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In the *Social Contract*, one of his best-known books, Rousseau intended to describe the relations between states – diplomacy, war, and peace – but he never completed this, partly because of time constraints but also because he was dissatisfied with his thoughts on the subject. While he emphasized the harmony that existed among citizens on the principle of the General Will, he believed that this harmony was impossible to achieve on the international level. He burned several versions of his attempts to grapple with this subject but some of these have survived: "Fragments on war" and "That the state of war arises from the social state." These texts show Rousseau's skepticism that peace could be maintained among states. In order to understand his skepticism we must examine the two "international" moments in his life that deeply influenced his political thought.

VENICE AND MONTMORENCY: THE TWO "INTERNATIONAL" MOMENTS OF ROUSSEAU

In 1743, through of the Abbé Alary of the French Academy and the Chevalier de Montaigu, Rousseau returned to the service of the French ambassador in Venice, the Count of Montaigu. Initially a private secretary, Rousseau became de facto first secretary because of a quarrel between the new ambassador and the French consul-general in the City, Le Blond. Rousseau occupied this post for less than a year – from September 14, 1743 to July 25, 1744.

Informing and corresponding are central functions in diplomacy and Rousseau had all the skills required to excel as secretary in Italy. In addition to his writing skills, he knew Latin and Italian. Moreover, the use of ciphers in encoding and decoding diplomatic messages was not an obstacle for a musician such as Rousseau, who imagined a new musical notation system. As secretary, he composed telegrams addressed to the king, letters to ministers, and submissions to the authorities of the Venetian Republic. During this period Rousseau demonstrated his republican sentiments and his preference for the people over their rulers (for example, he refused to ask for money when arranging passports for French nationals).

During the Renaissance, Venice had been the laboratory of European diplomacy – setting up the first permanent embassies and formulating a series of rules to be followed. But the power of the republic had eroded since that time: by the middle of the eighteenth century the republic no longer functioned as the epicenter of European diplomacy, although it did function as an important diplomatic link in the War of Austrian Succession. Several princes claimed the imperial throne after the death of Charles VI in 1740, as he left no male heir. The princes called into question the legitimacy of Charles's eldest daughter, Maria-Theresa. The Bourbons, ruling over Spain and Naples, attempted to take advantage of this situation and reinforce their power in Italy. The French branch of the dynasty joined them in 1743 in opposition to the Austrians led by Prince Lobkhowicz. The French government feared that Venice would break the rules of neutrality

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and take the side of Austria. French diplomats also used Venice as a hub for gathering wartime intelligence. In these circumstances Rousseau gained practical experience of crisis diplomacy when, as he said, "we were at war." This "practical moment" influenced him ten years later when his patron, Madame Dupin, commissioned him to publicize the ideas of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre.

Between 1713 and 1728 Saint-Pierre published numerous volumes dedicated to the search for peace among the European powers. These thousands of pages were difficult reading and Rousseau had to synthesize Saint-Pierre's ideas in order to make them accessible to a wider audience. Residing in the woods of Montmorency in 1756 Rousseau's "theoretical moment" in the realm of international political thought began. The result was two books: the *Abstract of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace* (published in 1761) and the *Judgement on Perpetual Peace* (published posthumously). Saint-Pierre had called upon the will of European political leaders as well as an appreciation of their own interests to establish international peace through law. He proposed the creation of a European assembly composed of European sovereigns which would impose the peaceful resolution of disputes. Several readers of the *Abstract,* including Voltaire, believed that Rousseau agreed with this design. However, in the *Judgement* and other writings on war, the differences between Rousseau and Saint-Pierre become very clear. His practical experience in Venice and his criticisms of Saint-Pierre produced Rousseau's idea that diplomacy is an activity which always takes place in the shadow of war.

DIPLOMACY EMBEDDED IN A "STATE OF WAR"

According to Rousseau, states do not fight among themselves constantly but they do remain in a constant state of war: their relations may turn into violent confrontations at any moment. He insisted that there were two major reasons for this phenomenon. First, states (like people) are affected by their passions and therefore their conduct is not guided purely by reason. Second, the theory of just war and (more generally) international law is an instrument of domination. These two arguments allowed him to distance himself from Saint-Pierre as well as from Hobbes and Grotius.

Intended first and foremost to appeal to the reason of princes, Saint-Pierre's conception was inspired by the Enlightenment tradition that expresses confidence in human progress. Rousseau, however, did not share this rationalism. As he saw it, political bodies operate on the basis of the passions, especially negative passions such as love of self (pride or vanity) but also ostentation (an excessive display to attract admiration and envy). In contrast to the natural body, political bodies are undetermined and related: their scope or geographical shape depends on their environment and relationships with their peers. There is no natural criterion for setting them up, and their form thus results from "comparison" and "friction" with other bodies: "the size of the body politic being purely relative, it is forced to compare itself in order to know itself; it depends on its whole environment and has to take an interest in all that happens. In vain, it wishes to stay within its own bounds, neither gaining nor losing; it becomes big or small, strong or weak according to the extent that its neighbour expands or contracts, grows stronger or weaker" (Rousseau 2008: 77). In other words, states are in a perpetual state of war with each other because of their artificial nature. This view is far from Hobbes's belief that war is "natural" because, for Rousseau, "war is a relation not between man and man but between state and state, and individuals are enemies only accidentally, not as men

nor even as citizens but as soldiers" (*Social Contract,* book I, ch. 4).

The just-war tradition cannot overcome this phenomenon according to Rousseau. Grotius's unforgivable mistake (and that of other just-war theorists) lies not only in a gap between theory and practice, between what it should be and what it is; his error is also not limited to an oversight on the status of the law of war, which remains weak because of its non-coercive dimension (there is no global institution that punishes offences). It results from the statute of law itself: law was becoming a resource in the hands of the most powerful states. In interactions between political bodies, the recognition of justice is conditioned by the logic of self-interest.

To mitigate the effects of this state of war, Rousseau proposed confederations of small republics. He believed that the model he proposed would combine the qualities of two different political regimes: monarchies and democracies. Like monarchical states, a confederation of republics would be able to mobilize strong armed forces in defense against the expansionist aims of imperialist powers; like democracies, they would be able to preserve the virtue of citizen participation at the domestic level. The confederation would shape a foreign policy based on strategic restraint and the primacy of a defensive policy. Rousseau uses the Helvetic example in the *Projet de constitution pour la Corse* and the *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne.* To a certain extent, he comes back to the autarky promoted by the ancients. In such a polity, diplomacy focuses on territorial protection and not the development of new alliances with foreign states or a project of conquest. The main purpose is to establish a less threatening political body in international affairs while ensuring its preservation over time. It should be emphasized that the defense of the confederation does not entail the end of war. These confederations do not "end the madness, they simply provide small States a means to be wise among fools" (Hoffmann 1963). Therefore, neither a realist nor a hopeless idealist, Rousseau offers a singular approach to international relations theory: he demonstrated how both oppression and war could be avoided, the two most negative consequences arising from the creation of the modern state.

SEE ALSO: Grotius, Hugo (1583–1645); Hobbes, Thomas (1588–1679); Venetian Diplomacy

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