



# The Law of Nations (Natural Law Paper)

*Emer de Vattel*

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## **The Law of Nations (Natural Law Paper)** Emer de Vattel

The great eighteenth-century theorist of international law Emer de Vattel (1714–1767) was a key figure in sustaining the practical and theoretical influence of natural jurisprudence through the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. Coming toward the end of the period when the discourse of natural law was dominant in European political theory, Vattel's contribution is cited as a major source of contemporary wisdom on questions of international law in the American Revolution and even by opponents of revolution, such as Cardinal Consalvi, at the Congress of Vienna of 1815.

Vattel broadly accepted the early-modern natural law theorists from Grotius onward but placed himself in the tradition of Leibniz and Christian Wolff. This becomes particularly clear in two valuable early essays that have never before been translated and are included in the present volume. On this philosophical basis he established what the proper relationship should be between natural law as it is applied to individuals and natural law as it is applied to states.

The significance of *The Law of Nations* resides in its distillation from natural law of an apt model for international conduct of state affairs that carried conviction in both the Old Regime and the new political order of 1789–1815.

The Liberty Fund edition is based on the anonymous English translation of 1797, which includes Vattel's notes for the second French edition (posthumous, 1773).

**Emer de Vattel** (1714–1767)  
was a Swiss philosopher and jurist in  
the service of Saxony.

**Béla Kaposy** is Professeur Suppléant of History at the University of Lausanne.

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