

**Études** | **Studies**  
**sur le** | **on the**  
***Contrat*** | ***Social***  
***social*** | ***Contract***

Actes du Colloque de Columbia  
(29-31 mai 1987)  
publiés et  
présentés par

Proceedings of the  
Columbia Symposium  
(29-31 May 1987)  
edited by

**Guy Lafrance**

Pensée libre, n<sup>o</sup> 2

Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Ottawa  
1989

**Données de catalogage avant  
publication (Canada)**

**Vedette principale au titre:**

**Etudes sur le Contrat social = Studies on  
the Social contract**

**(Pensée libre ; no 2)**

**Texte en français et en anglais.**

**Comprend des références bibliographiques.**

**ISBN 0-9693132-1-7**

**1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.  
Contrat social--Congrès. I. Lafrance, Guy  
II. Association nord-américaine des études  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III. Titre: Studies  
on the Social contract. IV. Collection.**

**JC179.R9E88 1989 320'.01 C90-090062-8F**

**Canadian Cataloguing in  
Publication Data**

**Main entry under title:**

**Etudes sur le Contrat social = Studies on  
the Social contract**

**(Pensée libre ; no. 2)**

**Text in French and English.**

**Includes bibliographical references.**

**ISBN 0-9693132-1-7**

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Contrat social--Congresses. I. Lafrance,  
Guy II. North American Association for  
the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III.  
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Series.**

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Ouvrage publié grâce au concours de l'Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau et grâce à une subvention du Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada.

The publication of this volume was made possible by the co-operation of the North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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ISBN 0-9693132-1-7

**THE ROLE OF ROUSSEAU'S WRITINGS ON  
WAR AND PEACE IN THE  
EVOLUTION OF THE *SOCIAL CONTRACT***

Rousseau ended his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* in 1754 with a frightening scenario of civil repression and inequality within nation states and continual wars between them. Eight years later he began the final draft of the *Social Contract* with a vision of a legitimately constituted state in which conquest is not considered a right and where force can not be the basis of law. In the interim between the two great works, besides working on various articles for the *Encyclopédie*, on the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, and on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau drafted numerous notes pertaining to relations between states and wrote what is generally referred to as the "fragment" on "L'État de Guerre." Within the same time period he also sifted through several volumes of a plan for a European confederation for peace that had been proposed earlier in the century by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, and with these writings in hand, carefully composed both an "Extrait" of the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* arguing why a confederation for international peace was necessary and a "Jugement" of it arguing why, although the plan was a good one, the *amour propre* of self-interested princes would prevent the plan from ever being adopted. These writings on war and peace, I will argue in this paper, constituted significant steps in the development of Rousseau's political understanding and can be seen as having an important role in the formulation of the principles of the *Social Contract*. At a time when questions about relations between states figure so largely in the discussions of relations within states, it is perhaps not inappropriate to stress that the principles of domestic political right that Rousseau put forth in the *Social Contract* were in part rooted in his earlier attempts to find ways to limit war and to promote peace.

Except for the work in the early years of this century done by J.L. Windenberger, G. Lassudrie-Duchène, and C.E. Vaughan,<sup>1</sup> and the more recent brief treatments by Stanley Hoffmann, R.H. Hinsley, and Kenneth Waltz,<sup>2</sup> surprisingly little attention has been given to Rousseau's writings on war and peace. This relative neglect may in part be explained by the fragmentary nature of Rousseau's writings on "L'État de Guerre." Last year, however, while I was working on a dissertation entitled "Rousseau on War, Peace and Education," I happened to discover a new arrangement for these fragments which I hope will lead in the future to a deeper appreciation of Rousseau's thinking about international relations. A detailed report of my research on these fragments appeared in *History of Political Thought* in the summer of 1987; here I will only briefly review what I discovered in order to show the importance of the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre" for the evolution of the *Social Contract*.

Never published by Rousseau himself but probably drafted shortly after he completed the second *Discourse*, the fragment referred to as "L'État de Guerre" consists of three sheets of approximately 10 1/2 by 7 1/2 paper which has been folded in half and written on both sides, thus making twelve medium-sized pages of very compressed and heavily reworked text. Due to some uncertainty about the correct order in which the three folded sheets were meant to be read, the manuscript has until now remained something of an enigma. When Édouard Dreyfus-Brisac first published a text of the fragment in 1896 as an appendix to his annotated edition of *Du Contrat Social*, he read the manuscript as three sheets folded inside of each other; but when C.E. Vaughan looked at the manuscript again in 1914 for his edition of *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* he saw

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1. See J.L. Windenberger, *Essai sur le système de politique étrangère de J.-J. Rousseau: La République Confédérative des Petits États* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1900); Georges Lassudrie-Duchène, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le Droit des Gens* (Paris: Imprimerie Henri Jouve, 1906); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe and The State of War*, trans. C.E. Vaughan (London: Constable and Co., 1917).
  2. See Stanley Hoffmann, "Rousseau on War and Peace," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 17, no. 2 (June 1963), pp. 317-53; R.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 46-61; and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), pp. 165-86.

that the Dreyfus-Brisac version contained too many awkward breaks and inconsistencies to be valid and suggested instead that Rousseau seemed to have filled in all four sides of the first sheet from beginning to end and then afterward had gone on to fill in the other two sheets folded inside of each other. Vaughan admitted, however, that even this reconstructed version of the text contained several gaps in Rousseau's argument, and he finally speculated that perhaps "We have to do, not with one fragment, but with two or three."<sup>3</sup>

Despite Vaughan's doubts about the integrity of the manuscript, it is his version of it which has been accepted as the definitive one since 1915: it is according to his arrangement that the pages of the manuscript are currently preserved in the Rousseau archives in Neuchâtel, and it is essentially his version that appears in the *Pléiade* edition of Rousseau's *Œuvres complètes*. A close look at this text, however, still reveals a number of very puzzling inconsistencies. One of the most bothersome breaks in the argument, as Vaughan pointed out, is a paragraph which begins "Ces exemples suffisent pour donner une idée des divers moyens dont on peut affaiblir un état," for what precedes this paragraph are not examples but principles, and what has been alluded to is not how states can weaken each other but why states tend to go to war with each other. A second, more serious problem has to do with the fragment's overall structure: the piece begins with a rather secondary quibble with Hobbes, moves into an implicit critique of Grotius, and then reverts back to an attack on Hobbes—a sign of haphazardness which is inconsistent with the carefulness with which individual sentences have been reworked and revised. Most bothersome of all, however, is the text's beginning, which is "Mais." "Mais," the piece begins, "quand il seroit vrai que cette convoitise illimitée et indomptable seroit développée dans tous les hommes au point que le suppose notre sophiste" (and the reader has to presume that Rousseau is referring to Hobbes) "ne produiroit-elle pas cet état de guerre universelle de chacun contre tous, dont Hobbes ose tracer l'odieux tableau."<sup>4</sup> This sentence obviously does not read like an opening sentence, especially not one by Jean-Jacques

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3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. C.E. Vaughan, 2 vols. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962), vol. 1, p. 281.
  4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), vol. 3, p. 601.

Rousseau. As one examines this sentence and the rest of its paragraph, one can not help sensing that one is in the middle of Rousseau's argument with Hobbes, not at its beginning. This suspicion grows when one reads in a footnote by the editors of the *Pléiade* edition that the title "Que l'état de guerre naît de l'état social," which appears right above the sentence beginning with "Mais," is *crossed out* in the original manuscript.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, to complicate matters even more, there is an additional fragment included in the Appendix of the *Pléiade* edition which has been given the title "Guerre et état de guerre." This fragment was not discovered until 1965, and when it was discovered was donated not to the Rousseau archives in Neuchâtel but to the Rousseau archives in Geneva. The editors provocatively mention that this fragment probably "relates to" the larger fragment at Neuchâtel, but until last year no one had tried to find out exactly *how* the two fragments might relate to each other.

I became puzzled and intrigued by the uncertainties concerning the proper order for the fragments on "L'État de Guerre" when I undertook a translation of the fragments as part of my dissertation. I was specifically interested in the possibility of finding a new arrangement for the sheets of the manuscript which would be different from both the Dreyfus-Brisac and the Vaughan versions and which would at least allow the passages pertaining to Hobbes to be kept together as a unit.

In January of last year I had the chance to go to Neuchâtel and Geneva to examine the fragments myself and to see if the more logical arrangement I had in mind would actually work with Rousseau's original manuscript. What I discovered was that in order to integrate the two passages on Hobbes into a coherent argument all I needed to do was to flip over the second two pages of the manuscript so that they are folded in the opposite direction from the way they have been folded before. When I did this—using a photocopy, since the original is stitched onto archival paper—I saw that the page with the crossed out title and the paragraph beginning with "Mais" could be fitted into the "centerfold" of the document, and that with this simple refolding another more eloquent passage becomes the text's introduction, the

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 1553.

polemic against Hobbes becomes a unit, and the overall flow of Rousseau's ideas becomes much more coherent.

There still remained the problem posed by the words "Ces exemples," however, which even with the rearranged pages of the Neuchâtel manuscript were still not preceded by any examples. At this point I realized that what the Geneva fragment refers to is examples of how states can harm each other, and when I went to examine the fragment in Geneva I discovered that once the sheets of the Neuchâtel fragment are placed in their new and more coherent order, the single folded sheet of the Geneva fragment falls right into place just before the page beginning with "Ces exemples."

With the Neuchâtel manuscript on "l'État de Guerre" in a more logical order and the Geneva fragment in its proper location, what has long been regarded as two or more separate fragments becomes a single well-developed exposition consisting of four integral parts. First there is a grand "overture" where Rousseau eloquently alerts his readers to the horrors of war and to the "contradiction manifeste" in the way civil life is organized. Next comes a substantial central section (titled "De l'état social") in which he proceeds from a critique of the concept of "natural" war (explicitly directed against Hobbes) to an analysis of war between states (implicitly directed against Grotius), and in which he rigorously attributes the origin of war to the nature of the state itself. This is followed by a somewhat parenthetical section (titled "Idée générale de la guerre d'état à état") in which Rousseau describes the specific methods that states use to harm each other. Finally there is a fourth section (titled "Distinctions Fondamentales") in which he turns his attention from questions of actual war to questions of legitimate war. ("J'ai parlé ci-devant de l'état naturel, . . . je parle ici de l'état légitime.") This final section is obviously incomplete, since it only touches upon the huge subject of "the rights of war," and it leads one to surmise that the exposition seen here is the one Rousseau was referring to in his March 9, 1758 letter to M.-M. Rey in which he stated that "Mes Principes du droit de la guerre ne sont point prêts."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, it is interesting to note that Rousseau ends the manuscript with a discussion of the relationship between slavery and the rights of war, for that

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6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Correspondance complète*, ed. R.A. Leigh, 43 vols. (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1984), tome 5, pp. 50-51. Cited also in Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, p. CXLVI.

is precisely the relationship which he analyzes at greater length in Chapter IV of Book I of the *Social Contract*.

In between the last two sections of the reconstructed manuscript is a page of the Geneva fragment which has been crossed out by Rousseau and which includes a somewhat long digression on the distinction between “la guerre” and “l’état de guerre.” This lengthy digression does interrupt the flow of Rousseau’s argument, which is probably why he crossed it out. However, since the definition of “l’état de guerre” that Rousseau gives us here so presciently describes the condition of a “cold war” similar to the one that has been carried on between the United States and the Soviet Union, one is tempted to disregard Rousseau’s own editing and keep the digression in the text.

Besides its intrinsic value as an indication of the seriousness with which Rousseau approached the problem of war, the reconstructed manuscript on “L’État de Guerre” can be seen to represent an important bridge between the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and the *Social Contract*. First of all, the manuscript paved the way for the *Social Contract* by providing the context within which Rousseau was able to sharpen his assessment of Hugo Grotius. In the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* Rousseau’s references to Grotius are very different from his references to Hobbes: Hobbes is explicitly and implicitly one of Rousseau’s main antagonists in the work, whereas Grotius is mentioned with relative respect; indeed, in the Dedication, in a fond recollection of the books in Isaac Rousseau’s workshop, Grotius’ name is placed alongside of those of Tacitus and Plutarch—a true mark of honor. By the time he wrote the *Social Contract* eight years later, however, Rousseau’s assessments of Hobbes and Grotius had clearly converged, and the argument against Hobbes that force cannot constitute law blends easily into the argument against Grotius that slavery cannot constitute a right. This convergence, together with Rousseau’s critical perception that Grotius’ “most persistent mode of reasoning is always to establish right by fact . . . a method . . . favorable to tyrants”<sup>7</sup> can be seen to have developed out of Rousseau’s attempt to formulate a “Principes du droit de la guerre” that

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7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract with “Geneva Manuscript” and “Political Economy,”* ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), p. 47.



would be an alternative to Grotius' well-known *Rights of War and Peace*.

The opening wedge for Rousseau's critique of Grotius can be found in the first section of the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre" right after the description of natural man. Rousseau proceeds to argue that real war can not be said to exist between *any* individuals—either between individuals in the state of nature, or between individuals in the civil state, or between individuals who happen to be kings. Here Rousseau is implicitly directing his arguments not so much at Hobbes as at Grotius, whose categories of public war, private war, and mixed war had been the starting point of his *Rights of War and Peace*. In contrast to Grotius' multilayered categories, Rousseau will argue that since war originates not in human nature or in individuals but in the system of international relations itself, war can by definition only be public and must thus be treated as a political convention or institution. It is this important principle that later provides the basis for Rousseau's critique in Book I of the *Social Contract* of Grotius' attempt to justify slavery on the basis of the rights of conquest. The argument with Hobbes about the relationship between war and human nature that Rousseau had worked out in the second *Discourse* is thus extended, in the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre," to include an argument with Grotius about the relationship between war and the state.

In addition to providing the initial context for Rousseau's critical assessment of Grotius, there are other important ways in which the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre" can be seen to form a transition between the second *Discourse* and the *Social Contract*. First of all the structure of the piece represents a spanning of the two texts. The first two sections, where Rousseau points to the ironic contradictions between civil order and international anarchy and then argues against the idea of a "natural war of every man against every man," recalls much of the underlying argument of the second *Discourse* (albeit in an abbreviated form and in a somewhat different sequence). Alternatively, the last three sections of the manuscript, where Rousseau analyzes what constitutes the "well-being" and "life" of a body politic and then goes on to hint at the criteria for "legitimate" war, looks forward to Book I of the *Social Contract*—particularly Chapter IV, "On Slavery," where he will explore in depth the definition of war as a political relation and will attempt to deduce fundamental notions about the rights of war from that definition.

More important even than representing a textual bridge between the second *Discourse* and the *Social Contract*, the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre" shows Rousseau making the crucial transition from questions of actual politics to questions of legitimate politics. This is perhaps the most important way that the writings on war contributed to the genesis of the *Social Contract*—and it is a development that could not be appreciated as long as the pages of the manuscript remained out of order. In Vaughan's edition of the text the statement "Up until now I have been speaking of the natural state . . . now I am speaking of the legitimate state" was buried in the middle of the argument, *before* the anguished descriptions of civil society as "miserable people groaning under an iron yoke" and of international relations as "a panorama of murder—ten thousand slaughtered men, the dead piled up in heaps . . ." With this sequence of ideas to go by, it is no wonder that Stanley Hoffmann and R.H. Hinsley have drawn cynical and pessimistic lessons from Rousseau's writings on war. But with the new arrangement these parts of the exposition are reversed: Rousseau's initial focus is on *de facto* politics—the way things are organized; but towards the end he makes an explicit shift to legitimate politics—to the way things ought to be organized.

At this point one might ask why Rousseau never completed his "Principes du droit de la guerre." One can only speculate that he gradually came to see the futility of pursuing a discussion of rights outside of any context of law. With no overarching legal framework as its basis, the assessment of a political body's "rights" becomes meaningless. This would explain why he eventually decided to place the particular precepts resulting from his "Principes du droit de la guerre" within the context of the *Social Contract*. For while the rights of war may have little meaning outside of any context of law, they do have meaning as the moral guidelines for the foreign policy of a legitimately constituted political community.

Such a hypothesis also serves to explain why Rousseau became interested, in the mid-1750s, in the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's project for a European confederation for peace. There is an intriguing passage at the beginning of the manuscript on "The State of War" which may have been the starting point for Rousseau's interest in international peacekeeping structures. "The perfection of the social order consists," he says, "in the conjunction of force and law. But for this it is necessary that law direct force. According to the notion that princes

must be absolutely independent, however, mere force alone—which appears as law to its own citizens but merely as *raison d'état* to foreigners—deprives the latter of the power and the former of the will to resist, so that in the end the vain name of justice serves only to safeguard violence."<sup>8</sup> It may be argued that Rousseau saw the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* as a way to counter the notion that princes must be absolutely independent and to bring the use of force between nations under the direction of law.

Now is not the time to explore in full the many different layers of meaning that can be discovered in Rousseau's "Extrait" and "Jugement" of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle*. Instead I would like simply to suggest that perhaps even more than the manuscript on "L'État de Guerre," the writings on the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* served as an important trial run for some of the fundamental ideas of the *Social Contract*. A few examples of the parallels between the two texts should suffice to make this clear.

One aspect of Rousseau's writings on the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* that it is important to take note of is his assertion that international peacekeeping structures will not evolve naturally (as Kant, for example, would later imply they would) but instead could only result from a deliberate act of human will. At the beginning of the "Extrait" Rousseau contrasts the common ties of history and geography that make Europe into a cultural unit with the actual state of war which arises out of rivalries and competing claims for supremacy. In all this, Rousseau goes on to point out, things are only following their natural course, since any society "without leaders or without laws, their union formed or maintained by chance, must necessarily degenerate into quarrels or dissension." To get beyond "the state of war" which, though *not* natural to individuals *is* natural to states, it would be necessary, Rousseau says, to have a coercive force that could ensure the maintenance of peace. "Everyone can see," he says, that "once there is a society it is necessary to have a coercive force which organizes and coordinates the movements of its members so that the common interests and reciprocal ties are given the solidity that they would not be able to have by themselves." However, he goes on to point out, "It would be a great error to hope that the violent state of things could ever change simply by the force of circumstances and

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8. Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 610.

without the help of art," that is, without the deliberate creation of new political structures.<sup>9</sup>

Later in the *Social Contract* Rousseau will make a similar point, albeit in somewhat different terms. He assumes, he says in Chapter VI of Book I, "that men have reached the point where obstacles to their self-preservation in the state of nature prevail by their resistance over the forces each individual can use to maintain himself in that state. Then that primitive state can no longer subsist and the human race would perish if it did not change its way of life." But earlier in the Book, in Chapter I, he had made it clear that the political right upon which to base such a new association "does not come from nature; it is therefore based on conventions."<sup>10</sup> Unlike the natural law theorists who believed that social life was natural to man and that ever more just and inclusive human associations would develop by themselves, Rousseau's observations of both international and national life had led him to see that security and legitimacy would not come about "without the help of art."

An even more obvious similarity between Rousseau's vision of a confederation for international peace and his vision of a social contract for civil order is in the elements of equality and mutual dependence that both institutions would be built on. In the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* Rousseau points out that in order to form a confederation that would be durable, "it would be necessary to put all the members in such a mutual dependence not only that no one alone would be in a condition to resist all the others, but also that particular associations which would be harmful to the whole would meet in it obstacles sufficient to prevent their execution." Later on, where he is arguing that the sovereignty of the contracting princes would not be jeopardized by such a confederation, he develops this idea of equal dependence even further: "By submitting themselves to the judgments of the assembly in their quarrels among their peers and by depriving themselves of the dangerous power of seizing the property of others, [these princes] would only assure themselves of their real rights and renounce those that they don't have . . . [One's] liberty might be alienated in the hands of a master, but it is strengthened in the hands of one's peers."<sup>11</sup>

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 569-570.

10. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 52 and 47.

11. Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, pp. 573 and 583-84.

It is quite probable that the experience of working through the complex relationships between equality and liberty in the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* contributed to Rousseau's ability to formulate, five or six years later, the well-known description of the *Social Contract's* purpose as to "Find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of which each one, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before."<sup>12</sup> In the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* Rousseau had argued that it is the equality of sovereign states that could provide the mutual dependence necessary to make a confederation legitimate and secure; here in the *Social Contract* he is arguing in similar terms that it is the equality of individuals that can provide the mutual dependence necessary to make a republic legitimate and secure. The contexts are somewhat different, but the underlying principles are the same.

A final parallel between the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* and the *Social Contract* is Rousseau's assessment of what is to be gained and what is to be lost by leaving the "state of nature" and entering into a context of law. At the end of his "Extrait" Rousseau sums up both the "inconveniences" which result from the "present manner of settling differences between princes by the right of the strongest" and the advantages to be gained by a confederation for peace. Among the thirteen inconveniences of the *status quo* are "continual and inevitable changes in the relationships between peoples which hinders any one of them from being able to hold on to the power that it rightfully possesses," "no perfect security as long as one's neighbors aren't either annihilated or subjugated," and "precautions and immense expenses for keeping oneself on guard." Among the advantages of the proposed confederation, he says, would be "complete assurance that . . . present and future conflicts would always be terminated without any war . . .," "perfect security for the administration of all reciprocal agreements between one prince and another," and "liberty and perfect security in regard to commerce . . ."<sup>13</sup>

The "pros and cons" of entering into a civil state that Rousseau presents us with in the *Social Contract* can in many ways be seen as a condensed summary of his lengthy evaluation of the *Projet de Paix*

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12. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, p. 53.

13. Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 587-88.

*Perpétuelle*: "What man loses by the social contract," says Rousseau, "is his natural freedom and his unlimited right to everything that tempts him and that he can get; what he gains is civil freedom and the proprietorship of everything he possesses. In order not to be mistaken about these compensations," he goes on to say, "one must distinguish carefully between natural freedom, which is limited only by the force of the individual, and civil freedom, which is limited by the general will; and between possession, which is only the effect of force or the right of the first occupant, and property, which can only be based on positive title."<sup>14</sup>

To sum up, both the "Extrait" of the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* and the final version of the *Social Contract* represent forms of political association which are instituted by deliberate acts of human will, which are maintained by equality and mutual dependence, and which are finally justified in terms of their ability to insure human security. Obviously Rousseau's lifelong conviction that only in small states can the sovereignty of the people ever become a reality limits the extent to which one should draw any extensive analogies between the *Projet de Paix Perpétuelle* and the *Social Contract*. Rousseau never hinted at a social contract for the world and indeed he argued consistently that there is no natural "general will" that extends to the human race as a whole.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, to know that the experience of summarizing and evaluating a project for perpetual peace helped Rousseau to formulate his principles of political right can perhaps provoke new thinking about the contemporary relevance of the *Social Contract*.

Grace G. Roosevelt

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14. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, p. 56.

15. See, for example, Chapter II of the *Geneva Manuscript*, in Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 157-163.