

# Kant and the necessity of peace

*"Perpetual peace is guaranteed by no less an authority than the great artist nature herself (natura deadala rerum). The mechanical process of nature visibly exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among man, even against their will and indeed by means of their very discord."* (Kant and Reiss, 1970, p. 108)

This strong statement by Immanuel Kant is placed at the beginning of the first supplement to the articles that should bring about perpetual peace. Kant describes the "end of history" not in terms of a distant utopia but as a necessity brought about by nothing else than human nature. This strong tone of determinism obviously provokes the uttermost reflex of opposition in the reader. This response paper reflects therefore on Kant's predictions (as the articles are in light of their necessity nothing less). How close are we to Kant's vision for a perpetual peace.

The starting point of Kant's theorising about peace are human beings themselves. The Kantian idea of humans being able to use reason and therefore to see the moral obligation to act upon the categorical imperative is in sharp contrast to their timely being and their imperfection. In order account for these shortcomings and to escape the state of Hobbsian warfare laws need to free human beings from savagery. (Kant and Reiss, 1970) This ideas find strong support by research conducted by Stephen Pinker, who ascribes the two-fold nature of man to evolutionary pressures towards more flexibility in reacting towards exogenous circumstances. (Gleditsch et al., 2013) The steady decline in violence of the last 350 years is attributed by Pinker to circumstantial change that dampens the more dangerous traits of mankind. Increased state building efforts, as theorised by Kant lead indeed to a reduction in violence in general. Broadly speaking the pre-conditions upon which the Kantian ideas were based seem to hold empirically. If the basic assumption of Kant turns out to hold, did he come to the right conclusions about the necessary end of war?

The following paragraphs will reflect on this question by examining the different articles. One of them tough can not be evaluate empirically. Article one that states the need to create peace treaties that end wards between states *forever*. The indefinite time frame of this article renders this it rather prophetic than predictive and makes a serious review therefore impossible.

Kant's claims indeed find strong empirical support although the underlying causal mechanism sometimes can be questioned. A good example for this is the second preliminary article which states the prohibition of territorial expansion. This plea for territorial integrity of states according to Zacher has been developed into an international norm leading to a starkly decreased number of wars. (Zacher, 2001) This argument needs to be questioned though. Among Western states this norm seems indeed to hold. Writing form the high point of Americas role as peacekeeping power (world police) Zacher's view seemed reasonable. In the light of current developments such as the annexation of Crimea it seems questionable that the

norm really sunk in as deep as Zacher would have liked it to be if not backed up by hegemonic US power.

Stronger positive evidence can be found if preliminary article five is considered: Elaborating on the use of the main achievement of the Westphalian peace Kant stresses the notion of territorial integrity. Indeed the sovereignty of states became one of the leading principles in international law and of massive importance in judging the legitimacy of state actions as for example evident in the R2P debate.

Also the last preliminary article supports Kant's predictions. Kant wanted to ban all means of warfare that lead to distrust and in turn to wars of extermination. Bringing this idea about the necessity to proscribe the most inhuman practices to a current equivalent mankind indeed achieved progress by banning and tabooing the use of weapons of mass destruction and reaching agreements about the non-use of other devices such as land-mines. Kant's prediction in this case turned out to be of extreme foresight.

The most notable set of predictions that support his claims are those made in the definite articles. Article stating that eternal peace requires all states to be constituted as a republic, meaning for Kant organised along the principle of separation of powers. This by the time purely theoretical prediction now a days receives strong backing by the democratic peace theory. (Bueno de Mesquita, 2017)

The second definite article proved itself to be equally strong in prediction. Stating that countries need to form a federation of republics in which interstate relations are governed by laws instead of force Kant correctly claimed that peace among these states can be achieved. Today we can see strong support for this thesis in the European integration process, that established a common binding legal framework among European states, that successfully established peace among them.

The three remaining articles have not experienced a significant improvement since Kant's times. The third definite article stating the right for universal hospitality is seen more as a guideline than as an established norm between states.

Also for the realisation article three that seems most utopian, the abolition of all standing armies, there is no evidence. The contrary is seen to be the case considering the totality of the two world wars that did not only use standing armies but rather mobilise complete societies.

Lastly the underlying reasoning of paragraph four proved to be correct and debt has been used in a number of wars to finance military expenditures and thereby increased duration and intensity of conflict the use of debt to do so is not regulated. In this regard we still fall short of Kant's predictions.

In conclusion it can be said that Kant's self enforcing perpetual peace is gaining ground. Often at least norms have been established that entail the spirit of Kant's ideas. The world-region that comes closest to his ideal is Europe that in the European Union created a federation of free democracies whose relations are governed by law. This example shows that Kant's ideas were not utopian. On the other hand we still fall short in many regions of the world to achieve a universal Kantian state that relies heavily on the ability of states to effectively monopolise power.

## References

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