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## Brexit and Saint-Pierre's Peace Project

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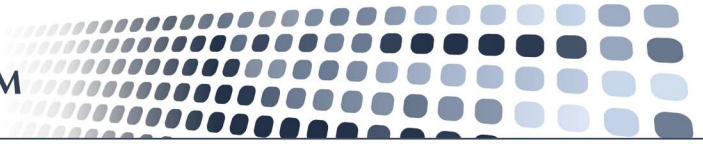


## Abstract

The Euroscepticism that led to the result of the Brexit referendum is not new, but can actually be traced back hundreds of years. This article explores Euroscepticism by comparing the modern EU with the European federation that was proposed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. The ‘peace project’ that he outlined generated many objections from philosophers including Rousseau, Kant and Voltaire. Although these objections were aimed at an abstract political proposal this article shows that similar arguments are in fact made today by contemporary Eurosceptics against an existent political institution – the EU. Whilst acknowledging that the federation proposed by Saint-Pierre and the structure of the modern EU differ greatly, this article highlights how they share one important aim, namely the maintenance of peace in Europe - an aim that makes their comparison so fruitful but one which was largely ignored by activists during the Brexit referendum campaign.

## Key-words

EU, UK, Brexit, Eurosceptic, Saint-Pierre, Hobbes, Rousseau, Social Contract



## 1. Introduction

Since its conception, the European Union (EU) has faced many difficulties, but never more so than over the last 10 years. These include the Eurozone recession of 2008, the European debt crisis and the necessity for financial bailouts for some member states, the huge influx of refugees into the Union largely as a result of conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the largely unhindered migration of EU citizens between member states. Whilst there has always been Euroscepticism amongst many EU citizens these particular issues have driven disillusionment of the European project to a new high, culminating in the referendum held in the UK on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 on whether it should withdraw from the EU altogether - the so-called 'Brexit' (Ornek & Ultan 2015). This referendum, and the result in favour of the UK leaving the EU has, like never before, brought to the fore questions concerning the fundamental purpose of the EU as well as the appropriate structure it should take in order for this to be satisfied.

The history of the EU can only be traced back 60 years but the concept of some sort of Europe-wide political union goes back centuries. An early example of this is that of Charles-Irénée Castel, Abbé de Saint-Pierre (1658-1743) who, in 1713, published *A Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe* in which he outlined the way a European federation could be formed as a means of bringing peace to Europe.<sup>i</sup> Although much ridiculed at the time by authors such as Leibniz (Hinsley 2004: 31) and Voltaire (Perkins 1965: 93), others were more sympathetic. Following his death, Jean-Jacques Rousseau edited and published a shortened version of the work, titled *Abstract of Saint-Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace*, (although this diverges significantly from Saint-Pierre's original (Spector 2013)), as well as a 'Judgement' of the work in which he raised various objections.<sup>ii</sup> In 1784 Immanuel Kant acknowledged the importance of Saint-Pierre's proposal and proceeded to publish, in 1795, his own essay entitled *Toward Perpetual Peace*, in which he likewise laid down conditions he thought would be necessary for peace to be attained in Europe.

The political events that have occurred in Europe over the subsequent centuries show, however, that whatever wisdom was conveyed in these works and reflections, they made very little practical difference to the lives of the average citizen of any European nation. However, perhaps Kant was right – maybe it was simply that the time was not right for



such proposals to be achievable. For eventually, out of the ashes of Western Europe following the Second World War, treaties were signed that led to ever closer political union in Europe culminating in what is now the EU (Staab 2011). Accordingly, the peace projects of the Enlightenment now seem less idealistic and fanciful and, by re-examining them in light of the problems currently facing the EU, they can proffer many insights.

In this article I concentrate on the project proposed by the abbé de Saint-Pierre, because, firstly, the extent of European political unity that he proposes has much in common with the modern EU. Secondly, he was a negotiator at the Peace of Utrecht, which, to a large extent, established the modern boundaries of the countries of Western Europe (Mallat 2015: 100).<sup>III</sup> In the first section I examine the philosophical background to Saint-Pierre's work by comparing it to the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In section two I outline Hobbes' view of the international domain and examine why Saint-Pierre, although agreeing with much of Hobbes' political theory, diverged greatly in regard to international relations. In the third section I offer a summary of the most important aspects of Saint-Pierre's solution to the problems facing the international domain – namely, his proposal for a European federation. In the final section I investigate various objections that were raised against Saint-Pierre's project by Rousseau and others, and relate these to the current crises facing the EU particularly the arguments that were presented by the opposing sides during the 2016 Brexit campaigns.

## 2. Saint-Pierre, Hobbes and man in the state of nature

Saint-Pierre's political background sits firmly in the social contract tradition and bears striking similarities to the theory proposed by Thomas Hobbes over 70 years prior to his own European peace project. As Hobbes' political theory is so familiar, and Saint-Pierre's is relatively obscure, I will compare them before considering their views of international relations in section two.

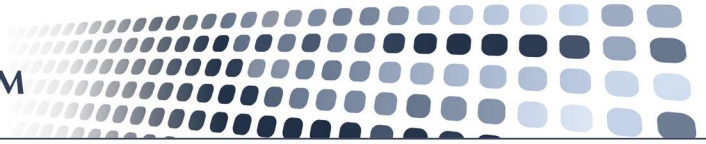
Hobbes describes the situation mankind would be in if there were no common power or rule of law. He calls this the 'natural condition of mankind', commonly referred to in the social contract tradition as the 'state of nature'. He explains that 'during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man'. The state of nature is therefore



a state of war and the life of man is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (Hobbes 1951: 82). He claims that this is the result of man's natural equality and the mutual will men possess for hurting each other (Hobbes 1951: 80; see also 1949: 25). As a consequence of this he claims that man has a natural right of self-preservation and 'a right to use all the means, and do all the actions, without which he cannot preserve himself' (Hobbes 1949: 27).<sup>IV</sup> Saint Pierre agrees with much of this analysis of the characteristics of man in the state of nature. He says that men in the state of nature are 'predatory animals, defiant, jealous, presumptuous, proud and arrogant' (Saint-Pierre 1714: xxiv). As there is natural equality, i.e. men are relatively similar in strength and intelligence, no one is able to gain total control over others and so violence is all that can be used to settle arguments. In such a situation men have an unlimited right to that which they judge is necessary for self-preservation (Saint-Pierre 1714: 4-6).

However, for Hobbes the state of nature is not, in principle, a moral vacuum and he posits nineteen laws of nature. He defines a law of nature as the 'dictate of right reason, conversant about those things which are either to be done or omitted for the constant preservation of life and members, as much as in us lies' (Hobbes 1951: 84). Since war is the very state in which the preservation of life is impossible, it follows that 'the first and fundamental law of nature is, that peace is to be sought after, where it may be found; and where not, there to provide ourselves for helps of war' (Hobbes 1949: 32). Similarly, for Saint-Pierre, the 'first rule of natural equity' is the silver rule, which states that man should 'never use violence against any of his peers, as he would not want any of them to use it against him' (Saint-Pierre 1714: 52-54).<sup>V</sup> However, given the lack of 'sufficient safety' in the state of nature, man has the right to use violence for self-preservation (Saint-Pierre 1714: 41-42).

Hobbes proposes that the only way out of this situation is for individuals to convey their right to all things to a third person and enter a contract (Hobbes 1949: 34). Each man must consent to 'subject his will to some other one, to wit, either man or council' (Hobbes 1949: 67). In doing so, each individual conveys to the man or council 'the right of his strength and faculties; insomuch as when the rest have done the same, he to whom they hath submitted hath so much power, as by the terror of it he can conform the wills of particular men unto unity and concord' (Hobbes 1949: 67). This union is called 'civil society' or 'commonwealth'. The person or council, in whom the will of all is invested, has

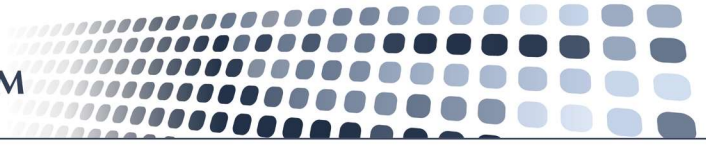


absolute power and is called the 'sovereign' (Hobbes 1951: 112). This sovereign has the right to make civil laws and to punish transgressors (Hobbes 1949: 74). For Hobbes, individuals enter civil society for peace and security, but security can only be achieved through fear – the fear of punishment if the laws are transgressed (Hobbes 1951: 219). Similarly, Saint-Pierre says that it is only through the fear of punishment that peace can be secured and this requires an agreement amongst equals fearful of 'their total destruction' (Saint-Pierre 1714: 52-54). The agreement establishes an absolute power capable of creating legislation and enforcing compliance. For both Hobbes and Saint Pierre this power can take the form of monarchy, aristocracy or democracy (Saint-Pierre 1714: 45-46 & Hobbes 1951: 112-114).

### 3. Saint-Pierre, Hobbes and the international state of nature

Given the similarities in their fundamental social contract theories we might expect the authors to agree about the nature of the international domain and, furthermore, for both to offer similar solutions to the problems it faces. However, as we shall see, although they do agree on the former, their views of the latter diverge significantly.

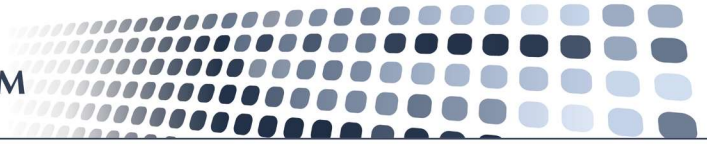
Both Hobbes and Saint-Pierre equate the international domain with a state of nature and hence a state of war. For Saint-Pierre, since sovereigns 'have as yet no permanent society among them, they have no law whereby to decide their differences without war' (Saint-Pierre 1714: 3). Thus, the international domain is a constant state of war because it 'can never procure any sufficient security for the execution of treaties' (Hobbes 1957: 2). Similarly, Hobbes says that because states are independent, sovereigns 'are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators...which is a posture of war' (Hobbes 1957: 83). As is the case in the inter-personal state of nature, the reason for this situation is because there is no common power in the world to punish injustices that may arise between states (Hobbes 2008: 57).<sup>VI</sup> Each state, therefore, has a national right to pursue its interests by whatever means it deems necessary and hence the international domain is a state of war. Although there are international laws of nature, analogous to those that exist in the inter-personal state of nature, without a power sufficient to enforce compliance it would be irrational to obey them (Hobbes 1997: 228). As Saint-Pierre says, any treaties that may exist between sovereigns in the state of nature are insufficient as a means to perpetual



peace because, as each sovereign has the power to violate them, they have ‘nothing in them that's binding, any longer than during the pleasure of the allies’ (Saint-Pierre 1714: 4).

Although the two philosophers offer similar characterisations of the international domain, they present very different solutions to the problems inherent in it. Given that Hobbes uses the analogy of the individual and the state when characterising the international domain, one might expect Hobbes to propose an analogous move and assert that, in order for the international state of nature to become a state of peace, sovereigns should give up their right to all things to a common power and thus form a global civil society. Furthermore, this common power would need to be powerful enough to enforce compliance to the international laws of nature. Hobbes does not, however, make this move probably because he does not think the analogy between the individual and the state is perfect.<sup>VII</sup> Rather, he thinks that for much of the time there will be a balance of power between states in the international state of nature, and whilst this is not a situation of true peace it does, to a large extent, enable citizens to live satisfactory everyday lives (Hobbes 1951: 83). The same cannot be said of individuals in the inter-personal state of nature and so the analogy of the individual and the state does not strictly hold.

Saint-Pierre, on the other hand, does not believe that true security can be obtained for citizens of any state if there is simply a balance of power existing in the international domain because, at any time, this balance can be upset through war and conquest. For Saint-Pierre, war between sovereigns wholly interrupts both domestic and international commerce and it is commerce, not war, which enriches both states and citizens, something that cannot be accomplished effectively in an international state of nature (Saint-Pierre 1714: 11). Furthermore, he thinks that many of the obstacles preventing sovereigns acting justly towards their own people are due to the state of international relations. So to truly solve the problems that exist within civil societies there has to be true peace, not only within the state, but also in the international domain (Saint-Pierre 1714: 87-89). In contrast to Hobbes, therefore, Saint-Pierre does propose the analogous move - just as individuals did in the inter-personal state of nature he thinks that states must form a union of states with a common power of sufficient strength to enforce compliance to international laws. This international union should be entered into voluntarily and it will not compromise national sovereignty. It is to the nature of his proposal that I shall now turn.



#### 4. The European federation of Saint-Pierre

Saint-Pierre presents his solution to the problems endemic in the international domain by concentrating on Europe. I shall, therefore, likewise restrict my discussion to Europe although there is no reason why, in principle, his solution should not be applied globally. Following his lead, and restricting the discussion to Europe, also enables direct comparisons to be made with the present-day EU.

Saint-Pierre's solution to the problem of the international state of nature is to take precautions against national wars, analogous to the precautions already taken to prevent violence between individuals. Rousseau gives an excellent overview of the general aims and motives of Saint-Pierre's European federation: 'To ensure an end to European wars would require a 'federal government as shall unite nations by bonds similar to those which already unite their individual members, and place the one no less than the other under the authority of the law' (Rousseau 1991: 55). Such a government would have the force to be able to hold 'the subject, the ruler, and the foreigner equally in check' (Rousseau 1991: 55). This is because states 'stand to each other strictly in a state of war' and any treaties that may exist 'are in the nature rather of a temporary truce than a real peace' (Rousseau 1991: 66). If a lasting federation is to be created, all its members must be 'in a state of such mutual dependence that no one of them is singly in a position to overbear all the others, and that separate leagues, capable of thwarting the general league, shall meet with obstacles formidable enough to hinder their formation' (Rousseau 1991: 66). Self-interest will, therefore, ensure loyalty to the federation. Saint-Pierre proposes twenty-four fundamental Articles necessary for this European federation to both form and remain stable. For brevity I have condensed the central ideas contained in these articles into eight main points:

1) Saint-Pierre claims that initially the contracting sovereigns must enter into a 'permanent and perpetual union.' This will involve a permanent European congress, in which all states are 'perpetually represented.' The function of the congress is to settle disagreements between the parties. The federation can begin when as few as two like-minded states sign up and then should expand slowly. (Saint-Pierre 1714: 106-107).

2) 'The European Society will not at all concern itself about the Government of any State' (Saint-Pierre 1714: 290-293). Thus, whether a state is a republic, democracy or monarchy is irrelevant. Saint-Pierre thinks that if the federation has the right to dictate the





form of government that member states must have in order to join then it is unlikely that any will do so and thus Europe will remain in an international state of nature.

3) The European federation must have the power, through the representatives of each member state, to pass measures that are in its best interests. Majority voting is the rule, although unanimity is required to change the fundamental articles (Saint-Pierre 1714: 131). Interestingly, he toys with the idea that votes in the assembly ought to be in proportion to population size, but settles on one member one vote (Saint-Pierre 1714: 129).<sup>VIII</sup> To ensure equity, the federation must have a rotating presidency.

4) In terms of financing the European federation he says that ‘the members...shall contribute to the expenses of the society, and to the subsidies for its security, each in proportion to his revenues’ (Saint-Pierre 1714: 129).

5) Saint-Pierre believes that it is commerce that enriches the lives of citizens and so for the European federation to be stable there must be agreed trade rules between member states. Writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century he did not have a modern understanding of the science of economics so he does not expand on what these should be, but he thinks that if effective rules were in place such a federation would, as Rousseau puts it, produce ‘a marked progress in agriculture and population, in the wealth of the state’ (Rousseau 1974: 93).

6) Saint-Pierre says that the European federation must recognise the territory held by each member. ‘Each sovereign shall be contented, he and his successors, with the territory he actually possesses, or which he is to possess by the treaty hereunto joined’ (Saint-Pierre 1714: 293-319). After all, most states can make some historical claim to foreign territory and so the only way to avoid future destabilising problems is if all states relinquish such claims on entering the federation. He does acknowledge, however, that the federation must have the right to help member states deal with any internal conflicts, rebellions or revolutions that may arise, because such problems can potentially spread across borders and effect the federation as a whole (Saint-Pierre 1714: 290-293).

7) It is absolutely essential that each state fears the repercussions of acting against the federation - ‘there can be no durable union...unless each member is retained in it, not only by considerations of pleasure and profit, which are sufficient for those that are wise and sensible; but also by some great fear, which is necessary to retain those in it that are not so’ (Saint-Pierre 1714: 123). He thinks that enlightened sovereigns will realise that it is in their best interests to be active members of the federation anyway. However, for those that are



ignorant, fear, induced by the threat of punishment, will be necessary to ensure that they recognise that continued membership is in their best interest.

8) The European federation is initially to be one of Christian states although this does not mean it is to be governed as such (Saint-Pierre 1714: 123). Rather, the central authority must ensure that disputes over articles of faith do not lead to inter-state or intra-state violence (Saint-Pierre 1714: 382-385). However, this might simply reflect the fact that at the time of writing Western Europe only consisted of Christian states. For he also says, with respect to Islamic states, that the ‘union, to keep up peace and commerce with them, might make a treaty with them, take all the same securities, and grant each of them a resident in the city of peace.’ They would be ‘either members or allies of the union’ (Saint-Pierre 1714: 105-106).

Saint-Pierre thinks that a European federation thus outlined would succeed in its aim of replacing the international state of war in Europe with abiding peace. In the international state of nature states are led to take up arms for reasons of conquest, protection against aggression, the maintenance of rights, economic advantage, the settlement of differences, or to fulfil the obligation of a previously entered treaty. He thinks the federation he outlines removes all these reasons for war and would therefore lead to perpetual peace.

Now it might seem that Saint-Pierre’s project, with its ultimate aim of maintaining perpetual peace in Europe, is not really relevant to the present day EU as superficially this seems to exist in order to improve the everyday lives of its citizens rather than to prevent wars between European states. However, if we briefly examine the history of the EU we see that a significant component of the original motivation for its establishment was in fact to maintain peace in Europe (Judt 2006). It seems reasonable to characterise Europe in the 1930s and 1940s as akin to a Hobbesian international state of war. Following the horrors of the two 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars, the Council of Europe was established in 1949. At a speech following its inauguration the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman said, ‘We are carrying out a great experiment, the fulfilment of the same recurrent dream that for ten centuries has revisited the peoples of Europe: creating between them an organization putting an end to war and guaranteeing an eternal peace’ (Nordvig 2014: 14). He went on to say ‘Audacious minds, such as...Abbé de Saint Pierre, Rousseau...[and]...Kant, had created in the abstract the framework for systems that were both ingenious and generous’



(Hagger 2015: 20). In 1951 the Treaty of Paris resulted in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, which was the world's first supranational institution and would, as Shuman put it, ensure that 'any war between France and Germany becomes not only unthinkable but materially impossible' (Schuman 1950). Subsequent treaties, aimed at ever closer political and economic ties followed until, via the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, the EU was born and finally, in 1999, there came the launch of the single Euro currency (Teasdale 2012). Furthermore, so essential is the EU regarded as an institution for the preservation of peace in Europe that in 2012 it received the Nobel Peace Prize, the committee stating that 'the Union and its forerunners have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe' (Telò 2014: 342).

When we consider the historical development of the EU we see, therefore, that it is very much a project for maintaining peace in Europe and this fact should not be overlooked or forgotten. Having acknowledged this point it is obvious that the projects for peace proposed by writers of the Enlightenment are worth considering when discussing the structure of the EU and the problems that it faces. In the following section I shall discuss some objections that have been raised against Saint-Pierre's European federation and show that they are relevant to the contemporary EU, particularly the Eurosceptic arguments that were made during the Brexit campaigns in the UK.

## 5. Objections to Saint-Pierre's federation and the European Union

In Rousseau's 'Judgment' of Saint-Pierre's project, and in his other writings on political philosophy, we find many insightful objections to the federation.

### 5.1. A large European federation would be impractical

Although Saint-Pierre thinks that a European federation could start with just a small number of states agreeing to his fundamental Articles he says that, for it to be sufficiently stable, it should 'increase as much as possible the number of sovereigns party to the grand alliance' (Cooper 1974: 26). Rousseau, however, argues that a large federation would in fact be weak. Throughout his political writings, he makes reference to the ideal size or extent of states. He says that just as 'nature has set limits to the statute of a well-formed man...so with regard to the best constitution of a state there are limits to the dimensions it should



have, in order that it be neither too large to be well governed, nor too small to be self-sustaining.’ For, ‘the more the social bond stretches, the looser it becomes, and that in general a small state is always proportionally stronger than a large one’ (Rousseau 1991: 122). In fact, he goes as far as advising Poland to reduce its size - its size being its ‘radical defect’ (Rousseau 1991: 173).

Rousseau gives two main reasons why he thinks this is the case. Firstly, administration becomes more burdensome and expensive the more levels of bureaucracy that exist, i.e. town, county, province, state, inter-state, and so on. Secondly, no single set of laws will be acceptable in a large federation given the diversity of religious and cultural beliefs that will be held by the citizens (Rousseau 1991: 122-123). This second reason will be discussed later.

The first claim was also cited as one good reason for the UK to leave the EU in the Brexit discussions (Malpass 2016). The EU has expanded dramatically since the days of the Council of Europe, which had only six signatories, to the present-day Union, which has 28 member states, and it has been suggested that this is one reason why it faces such problems today (Verdun 2007: 14). However, there have been many studies undertaken to see whether the expansion of the EU has slowed down decision making within the Union but all are inconclusive (Hertz & Leuffen 2011). Part of the reason for this is that EU expansion has occurred in conjunction with ever increasing political union, thus making comparisons difficult to draw (Hertz & Leuffen 2011: 193). As for Rousseau’s worry that administration becomes more expensive the more levels of bureaucracy that exists, this may be true in the case of the EU. Speaking on behalf of the Leave campaign, British Conservative MP Michael Gove claimed that, on leaving the EU, Britain would not have to spend 600 million pounds per week on EU regulations (Gove 2016). However, in reality administration costs for the EU accounted for less than 6% of the EU budget in 2015 (McColl 2015) and, in order to claim that this figure is excessive, it has to be balanced against the economic advantages that a larger single market brings with it - a move that the Leave campaign failed to make. What is interesting is that, contrary to Saint-Pierre’s proposal, member states of the EU do not contribute to the expenses in proportion to their revenue. For example, due to the UK rebate that has been in place since 1985, the UK contributed in 2015 less of its Gross National Income to the EU budget than any other member state (McColl 2015).

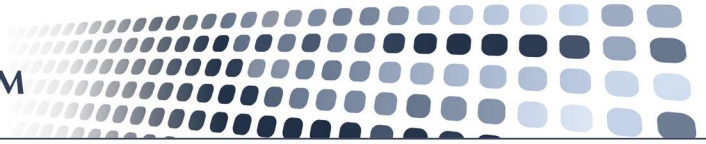


However, what is actually at the heart of Saint-Pierre's support for a large European federation emerges directly from his Hobbesian political theory and the central notion that the international state of nature is a state of war. For the main reason that he advocates a federation is to bring about perpetual peace in Europe and thus an end to this international state of war. He thinks that such a peace is not going to be achieved if only two or three European states form a federation, for they will still be in a Hobbesian state of war vis-à-vis the other European states. Rather, the only way for European states to leave this international state of war is if *all* the states agree to join the federation.

Applying this to the EU we find that this is also at the heart of the EU's policy of expansion, which holds that 'the extension of the zone of peace, stability and prosperity in Europe will enhance the security of all its peoples...In addition it will boost economic growth and create jobs in both old and new member states' (European Commission 2001: 5).<sup>IX</sup> Thus EU expansion is motivated by both economic and political interests. With respect to some states the motivation has been largely economic, as was the case with the 1995 enlargement which saw the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the EU. On the other hand, the enlargement of 2004, which took in the bulk of the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe, was motivated in the main by concerns for peace and stability in Europe (Avery et al 2009). Given that the EU has helped to maintain peace in Europe for over 60 years it is surprising that this was not emphasised by Britain Stronger in Europe (the official organisation established to campaign for a Remain vote in the Brexit referendum) when it presented its 'six reasons' why the UK should remain in the EU (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016).

## 5.2. Problem of Diversity of Culture

As mentioned earlier, Rousseau also thinks that a large federation would be unstable because no single set of laws will be acceptable given the diversity of religious and cultural beliefs that will be held by the citizens (Rousseau 1991: 122-123). Saint-Pierre does not see this as a problem because he proposes that the European federation be comprised only of Christian states, which he assumes will all hold relatively similar beliefs.<sup>X</sup> Furthermore, he insists that the federal authority is not to legislate on matters of Church doctrine (Saint-Pierre 1714: 382-385). However, if we examine Rousseau's view in more detail we see that his objection is only really effective against some types of federations and is actually



enlightening when we consider why the EU has managed to grow relatively successfully, helping to maintain peace in Europe, over the last 60 years.

Rousseau believes that the opinions of subjects are their own private concerns, unless they are of importance to the community. He explains that, for there to be a stable society, there has to be a shared conception of justice and a belief in the sanctity of the social contract. With respect to religion he thinks that it is important to the state that religious belief leads one to respect one's duties as a citizen. Therefore, 'the dogmas of...religion are of no interest to the state...except as they have a bearing on the morals and duties which the citizen professing it should hold and perform in dealing with others.' (Rousseau 1991: 437). He points out that 'one should tolerate all those religions that tolerate others, provided that their dogmas are in no way contrary to the duties of the citizen', for 'it is impossible for intolerant men joined by the same dogmas ever to live in peace among themselves' (Rousseau 1991: 136-138).

So, for Rousseau, diverse religious and cultural beliefs are not *necessarily* an obstacle to civil society. As long as there is a shared conception of justice, an acceptance of the fundamental constitution of the state and tolerance towards other citizens, then any society should be possible, including an international multi-cultural federation such as that proposed by Saint-Pierre. However, Rousseau thinks that, in reality, peoples with differing religious and cultural beliefs never can have a common conception of justice, and if he is right about this then a European federation comprised of a mixture of such peoples would never be stable.

If we apply this to the EU we can see why it has been able to grow in size, despite the fact that it is comprised of a vast array of cultures. For in the case of the EU, the acceptance of a fundamental conception of justice *is* required for states to join. The Treaty on European Union (TEU) asserts, in Article two, that the Union is:

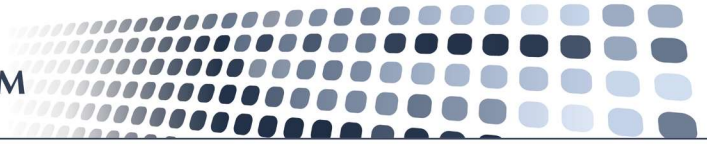
founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. (TEU 2007)



Furthermore, Article 49 affirms that ‘Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article two and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union.’ Article three stresses that the EU ‘shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced’ (TEU 2007). All this is summed up in the motto of the EU which, in English, is ‘United in diversity’ (Kjær & Adamo 2016: 2).

From this we can see that there is a significant difference between the EU and the federation proposed by Saint-Pierre. Saint-Pierre holds that his European federation should not be concerned with the internal constitution of any member state. Contrary to this, however, the constitution of member states is *fundamental* to the EU - for it insists that membership is only open to European states that fulfil the ‘Copenhagen Criteria’ which, in addition to economic conditions, proclaims that states must have ‘stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities’ (Krygier 2006: 15). It is surprising that this issue was not also central to Saint-Pierre’s project for he was, after all, proposing a democratic European federation. Did he really think that a European federation based on democratic principles could function if comprised of member states that were, themselves, undemocratic?

It was this that was in fact the main criticism of Saint-Pierre’s project made by Voltaire in ‘De la paix perpétuelle’, which he published in 1769. He said, ‘the peace imagined by a Frenchman named Abbé de St. Pierre is a chimera which will never subsist between princes any more than between elephants and rhinoceroses, between wolves and dogs. Carnivorous animals always tear each other apart at the first occasion’ (Riley 1974: 191). Rather, he thought peace in Europe could only come about when ‘men shall know that there is nothing to gain in the happiest wars, except for a small number of generals and ministers’ and when citizens of states perceive those that support war to be ‘the enemy of all nations’ (Riley 1974: 192). He was, therefore, acknowledging that peace could only eventuate when the attitudes and beliefs of citizens and sovereigns had changed. So for Voltaire the main reason Saint-Pierre’s federation would never form is because it accepted states that had governments whose beliefs were at odds with the democratic principles that were necessary for the federation to be permanent and successfully perform its function of maintaining peace in Europe.



It is true that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were no truly democratic states in Europe (Cesa 2010) and so Voltaire's criticism of Saint-Pierre's proposal seems reasonable. Turning to the EU, over half the current members have not been democracies at some point during the last 60 years. However, what was important to the initial success of the EU project was that the original six signatures to the EU project *were* democratic and it only grew in size by accepting states that fulfilled the criteria that would become known as the 'Copenhagen Criteria'.

However, although the EU only accepts as members those states that, from a constitutional point of view, share a fundamental conception of justice, this does not mean that all the citizens of the EU, on a personal level, share this conception. Furthermore, as the EU requires that member states be democracies, the personal conceptions of justice held by its citizens will be reflected in the policies adopted by each government. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Brexit referendum where an issue of utmost importance to both the UK and the EU as a whole was determined by the citizens of one member state. In granting such a referendum the British government enabled individuals' feelings of xenophobia and nationalism potentially to direct the course of foreign policy (Versi 2016). In addition to the problems arising from a diversity of cultures at a state level, Rousseau likewise claims that nationalism would also be a big problem for a large federation.

### 5.3. Nationalism

Although Rousseau thinks that nationalism, a devotion to one's own country, would prevent any form of large federation from being stable, he does not necessarily see nationalism as a bad thing. Although he says, 'Today...there are no longer any Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards or even Englishmen; there are only Europeans' (Rousseau 1991: 168) he is actually being ironic. For he goes on to say,

incline the passions of the Poles in a different direction, and you will give their souls a national physiognomy which will distinguish them from other peoples, which will prevent them from mixing, from feeling at ease with those peoples, from allying themselves with them...Loving the fatherland, they will serve it zealously and with all their hearts (Rousseau 1991: 168-169).





Rousseau goes on to advise that national tastes, dress, games and so on, should be promoted at the expense of foreign alternatives. Children ought to be taught from the moment of birth that they are Poles and different from other Europeans. However, put into context, these statements seem less xenophobic and more understandable. In his writings on Poland and Corsica, Rousseau is trying to give practical advice to nations that have been tyrannised by larger, aggressive neighbours. His advice is intended mainly as a means to help them with self-determination in an international state of war. As he says, he can see only one way to establish a stable Poland; ‘it is to establish the Republic so firmly in the hearts of the Poles that she will maintain her existence there in spite of all the efforts of her oppressors’ (Rousseau 1991: 168). Rousseau does not, therefore, advocate nationalism for aggressive reasons, but rather *defensive* ones (Hoffmann & Fidler 1991: 1xi; see also Cobban 1964). This means that, for Rousseau, there is nothing intrinsically inconsistent with advocating nationalistic feelings whilst at the same time pushing for the formation of a European federation. In an international state of war such feelings are perhaps necessary for the survival of the state, but they may be detrimental once a European federation is established.

As is obvious from the current difficulties facing the EU, nationalist sentiments do not necessarily diminish with close political unity and can in fact be extremely detrimental to political stability. Article nine of the TEU asserts that ‘Every national of a member state shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to national citizenship and shall not replace it.’ (Bogdandy 2012: 315). However, being legally classed as a citizen, and considering oneself to be a citizen, do not necessarily coincide. Studies have shown that, across the Union as a whole, a majority do consider themselves to be EU citizens, but a significant minority – 31% – do not consider themselves to be ‘European’ at all (European Commission 2015: 27). The figures differ widely across the Union and this is reflected in the level of Euroscepticism felt in member states. In 2015 only 15% of people in the UK as a whole considered themselves to be ‘European’ (Ormston 2015: 7) and this played a substantial part in the final outcome of the Brexit referendum.

During the referendum campaign those advocating a withdrawal from the EU made a significant appeal to nationalist sentiments when discussing immigration. Article three of the TEU guarantees the free movement of EU citizens across the Union and Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) guarantees the rights of EU



citizens to work in all member states without discrimination based on nationality (Rogers et al 2012: 90). If everyone considered themselves to be ‘European’ this might not cause problems. However, in a member state, such as the UK, where the vast majority of the population do not identify this way, the presence of those from elsewhere in the Union living and working can cause serious resentment (Migration Watch UK 2015). As part of their Leave campaign the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) produced a poster showing a huge line of people from ethnic minorities alongside the caption ‘Breaking Point’, with the subtitle ‘we must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders.’ (Chambre 2016). Although it was compared to Nazi propaganda footage by a large proportion of the British population (Stewart and Mason 2016) the then leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, defended its use by explaining that it was a genuine photograph of people who have entered the EU via Slovenia and who have subsequently become EU citizens (Stone 2016). Due to Article 45 of the TFEU these people are now free to enter the UK whenever they desire. His overall argument was that a UK outside the EU could directly control its borders thus preventing such people from entering. Furthermore, he argued that allowing the free movement of EU citizens was a threat to national security because it made it easier for terrorists to enter the country (Goodwin 2016).

The issue of internal migration within a European federation was not really an issue in the time of Rousseau and Saint-Pierre and so neither considered it a problem. However, in the EU, which has fundamental Articles that respect human rights, migration will occur and nationalism will cause problems if citizens consider the migrants to be detrimental to their own welfare. Thus Rousseau is right – nationalism can seriously destabilise any kind of European political union.

More generally, nationalist sentiments are often exploited by Eurosceptics in the EU when they assert that the EU weakens the sovereignty of member states.

#### **5.4. Federation weakens sovereignty**

Immanuel Kant objected that a federation such as that proposed by Saint-Pierre destroys, or at least weakens, the sovereignty of member states. Saint-Pierre actually foresaw such an objection and offers an interesting response. He says, ‘whosoever has a cause to fear is in dependence... Thus we may truly say, that all the sovereigns, howsoever independent they may be imagined, are really dependent upon each other, because they



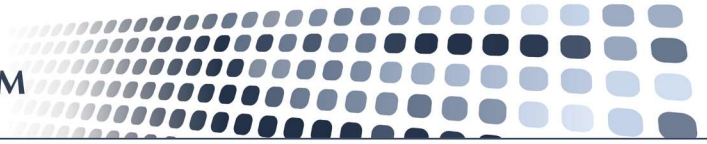
have really cause to fear each other' (Saint-Pierre 1714: 74-75). It follows from this that states are more *independent* the *less* they fear each other, as in his proposed European federation, when arbitration rather than force is used to settle disputes. Therefore, on this account, European federation actually strengthens, not weakens, state sovereignty. However, in common parlance what is more commonly meant by independence is the freedom to do that which one desires; and if independence is characterised in this latter way then surely his European federation does limit independence and thus does weaken sovereignty.

To fully understand Saint-Pierre's view - that dependency consists of fear - it helps to compare his federal sovereignty with Rousseau's concept of the general will. Rousseau says that when individuals form a civil society, via the social contract, they lose 'natural' freedom but gain 'agreed' freedom, for they all form part of the general will, i.e. the sovereign. Each individual may lose some advantages of natural freedom - the 'unqualified right to lay hands on all that tempts him' - but he gains 'Moral Freedom, which alone makes a man his own master' (Rousseau 1991: 263). Rather than

giving anything away, he makes a profitable bargain, exchanging peril and uncertainty for security, natural independence for true liberty, the power of injuring others for his own safety, the strength of his own right arm - which others might always overcome - for a right which corporate solidity renders invincible (Rousseau 1991: 281).

Individuals also gain equality - 'However unequal they may be in bodily strength or in intellectual gifts, they become equal in the eyes of the law, and as a result of the compact into which they have entered' (Rousseau 1991: 268).

The same can be said for the national sovereigns that leave the international state of nature to form Saint-Pierre's European federation, for the federation secures the rights and hence the 'agreed' freedom of the national sovereigns. They might lose their 'natural' freedom, but instead they gain all the advantages of a system of arbitration - true liberty, equality and safety. As Rousseau says, freedom 'would be forfeited, if lodged with a superior', but 'it is confirmed, when lodged with equals' (Rousseau 1991: 81). Therefore, as each national sovereign forms part of the federal sovereign, which is analogous to the general will, no national sovereignty is lost on joining the European federation.



Considered in this way, Saint-Pierre's remarks on dependency make more sense. In the international state of nature sovereigns feel independent, for there is no superior power to dictate and command. But because of the insecurity of the international domain, this independence, or natural freedom, does not amount to much because the fear that exists in the state of nature limits the actions of the state. For example, in a state of war the economy is less secure and substantial money needs to be spent on defence. On the other hand, in the European federation, each sovereign may not feel as independent, for there are federal laws limiting their actions with respect to one another. But these federal laws are the result of a process of arbitration in which each sovereign played as great a part as any other, for they all form part of the federal sovereign. Therefore, from a practical point of view, the state sovereigns have greater freedom than before. The consequences of peace - ease of commerce, freedom of movement, a vast reduction in arms budgets and so on - will help to relieve the suffering of the subjects and increase the wealth of the state. Therefore, federation strengthens rather than weakens sovereignty - the acceptance of the federal authority does not 'compromise national sovereignty more than the contract among individuals compromises individuality' (Perkins 1955: 264).

Turning to the EU, we see that one of the major arguments against its continued existence, advanced by Eurosceptics, is that membership of the EU weakens the national sovereignty of member states. In the UK the political party that directly advocates withdrawal from the EU actually calls itself the 'United Kingdom Independence Party' (UKIP) which, by its very name, is appealing to the view that somehow the UK, whilst remaining in the EU, is no longer an independent sovereign state (UKIP 2015). During their Brexit campaign this claim was central to their argument for a UK withdrawal from the EU.

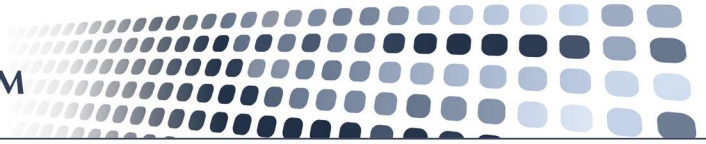
Saint-Pierre's analysis of sovereignty, as outlined above, can be used to argue against this Eurosceptic view, for in the EU all member states are part of the European sovereign and so their individual state sovereignty is in no way weakened. More explicitly, as all member states of the EU are represented in the European Parliament, they all have input into the formation of European law and thus any laws that are enacted are not forced upon any of them. What is particularly ironic in the case of the UK is that, due to the nature of its parliamentary system, it is actually *impossible* for its sovereignty to be limited. As Kellerman says, with respect to the UK, 'legislative sovereignty in Parliament, due to the



lack of a codified constitution, can never truly be challenged. No Parliament can restrict the sovereignty of future Parliaments, thus making any delegation of power to the EU voluntary and ultimately retractable' (Kellerman 2011: 1-2). The very fact that a referendum on membership of the EU is permissible in the UK shows that sovereignty ultimately lies with the British people and not with the EU. Furthermore, as codified in Article 50 of the TEU, 'any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements' (Bickerton 2013: 53).

However, although the presence of Article 50 of the TEU shows that state sovereignty is not, *in principle*, weakened by EU membership, it could be argued that it is weakened, *in practice*, due to the dire consequences that could befall a state if it were to leave the Union. As noted earlier, Saint-Pierre thinks that for his European federation to be stable it is essential that each member state fears the repercussions of acting against the union and so recognises that prudence dictates continued membership. Given his Hobbesian background he thinks that the only way this will happen is if the federal sovereign is strong enough to ensure compliance to laws by force. The EU is not of course grounded in Hobbesian political theory and any notion of holding the Union together by force is anathema to its fundamental principles. However, in the modern world there are other significant reasons for why a member state may fear the idea of leaving the EU and thus believe that self-interest dictates continued membership. One of the reasons used extensively by the Remain side during the Brexit debates was that leaving the EU would be financially damaging for the UK.<sup>XI</sup> If this is true then it could be argued that although membership of the EU does not weaken state sovereignty in principle (given the existence of Article 50), in practice it is weakened because, for financial reasons, rationality dictates that withdrawal is not an option. Furthermore, if this is not true and it is in fact in the UK's financial interest to leave the EU then, contrary to the claims of the Leave campaign, continued membership neither undermines sovereignty in principle or in practice.

However, even if we grant that by being a member of the EU state sovereignty is weakened in practice, the same can be said whenever there is an intergovernmental organisation withdrawal from which may have dire consequences for member states. Such organisations include the WTO, IMF and NATO. For example, NATO has 28 members and Article five of the NATO Treaty commits member states to mutually defend each other (McCauley 2008: 196). As Article 13 asserts that any state is free to leave the



organisation (McCauley 2008: 197) the sovereignty of member states is not, *in principle*, weakened by membership. However, in reality withdrawal from NATO could be seen as such a perilous thing to do that rationality dictates continued membership. Thus, fear of leaving does limit the actions of member states and so, *in practice*, membership of NATO does weaken state sovereignty.

Ultimately, in a globalised world, national sovereignty will, *in practice*, always be limited by an array of factors. One such factor, as important as any other, is international commerce and the necessity of European commerce to the success of his federation is not lost on Saint-Pierre.

### 5.5. European commerce

Saint-Pierre says that international commerce is in the interest of all states and the 'loss to the nations which are at war is the revenue derived from trade.' (Cooper 1974: 59). In fact, one of Saint-Pierre's main reasons for advocating European federation is because war is so detrimental to international commerce. He therefore proposes that for his federation to be stable there must be economic rules for fair commerce between the states and such rules will provide a great incentive for them to maintain peaceful relations.

Rousseau does not deny that the 'advantages resulting to commerce from a general and lasting peace are in themselves certain and indisputable' but, he goes on, 'being common to all states, they will be appreciated by none' (Rousseau 1991: 93). As was the case with individuals, he thinks that it is through *comparison* that states feel weak or strong. Given that all states benefit from international trade, they will all remain relative to each other weak or strong. But it is through inter-state commerce and communication that it is possible to compare wealth, and so commerce, rather than being conducive to peace, actually harbours reasons for war. He thinks that the only way to avoid comparison is to have self-sufficient states, and so he proposes that no state should be so populated that it cannot sustain its people (Rousseau 1991: 125). As he says to the Corsicans, 'no one who depends on others, and lacks resources of his own, can ever be free' (Rousseau 1953: 280), and to the Poles, 'pay little attention to foreign countries, give little heed to commerce; but multiply as far as possible your domestic production and consumption of food stuffs' (Rousseau 1991: 181).

In the age in which Rousseau was writing there may have been some wisdom in these words, for international commerce was not as expansive and integral to the everyday lives



of citizens as it is in the present day (Persson and Sharp 2015). However, in a world where consumer demands go way beyond that needed for basic subsistence, national self-sufficiency is not an option. For example, modern consumer products such as mobile phones and computers are dependent upon international trade because the total resources needed to produce them do not exist in any one state.

In terms of the EU, one of the main reasons for its success in maintaining peace in Europe is due to the mutual economic benefits felt by member states. The single market has allowed free trade and movement of labour making European commerce easier and therefore cheaper. Any member state that leaves the EU will have to negotiate its own trade agreements both with the EU and the rest of the world and, once established, prudence will dictate adherence to their terms in order to avoid financial difficulties (Springford and Tilford 2014). In the debate over Brexit the Remain campaign claimed that such agreements are more advantageous for the UK within the EU (Britain Stronger in Europe 2016) whilst the Leave campaign claimed that individualised trade agreements would be the most beneficial (Better Off Out 2016). Judging by the lack of progress in the Brexit negotiations (as of July 2018) it is likely that it will be a long time before any firm conclusions on this issue can be drawn.

## 6. Conclusion

As we have seen in this article, in many important respects the sort of European federation that was proposed by Saint-Pierre is very different from the modern EU but, on the other hand, there are many similarities and this is why it is so interesting to compare the two projects from such different periods of history. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European international relations did approximate a Hobbesian state of nature and, as Rousseau put it, perpetual peace seemed like an ‘absurd dream’ (Rousseau 1991: 129). Kant suggested that the only reason Saint-Pierre had been ridiculed by subsequent philosophers was because he had ‘thought that its realisation was so imminent’ (Kant 1991: 47); for Saint-Pierre had thought it could be achieved within six months. However, Kant did acknowledge that such a project was something to pursue in the future, when the time was right.

It was perhaps Voltaire who had an idea as to when this right time might be. He said ‘the sole means of rendering peace perpetual among men is then to destroy all the dogmas



that divide them, and to re-establish the truth which unites them; that is what perpetual peace really is' (Riley 1974: 192). However, he believed that when the citizens of European nations had reached such a level of enlightenment, no European federation would be required to maintain peace because there would be no one with an interest in war anyway. Nonetheless, he did acknowledge that some form of European Assembly ('diète européenne' (Voltaire 1785: 1)) could be useful for 'extraditing criminals, in settling commercial questions, in resolving conflicts between different national laws in international dealings' (Riley 1974: 192).

Arguably European international relations remained Hobbesian for 180 years after Voltaire wrote these words and only began to change in character in the 1950s when the first EU treaties were signed. What was critical to this, however, was that the signatories of these treaties were only from states that had institutions that enshrined the beliefs that Voltaire claimed were necessary for true peace to be achieved. Of course, the EU has subsequently developed way beyond Voltaire's proposed European Assembly, for EU member states are far more integrated than he thought would be required to maintain peace, and perhaps this is where Voltaire was naïve. Maybe closer political union is required in order to prevent a return to a Hobbesian international order even amongst so called enlightened states.

It is too early to say what long-term affect the Brexit referendum will have on the EU and on the UK itself but the success of the Leave campaign has raised many issues that go right to the heart of the Union. The Brexit debates focussed heavily on issues such as immigration, economics, state sovereignty and nationalism and what we have seen in this article is that many of the arguments used by the Eurosceptics against the EU have been around, in some form or other, for centuries. Originally proposed by such philosophers as Rousseau, Kant and Voltaire they were formulated in order to show why an abstract political proposal, made by an obscure French Abbot, would never work in practice. Present day Eurosceptics are, on the other hand, using similar arguments against an actual existent institution. But what we have also seen is that there was a significant issue, the maintenance of peace in Europe, which was rarely touched upon in the Brexit debates, even though it was one of the main driving forces behind closer political unity from the outset of the European project. And it is because of this that it is worth revisiting the





writings of Saint-Pierre, and these other early writers on European integration, because for them peace in Europe is its ultimate aim.

One of the most vocal Eurosceptics, Nigel Farage, addressed the EU Parliament before the Brexit vote saying 'I hope it brings an end to this entire...[EU]...project and in a few years' time, we can be sovereign, democratic nation-states that work and trade together' (Farage 2016). Perhaps he would have done well to remember the other reason why the EU was established in the first place – to bring peace to Europe. As Saint-Pierre said, as far back as 1713 'Neither the balance of power nor Treaties are sufficient to maintain peace; the only way is by European Union' (Brown et al 2002: 398). The EU differs significantly from his proposed European Union but I suspect that had he been alive today he would have thought an institution such as the EU has certainly gone a long way to fulfil his ultimate aim of maintaining peace in Europe. Only time will tell whether a potential UK withdrawal from the EU will upset this aim.

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<sup>I</sup> Saint-Pierre had been a member of the French delegation which, in 1713, had successfully negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht that effectively brought to an end the War of the Spanish Succession (de Bruin & Brinkman 2013).

<sup>II</sup> It is unclear how seriously Rousseau took Saint-Pierre's proposal. Many subsequent philosophers assumed he was sympathetic, including Kant (Kant 1991: 47 and 92) and Voltaire, who called him an 'odd fool' for agreeing with Saint-Pierre (Perkins 1965: 93). More recently, both Wight (1996) and Waltz (2001) interpret Rousseau as a proponent of international federation. On the other hand Friedrich (1948) claims that Rousseau thought Saint-Pierre's project was ridiculous. Likewise, Hoffmann & Fidler (1991), Lafrance (1998) and Hinsley (2004) present the view that Rousseau was far from being an advocate of international federation.

<sup>III</sup> For more information on the treaty see Linda and Marsha Frey (2012).

<sup>IV</sup> See also Warrender (2000:18-22) & Gauthier (1969: 30-31).

<sup>V</sup> Hobbes likewise summarises his laws this way (1949: 55).

<sup>VI</sup> See also Lot (1989: 95).

<sup>VII</sup> Charles Beitz (1999) examines the conditions that lead Hobbes to conclude that the inter-personal state of nature will be a state of war and argues persuasively that the international domain is sufficiently different that the analogy of the individual and the state is inadequate (Beitz 1999: 27-50).

<sup>VIII</sup> See also Hinsley (2004: 35).

<sup>IX</sup> See also Petrovic (2013: 123) and Verdun (2007: 14).

<sup>X</sup> Although he acknowledges that, once peace is established, it will spread to enable peace between non-Christian states as well. (Frey 2012: 457). See also Goyard-Fabre (1998: 38).

<sup>XI</sup> A MORI poll in May 2016 showed that 88% of the UK's most prominent economists believed that a UK exit would be financially damaging (Ipsos MORI 2016).

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