

# Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 1992-93

Volume 20 Number 2

- 99 Charles Salman Phaedrus' Cosmology in the *Symposium*
- 117 Jeffrey S. Turner The Images of Enslavement and  
Incommensurability in Plato's *Meno*
- 135 Leonard R. Sorenson Rousseau's Socratism: The Political Bearing of  
"On Theatrical Imitation"
- 157 Hilail Gildin The First Crisis of Modernity: Leo Strauss on  
the Thought of Rousseau
- 165 John Farrenkopf Nietzsche, Spengler, and the Politics of  
Cultural Despair
- 187 Leah Bradshaw Tyranny: Ancient and Modern
- Book Reviews*
- 205 Will Morrisey *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas  
Jefferson*, by Robert W. Tucker and David  
C. Hendrickson
- 209 Christopher Kelly *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age*, by  
Grace G. Roosevelt
- 217 Terence E. Marshall *Political Philosophy*, Volume 1, by Luc Ferry

# Interpretation

- Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin, Dept. of Philosophy, Queens College
- General Editors Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987) • Howard B. White (d. 1974)
- Consulting Editors Christopher Bruell • Joseph Cropsey • Ernest L. Fortin • John Hallowell (d. 1992) • Harry V. Jaffa • David Lowenthal • Muhsin Mahdi • Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) • Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Kenneth W. Thompson
- Editors Wayne Ambler • Maurice Auerbach • Fred Baumann • Michael Blaustein • Mark Blitz • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo • Edward J. Erler • Maureen Feder-Marcus • Joseph E. Goldberg • Steve Harvey • Pamela K. Jensen • Grant B. Mindle • James W. Morris • Will Morrisey • Aryeh L. Motzkin • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G. Rubin • Bradford P. Wilson • Hossein Ziai • Michael Zuckert • Catherine Zuckert
- Manuscript Editor Lucia B. Prochnow

- Subscriptions Subscription rates per volume (3 issues):  
individuals \$25  
libraries and all other institutions \$40  
students (four-year limit) \$16

Single copies available.

Postage outside U.S.: Canada \$4.50 extra;  
elsewhere \$5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks  
or longer) or \$11.00 by air.

Payments: in U.S. dollars AND payable by  
a financial institution located within the U.S.A.  
(or the U.S. Postal Service).

---

CONTRIBUTORS should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th ed. or manuals based on it; double-space their manuscripts; place references in the text, in endnotes or follow current journal style in printing references. To ensure impartial judgment of their manuscripts, contributors should omit mention of their other work; put, on the title page only, their name, any affiliation desired, address with postal/zip code in full, and telephone. Please send THREE clear copies. Contributors using computers should, if possible, provide a character count of the entire manuscript.

---

Composition by Eastern Composition, Inc.,  
Binghamton, N.Y. 13905  
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co.,  
Lancaster, PA 17603

Inquiries: Patricia D'Allura, Assistant to the Editor,  
INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y.  
11367-0904, U.S.A. (718)520-7099

Grace G. Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 275 pp., \$44.95.

CHRISTOPHER KELLY

*University of Maryland Baltimore County*

The title of this book clearly indicates that the author's purpose is to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Rousseau's thought on international relations. Grace Roosevelt wishes to show that Rousseau presents both a way of understanding some of the distinctive features of modern politics (such as the phenomenon of a cold war) and guidance in a practical project of reform directed toward the promotion of peace. In addition, in appendices she provides new translations of Rousseau's principal writings on international relations: the "Summary" and "Critique" of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Project for Perpetual Peace* and an unfinished manuscript on "The State of War."

Rousseau's views on international relations have been examined by both students of international relations and activists in the past, although their interpretations differ sharply (pp. 8–9). Contemporary theorists of international relations, most notably Kenneth Waltz and Stanley Hoffman, view Rousseau as providing a rather useful paradigm of an understanding of international politics that traces the source of conflict to the system of independent states or (in Hoffman's more sophisticated account) a combination of this system and the internal constitution of existing states. These scholars do not see any basis for drawing optimistic conclusions from Rousseau's analysis. Peace activists at the beginning of this century rather naively saw a much more optimistic Rousseau and viewed him as a spiritual founder of the movement that led to the foundation of the League of Nations. Roosevelt's goal is to show that the more sophisticated understanding of contemporary scholars can be improved in a way that furthers ends comparable to those of earlier pacifists.

Roosevelt offers two sorts of evidence to support her rejection of the pessimism of the view of Rousseau given by contemporary political scientists: a significant discovery about the state of a manuscript and an interpretation of Rousseau's thought as a whole that sees works such as the *Social Contract* and *Emile* as suggesting solutions to the apparent impasse described by Hoffman and others. Roosevelt uses these elements to draw a new picture of a somewhat more optimistic, but not naive, Rousseau.

The story of Roosevelt's discovery is a fascinating one. As a result of careful reading and attention to details such as the different ways paper can be folded, she has solved a problem of Rousseau scholarship that has puzzled

editors for almost a century. Since their first publication in 1896, what have been regarded as a series of fragments collected under the title "The State of War" have been put in a variety of sequences. While working on a translation of these fragments for her book, Roosevelt noticed a pattern: an obvious transition had been placed at the beginning, what might be a beginning had been placed in the middle, etc. These observations caused her to think that it was time for another attempt at reordering. An examination of the original manuscript, made up of several folded sheets of paper, showed her that the incoherence vanished if the sheets were refolded. As a result of this ingenuity Roosevelt has been able to demonstrate quite convincingly that the supposedly disconnected fragments in fact make up a single draft of a section of an essay. On the basis of her discovery she has put together a new version of this manuscript. She has provided very readable, although not always strictly literal, translations of her reconstitution and Rousseau's works on the Abbé de Saint-Pierre.

In spite of the fact that the material in the newly constituted "State of War" is not new (the "fragments" are cited by Hoffman and others), Roosevelt argues that the sequence of ideas revealed by her reordering allow one to draw more optimistic conclusions from Rousseau's presentation. What others have read as a gloomy juxtaposition of justice in the abstract and the real practice of international relations, Roosevelt now argues can be seen as a harsh judgment of the actual state of international politics that prepares the way for a treatment of the principles of legitimate international relations which can be a foundation for reform.

While Roosevelt's intelligence and resourcefulness in making her discovery are admirable, it is clear that her case for Rousseau's relative optimism depends on something more than this reordering. Accordingly, her broader interpretation of his major works forms the bulk of her book. To begin this broader interpretation, Roosevelt shows that the distinctive features of Rousseau's presentation of international relations come from his criticism of his predecessors, most notably Hobbes, Grotius, Diderot, and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Her treatment of these criticisms shows them to be in accord with a tendency that Arthur Melzer has shown in his splendid book, *The Natural Goodness of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), to be characteristic of Rousseau's thought as a whole. Rousseau debunks his predecessors and contemporaries as being naively idealistic even when they appear to be cynical and hard-headed, but then goes on to claim that his own harder-headedness gives reason for an even more extreme idealism.

Thus Roosevelt finds Rousseau's optimism in what can be called his realistic idealism. Against Hobbes, Rousseau argues that conflicts between states are more destructive than the worst conflicts among individuals in the state of nature. As he puts it, the existence of independent states means that "living simultaneously in the social order and in the state of nature we are subjected to

the evils of both without gaining the security of either” (p. 35). This pessimism is mitigated by the accompanying assertion that the causes of war are not natural to humans but are the changeable products of social relations. Against Grotius, Rousseau rejects the attempt to limit war by relying on a modified natural law or law of nations. He argues that neither natural law nor customary practice provide any solid ground for placing limitations on war. Instead, Rousseau offers a new definition of war as “a relationship between things,” i.e., states, rather than among humans (p. 57). This new definition is meant to reduce a sense of hostility between the members of states at war and give a stronger sense of the proper treatment of noncombatants. It also extends the definition of war to cover periods of hostility in which there is no actual fighting—periods of cold war. Against Diderot, Rousseau argues that there is no abstract natural “general will” of mankind that can be appealed to automatically, but only more concrete general wills of communities that must be constructed. These more particularized general wills can be cultivated, extended, and made more effective in forming ties between peoples, however. Finally, against the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, he argues that it is foolish to expect rulers to bring about international cooperation out of an accurate sense of their genuine self-interest. Rulers cannot be expected to have such a sense, and it is not obvious that even if they did it would lead them to sacrifice their ambition and power to the pursuit of peace for their peoples. Nevertheless, international cooperation can begin from peoples and popular government. In short, while “realistically” claiming that civil society is more destructive than the state of nature, that there is no natural law or naturally operative universal general will that can be practically applied to international relations, and that most existing governments will frequently prefer war to peace, Rousseau also “idealistically” suggests that there are no intrinsic causes of warfare in human nature, that a general will can be consciously constructed by human effort, and that the proper education of individuals and whole peoples can produce a will for international cooperation.

Roosevelt seeks to show how Rousseau’s idealistic side can be put into practice with her interpretations of *On the Government of Poland* and *Emile*. She suggests, first, that these two works present alternative (and apparently mutually exclusive) strategies for the furthering of peace and, second, that ultimately they can be viewed as complementary or even as part of a single project. At first glance, and even after many subsequent glances, these two works stand very close to the opposite poles of Rousseau’s thought. In the former Rousseau offers a model of civic education based on giving the community a sense of a unique and exclusive collective identity. This model, which is suitable only for relatively healthy, or “backward,” nations, contributes to international peace by turning attention inward and away from expansion and domination. A nation formed on this understanding will certainly not be philanthropic toward other nations, but neither will it be aggressive. In a relatively large

country like Poland this policy will require an internal confederation, and it presumably could lead to the formation of defensive alliances even of the sort recommended by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. In *Emile* Rousseau gives the model of what he calls natural education of a sort that Roosevelt argues is a cosmopolitan or humanist education. She says, "Whereas the Polish youth can only be citizens of Poland, Emile will eventually be able to feel and act like a citizen of the world" (p. 165). Precisely because he lacks a strong attachment to his own country, an Emile can promote peace out of a generalized compassion that extends to the entire human race. In the end, Roosevelt argues that the attachment to a small republic can be viewed as a stage on the way to a more general attachment to the human race comparable to Emile's. Because such an attachment is not natural, it must be developed gradually through stages. In this interpretation of Rousseau citizenship will turn into cosmopolitanism "in the long run" (p. 181). The two poles of Rousseau's thought are not opposites, but merely complementary parts of the same comprehensive view and project.

Roosevelt's interpretation has much to recommend it. As mentioned above it reflects the constant and most seductive tendency of Rousseau's thought of combining sobriety and extreme idealism. Nevertheless, two sorts of questions must be raised about the accuracy of this interpretation before Rousseau's understanding of international politics can be judged. First, has Roosevelt accurately presented the different parts of Rousseau's thought? Second, has she drawn the same conclusions Rousseau does?

To the first of these questions the answer is, to some extent, yes. Roosevelt has given an intelligent and well-informed reading of both well-known and less well-known works of Rousseau. There, are however, a few confusions in her presentation. For example, in her treatment of civic education and the foreign policy of a self-absorbed republic she tends to make the common error of underestimating the positive function Rousseau attributes to the passion of *amour-propre*. For example, she says, "Rousseau would show in the great educational writings of his later life that any attempt to create new forms of political order based on real self-interest rather than apparent self-interest would require new forms of education based on *amour de soi* rather than *amour propre*" (p. 118). Furthermore she organizes her account of civic education around a distinction between the *amour de soi* of a nation that would lead to healthy self-absorption and the *amour-propre* that would lead to aggression (see pp. 132, 141, 145, and 150). In doing so she suggests that nations can be understood in terms of what is natural and unnatural for individual people. Rousseau presents the opposition between natural and social humans largely in terms of the opposition between self-absorbed *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* which takes its bearings from relations with other people. He does not, however, present a preservation of the natural self-absorption of *amour de soi* as an option for humans living in societies. Although *amour-propre* can be said without much exaggeration to be the source of virtually all the evils of civilized life, it should not be forgotten

that it is also the source of all the virtues of civilized life, that is of all human virtues except physical ones. Even in the “natural” education given to Emile the goal is to delay and then channel the development of *amour-propre*, not to prevent its emergence altogether. Consequently, the political goal for Rousseau is to channel *amour-propre* toward patriotism and pride rather than toward exploitation, conquest, and vanity. When her treatment becomes most specific and tied to particular texts Roosevelt recognizes that a “sublimated” *amour-propre* does play a positive role for Rousseau (e.g., pp. 136 and 163), but such recognition should require a substantial rethinking of the terms in which she presents foreign policy. It should be added that this rethinking does not necessarily mean changing the substance of her conclusions at all, although the inevitable preservation of *amour-propre* in human affairs means that even in the long run there will always be cause for worry. Rousseau consistently argues that all states, even the best ones, tend to decline.

A second reservation one might have about Roosevelt’s interpretation concerns her presentation of Emile’s cosmopolitanism as pointing in the direction of the pursuit of international peace. It is certainly the case that Emile is a cosmopolitan in a very strong sense, and that with *Emile* and his writings on the Abbé de Saint-Pierre Rousseau deserves the credit (or the blame) for engendering a certain variety of liberal internationalism. Emile is brought up to feel a generalized compassion for the entire human race rather than a narrow patriotism. Furthermore, he is well-traveled and, after his travels, is meant to maintain an active correspondence with like-minded people in other countries. The purpose of this correspondence is to cure him of local prejudices. To use the current expression, one could say that Emile thinks globally and acts locally. In Emile’s case, however, his cosmopolitanism serves the goals of local social life rather than his local social activism directly serving cosmopolitan goals. Emile does not work to make the world a better place, he works to make his neighborhood a better place. His narrow concern for what will benefit his family directly does not make him an opponent of efforts to further international peace, but it surely prevents even his generalized compassion from making him very concerned about what goes on in faraway places. For example, Rousseau gives no suggestion that Emile is very concerned about the plight of those captured and enslaved by the Barbary pirates until, in the sequel to *Emile*, he becomes one of their victims and participates in a slave revolt. Thus even the very cosmopolitan Emile represents a retreat to private life in the face of the unavoidable violence and injustice of both domestic and international politics. If one wishes to find activism for the sake of international goals in Rousseau’s thought, one must turn to Rousseau’s own literary activity rather than to the example set by Emile.

When she draws conclusions from her analysis, Roosevelt acknowledges that her own emphasis might well be rather different from Rousseau’s. When she summarizes Rousseau’s account of the options of the autonomy of patriotic

citizenship and the interdependence of cosmopolitanism, Roosevelt says: "Rousseau's heart was in the former choice" (p. 180) and concedes that he saw cosmopolitanism as a palliative for corrupt hostile modern nations which could not have recourse to the other, superior, option. The question of the nature of the preferences of Rousseau's heart is difficult one, in part because he revealed so much about the complexities of his internal experience. The *Confessions* and *Reveries* seem to show that he found his deepest satisfactions altogether outside of the normal options of either local or cosmopolitan political life. Be that as it may, Roosevelt identifies Rousseau's practical political preference accurately. Her own claim that Rousseau's writings show that these different options can be reconciled, that "patriotism and humanitarianism are not mutually exclusive in the long run" (p. 181), shows very clearly where her own heart is. It is to her credit that she points out some difference between Rousseau's preferences and her own. Because of such scrupulousness, even readers who disagree with Roosevelt will be able to learn from her presentation.

Do these reservations mean that Roosevelt has failed in her attempt to show an optimistic side to Rousseau's view of international relations? To a degree she has, in fact, been obliged to underemphasize several parts of Rousseau's understanding, for example his frequent denunciations of cosmopolitanism as it usually manifests itself. Furthermore, in his accounts of international politics, as well as his accounts of domestic politics, Rousseau strongly insists that cooperation can come only as a result of either a very strongly felt concrete identification or an extremely harsh use of force. Europe, for example, according to the Summary of the *Project for Perpetual Peace*, is "not just an idealized collection of peoples who have only a name in common, like Asia or Africa, but a real society with its own religion, manners, customs, and even laws" (p. 203; see also p. 97). Even this "real society," however, can probably be unified only by a combination of force and mutual fear of an outside threat. The relatively near future may show to what extent this real society of Europe is capable of a real unity and whether its peoples will benefit from it. Whether Rousseau would be optimistic about European unity after 1992 is hard to say; it is easier to say that he would have little hope for a unity extending beyond the bounds of a common culture.

These reservations stated, it is necessary to take note of Roosevelt's strongest point in support of her case. As she asks in her one italicized sentence of the book, "*Why, if Rousseau really thought the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's proposals were so dangerous, did he take such pains to have them read*" (p. 115). Rousseau originally undertook his task of editing the Abbé's writings on a variety of subjects because he had been asked to by a patron, but he says that he also had hoped to use the mantle of the Abbé's reputation as protection while boldly stating harsh truths to the French monarchy. He quickly realized, however, that observations that were tolerated when they came directly from a harmless, ineffective, idealistic dreamer with friends and family in high places,



would be looked at differently when they came even indirectly from a famous writer of republican sympathies. Even with his realization of the riskiness of his project, Rousseau did not abandon it completely and took care to see that the "Summary" and "Critique" would be included in editions of his collected works. This shows at the very least that he wished to spread disillusionment and skepticism about the current political order. In his followers this disillusionment and skepticism turned into either a complete rejection of politics in the name of private life or a hope for a radical transformation of political life that would allow for the fulfillment of the Abbé's dreams. As is the case so frequently with Rousseau, if not in his own judgments at least in those influenced by him, politics as it was traditionally understood is rejected out of hand and is replaced with a desire for an apolitical life or a transformed politics that will suffer from none of the traditional defects. By teaching us that politics has accomplished both too much and too little Rousseau has contributed to a climate in which we alternately expect too little and demand too much from it.

In sum, in her aim of demonstrating Rousseau's hardheaded optimism, Roosevelt has been only partially successful. In her aim of showing the important role that reflection on international relations had in Rousseau's thinking as he formulated his principles of political right for domestic politics, she is much more successful. Finally, by having the ability to read sensitively and the vision to refold a few manuscript pages, she has performed a permanent service to those who will now begin to take an interest in a too-long-neglected part of Rousseau's thought.