

The “anti Hobbes”? Montesquieu’s contribution to International Relations Theory

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Montesquieu is a central figure of political science as a forefather of sociology and as a theorist of the modern state based on the separation of powers, but he has long been ignored in the field of international political theory. However, he is slowly being rediscovered as part of a quest for the roots of liberal international relations theory. Most famous for his typology of political regimes, Montesquieu also sought to devise ways to civilise relations among states. This paper will show that in the same systematic way he explored the social, political and legal aspects of different political systems, he also exposed how they could ensure their international security.

Introduction

After the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, the American government articulated a neo-Wilsonian agenda aimed at democratising the “Broader Middle-East”. Rather than a generous self-denying effort to free the Arab and Muslim world from oppression, this policy was based on the belief that democracies seldom go to war with each other and that democracy promotes internal peace by channelling conflict through institutions. As misguided as this reshaping of the world may seem (Hassner, 2002), it is rooted in the idealism of the democratic peace theory.¹

The political influence of this theory is part of the contemporary resurgence of liberalism (Deudney, 2004) in the field of International Relations. Coming back out of the cold after the scathing criticism by Realists had branded it “idealistic”, the liberal theory of international politics has concentrated less on its normative aspects and has shaped concepts for an empirical theory of the reality of international relations (Battistella, 2003).

Part of the revival of liberalism is a quest for roots. While Realism has clearly claimed its forefathers among the great political philosophers (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes), international liberals such as Michael Doyle have only more recently decided to “go back to the future” to find the sources of a liberal theory of international relations (Doyle, 1986). The most obvious figure is Immanuel Kant, whose “Perpetual Peace” occupies a central position in the classical literature on

¹ And the reason why I'm so strong on democracy is democracies don't go to war with each other. And the reason why is the people of most societies don't like war, and they understand what war means.... I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace. And that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East, the broader Middle East, is to promote democracy” President George W. Bush, Press conference with Prime Minister Blair, October 3, 2005.

liberal peace. However, as Daniel Deudney convincingly argued, the roots of international liberalism can be traced back further to the Federalists and to Montesquieu (Deudney, 2004).

Most famous for his taxonomy of regime types and his theory of the balance of powers, Montesquieu wrote much about liberty. His contribution to the science of politics is important and complex. Like the writers of his time, Montesquieu did not think along the lines of a separation between “domestic” and “international” politics. This very modern distinction only emerged in the 19th century, when “external” or “foreign” policy came to be considered as essentially different from “internal” or “domestic” politics. Thus, Montesquieu is most often quoted for the domestic aspects of his writings but even though he is not a “superstar” of the philosophy of international relations, international politics, relationships between sovereign entities were one of his preoccupations. Still, despite a very recent rediscovery of Montesquieu’s writings on empire² he remains largely overlooked when it comes to the theory of international relations (Deudney, 2007).

My aim here is to bring to light Montesquieu’s contribution to the theory of international politics by presenting his writings in relation to those of an established thinker in the realm of international relations theory: Thomas Hobbes.

The choice of Hobbes as a counterpoint to Montesquieu is evident, indeed not only is Hobbes a key thinker in international relations theory, but Montesquieu himself presented his seminal work *L’esprit des lois*, as a rebuttal to his English predecessor.

Simone Goyard Fabre identified Montesquieu as being the anti-Hobbes (Goyard-Fabre, 1973), and it is undeniable that Montesquieu belongs to a long post-Hobbesian tradition of refutation of the political theory of the author of the *Leviathan*. Indeed, Montesquieu criticised Hobbes openly in *L’esprit des Lois*, going so far as to express his intent “to attack the system of Hobbes” in his *Défense de l’Esprit des Lois* (Montesquieu, 1964: 809).

Hobbes and Montesquieu differed most notably on the idea of natural law, Hobbes claiming there is no higher standard than those established through positive law and Montesquieu, despite his reputation as a relativist, referring to natural law as a normative notion. Montesquieu is less pessimistic than Hobbes in his perception of the state of nature. Where Hobbes considered the state of nature to be a state of war amongst individuals, Montesquieu admitted that it could degenerate into a state of violence but that the first instinct of humans was not domination. I would argue that Hobbes and Montesquieu also differ, as a consequence of their ontological differences, in their conception of relations among states.

Hobbes and the realist tradition in international relations theory

Builder of the first theory of the state, Thomas Hobbes is a central figure of international relations theory today. Although he didn’t have much to say about international relations directly, his writings

² See for example the recent *Montesquieu et l’Empire*, Revue Montesquieu numéro 8, 2005-2006.

are, rightly or wrongly, a corner stone of realist international theory. His observations about the necessity of survival, the anarchy of the state of nature, the inherent competitiveness and conflict of relations among individuals can all be translated to inter-state relations. Hobbes is definitely in the pantheon of the philosophers of international relations. One need only note that he is the classical author most quoted, just before Kant, in the major study by Dario Battistella, *Theories des relations internationales* (Battistella, 2003). On the other hand, Montesquieu's writings on war and peace have long been ignored by international theorists, even if they are slowly being discovered as part of a recent interest in the contribution of republicanism to international political theory³.

As Martin Wight (1968) has famously observed, few classical authors truly concerned themselves with international relations. Hobbes is clearly one of those as his writings on the specific issue of international politics are but a few paragraphs in his major work the *Leviathan*. However, Robert Jackson convincingly argues that Martin Wight's remark on the absence of a classical theory of international relations is based on an overly rigid distinction between domestic and international politics (Jackson, 1996). Jackson considers, rightly I believe, that despite certain evident differences between the domestic and international aspects of politics, they are

two branches of one overall political theory which is fundamentally preoccupied with the conditions, arrangements and values of organised political life on the planet Earth (Jackson, 1996:204).

Therefore, even if most classical theorists have written little about international relations as such, their political theory often holds teachings that, although not being explicitly concerned with inter-state relations, in fact can be building blocks for a classical theory of international relations. This is the case for both Hobbes and Montesquieu, even though Hobbes' contribution to IR theory is widely acknowledged and that of Montesquieu is still largely undiscovered.

Thomas Hobbes' pre-eminence today is based on his empirical realism which projects onto state actors the behaviour of egoistic individuals. From this stems the basic tenet of realism: that the rationale behind the behaviour of every state is the maximising of its national interests. His conceptions of the nature of man and of international politics are both based on his fundamental anthropological pessimism. In chapter XIII of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines his state of nature as the famous *Homo homini lupus*. He reaches this conclusion based on the fact that men are naturally equal and that they are driven by egoism. In the absence of government this leads to a state of war of all against all.

Hereby it is manifest 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 (Hobbes 2008, 82).

³ See for example the work of Daniel Deudney (Deudney, 2007) or Nicholas Onuf (Onuf, 1998)

In Hobbes' state of nature, men find themselves in a state of anarchy, understood as the absence of authority and order. The violent nature of this state of anarchy, the war of all against all, is the determinant aspect of Hobbes' political philosophy which it is a theory of survival. The aim of the social contract, of accepting hierarchy and the power of the sovereign, is to escape the inescapable and universal danger presented by anarchy. Hobbes' pre-social state of nature is a hypothetical tool which legitimizes the power of the state as a means of to achieve security for individuals. In Hobbes' political theory, the social contract stems from the need to end the violence and instability of the state of nature.

His theory of government presented in his *Leviathan* was an answer to the chaos of the English civil war. Faced with the reality of civil conflict, Hobbes aimed his writing at solving the main issue of his time: the threat of anarchy. In the 1640's, the English civil war led to the execution of Charles I while the power of the monarch in France was under increasing threat which would culminate in the revolt of the Fronde in 1648. At the end of the 16th century, the Frenchman Jean Bodin had formulated the first theory of absolutism as an answer to the religious civil-wars that plagued France (Bodin, 1579). Faced with the threat of chaos and destruction, Thomas Hobbes also found a solution in a strong central power that would ensure the peaceful coexistence of men within a state. Absolute power of a sovereign was the only way out of the dangerous state of nature.

Hobbes also considers that there is a fundamental difference between domestic politics organized through the social contract and characterised by hierarchy, and international politics that remain in a state of anarchy.

There is no hierarchy in international relations and states remain in a state nature:

yet in all times kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbours, which is a posture of war. (Hobbes, 2008: 83)

This anarchy among states leads to war for three reasons based in human nature: rivalry, fear and pride which push men towards aggression for profit, security or reputation. Hobbes' conception of inter-state relations is constructed around the empirical observation of the international system marked by anarchy as well as his pessimistic anthropological understanding of human nature. The international system does not permit the restraint of superior power over the states and thus the destructive passions of men remain a constant risk to peace. The absence of world government means that international politics are dominated by power and state interests. These are of course the main tenets of realism today.

Both the domestic and the international aspects of Thomas Hobbes' political theory are steeped in the powerful emotion of fear. Not only did he live in insecure times marked by political instability, but he also built his personal story around the fact that he had been born prematurely, because, he

alleged, his mother had given birth after hearing the terrifying news of the invasion of the Spanish Armada (Donnelly, 2000). But Hobbes' fear is rooted in the political situation of his time, the political upheavals and instability with the destruction and loss of life that went with them and that ultimately led to the birth of the modern state.

A century later, when Montesquieu wrote *L'esprit des Loïs*, the major concern of theorists had shifted away from anarchy and was no longer the fear of absence of power but rather the fear of power itself.

Montesquieu, the anti-Hobbes

During the 18th century, as Judith Shklar wrote: "Empire was on the agenda of every European state" (Shklar, 1990: 267). The great European powers were ruled by strong monarchs whose authority was not only uncontested but believed to be divine. Instability no longer came from civil wars but from imperialism. The century opened with the war of the Spanish succession¹ and ended in the "global" Napoleonic wars. The traditional struggles for domination had expanded from the European continent into the New World⁴. In the first years of the century, France and its Sun King attempted to establish its hegemony over the continent in the War of the Spanish Succession. Montesquieu was a witness to the destruction brought about by Louis XIV's quest for power and was very aware of the negative effects of expansionist policies.

In 1727, he wrote a short work on "Universal Monarchy in Europe" whose publication he chose to interrupt for fear that his implicit condemnation of the corruption of the French monarchy and its subsequent imperial policy would be "misunderstood" (Montesquieu, 2000). In this essay, Montesquieu links despotism with a spirit of conquest and expansion and goes on to describe why Europe's situation at the time made politics of expansion on the European continent impossible. His arguments against conquest and expansion are less ethical and more pragmatic than those of other Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke. First of all he explains how progress in military engineering has made conquest nearly impossible (Montesquieu, 2000: 25). He also exposes how the moral evolution in Europe means that conquest is no longer economically satisfying. Montesquieu states that the *jus gentium* has changed since the time of the Roman Empire and that pillages and massacres among European countries are no longer morally acceptable. This moral impossibility of pillage has made conquest too expensive and the spoils too meagre for it to be a worthwhile practice (Montesquieu, 2000). Montesquieu also highlights the risk of overstretching and considers that moderate

⁴ The first of the French and Indian wars (King William's war) had started in 1689 and Queen Anne's War (1702-1713) took place at the same time as the war of the Spanish Succession and was another battle field of the global struggle between France and England. The last of the general European wars caused by Louis XIV's efforts to extend French power, the war of the Spanish Succession lasted from 1701 to 1714. The main protagonists were France, Spain and Bavaria, opposed to England, Holland and the German states.

governments require medium size states. Montesquieu's fear was not anarchy but its contrary: extreme hierarchy or absolute power.

The quest for security is considered today as the main objective of foreign policy by realists. This is, as we have shown above, a legacy of Thomas Hobbes. However, security was also the main concern of Montesquieu; it may even be considered as his central preoccupation. Indeed, Montesquieu's work is most often understood as a defence of liberty, an effort to understand and create the political mechanisms that guarantee freedom. But, in his short definition of liberty "political freedom consists in security" (Montesquieu 1979: 375), Montesquieu acknowledges the fundamental importance of security. Without security, liberty is impossible. However, and we touch here on the fundamental difference between these authors, Montesquieu understands security in a much broader sense than Hobbes. For the English man security is simply survival, whereas for the French man security is protection from the very arbitrary power defended by Hobbes.

This major difference can be explained by the deep transformation of European politics between the 17th century of Hobbes and the 18th century of Montesquieu. The key threat to peace was no longer the "growing pains" of centralised states but their expansionist ambitions. As has been mentioned above, Montesquieu belongs to a long line of Hobbesian dissenters. He explicitly presents *L'esprit des Lois* as an effort "to attack the system of Hobbes, a terrible system"⁵. Montesquieu's life work is a rebuttal of the theories of absolutism and a defence of moderation. His great foe was despotism and his writings were aimed at fighting against the growing absolutism of the French monarchy. As a member of the *Parlement* of Bordeaux, he defended the importance of subordinate political institutions that could moderate, or check, the power of the sovereign. Theories of absolutism undermined this role of intermediate powers and Montesquieu saw Hobbes as the most dangerous absolutist thinker of them all.

Montesquieu believed that Hobbes' theories were based on a misconception of the state of nature, of man's pre-social condition, he therefore set out, in Book one of *L'esprit des lois*, to present his own vision of the natural condition of mankind. He starts out by refuting Hobbes' idea that men naturally believe themselves to be all equal by stating: "In this state every man, instead of being sensible of his equality, would fancy himself inferior." He continues: "there would therefore be no danger of their attacking one another; peace would be the first law of nature" (Montesquieu, 1979: 92).

Montesquieu attributed to Hobbes the same conviction as Machiavelli, that human desires are never sated, and countered it with his vision of men as being timid creatures (Onuf, 1998). However, the peacefulness of the state of nature gives way to the aggression of man in society. According to Montesquieu, once men live in society they lose their natural fear and the state of war begins:

As soon as man enters into a state of society he loses the sense of his weakness; equality ceases, and then a state of war commences. Each particular society begins to

⁵ Montesquieu, *Défense de l'esprit des lois*, op.cit.

feel its strength, leading to a state of war between different nations. (Montesquieu, 1979: 93)

Despite the clear differences between Hobbes and Montesquieu's conceptions of the state of nature, I would argue that another major difference between both authors lies in their methodology. Thomas Hobbes' theory is universalistic and has a holistic quality, whereas Montesquieu, as a forerunner of sociology, was an empiricist and sought to find the fundamental laws of various social systems.

While Montesquieu did describe a state of international politics dominated by conquest, imperial ambitions and war, this was only the case in a world of despotisms. Following his famous typology of political regimes he saw three different international systems: the extreme of anarchy or hierarchy among countries ruled by despots; a system of mutual deterrence and growing interdependence among monarchies; and finally a world of peace among republics united by the pooling of their federative power. As this article aims at bringing to light Montesquieu's contribution to the philosophy of international relations, I will show that Montesquieu did not only oppose Hobbes in the realm of domestic politics but also sought to offer an alternative to the very Hobbesian international system based on the power politics of absolute sovereigns.

Throughout his work it is evident that Montesquieu foremost objective is to avoid despotism which he sees as the state of limitless and violent power. All his constitutional principles aim at limiting power domestically.

But this principle of moderation and security can also be found in the "international" aspect of his political theory. Indeed, unlimited power in inter-state relations is also a threat to the security and rights of individuals. The chaos of the wars and conflict brought on by the boundless ambitions of despots has a negative impact on the lives of their own citizens, as well as those in neighbouring countries. Besides the evident loss of life, limb and property, Montesquieu sees longer lasting adverse effect of war. Domestically, the conquering power is economically ruined and dominated by a military spirit while the conquered territories live under the unjust rule of the conqueror (Montesquieu, 2000).

In the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu classifies political regimes according to size and mode of government. According to his taxonomy, republics are small, monarchies medium-sized and despotisms extended. In a rather deterministic way, Montesquieu attempts to establish absolute causality between size and the degree of moderation of the government. This causal link between extent of territory and regime type is made clear when Montesquieu states that there is a connection between the power of the sovereign and the distance between the capital and the borders of the country (Montesquieu, 1979: 294). He states it even more clearly in chapter 20 of Book VIII of *L'esprit des Lois*:

If it be, therefore, the natural property of small states to be governed as a republic, of middling ones to be subject to a monarch, and of large empires to be swayed by a despotic prince; the consequence is, that in order to preserve the principles of the

established government, the state must be supported in the extent it has acquired, and that the spirit of this state will alter in proportion as it contracts or extends its limits. (Montesquieu, 1979: 280).

Thus, a political regime is not stable over time but varies according to the size of the territory. The causal link is absolute. A republic is small; a monarchy of medium-size and despotism rules over extended territory. The larger the state, the stronger the central power must be in order to ensure that its authority is respected. As size grows so must the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual.

L'esprit des Lois is built around the three regime types of republics, monarchies and despotisms. Not only does Montesquieu present the principles of each government in book III, but he goes on to explain how the social system should be organised according to these principles. He then focuses on the ways in which each regime type deals with offensive and defensive force in books IX and X respectively. In these fairly short chapters, he develops the main precepts of his thoughts on international politics and security: the very strict limitation of war and the fact that security strategies vary from one regime-type to the other.

Civilising international relations:

Despotism is Montesquieu's greatest fear; the aim of his political theory and constitutional principles is to avoid it. Political liberty can only be found under moderate governments (Montesquieu, 1979: 324). Moderation is Montesquieu's path to liberty. Despotism is the epitome of unlimited power. Indeed, "a despotic government (is) that in which a single person directs everything by his own will and caprice" (Montesquieu, 1979: 88). The despot has no rules by which he is bound and his power is limitless. Despotism holds sway over vast expanses of territory; it is the only way in which Montesquieu envisages the government of an extended territory.

The governing principle of despotism is fear. Fear of the subjects who dread the acts of the despot and fear of the despot who worries that he might be overthrown. This fear of a "coup" has a direct impact on a despot's security strategy. A despotic leader cannot take the risk of having strong generals and armies garrisoned at the borders of the empire. If left to their own devices these could choose to overturn his authority and take power themselves. Montesquieu observes this in Book IX, chapter 6: "despotic governments are afraid of them (fortresses). They dare not entrust their officers with such a command, as none of them have any affection for the prince or his government." (Montesquieu, 1979: 293)

Thus, in order to satisfy his greed but also in order to maintain control over his troops, a despot can only ensure the safety of his empire through a policy of perpetual expansion and conquest. To secure the heart of the empire, imperial rulers expand and destroy in order to eradicate any foreign threat ("They sacrifice a part of the country; and by ravaging and desolating the frontiers they render

the heart of the empire inaccessible” (Montesquieu, 1979: 292)). Empires then face a security dilemma since the more they expand, the more vulnerable they become and the more the central power needs to be strong to ensure the unity of the territory. Also, the more extended the borders, the more external threats there are since “the increase of territory obliges a government to lay itself more open to an enemy” (Montesquieu, 1979: 293)).

Expansion is the way to security for empires but this belligerent attitude is self-renewing. Each expansion increases the power of the despot who becomes increasingly ambitious. And each expansion brings new security threats that need to be dealt with through further extension of the empire. In order to ensure its security, an empire is a permanent threat to its neighbours since it must be in constant expansion. Montesquieu considers that despots are so belligerent and violent in their conquests that they do not wage war (which entails respecting the rules of war) but simply destroy and devastate. As a consequence, a world of despotisms or empires is a world of arbitrary violence and chaos. It is the state of nature described by Hobbes in the *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 2008).

Montesquieu then presents the international relations of monarchies and republics. In his presentation of the international aspects of these moderate regimes, Montesquieu sets forth a number of ways in which international politics can be civilised and moderated in order to ensure security.

a) Knowing the boundaries: preserving liberty through territorial moderation

According to Montesquieu’s mathematical equation between size and the degree of moderation, a monarchy is at risk of degenerating into despotism if its territory becomes too extended. For that reason the first way in which a monarchy can ensure its security is by respecting its “natural borders”. The way of corruption for a monarchy lies thus in territorial ambitions. Montesquieu asserts that monarchies have “natural” boundaries, a statement that ironically will be used by the French in 1793 to justify their own territorial ambitions (Nordman 1998).

Montesquieu provides us with an abstract, mathematical way of calculating the optimal extent of a monarchy in chapter 6 of Book IX:

To preserve a state in its due force, it must have such an extent as to admit of a proportion between the celerity with which it may be invaded, and that with which it may defeat the invasion. As an invader may appear on every side, it is requisite that the state should be able to make on every side its defence; consequently, it should be of a moderate extent, proportioned to the degree of velocity that nature has given to man, to enable him to move from one place to another. (Montesquieu, 1979: 294)

He also gives a geographical definition of natural borders as “natural” obstacles to conquest and expansion such as rivers, mountains and seas. In doing it so, it is evident that Montesquieu is justifying the European territorial status quo as the best means of ensuring liberty: “In Europe the natural division forms many nations of a moderate extent (...) It is this which has formed a genius for

liberty that renders every part extremely difficult to be subdued and subjected to a foreign power” (Montesquieu, 1979: 525).

b) Peace through balance of power

Montesquieu is a realist as regards the appetite for power. The respect for the natural boundaries of the state must be in contradiction with the ambitions and appetites of kings. How then is a monarchy, whose “spirit ... is war and enlargement of dominion” (Montesquieu, 1979: 289) to maintain the territorial stability and moderation necessary to the survival of its freedom? The answer lies in equilibrium through a balance of power among monarchies. After the chaos of the war of the Spanish Succession, the treaty of Utrecht tried to replace the power politics of universal monarchy with a moderate political system based on the balance of power (Armitage, 2000). The idea behind this new organisation of the European state-system is the same one behind Montesquieu’s separation of powers: power must be divided in order to be limited and guarantee freedom. Rather than an impossible imperial peace, Europe’s stability could only be achieved if the power of each state deters the ambitions of its neighbours. The aim is a just equilibrium that avoids any one state becoming too powerful. Although Montesquieu doesn’t develop this idea as much as Hume for example⁶, he does refer to it implicitly when he writes that “and its (the monarchy’s) strength will remain entire, while pent up by the neighbouring monarchies” (Montesquieu, 1979: 519) and that “in Europe, on the contrary, strong nations are opposed to the strong This is the grand reason ... of the strength of Europe; of the liberty of Europe” (Montesquieu, 1979: 292). As long as a monarchy is prevented from expanding into an empire by the strength of its neighbours, it may avoid corruption.

Since the security principle of monarchies to stay within one’s “natural borders” is to be enforced through mutual deterrence, this implies securing the territory through military means. However, Montesquieu shares the general suspicion towards standing armies as causes for national debt and increased “military spirit”. Balance of power should then be based on defensive military structures such as fortifications and fortresses.

c) Trade as a tool for moderation and peace

Writing in the century of the global development of trade and commerce, Montesquieu sees another way in which a modern monarchy may ensure its security in a system of relations among states. Trade and commercial relations have rendered states mutually dependent. He summarises this when he writes of the “spirit of commerce” being “peace”, “two nations who traffic with each other become reciprocally dependent; for if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling: and thus their union is founded on their mutual necessities” (Montesquieu, 1979: 610). According to him, monarchies can ensure their safety through mutual deterrence and increased interaction through

⁶ See Hume’s essay *Of the Balance of Power* in David Hume (1994), *Political Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

trade. This international system of “check and balances” ensures the moderation of the expansionist appetites of ambitious rulers and thus preserves the equilibrium necessary to peace and liberty.

In his writing on the security of monarchies, Montesquieu developed two key components of international relations theory: balance of power, a staple of contemporary realist theory, and trade as a means of pacifying international relations, which is still a key element of liberal international relations theory.

d) Peace through federation

Finally, in a major development that was to become the cornerstone of the American constitution, Montesquieu offers the possibility of survival for small republics through federation. Republics were fairly rare occurrences in early 18th century Europe, but contemporary and historical examples demonstrated to Montesquieu that a republic must necessarily be small. Indeed, self-government implied assemblies and intense communication between the citizenry, both of which were only possible in small territories. A republic then is faced with the dilemma Machiavelli had so compellingly exposed (Armitage, 2002). In order to be free it must be small, if it expands it is no longer a republic. The deterministic importance of size and the direct causal link between size and political regime Montesquieu establishes, means that he shares completely Machiavelli’s idea that a large polity cannot be governed by republican principles (Armitage, 2002), indeed if a republic were to expand it would lose its virtue, as Rome had been corrupted by luxury. However, if a republic remains small, it is threatened by the greed and appetites of its neighbours. Montesquieu summed this up very neatly: “If a republic be small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it be large, it is ruined by an internal imperfection” (Montesquieu, 1979: 287).

Although Montesquieu shares the premise of the republican dilemma, his taste for moderation and balance means he disapproved of Machiavelli’s preference for ‘grandezza’ over ‘liberta’ (Armitage, 2002). The dilemma seemed unsolvable; how could a republic survive and remain free? Montesquieu wrote in times when an extended republic was not conceivable (Shklar, 1990).

Also, republics were no longer adapted to the modern world of the 18th century (Shklar, 1990). Apart from a few weak states such as Venice, republicanism no longer seemed a viable way of organising power in a world of larger states. Indeed, the 17th century had witnessed an acceleration of the consolidation of large European states and small polities had little chance to survive, let alone thrive, in this context.

In *L’esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu nevertheless offered a solution to the issue of a republic’s security. If a small polity could not survive alone without falling prey to its larger neighbours, republics should unite in order to ensure their survival. His model of a federative republic didn’t mean that republics should merge into a “super” republic, but rather that they should divide their sovereignty and pool their “federative power”. John Locke had defined this power in chapter XII, paragraph 146, of his *Second Treatise*: “This therefore contains the power of war and peace, leagues and alliances, and all

the transactions, with all persons and communities without the common-wealth, and may be called federative, if any one pleases" (Locke, 1988: 365)

Although he refers to the city-republics of Greece (Montesquieu, 1979: 288), Montesquieu's solution is qualitatively different from most of the leagues republics had formed in antiquity for military purposes.

Indeed, the pooling of part of their sovereignty means that the federation these republics enter into is more than a mere alliance. In a time and in a country where sovereignty was still largely considered to be unlimited, perpetual and indivisible, Montesquieu's division, albeit borrowed from Locke, was a great innovation. Not only does he divide "domestic" powers (legislative, executive and judiciary) but he also strips the republic of part of its sovereignty in order to combine it with its neighbours.

In a sense, in a time when the nation-state had yet to be born, Montesquieu foreshadowed the supra-national institutions of the 20th century. If there remains a debate over the level of integration Montesquieu saw in a federation of republics (he uses both the term "federation" and "confederation" as synonyms), he did consider that if each unit maintains the right to secede, there is also a right of interference for each part in the affairs of the other parts. Indeed, not only do the republics exercise their federative power collectively, they also surrender part of their domestic sovereignty since their fellow confederates can intervene in their internal affairs if there is a risk of corruption and despotism:

Should a popular insurrection happen in one of the confederate states, the others are able to quell it. Should abuses creep into one part, they are reformed by those that remain sound. The state may be destroyed on one side, and not on the other; the confederacy may be dissolved, and the confederates preserve their sovereignty. (Montesquieu, 1979: 287)

In fact, the Lycian league which he pronounced to be his favourite, shared taxation; had a federal court responsible for dealing with disputes among the members of the league; controlled communal land and trade rights; dealt with religious and economic questions as well as certain aspects of civil life. Its most distinctive feature was its representative government. The degree of integration of the Lycian league tended towards political integration, well beyond the simple need for defence (Kantor, 2006). The representative system the Lycian league used in order to ensure the participation of all its cities in the decision-making process is of utmost importance in the idea of a federative republic. Only through representation of citizens unable to participate directly in the deliberations could a republic maintain popular sovereignty and liberty while expanding.

Conclusion

In Montesquieu's federal solution, a world of republics would be governed by a cosmopolitan principle of shared sovereignty. In his writings on the federative republic, Montesquieu can certainly be considered to have laid the foundations on which Kant built his plans for Perpetual Peace (Kant 1983).

In his search for ways in which to avoid the dangers of a Hobbesian state of war among nations, Montesquieu laid down some of the key elements of contemporary international relations theory be it realist or liberal: balance of power, peace through trade and interdependence, and the seeds of cosmopolitanism later to be found in the various attempts at supra-national institutions of cooperation in the 20th century such as the ill-fated Society of Nations, the United Nations or even more relevantly the European Union.

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