

**KANT ON THE ‘GUARANTEE OF PERPETUAL PEACE’ AND  
THE IDEAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS****Lucas THORPE\*****ABSTRACT**

The ideal of the United Nations was first put forward by Immanuel Kant in his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*. Kant, in the tradition of Locke and Rousseau is a liberal who believes that relations between individuals can either be based upon law and consent or upon force and violence. One way that such the ideal of world peace could be achieved would be through the creation of a single world state, of which every human being was a citizen. Such an ideal was advocated by a number of eighteenth century liberals. Kant, however, rejects this ideal and instead argues that the universal rule of law can be achieved through the establishment a federation of independent states. I examine the relevance of Kant’s arguments today, focusing on two questions: Firstly, as advocates of the rule of law, why advocate a federation of independent nations rather than a single world state. Secondly, is this ideal realizable? Is Kant right to think that republics are natural and are likely to live peacefully with one another? Kant’s arguments on this issue have been taken up again in recent decades by defenders of the theory of the “democratic peace”, the theory that democracies are more likely to live at peace with one another.

**Keywords:** Kant, Hobbes, Peace, War, International Law

**KANT, EBEDİ BARIŞIN GARANTİSİ ve BİRLEŞMİŞ  
MİLLETLER İDEALİ ÜZERİNE****ÖZET**

Birleşmiş Milletler ideali ilk olarak İmmanuel Kant’ın 1795 yılında yazdığı *Ebedi Barış* adlı makalesinde ortaya konmuştur. Kant, liberal gelenekten gelen Locke ve Rousseau gibi, bireyler arasındaki ilişkinin ya hukuk ve rıza yoluyla ya da güç veya şiddet üzerinden kurulabileceğine inanır. Bu türden bir dünya barışı idealine ulaşılabilmesinin yollarından biri, her bir insanın vatandaşı olduğu tek bir dünya devletinin yaratılmasıdır. Bu türden bir ideal 18. yüzyıl liberallerinin bir kaçı tarafından savunulmuştur. Kant, bu ideali reddetmekle birlikte evrensel hukuk yasalarına, bağımsız bir devletler federasyonunun kurulmasıyla ulaşılabileceğini savunur. Bu yazıda Kant’ın bu konudaki argümanlarının günümüzdeki geçerliliğine bakacağım. Bunu yaparken iki soru üzerine odaklanacağım: Birinci olarak, hukuk yasalarının bir savunucusu olarak, Kant’ın neden tek bir dünya devletini seçmek yerine bağımsız devletler federasyonunu seçtiği. İkinci olarak, bu gerçekleştirilebilecek bir ideal midir? Kant, cumhuriyet devletlerinin doğal olduğu ve barış içinde birbirleriyle yaşayabilecekleri yönünde ortaya koyduğu argümanlarında haklı mıdır? Kant’ın bu konudaki argümanları, demokratik devletlerin birbirleriyle barış içinde yaşamalarının daha muhtemel olduğunu kabul

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eden “demokratik barış” teorisi savunucuları tarafından günümüzde tekrar kullanılmaya başlanmıştır.

**Keywords:** Kant, Hobbes, Barış, Savaş, Uluslararası Hukuk

### **The Foundation of the United Nations and *Perpetual Peace***

The United Nations was founded at the end of the second world war with the primary goal of establishing world peace and international security. The Preamble to the Charter, signed in June 26 1945 in San Fransisco by representatives of 50 Nations, states the following :

WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
DETERMINED

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has bought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom

This preamble makes it clear that the primary aim of the United Nations was, and is, the maintenance of international peace and security. But it is also determined to (a) support human rights, (b) maintain international law and (c) promote economic development. These three activities should not be seen as separate and independent goals but were and should be regarded as integral to the achievement of the primary aim of achieving international peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

This ideal of a United Nations was not new. It was first put forward exactly 150 years before the charter was signed by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant in his essay *Perpetual Peace* which was published in 1795. In this essay Kant argues that, “[n]ations, as states, can be appraised as

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<sup>1</sup> In addition it should be noted that the preamble not only affirms the rights of individuals, but also the rights of states, and this notion of states as well as human individuals as having rights is reaffirmed in the second article that stresses that the “organization is based upon the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members”.

individuals, who in their natural condition (that is, in their independence from external laws) already wrong one another by being near one another; and each of them, for the sake of its security, can and ought to require the others to enter with it into a constitution similar to a civil constitution, in which each can be assured of its right. This would be a league of nations, which, however, need not be a state of nations” (1996, 8:353, pp.325-6, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> And I believe that the ideal we find presented in the preamble including the understanding of the relationship between the primary goal (peace) and the three subsidiary goals is essentially the ideal put forward by Kant. For, as we shall see, Kant argues that in order to promote world peace we must (a) encourage a respect for human rights, (b) maintain international law and promote the development of international institutions and (c) promote economic development

For Kant, the idea of world at peace is both a moral ideal and something he considers to be a realistic and achievable goal. I will begin in the first half of this paper by examining the way in which Kant thinks of peace as a moral ideal. I will then discuss the degree to which it is a realizable ideal, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a central section of the essay, Kant introduces the idea of what he calls a “guarantee” of perpetual peace. Kant’s claim here is often read as having to do with the historical inevitability of perpetual peace. I will argue, in contrast, that Kant’s aim in appealing to a “guarantee” of perpetual peace is merely to demonstrate the real possibility of perpetual peace. I will conclude the paper by briefly discussing, and rejecting, a Kantian case for liberal interventionism and regime change.

### **World Peace as a Moral Ideal**

For Kant and, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century liberals in general, peace is *the* political ideal: to live in peace with others involves more than not being engaged in open conflict but for one’s relations with others to be based upon law and right rather than upon violence or the threat of violence. Hobbes makes this point very clearly in *Leviathan*: “For WARRE, consisteth not in Battell only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known. . . So the nature of War, consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in all know disposition thereto. . . All other time is

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<sup>2</sup> And he continues by adding that the idea of a state of nations “would be a contradiction, inasmuch as every state involves the relation of a superior (legislating) to an inferior (obeying, namely the people); but a number of nations within one state would constitute only one nation, and this contradicts the presupposition (since here we have to consider the right of nations in relation to one another insofar as they comprise different states and are not to be fused into a single state)” (*ibid.*).

PEACE.” (Hobbes, p.185). And Hobbes believed that peace, defined in these terms, was only possible between individuals, be they individual human beings or states, if they were governed by public law. War is essentially a form of lawlessness. In this point all the major classical liberals, including Kant, were in agreement. Peace and law go hand in hand. The main focus of disagreement between them was on the nature of law and how it can be instituted.<sup>3</sup>

Kant was a strong universalist, believing that the ultimate moral community includes the whole of humanity. Thus, his ideal is that the relations between *all* human beings should be governed by law and not by force, for ultimately the human race constitutes a single society and hence the ideal legal system is one that encompasses all human beings. Now one way that such an ideal could be achieved would be through the creation of a single world state, of which every human being was a citizen. And such an ideal, of a world state, was advocated by a number of eighteenth century liberals, most famously by the Abbe Saint Pierre, who believed that for the whole human race to be ruled by law, there would have to be a single universal law and hence a world state.<sup>4</sup> Kant, however, rejects this ideal and instead argues that the universal rule of law can only be achieved through the establishment of a league of nations, or a world federation of independent sovereign states living at peace with one another. Thus Kant’s understanding of a peaceful global order involves a two-tier concept of law. We have national law which governs the relations between citizens within a state, and international law which governs the relationship between states. International law on this conception is not thought of as protecting or determining the rights of individuals, but merely as regulating the relationship between states.<sup>5</sup>

Now Kant rejects the idea of a world state not merely because he believes that such a state would be *impossible* to achieve, but also because the notion of a world state is ultimately *undesirable*. He has two main reasons for suggesting that a world state is unachievable. Firstly he is committed to the idea that the rule of law is something that can only be done

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<sup>3</sup> Kant, then, in the tradition of Locke and Rousseau is liberal who believes that relations between individuals can either be based upon law and consent or upon force and violence and his liberal ideal is the idea of a world of individuals living at peace with one another and he believes that this is only possible in a society governed by law.

<sup>4</sup> Such was the position of the Abbé Saint Pierre in his “Project for making perpetual peace in Europe” (1715), and given the title of Kant’s essay, it is clear that he had the position of the Abbé in mind in this work.

<sup>5</sup> International law, then, should be distinguished from what Kant calls ‘cosmopolitan law’ which has to do with how nation-states relate to non-citizens.

on the small scale, and that the larger the state the weaker the law. This is a claim proposed by Rousseau, and it is likely that Kant if following Rousseau in this. Such a presupposition may have been uncontested in the 1790s, given the speed of communications at those times, however it is less plausible in the modern world with near instantaneous communications. Secondly, however, Kant argues that cultural differences, and here he specifically, mentions religious and linguistic difference, make the achievement of such a global state impossible, as such state would likely be unstable.<sup>6</sup> His assumption seems to be that a certain homogeneity of citizens is necessary for the unity and stability of a republic. Once again, however, political experience since the time of Kant may offer some evidence against such a claim, for there do seem to be large multi-ethnic states that seem to be relatively stable. The USA seems one example of such a non-culturally homogeneous democracy. Although there is a single national language, and one may wonder about its long-run stability.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps an even stronger example of a non-culturally homogenous modern democracy is contemporary India where there is neither a shared single religion, nor a shared single language. But once again, it is not clear how stable multicultural India is.

The previous two concerns are about the potential stability of a global state. However, in addition to being worried that a stable global state is unrealizable, Kant also argues that a single world state would not itself be desirable. Firstly a single world state will lack the economic virility of a federation of competing sovereign states<sup>8</sup> and secondly, and more importantly he believes that a world state would ultimately be despotic and crush freedom. Thus he argues that:

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<sup>6</sup> Thus he argues that “Yet the craving of every state (or of its head) is to attain a lasting condition of peace in this way, by ruling the whole world where possible. But nature wills it otherwise. It makes use of two means to prevent peoples from intermingling and to separate them: differences of *language* and of *religion*” (1996, 8:367, p.336)

<sup>7</sup> Thus Neil Gross (2018) wonders “if trust in American democracy is eroding because the nation has become too big to be effectively governed through traditional means? With a population of more than 325 million and an enormously complex society, perhaps this country has passed a point where — no matter whom we elect — it risks becoming permanently dissatisfied with legislative and governmental performance.” I thank an anonymous referee to drawing the work of Neil Gross to my attention.

<sup>8</sup> He also suggests that a world system of peacefully co-existing republics would be more vigorous than a single world empire. Thus he argues that, unlike a “universal despotism that saps all man’s energies and ends in the graveyard of freedom,” the sort of world federation he envisions “is created and guaranteed by an equilibrium of forces and a most vigorous rivalry.” (1996, 8:367, p.336)

The idea of the right of nations presupposes the separation of many neighboring states independent of one another; and though such a condition is of itself a condition of war (unless a federative union of them prevents the outbreak of hostilities), this is nevertheless better, in accordance with the idea of reason, than the fusion of them by one power overgrowing the rest and passing into a universal monarchy, since as the range of government expands laws progressively lose their vigor, and a soulless despotism, after it has destroyed the seed of good, finally deteriorates into anarchy. (1996, 8:367, p.336)

Such a single world state, Kant suggests, would not ultimately lead to the rule of law but to world despotism. So Kant's primary worry about the idea of a global state is not ultimately about the feasibility of such an idea, but its desirability.

### **World Peace as a Realistic Goal**

So Kant's moral ideal is of a world of free and independent sovereign republics living at peace with one another. But he also argues that it is a realistic goal that we can hope to achieve. Indeed he argues that world peace is *both* a moral goal that any moral statesman should work towards *and* a state of affairs that could even be realized by a world of devils dominated purely by self-interest.

In International Relations, as a discipline, there is a sharp divide between *realists*, who believe that states are self-interested, power-seeking rational actors and that any cooperation between them can only be accidental and *idealists*, who believe that states can mutually gain from cooperation and that the international rule of law is both realizable and desirable. Kant is often regarded as the arch idealist and he clearly believes that we and our politicians, have a moral duty to do what we can to establish a lawful world order. However, there are strong realist, even Hobbesian strains in Kant's thought, for he also believes that "[t]he problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is soluble even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding)" (1996, 8:360, p.335) For "the problem is not the moral improvement of human beings but only the mechanism of nature, and what the task requires one to know is how this can be put to use in human beings in order so to arrange the conflict of their unpeaceable dispositions within a people that they themselves have to constrain one another to submit to coercive law and so bring about a condition of peace in which laws have force." (*ibid.*). And he adds that we can see such a principle working not just between individuals, but also between states.

Kant hopes to show us that many of the aspects of human nature that tend to lead to war and conflict are precisely those elements that also ground

the possibility of peaceful co-existence. In this aspect of his project Kant is clearly walking in the footsteps of that arch realist Hobbes. Hobbes had argued in *Leviathan* that the primary cause of conflict and war between individuals is the (reasonable) desire all of us have to be able to satisfy our goals both in the present and in the future. Thus, Hobbes famously claimed that “in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.” (Hobbes, p. 66). Hobbes is often misinterpreted here as claiming that human beings are primarily driven by a desire to dominate others, with this desire to dominate others being the major source of conflict between individuals. Now, while Hobbes clearly does not deny that human beings are often driven by a desire for glory and domination, this is not the point he is making here with this claim about the restless desire for power. For Hobbes is careful in his use of words, and explicitly defines ‘power’ at the very start of the previous chapter, where he argues that “[t]he POWER of a man, (to take it universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent good.” (Hobbes, p.58). Thus this should make it clear that what Hobbes calls the ceaseless desire for power over power just means the desire to ensure that we can achieve our goals both in the present and in the future. Each individual desires to satisfy not only their present desires but also to secure the means to satisfy their desires in the future. And in a world of limited resources, without public law this can only lead to conflict. Thus, as Hobbes famously argues, the state of nature, and by this Hobbes means the way things would be before law is instituted, is a state of war, and in such a state the life of man would be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short.” (Hobbes, p.84)

Hobbes believes, however, that the same natural facts about humans that lead us to conflict are also those elements of human nature that promote peace, for we can all recognize that the best way of achieving our interests is to live at peace with our neighbors, and that the only way we can do this is if we are willing to give up some of our claims if others are willing to do the same. It is rational, then, to submit to a law that forces us to renounce some of our desires on the understanding that our neighbors will do the same. But this, Hobbes thinks, is only possible given the existence of public law. Now once such law is in place, some of us might obey it for moral reasons, but if this doesn't do the job cold-hearted selfish rational calculation will. Kant takes this analysis and applies it to the sphere of international relations between states rather than the relations between human individuals, and, perhaps surprisingly for those who know a little about Hobbes and Kant and were taught that they represent two different ends of the scale, Kant agrees with Hobbes that the natural relations between states is one of war. Thus he argues that:

A condition of peace among men living near one another is not a state of nature (*status naturalis*), which is much rather a condition of war, that is, it involves the constant threat of an outbreak of hostilities even if this does not always occur. A condition of peace must therefore be *established*; for suspension of hostilities is not yet assurance of peace, and unless such assurance is afforded one neighbor by another (as can happen only in a *lawful* condition), the former, who has called upon the latter for it, can treat him as an enemy (1996, 8:349-50, p.322)

Thus Kant agrees with Hobbes that peace and law are not natural but need to be established or instituted. The state of nature, for Kant, like Hobbes, is a state of war. Now, Hobbes believed that the only way that the state of peace can be established is through the introduction of an absolute sovereign. Kant, however, believes that the existence of law does not require the existence of a sovereign, and this is why he thinks that global peace is possible without the existence of a global state. Rather than being guaranteed by the will of a sovereign, Kant instead argues that “[w]hat affords this *guarantee* (surety) is nothing less than the great artist *nature*” (1996, 8:361. 331)

Now many scholars have misunderstood Kant’s claim here. Suggesting that when Kant talks of a “guarantee” here he is making a claim about the historical origin of such a perpetual peace, claiming that somehow nature guarantees that a peaceful world of republics will eventually emerge. Thus, for example Luigi Caranti argues that “[i]n his political writings Kant often claims that the achievement of a condition of perpetual peace among nations is guaranteed by nature” (p.611), and he suggests this should be thought of as a “prediction concerning human history” (p. 612).<sup>9</sup> By ‘guaranteed’ here Kant does not mean ‘made inevitable’ and he is not offering a prediction about how human history will unfold. Instead he is concerned with offering an account not of the emergence of perpetual peace, but of its possibility. And there are at least two important reasons why we may doubt the possibility of perpetual peace, and the idea of nature as providing a “guarantee” is meant to address these worries about the possibility of perpetual peace.

The first worry is more political. For, as Wolfgang Ertl has pointed out, Kant’s text is

modelled on peace treaties and in a sense is meant to provide the ideal peace treaty – not restricted to particular wars, but addressing the cessation of war as such – the powers in charge

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<sup>9</sup> See also Ypi (2010),

of this guarantee are not of the usual sort. In ordinary peace treaties the guarantor powers try to ensure compliance with the terms of the treaty by virtue of threatening sanctions if the parties concerned disobeyed. (p. 2540)

So one worry concerning the possibility of lasting peace, rather than merely a period of time with no fighting, is that real peace requires something like a treaty and a treaty normally requires a guarantor, and it is not clear who or what could act as guarantor for the sort of perpetual peace that Kant hopes for, especially in the absence of a world sovereign. Kant's suggestion, is that rather than a particular party acting as a guarantor, the three conditions previously mentioned could themselves guarantee such a peace. And because these conditions could come about naturally it makes sense to say that in such a case the peace would be guaranteed by nature.

The second worry is more theoretical and involves Kant's understanding of what is involved the idea of something being universally the case rather than just generally true. Universal judgments for Kant have a certain necessity to them, and he thinks for any such necessity there needs to be a 'ground of necessity'. The reason why this is a worry is because Kant understands the "perpetual" in the idea of perpetual peace to involve some kind of universality or necessity, and so this necessity would require some sort of ground or guarantee. For Kant, we have only achieved *perpetual* peace if there will *always* be peace. And so Kant's worry is that although the idea of perpetual peace is *logically possible*, it is not clear that it is *really possible* unless we can show that there could be some ground of necessity that is really possible.

Now, one might think that it is clearly possible that for each moment in the future there was no war, and if this is possible then it is also trivially true that perpetual peace is possible. But for Kant, the fact that it is possible that in each moment in the future there could be no war, is not sufficient to show that *perpetual* peace is possible. This worry about moving from each judgment to always judgments is found elsewhere in Kant's corpus. Thus, for example, in an unpublished fragment Kant argues that, "[i]t is possible in *each* throw of the dice that I roll a six, and just as possible as every other result; but it is not possible for me *always* roll a six because that would require a ground of necessity" (2005, # 7170 19:263, p.461, emphasis added). The thought here is that unless there is some "ground of necessity", such as the dice being loaded, it might be possible for *each* throw of the dice to be a six for any arbitrarily large sequence of throws, but this is quite distinct from the claim that it is possible for *all* throws to be six. And this is analogous to the story Kant tells about perpetual peace: it is possible that at each moment in the future there is not war, but this does not entail that it is possible for there to be *perpetual* peace. To demonstrate the possibility of

perpetual peace we need to show the possibility of some *ground of necessity*, or what Kant calls a *guarantee* of peace.

In his footnote to the dice passage Paul Guyer writes that "Kant's present argument is fallacious: that it is not necessary to roll a six, does not mean that it is impossible to do so" (Kant, 2005, p.609). But, I see no reason to think that Kant's argument here is *obviously* fallacious and there at least two distinct motivations that might lie behind Kant's claim in the dice passage. The first appeals to insights found in intuitionist logic, the second to probability theory.

Firstly, Kant thinks that 'each' judgements do not entail 'all' judgments, for he thinks that 'all' judgments have a type of necessity that 'each' judgments lack.<sup>10</sup> Thus he is committed to the position that any 'always' or 'perpetual' judgment involves some appeal to a mechanism, function or ground that will guarantee the necessity of the "always".<sup>11</sup> His motivations here is similar to the type of motivations that led to the development of intuitionistic logic, and finalistic conceptions of mathematics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In classical logic the fact that there does not exist an  $x$  that is not  $p$  ( $\neg\exists x\neg Px$ ) entails the fact that all  $x$ s are  $p$  ( $\forall xPx$ ). In intuitionist logic this inference is not valid. So the intuitionist thinks that  $\neg\exists x\neg Px$  and  $\neg\forall xPx$  are consistent. And Kant, like the intuitionist, in both the dice passage and in *Perpetual Peace* seems to commit himself to the consistency of such judgments. One reason intuitionists in mathematics adopted such a position is because they thought that it was possible to prove that a property could fail to hold universally of numbers (for 'all' numbers) even though one could not construct a particular number for which it did not hold (for 'each' number one can find, the property holds).<sup>12</sup> We can apply

<sup>10</sup> I am interpreting such 'each' judgments as 'each and any judgments', which I will argue are best thought of as negative existential judgments.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps he is also thinking about issues connected to the relationship between a series, and what Leibniz called 'the law of the series'. While it is clear that for any arbitrarily large sequence of rolls it is possible that each roll is a six, it is not clear that this entails that it is possible to always roll a six. It is not the series of number  $1/2, 1/4, 1/8 \dots$  that converges on 1, but the function. We can only say that this series converges on 1 because there is a function 'behind' the series that makes the series 'necessary'. The three dots only make sense because we understand the function, which is that for each member of the series, after the first, the denominator is twice that of the previous member. Similarly, to say that we will always roll a six is to think of the series 6, 6, 6 . . . It is to think that not only that (a) each roll up to a certain point been a 6 (which for any moment is possible) but also that (b) every future roll will be a six. And that the thought 'every future  $x$  will be  $y$ ' involves the idea of necessity. And this is perhaps why Kant thinks it requires a ground.

<sup>12</sup> Thus Stewart Shapiro explains that, "intuitionists agree that the proposition  $\exists x\neg Px$ , entails the former  $\neg\forall xPx$ , but they balk at the converse because it is possible to

such a way of thinking to Kant's argument in *Perpetual Peace* and in the dice passage if we interpret the "each" statements here as negative existential judgments. So with regard to the dice passage, Kant accepts that it is possible that each role of the dice is six, which I suggest interpreting as the claim that it is possible that there is not a role of the dice that is not six ( $\neg\exists x\neg Px$ ). However, he thinks that this does not entail that it is possible all roles are six ( $\forall xPx$ ). In order to establish this, one would need a ground of necessity. Similarly, in the case of perpetual peace, the fact that it is possible that at each moment in the future there will not be war ( $\neg\exists x\neg Px$ )<sup>13</sup> does not entail that perpetual peace ( $\forall xPx$ ) is possible.<sup>14</sup> In order to show that perpetual peace is possible, one has to show that a ground of necessity is of such peace possible, and in this context he calls such a potential ground of necessity a 'guarantee of perpetual peace'. Secondly, there are also arguments from probability theory that have been used to support a conclusion similar to Kant's. For, standard probability theory tells us that the probability of always rolling a six is zero, and one might think that if something has a probability of zero it is impossible.<sup>15</sup>

One reason why this second worry is important is because one might think that it is obviously the case that it is possible that at each and any moment in the future there is not war, and one might think that this fact alone is enough to show that perpetual peace is possible, and so there is no need to provide any argument to prove the real possibility of perpetual peace. It seems clear that Kant accepts that it is possible that at each and any moment in the future there is not war. And so it is only because Kant is committed to something like the claim that  $\neg\exists x\neg Px$  does not entail  $\forall xPx$  that he thinks that we need to offer some argument for the possibility of perpetual peace.

I suggest, then, that Kant's appeal to a "guarantee" of peace in his essay is meant to address such worries about the possibility of perpetual

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show that a property cannot hold universally without constructing a number for which it fails." (p.9)

<sup>13</sup> "There isn't a moment in which there is not-peace"

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear how to interpret Kant's modal language here. Perhaps to explain this properly one would have to discuss modal intuitionist logic as the claim might seem to concern the consistency of  $\Diamond\neg\exists x\neg Px$  and  $\neg\Diamond\forall xPx$ . These are consistent in the intuitionist version of S4 developed by Biermann and de Paiva (2000). But I think one does not really need to go in to intuitionistic logic in order to understand the relevance of intuitionist logic and mathematics for Kant's position in perpetual peace. Perhaps one can understand Kant's modal talk in these discussions in meta-linguistic terms, rather than building it into the object language.

<sup>15</sup> There has been an interesting discussion of this question recently in Analysis. See, Williamson (2007) and Weintraub (2008)

peace, not to offer an account of its historical genesis. Kant's aim in perpetual peace is to show what mechanisms could lead to the establishment of perpetual peace and to show that such mechanisms could in principle be created by beings like us, indeed even by a "nation of devils" (8.366). If he can do this he can show that Perpetual Peace is both possible and he can give some indication of what future changes are likely to be necessary conditions for such perpetual peace. If he is successful in showing both of these things then he has successfully shown that the idea of perpetual peace can function as a practical ideal. Thus, what Kant means by introducing the idea of a "guarantee" of peace is that we don't need a world sovereign to guarantee world peace, for given certain conditions, namely the spread of democracy, the creation of international institutions and the globalization of trade relations, peaceful relations would be natural, and that these conditions could arise naturally, even given what we know of human nature. The emergence of such peace creating conditions is not however, inevitable. These conditions (and the peace they make possible) are not *guaranteed* to come into existence; but, Kant thinks, if they *were* to come into existence they *would guarantee* peace.<sup>16</sup> This is what Kant means by a "guarantee" of perpetual peace in this context.

Kant believes that there are three central philosophical questions: What can I know? What should I do? And, for what can I hope? When Kant suggests the world peace is something that could slowly develop through purely natural mechanisms he is neither being utopian nor arguing that world peace is the inevitable result of some laws of history carved in stone. Kant,

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<sup>16</sup> This distinction between two possible senses of guarantee is also noted by Henry Allison who argues that Kant uses the word simultaneously in both senses. Thus Allison argues, "A closer consideration of the guarantee, however, suggests that Kant's claim is not as audacious as it might appear and that the differences between the account in *Perpetual Peace* and other texts are more rhetorical than substantive. The so-called guarantee has two grounds, only one of which is teleological. The first, non-teleological, ground is the reflection that the problem of finding a just political order must be soluble, since it does not require any moral change but is essentially a matter of technical rationality. This is the point that the reference to the nation of intelligent devils (the counterpart to Rousseau's angels) is intended to underscore. But the fact that the problem is soluble for human reason does not of itself guarantee that it will be solved. Thus, the need for the second and properly teleological thesis that our nature, that is, our unsocial sociability, will compel the human race to find the solution. In short, the guarantee consists in pointing out that both capacity and motivation are present, which is sufficient to show that, contrary to the claims of the cynical political moralist, the end is attainable. Moreover, I do not think that Kant either intended or needed to claim more than this." (Allison, pp.226-7) My suggestion is that Kant is only using the notion of a guarantee in the first of these senses.

on my reading is not a historical determinist who believes that there is an objective law of history, which possesses the same sort of status as other laws of nature, and that predicts political progress over time leading to the development of the rule of law both within and between states.<sup>17</sup> Although he does *hope* it is the case that world history is progressive in this sense and also thinks that that in so far as we are moral beings we need to have such hope. So, on my interpretation, Kant's aim in his historical writings is far more modest than attempting to defend a form of progressive historical determinism. Instead, he merely wants to show that, given what we know of human nature, and to be honest a lot of what we know isn't very nice, a world of independent sovereign states living together peacefully is something that we can realistically hope for and work to bring about. For he believes that in so far as we are moral we need to hope that there is will be progress in the political sphere, and thus the goal of his historical writings is merely to show that such hope is not unreasonable. And he thinks he can show the reasonableness of such hope if he can provide reasons to think that there are natural mechanisms that could produce such progress. Engaging in this Kantian project and trying to understand the natural mechanisms that could lead to such a state of affairs has at a number of positive motivations. It can help us avoid despair. In a world in which man is a wolf to man (*Homo homini lupus*), it is easy to give up hope about the possibility of achieving any sort of lasting peace between people or peoples. Especially in today's world such despair seems difficult to avoid.<sup>18</sup>

Having said this, my reading of the guarantee of peace passage is certainly compatible with Kant being a historical determinist in the strong sense I suggested above. For it might be the case that Kant believes both: (1) In order to be perpetual, peace would need a natural guarantee as a ground of necessity. And, (2) there is an objective law of history with the same status as other natural laws which guarantees that such a state of perpetual peace

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<sup>17</sup> In saying this I agree with Paul Guyer, who argues that, "the historiographical thesis of *Perpetual Peace* can be only the proposition that the natural history of mankind is compatible with the achievement of peace, not a claim that the history of mankind renders this achievement inevitable." (Guyer, pp.411-2).

<sup>18</sup> In addition, as Aristotle pointed out, one of the main cause of war is the desire for peace. And Kant also recognizes that, "the desire of every state (or its ruler) to achieve lasting peace by . . . dominating the whole world, if at all possible." (Kant, p.113) Such a desire is expressed by many world leaders, and often the motivation behind such a desire is the belief that peace is achievable in no other way, that the idea of a world federation of sovereign states governed by international law is an empty dream. Showing that how such an ideal could develop naturally, even if not inevitable, is one way of countering such despair. In addition, if we have a theory of the natural mechanisms and causes that tend to produce and maintain peace we can promote and encourage them.

will come about. My primary claim in this discussion is that Kant's appeal to a guarantee in *Perpetual Peace* should be understood in the first and not the second sense, and so should not be taken at textual evidence that Kant is a historical determinist in something like the second sense. But my reading of what Kant means by a guarantee in this context is perfectly compatible with him also being a historical determinist in the strong sense suggested. A proper understanding of Kant's attitude to this second question would involve thorough examination of his essay *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* and the Appendix to the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment*. The *Universal History* essay is particularly important as this is his first published work in which he suggests that a federation of nations would have to come into existence as a ground for perpetual peace.<sup>19</sup> And this essay can be read as defending a form of historical determinism in suggesting that there are natural forces, and in particular what he calls the "unsocial sociability" of humankind, that will lead to the development of such an international order.

Now, this is not the main topic of this paper, but before moving I will make two quick points about the *Universal History* (1784) essay. This essay was published more than ten years before *Perpetual Peace* (1795), and in between Kant wrote the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790),

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<sup>19</sup> Thus Kant writes that "(n)ature has therefore once again used the incompatibility of human beings, even of great societies and state bodies of this kind of creature as a means to seek out in their unavoidable antagonism a condition of tranquility and safety; i.e. through wars, through the overstrained and never ceasing process of armament for them, through the condition of need that due to this finally every state even in the midst of peace must feel internally, toward at first imperfect attempts, but finally after many devastations, reversals and even thoroughgoing exhaustion of their powers, nature drives them to what reason could have told them even without much sad experience: namely, to go beyond a lawless condition of savages and enter into a federation of nations,<sup>4</sup> where every state, even the smallest, could expect its security and rights not from its own might, or its own juridical judgment, but only from this great **federation of nations** (*Foedus Amphictyonum*), from a united might and from the decision in accordance with laws of its united will." (2007, 8:24, p. 114, emphasis added) And similarly to the argument in *Perpetual Peace* he suggests that such peace would require the existence of two conditions (the internal constitution of all states is republican, and they form themselves into a federation) that could serve as a ground of the necessity of the peace. Thus he argues that, "finally, partly through the best possible arrangement of their civil constitution internally, partly through a common agreement and legislation externally, a condition is set up, which, resembling a civil commonwealth, can **preserve itself like an automaton**." (2007, 8:25, p.115, emphasis added). I take it that this reference to the international order preserving itself like an automaton his way of stressing the necessity of such a perpetual peace, which requires some underlying mechanism to keep it place. So I take this passage to be a forerunner of the guarantee discussion in *Perpetual Peace*.

where he worked out his view on teleology in nature in more depth. In addition during this period Kant actively followed the revolution and following terror in France. So, it is quite possible that his views on history and progress changed quite significantly between these two texts. Having said this, I think that the position defended in the *Universal History* essay is broadly compatible with the position I have attributed to him in *Perpetual Peace*, and that neither essay should be read as advocating historical determinism, but instead should be read as acting in the service of rational hope, by giving us reason to think that a hope in historical progress is not unreasonable. Thus, Kant claims towards the end of the *Universal History* essay that,

nature perhaps needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order finally to propel its germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim. And this point in time must be, at least in the idea of the human being, the goal of his endeavors, because otherwise the natural predispositions would have to be regarded for the most part as in vain and purposeless; which would remove all practical principles and thereby bring nature, whose wisdom in the judgment of all remaining arrangements must otherwise serve as a principle, under the suspicion that in the case of the human being alone it is a childish play. (2007, 8:19, p.110)

Kant makes it clear here that our belief in a progressive history is a demand of practical reason, rather than of theoretical reason. It seems to be something like what in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he will call a postulate of practical reason. If we do not believe in progress then this will, Kant thinks, lead to a form of moral despair, which will undermine our moral capacities, and so we have a moral reason to hope in the possibility of a progressive history. I suggest, then, that the claims in both *Perpetual Peace* and *Universal History* which seem to defend a form of historical determinism are best read in this light as merely telling a story which allows us to hope in the possibility of such progress and in so doing avoid moral despair. Kant makes it clear that his aim is to provide a remedy to moral despair towards the end of the *Universal History* essay when he claims,

Such a justification of nature – or better, of providence - is no unimportant motive for choosing a particular viewpoint for considering the world. For what does it help to praise the splendor and wisdom of creation in the non-rational realm of nature, and to recommend it to our consideration, if that part of the great showplace of the highest wisdom that contains the end of all this - the history of humankind - is to remain a ceaseless

objection against it, the prospect of which necessitates our turning our eyes away from it in disgust and, in despair of ever encountering a completed rational aim in it, to hope for the latter only in another world? (2007. 8:30, p.119)

### Three conditions of lasting peace

At the heart of his essay Kant introduces what he calls three “definitive articles” for the establishment of perpetual peace. These are the conditions that Kant believes, if realized, will make lasting peaceful relations between states possible. They are the conditions that if they were in place would *guarantee* a lasting peace. The first two stress the need for individual states to be republics and for the creation of a federation of such states. In addition he also argues that the deepening of economic trade relations between states will also be conducive to peace. These are the three factors stressed in the preamble to the United Nations charter.

Kant’s first article is that “The civil constitution in every state shall be republican.” (1996, 8:350, p.322) And it seems that what Kant calls a republic is very close to what we would call a liberal democracy. Thus he explains that what he calls a republic is based upon three principles: “first on principles of the freedom of the members of a society (as individuals), second on principles of the dependence of all upon a single common legislation (as subjects), and third on the law of their equality (as citizens of a state)” (1996, 8:350-1, p.322). Kant’s suggestion that only republics are capable of establishing lasting peaceful relations has come to be known as the theory of democratic peace. Kant has a number of arguments for suggesting that republics are likely to establish lasting peaceful relations. He believes that most wars are started by leaders for their own benefit and that wars (especially between republics) are not to the benefit of citizens, and so citizens in a republic, unlike princes, will be hesitant in engaging in wars.<sup>20</sup> He also suggests that that in republics, at least over time, there will emerge a public culture of respect for law and that this will spread to relations with other states, or at least to other republics.

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<sup>20</sup> “When the consent of the citizens of a state is required in order to decide whether there shall be war or not (and it cannot be otherwise in this constitution), nothing is more natural than that they will be very hesitant to begin such a bad game, since they would have to decide to take upon themselves all the hardships of war (such as themselves doing the fighting and paying the costs of the war from their own belongings, painfully making good the devastation it leaves behind, and finally - to make the cup of troubles overflow - a burden of debt that embitters peace itself, and that can never be paid off because of new wars always impending)” (1996, 8:351, p.323-4.)

In recent years<sup>21</sup> there have been a large number of statistical studies on the thesis of democratic peace, and the consensus seems to be that liberal democracies are, historically less likely to engage in military conflicts with one another than other types of regimes although they are often aggressive in their relations with other types of regimes. However, there are exceptions. For example, one can point to the British-American wars and the Spanish-American war as examples of republics going to war with one another. However defenders of the Kantian thesis have argued that lasting peace is only likely between mature democracies that have had the chance to learn from their international experience and where respect for the rule of law has been firmly established.<sup>22</sup> And a defender of the Kantian thesis could also point out that these wars occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before the creation of serious international institutions. Even if there is some empirical evidence to suggest that republics are statistically less likely to go to war with each other than non-republics, our experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries of how populations in democracies can be whipped up by populist leaders into mobs driven into war fever by rabid nationalism, the Kantian optimism here seems questionable. At the very least he seems to have underestimated the capacity for citizens in republics to be driven by nationalistic rhetoric and fervor.

Kant's second article is that "The right of nations shall be based on a federalism of free states." (1996, 8:354, p.325). Thus he argues that, "right cannot be decided by war and its favorable outcome, victory; and by a peace pact a current war can be brought to an end but not a condition of war" (1996, 8:356, p. 327) And that peace "cannot be instituted or assured without a pact of nations among themselves, a direct duty; so there must be a league of a special kind, which can be called a pacific league (*foedus pacificum*), and what would distinguish it from a peace pact (*pactum pacis*) is that the latter seeks to end only one war whereas the former seeks to end all war forever." (1996, 8:356, p. 327) And he adds that if the concept of the right of nations is to retain any meaning it must be "necessarily connected" with a federation of this kind" (1996, 8:356, p.328). Thus, Kant argues that although peace and international law doesn't require the existence of a world state it does require international institutions and agreements. Although Kant is not fully clear about his motivations here, it seems plausible to suppose that one of the main functions of such institutions is to make the rights and duties of states towards one another public and clear.

In addition, Kant also suggests that economic growth and trade are also natural factors that make lasting peace between nations possible, suggesting that globalization, in enmeshing nations in a web of trading

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<sup>21</sup> Following the publication of the influential Doyle (1983).

<sup>22</sup> See Cederman (2001).

relations may also encourage lasting peace. Thus, he point to, “the spirit of commerce, which cannot coexist with war and which sooner or later takes hold of every nation.” (1996, 3:368, pp.336-7). Once again the development of the international arms trade and the way in which such a trade fuels wars, tells against Kant’s optimism here, although global trade relations do also provide some disincentives to war.

What Kant is suggesting then is that lasting peace would be possible between a federation of republics enmeshed in a web of trading relations. Kant himself suggests these three factors could emerge naturally, and that combined will allow for the establishment of world peace without the existence of a world sovereign. Firstly, he believes republics, or what we would perhaps call liberal democracies, are naturally inclined to live peacefully together. Secondly, in order for international peace to be established international law must be established and this is only possible given the creation of international institutions, such as the United Nations. And thirdly international trade relations will also tend to encourage peace.

Kant is not arguing that there is a law of history that requires that such a state of affairs. He is not arguing that democratization and the growth of international institutions and trade are inevitable. Rather he is arguing that a world of liberal democracies engaged in mutual trade relations and regulated by international institutions is likely to be a peaceful world and that such a world, is not a utopian ideal but something that could emerge naturally and that we can and should work to bring about.<sup>23</sup>

### **On Kant, Neo-conservatives and Revolutions**

Let us assume that Kant is right and that a world federation of republics is both possible and desirable. What can we do to help bring it about? Here I believe there is a tension between Kant’s two articles: for Kant believes that in order to achieve lasting peace we need to encourage both democratization/liberalization and the strengthening of international institutions and international law. However, as recent world events have shown, these two liberal imperatives often seem to conflict. It seems that we must often choose between strengthening international institutions and

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<sup>23</sup> Before explaining what is meant by these three requirements let me briefly refer back to the preamble to the United Nations charter that I quoted at the start of this paper, for it seems clear that the charter is alluding to these three factors. If we remember: the aim of the United Nations is to save the “succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and, if Kant is right, then doing this will involve encouraging the spread of human rights (the republican constitution requirement), establishing conditions under which there is respect for international law (the international institutions requirement) and promoting economic growth and relations (the trade requirement).

international law *or* working for democratization and respecting human rights in particular countries. We must choose between respecting the rights of individuals and the rights of states. What policy should democracies support if they are faced with a dictator or despotic regime, but the only way to overthrow this regime is to engage in unilateral action that undermines international law or international institutions. Nothing I have said about Kant's views up until this point help us to answer this question because if he is right that establishing lasting peace and justice involves both encouraging democratization and the nurturing of international institutions then it seems that a Kantian case could be made for democratic powers to use their military might to overthrow dictatorships and impose democratic regimes through military intervention. Indeed these were precisely the arguments made by many American neo-conservatives for regime change in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. Their reasoning went: Invade Iraq, make it a democracy, and the other Arab states will democratize around it and we'll have peace in the middle east. It seems, then, that the Kantian theory of the democratic peace was one of the main arguments to justify the US invasion of Iraq. And many 'liberal interventionists' use similar, seemingly Kantian, arguments to justify wars. What would Kant have to say about this?

Now one argument against such a position, as made forcibly by Kofi Anan in the summer of 2003, is that democracy cannot be introduced by force. Now in general this seems to be a plausible claim, but there are exceptions that defenders of such regime change can point to. For example, the defenders of the possibility of spreading democracy often point to the experiences of Germany and Japan after the second world war. However, even if there are exceptions, it does seem to be true, as the current experience in Iraq makes clear, that at the very least introducing democracy through external force is extremely difficult.

Kant's own answer to this question is quite clear, however, for even if it were possible to introduce democracy by force, he believes that a respect for international law and institutions should trump our dislike of despotic regimes, for the proper remedy for despotism is internal reform or revolution not external intervention. For even if our international institutions are imperfect, we are better off with some institutions rather than none.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> And those who advocate unilateral interventions to make the world a safer place are, then, in Kant's eyes the equivalent of international Jacobins. Thus, towards the end of his essay Kant makes a few remarks about the relationship between morality and politics and on the justice of revolutions. This essay was written 6 years into the French Revolution and in many ways Kant was a big fan of the revolution as a natural event, however he thought that morally one can never have a right to revolt,

Thus Kant argues that in terms of “the external relations of states, it cannot be demanded of a state that it give up its constitution even though this is a despotic one” (1996, 8:373, p.340) and he justifies this claim by arguing for what he calls ‘permissive laws of reason’ that “allow a situation of public right afflicted with injustice to continue until everything has either of itself become ripe for a complete overthrow or has been made almost ripe by peaceful means; for some rightful constitution or other, even if it is only to a small degree in conformity with right, is better than none at all, which latter fate (anarchy) a premature reform would meet with.” (1996, 8:374, p.341)<sup>25</sup> Our states and our international institutions are not perfect, but they are all we have if we care about the rule of law.

Again I suggest that Kant is probably right in this. International law and institutions are in their infant stages but will only grow into mature institutions if they are allowed to function and this involves us being willing to accept some of the inevitable mistakes they make. Looking at the cumbersome functioning of the United Nations at the present time, with the difficulty the organization has in making any meaningful decisions must be very frustrating for any well-meaning leaders (and let us assume for the sake of argument that such individuals exist). But the desire to bypass such a cumbersome decision making process and act unilaterally for the sake of the grater good is a bit like the temptation a well meaning parent faces when she sees her child struggling with his schoolwork. But the well meaning parent who does her child’s schoolwork for him because she knows she will do a better job, ultimately never allows him to develop his own talents and mature into an adult himself. Now, of course, the consequences of a child’s mistakes are far less serious than the consequences of the failures of the young international community. Thus, for example, even many critics of liberal interventionism think that the international community made a real mistake in not intervening to stop the genocide in Rawanda. And in such cases of humanitarian emergencies I believe that a case can be made unilateral extra-legal action. For example, David Scheffer one of the chief architects of the Clinton policy in Bosnia and a serious believer in the international rule of law, has argued that such cases should be thought of as analogous to the situation where an individual sees a crime in progress and can only stop it by

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because morality demands that we do everything we can to encourage and nurture the rule of law and revolutions are, for him the overthrow of all law.

<sup>25</sup> And Kant continues by adding that, “Thus political wisdom, in the condition in which things are at present, will make reforms in keeping with the ideal of public right its duty; but it will use revolutions, where nature of itself has brought them about, not to gloss over an even greater oppression, but as a call of nature to bring about by fundamental reforms a lawful constitution based on principles of freedom, the only kind that endures” (1996, 8:374, p.341).

‘taking the law into his own hands’. Such behavior is often extra-legal but is not, necessarily, inimical to the rule of law. But apart from such cases of humanitarian intervention, I think that the Kantian should reject the call for war in the name of peace.<sup>26</sup>

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