his proposal voluntarily (Rousseau, 1756c, pp. 390–392).

Second, the Abbé had no philosophy of historical change, and did not see that European politics had evolved significantly since the times of Henry IV. A unification of Europe through force was conceivable in the early 1600s but impossible a century later. This is implied in Rousseau’s argument that even if a strong ruler should emerge who understood the merits of the Abbé’s proposal, who followed the example of Henry IV, and who launched an effort to unify Europe through force, he would be defeated by the balance-of-power dynamic which was consolidated at Westphalia in 1648.

Given the immensity of the force required to establish a federation of Europe, and given the high likelihood of a vast, protracted war which would end in failure, Rousseau wonders ‘whether the League of Europe is a thing more desired or feared? It would perhaps do more harm in the moment than it would guard against for ages’ (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 396).

5. Rousseau and the Post-Cold War World

Rousseau’s vision of international relations may lend insights to post-Cold War interaction. His distrust of powerful rulers, for example, adds elements of sobriety to a debate which has focused exclusively on a ‘new climate of cooperation’ and on the good intentions of statesmen. Clearly, the end of the Cold War has altered the superpowers’ balance of terror; and the collapse of the USSR has meant the end of Soviet-style communism and therefore the end of the traditional justifications for the Cold-War order. The superpowers’ means of nuclear terror, however, have survived.

In January 1993, Presidents Bush and Yeltsin signed the START-2 agreement, which aims at reducing the existing superpower stocks of about 21,000 strategic warheads to between 3,000 and 3,500 for each by the year 2003.12 Such a momentous reduction of strategic weapons is unprecedented. It is also unnatural and unlikely: states are driven by their amour-propre to increase their strength, not to reduce it.

In today’s uncertain environment, many impediments may still intervene to subvert the disarmament process. The instability which has descended upon the former Soviet empire includes an uncertain relationship between the proponents of START-2 and the opponents — both within and among the nuclear republics. The Russian opponents argue that strategic nuclear weapons gave the Soviet Union the status of a superpower; ratification of START-2 would rob Russia of that status. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belorus would similarly lose their claim to great-power status if they deliver on their promises to hand their nuclear weapons to Russia for destruction. The parable of the stag hunt (Rousseau,
1755b, p. 238) indicates that if one of the participants in a common project defects, then the entire venture is imperilled. And two arguments speak against a cooperation in the case of nuclear disarmament in the former USSR. First, if the smaller nuclear republics gave their weapons to Russia for destruction, they would forfeit their ultimate argument for independence from Russia. Second, they have no guarantee that Russia will, in fact, destroy the weapons; she may instead keep them — she may decide simply to add the nearly 3,000 warheads from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belorus to her extant stockpiles of above 8,000 warheads.

Furthermore, the START-2 agreement does not really alter the Cold-War balance-of-terror structure significantly. The agreement focuses on reductions of land-based missiles, whereas the balance of terror mainly hinges on the presence of a sea-based deterrent — on hidden, invulnerable submarines which constantly move quietly through world's oceans with their deadly cargoes of sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) on board. The SLBMs of the USA have remained unaffected by the end of the Cold War; Russia has assumed all the SLBMs of the old USSR. The US and the Russian sea-based arsenals remain superior to those of any other state.

One caveat must be noted before Rousseau's argument is consulted to inform the contemporary world scene: since he wrote over 200 years ago, his arguments cannot be directly applied to late-20th century world affairs. Indeed, just as Henry IV's Great Scheme was rendered obsolete by the Peace of Westphalia, so Rousseau's was eroded by Bismarck's unification of Germany. The 'Germanic Body', this key precondition for the European balance-of-power system, was destroyed over a century after Rousseau wrote his essays on war and peace.  

5.1 The Triumph of Liberal Democracy

In recent decades a tight-knit community has been established in Europe. It is generally held that all 'industrial democracies are today effectively linked in a web of binding legal agreements which regulate their mutual economic interactions' (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 283). In light of Rousseau's view of interdependence, an extended and more tightly-knit, liberal-democratic European Community need hardly appear as the triumph of reason and justice. Rather, he might argue that cycles of war of ever-increasing violence have simply taught European leaders an obvious, pragmatic lesson: in the nuclear age, the national interest can no longer be furthered by all-out war.  

Also, Rousseau might warn against confusing the victory of liberal-democratic values with the triumph of self-interested, wealth-based consumerism — with 'the rule of money'. Such a development, he would argue, is a two-edged sword; it might just as well enhance conflict as further peace and order. The spread of liberal values across the world also means the expansion of similar desires (Rousseau, 1772). And as long as the nations of the world are inhabited by alienated and desirous citizens, Hobbes's assessment applies:

... if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their own delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other (Hobbes, 1651, p. 184).

From this bleak perspective, the continued evolution of an integrated, liberal-democratic European Community may maintain order and security in Europe itself. However, it will, even in the best of circumstances, enhance competition and conflict in the world at large. First of all, it may exacerbate conflicts within the wealthy, liberal North-West. If Europe is able to include some of the richest and ablest countries east of the Elbe in its evolving division of labor, the European Community may replace the United States as the richest, most creative region in the world. The continued integration of Europe may hasten the relative decline of the USA and exacerbate its post-Cold War Angst (Attali, 1991, pp. 35–67).

Second, the continued spread of liberal values may enhance the inequality and the conflict of interest between the rich and the poor nations of the world. The division of
labor within an increasingly interdependent liberal world economy will further enrich the wealthy, liberal-democratic states in the North; their interaction with the poorer, Southern regions of the world will take place across a steadily increasing gap in living conditions (Galtung, 1971). The recent communications revolution will bring to millions of people in the non-Western world the images and desire of affluent liberal democracies: their attendant promises of individual liberty, of opulence and mass-consumerist lifestyles. The poor masses of the world can increasingly see for themselves through posters and magazines, cinema, television, video, and tourism the extent to which their living conditions differ from those of their rich neighbors. They will be tempted and enraged by the incessant stimulation of wants that cannot be satisfied (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).

5.2 Virtuous Rage and Wars of Liberation

Some authors have argued that the resulting rage will ignite a just, cleansing struggle for liberation in the Third World (Fanon, 1963). Such arguments may find support in Rousseau’s moral outrage against conquest and repression. Rousseau (1761, p. 402) condemned the colonialist practice whereby ‘all land inhabited only by savages should be considered vacant, and that one may legitimately seize it and drive the inhabitants away without doing them any wrong according to natural right’. When a Spanish conquistador ‘took possession of the South Sea and all of South America in the name of the crown of Castile, was this enough to dispossess all the inhabitants’? asks Rousseau (idem) rhetorically. ‘How can a private individual seize an immense territory and deprive the human race of its existence except through a punishable usurpation . . .?’ (idem).

Rousseau’s moral arguments can easily be read in a modern, anti-imperialist light and construed as a justification for wars of national liberation in the Third World. However, his arguments are also informed by power-political and pragmatic insights which shine profoundly pessimistic lights on this issue of wars of liberation. For although such wars may be virtuous in principle, they are in practice as destructive, corrupt, and alienating as other wars.

Wars and conquest can never be a source of political legitimacy, argues Rousseau (1756a; 1761, pp. 400–404). For wars obey no law but the law of the strongest; soldiers obey no justice but that which is defined by their state. In his view, war combines the anarchy of international politics with the oppressive order of the state. In war, human action degenerates into an appalling brutality which exceeds even the Hobbesian state of nature (Rousseau, 1756a; Roosevelt, 1990).

War does not occur in the state of nature; war is a product of social interaction (Rousseau, 1756a, pp. 293 f.). Yet, in war, soldiers are removed from the rules and laws of civil society and placed in a condition of anarchy. The alienating effects of belligerent social action and the brutalizing effect of anarchy preclude the establishment of a proper civil society by soldiers – regardless of how just a war they may be fighting. For ‘peoples that are worn out by a long enslavement and the resulting vices lose both the love of country and the sentiment of happiness . . . A people in this state is no longer fit for a healthy institution, because its will is no less corrupt than its constitution’ (Rousseau, 1761, p. 410). The just nature of their cause does not prevent freedom-fighters from being permanently despoiled by their struggle, Rousseau suggests. Thus, he would deeply disagree with those radical theorists who think that armed revolution can establish a free and democratic society (Rousseau, 1761, p. 403).

This pessimism is exacerbated by another momentous event which has followed the end of the Cold War: the collapse of the Third World. The poorest countries of the world have, of course, not collapsed; however, the notion of a distinct, non-aligned, anti-imperialist political bloc exists no longer. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War meant the withdrawal of Soviet forces from long-standing superpower entanglements in Africa and Asia. The end of the Cold War eased the superpower competition. But it
also deflated the ‘geo-strategic real-estate value’ of many poor countries and robbed them of political and economic bargaining power (Toffler, 1991, pp. 394–397). Furthermore, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the uncertain fate of NATO have made important concepts like ‘neutralism’ and ‘non-alignment’ meaningless. In the post-Cold War world there no longer exist two great blocs to be ‘neutral’ in relation to; there no longer exist two interlocked, Northern military systems to be nonaligned from. By losing concepts like ‘imperialism’ and ‘non-alignment’, the countries of the Third World have lost much of their common identity as victims of northern (US as well as Soviet) imperialism. They have lost their semblance of unity and much of their traditional self-definition.  

The end of the Cold War has weakened the solidarity among the world’s poorest countries. It has made it easier for the wealthy liberal democracies to divide, conquer, exploit, and marginalize (Galtung, 1971) the rest of the world. Poor nations are at risk of becoming even more impoverished by demographic growth, more exploited by interdependent trade practices, alienated by wars, and brutalized by the influx of Western weapons. More than ever, they are at risk of becoming more vulnerable to Western economic and cultural influences than at any time since decolonization. Their relative poverty and weakness may enhance the vulnerability of these regions to the economic and cultural onslaught of the postmodern world market.

Prodded by the fear of cultural extinction to emphasize the value of their own cultural uniqueness, various tribes, clans, and nations may strike out alone to establish their own sovereign states and to defend themselves against the onslaught of Western-style institutions and values. In a context where the traditional bonds of Third-World solidarity are severed, this may pour ethnocultural oil onto existing local fires which are consuming the already scarce resources of many poor regions. This forces the former Third-World nations to face a cruel paradox. On the one hand, this cure may be worse than the disease; new nation-states are rarely consolidated without conflict and violence (Wiberg, 1991), and the creation of more such entities is likely to fan the ethnic, religious, and tribal fires with which the poorest regions of the globe are already so amply ignited. On the other hand, the nations of the former Third World can ill afford to reject the concept of the nation-state, for this would also entail rejection of membership in the post-Cold War order: in spite of idealist arguments to the contrary, international politics is still a deadly game played by Western-made rules which excludes non-territorial members. The poor nations’ paradox is made no easier by the fact that few ideas are as characteristically Western as the idea of the sovereign nation-state.

5.3 Independent States and Uncertain Commonwealths
During the late 1980s, the Soviet-style Communist party structure collapsed. The Second World no longer exists. ‘As soon as a tyrant ceases to exist’, remarks Rousseau (1761, p. 403), ‘everything comes apart and falls into dust, like an oak collapses into a pile of ashes when the fire that has devoured it dies out’.

It is uncertain whether thistles or roses will grow from the debris of the Soviet empire. Rousseau’s discussions of war and peace suggest three possible futures for the nations of the former USSR. The first is a crazy quilt of autonomous republics whose sovereignty is maintained by a complex balance-of-power game of alliance manipulations. This would produce a byzantine ‘Russian body’ which might play a stabilizing role in the post-Cold War world system – akin to the role that the ‘German body’ played after the Wars of Religion. It is, however, unlikely to bring peace. A balance-of-power system may block major conquests over the longer haul, but in day-to-day politics it will perpetuate small-scale quarrels and aggravations. In this scenario, a large share of the scarce resources of the region will be used by local leaders to prepare and fight wars and will not be channeled into much-needed projects of economic development.

The second scenario begins with a violent
breakdown of this tenuous balance of regional power. A strong and ruthless new leader may, like Henry IV, seek to reunify the major area of the old Soviet empire by military means. If he fails, he will throw the entire region into a terrible civil war. If he succeeds – if he can muster enough force to overcome the balance-of-power system – he will only purchase unity at the price of a major war, and will be forced to use sustained repression to maintain this unity over time.

In between these two gloomy scenarios of balance of power and conquest by force lies a scenario of enlightened cooperation. This third scenario is unlikely to stir up great enthusiasm among the members of the old Second World, because the several smaller and middle-size republics which have obtained sovereignty after decades of oppression and humiliation are reluctant to give it over to a higher body.

The problems with this third scenario lie in its assumptions. It assumes, first, that rulers and citizens of the new republics are rational. Rousseau would counter this assumption with the claim that the inhabitants are alienated and therefore unaware of their own real interest. The new rulers are driven by power – each 'seeks to command in order to enrich himself, and to enrich himself in order to command' (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 391). The newly liberated citizens are driven by patriotic myths, religious faith, by the promise of quick wealth and the fear of rapid conquest. Encouraged by local rulers who exploit patriotism, faith, and fear to consolidate their power at home and to extend their power abroad, the alienated citizens are caught in a vicious cycle of domestic repression and foreign adventurism; they enthusiastically contribute their scarce money and their wretched lives to support wars of conquest and the subjection of conquered peoples – without realizing that they thereby deepen their own misery and fortify their own slavery.

The third scenario also assumes that the basic political actors are equal. Rousseau would counter this assumption with the claim that the salient actors in question are nations and states and that they are essentially unequal. He would recall, first, that relations among sovereign states are conducted according to principles of power and, second, that power is a relative phenomenon. Thus, although

... the advantages resulting to commerce from a general and lasting peace are in themselves certain and indisputable, still, being common to all states, they will be appreciated by none. ... For such advantages make themselves felt only by contrast, and he who wishes to increase his relative power is bound to seek only such gains as are exclusive (Rousseau, 1756c, p. 391).

The third scenario will seem appealing only when compared with the more frightening first and second scenarios. These two alternatives, together with the destruction of Yugoslavia and the threat of civil war in the Caucasian and Central Asian republics (and the sobering thought that former Soviet republics still possess nuclear missiles), add up to a frightening spectacle which may drive the Soviet republics into collaboration. The result of this drive, however, is not a Lockian contract based on reason, but a Hobbesian contract rooted in fear.

Yet, by Rousseau's logic, this Hobbesian contract is unlikely to establish an omnipotent Leviathan. Although the greater republics like Russia and Kazakhstan may consider interdependence advantageous and therefore advocate a tight federation, the smaller republics may not. They may instead find their new-won self-determination better served by a complex balance-of-power game, and therefore opt for looser models of integration, such as confederation or even the vague and ambiguous notion of an 'association of states'.

6. Conclusion
In his novel Small World, David Lodge (1985, p. 51) describes an encounter during which assistant professor Persse McGarrigle tries to explain his dissertation on Shakespeare and Eliot to an older colleague. 'I could have helped you with that', the colleague responds.

All you'd have to do would be to put the texts onto tape and you could get the computer to list every word, phrase and syntactical construction that the
two writers had in common. You could precisely quantify the influence of Shakespeare on T. S. Eliot.

But my thesis isn’t about that’, said Persse. ‘It’s about the influence of T. S. Eliot on Shakespeare...'

Like young McGarrigle’s study on Shakespeare, this article on Rousseau does not seek to trace the influence which a past author has had on contemporary writers. Rather, it turns the orthodox view on its head. It suggests that contemporary approaches to international relations have profoundly affected the way we read Rousseau’s texts on war and peace. The realist paradigm has provided a notably formative influence; it has provided the tinted lenses which have colored our perception of the arguments.

When Rousseau’s texts on war and peace were introduced to the study of international relations some 30 years ago, scholars saw world politics through the lenses of realpolitik. The case which was argued then – that Rousseau was one of the major contributors to the realist paradigm – remains the dominant view. This essay does not dispute the formative importance of Rousseau on International Relations scholarship. It does, however, dispute the claim that he expressed the realist viewpoint.

The identification of Rousseau with the realist tradition rests largely on the elegant analysis of a few leading contemporary theorists. Waltz (1959) and Hoffmann (1963), most notably, discussed Rousseau’s key texts at a time when the Cold War was the overshadowing fact of world politics and when realism was the dominant approach to international relations. They captured Rousseau’s 18th-century ideas on interstate politics in the terms of a mid-20th century realist discourse; they cast Rousseau in the image of their bipolar times with such eloquence and sensibility that, even a quarter of a century afterwards, we can hardly read Rousseau except through the realist lenses of Waltz and Hoffmann.

This article presents an alternative reading of Rousseau. It is a view informed by the disappointments and the uncertainties of the post-Cold War era. It seeks to show that although his writings on international politics display many of the defining precepts of realism, he can also be read as representing a different, non-Marxist radical, school of thought. Such an alternative reading may, in turn, release Rousseau from the realist camp whose members have kept him so long as their exclusive captive.

NOTES

1. The idealist claims that man is endowed with reason and that he can understand and control both his natural and his social environment. Since norms of justice are knowable only through reason, then all just acts are rational acts. Consequently, the interests of all people are served by rational behavior and are, in the final instance, complementary. The idealists argue that if men are just granted full freedom, they will employ their reason and arrive at a political order that serves the common interest of mankind – and which is, therefore, just and peaceful. From this viewpoint, history can be understood as a progressive unfolding of human reason, justice, freedom, and peace (Knutsen 1992a, pp. 205f.; 270 n. 1).

2. The realist claims that man never acts on reason alone but also on faith, passion, and other irrational impulses; that all politics concerns power; that, throughout human history, politics has always been power politics; and that there is no reason to assume that this feature will suddenly disappear (Knutsen, 1992a, pp. 206; 223ff.).

3. Recent contributions to a re-reading of Rousseau include Williams (1989) and Roosevelt (1990). Colletti (1972) is also of great interest here. Hoffmann & Fidler (1991) have recently produced the first comprehensive English collection of Rousseau’s international relations writings, which they have prefaced with an exhaustive bibliographical essay – informed by the realist paradigm. Hoffmann (1963) deserves, together with Waltz (1959), praise for having systematized Rousseau’s ideas on international relations and introduced them to the English-speaking public with authority and eloquence. However, both of them must also take some of the blame for the realist twist which these ideas have been given in standard scholarship during the decades of the Cold War.

4. These themes constitute the basis for an approach which criticizes both the realist and the idealist tradition: namely, the left-wing radical approach to International Relations. It is intimated elsewhere (Knutsen, 1992a, pp. 205–207, 260) that Carr (1964) represents an important application of such a Rousseauean perspective to international relations analysis.

5. It is in this context that Rousseau presents his ‘parable of the stag hunt’, which provides Waltz (1959, p. 168) with a key to Rousseau’s thoughts on international relations.

6. ‘There can be no injury, where there is no
property’, remarks Rousseau (1755b, p. 242), quoting Locke. Later, Rousseau (1765) applies this argument in his proposal for a constitution of Corsica. Here he provides a more elaborate discussion of the concept of ‘property’, and he forshadows radical theories of revolution by explaining how the introduction of commerce and industry occasioned social inequalities and oppression which, in turn, provoked native revolts on the island.

7. In Eagleton’s (1986, pp. 132 ff.) discussion of post-structuralism, the argument allows the Derriadean apples to fall rather close to the Rousseauean trunk. (These immediately roll downhill and disappear into the impenetrable briarpatch of deconstructionist vocabulary.) For arguments relevant to the study of war and peace, see Ruggie (1993).

8. Hoffmann (1963), Waltz (1959), Clark (1989), Amstrup (1992) and others eloquently identify themes of power politics, determinism, irrationality, and conflict of interest in Rousseau’s writings on war and peace.

9. The classic discussion of the relationship between the idealist and the realist approaches to International Relations is still Carr (1964, pp. 1–95).

10. In his later essays, Rousseau (1765, pp. 332 ff., 338; 1772, pp. 476 ff.) intimates that since interdependence is inimical to the equality and liberty of states, a peaceful international order is best guaranteed by small, self-sufficient, egalitarian countries.

11. Hoffmann (1963) is more aware of Rousseau’s theory of alienation than Waltz (1959). And on this difference hinges a key disagreement between these two authoritative commentators (see e.g. remark in Hoffmann & Fidler, 1991, p. xxiii).

12. According to the START-2 agreement, the process of nuclear force reductions will be carried out through two phases. Phase One will be completed seven years after entry-into-force of the START Treaty; phase Two is scheduled for completion by the year 2003. By the end of the second phase, each side must have reduced its total deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 3,000–3,500. Of those, none may be on MIRVed ICBMs – in a word: according to START-2, all the MIRVed ICBMs of the two superpowers will be eliminated by 2003, and only single-warhead ICBMs will be allowed. START-2 contains no prohibition on MIRVed SLBMs. The treaty does, however, limit the number of sea-based nuclear warheads to 1,700–1,750 by the year 2003.

13. These arguments throw interesting light on German unification. For, as Rousseau might have predicted, Europe’s balance-of-power system lost its self-equilibrating properties in its wake. The Continent was then twice near-destroyed by world wars. Interstate equilibrium was only re-established when extra-European superpowers intervened, divided Germany, and kept the Continent in aye by a nuclear balance of terror.

14. Kant (1795), who relied heavily on Rousseau (1756b, 1756c), elaborated this argument in his own essay on ‘Perpetual Peace’. Kissinger (1979, p. 70) has, in turn, drawn on Kant in his analysis of a stable, nuclear deterrent.

15. Rousseau was greatly influenced by Hobbes’s description of the state of nature. He explicitly discusses Hobbes in his discourse on war (Rousseau, 1756a, pp. 305 ff.) and in chapter 2 of the first draft of his Social Contract (Rousseau, 1761, p. 453). He appears to agree with Hobbes’s description of the state of war among men. However, he also makes clear that Hobbes is mistaken in thinking that this condition characterized the state of nature. According to Rousseau, Hobbes had not described the behavior of innocent men in the state of nature, but of alienated men in primitive society.

16. Roger D. Masters once suggested that Rousseau removed his attack on colonialism from the final version of his Social Contract because he feared the French secret police. The manuscript criticized the French claims in the Seven Years’ War, which was fought at the time, and Rousseau did not want to attract undue attention (see Hoffmann & Fidler, 1991, p. xxix). For other examples of Rousseau’s fear of the secret police, see Cranston (1991).

17. Indeed, the collapse of the USSR involved an immediate retreat of Soviet involvement in protracted Third World civil wars (Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Nicaragua and, to some degree, Ethiopia). As the USSR withdrew, the USA lost much interest in regions which previously had had great geostrategic importance (Katz, 1991; Knutsen 1992b).

18. This argument which was presented among others by Harris (1986) nearly a decade ago, has been opposed for example by Holm (1991).

19. Although the appeal national liberation can be traced back at least to Machiavelli, Rousseau (1765, 1772) has often been charged with the patronity of the doctrine (Harris, 1992, p. 35).

20. In its ideal form, this scenario is informed by a Lockeean notion of voluntary agreement between free, equal, and sovereign republics ‘to join and unite into a Community for their comfortable, safe and peaceable living amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it’ (Locke, 1689, p. 375). Rousseau was, in his youth, a great admirer of Locke.

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