WHY IS THE NUMBER OF LIBERAL STATES INCREASING? 
A KANTIAN ADDITION TO MICHAEL DOYLE

Abstract:

Michael Doyle, in his well-known article „Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs“ stated Kantian reasons for the empirical finding that liberal states are not prone to waging wars among themselves, but did not explain his other empirical finding about the rise of the number of liberal states during the last two centuries. This article tries to supplement Doyle’s argumentation exactly on this issue, offering reasons for increase of number of liberal states – again on the basis of Kant’s political philosophy. Particular attention in this context is paid not only to Kant’s understanding of „eternal peace“, but also to his concept of „ethic community“ developed in the work Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone (Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft).

THE PROBLEM

The primary focus of this article will be on the possible reasons why the number of liberal states appears to be steadily expanding through the years. In that context, I will attempt to shed some new light on Michael Doyle’s pivotal piece „Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs“ (hereafter „KLLFA“), with special attention to two issues:

1) The Kantian explanation it gives for the assertion that liberal states are unlikely to wage wars against each other;

2) The lack of explanation (Kantian or not) of its other assertion, i.e. the claim that the number of liberal states is on the increase.

Doyle soundly believes that much of the explanatory power of (1) is to be based on Kant’s essay Zum ewigen Frieden (hereafter ZEF). I will attempt to demonstrate that it is possible to employ Kant not only in that context, but also for explaining the increasing number of liberal states in the world. For such an explanation, however, it is necessary to expand our view on Kant’s writings, i.e. to enrich an understanding of ZEF with our

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152 Toward Perpetual Peace.
attention to Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft (hereafter RGBV)\textsuperscript{153}, in particular to the concept of the „ethical commonwealth“ that it develops.

**DOYLE’S ARGUMENTATION**

Let us first take a closer look at Doyle’s elaboration related to the increasing number of liberal states in the world. Doyle begins his argumentation with providing an essentially Kantian definition of liberalism: „Liberalism has been identified with an essential principle – the importance of the freedom of the individual. Above all, this is a belief in the importance of moral freedom, of the right to be treated and a duty to treat others as ethical subjects, and not as objects or means only“\textsuperscript{154}. This definition is followed by the assertion that liberalism includes a commitment to a threefold set of rights:

- Freedom from arbitrary authority („negative freedom“), which includes freedom of conscience, a free press and free speech, equality under the law, and the right to hold and to exchange property without the fear of arbitrary seizure;
- Rights that are necessary to protect and to promote the capacity and opportunity for freedom („positive freedoms“), which include social and economic rights such as equality of opportunity in education and rights to health care and employment.
- The right to democratic participation and representation – necessary to guarantee the previous two freedoms\textsuperscript{155}.

The dilemma of liberalism is, Doyle continues, how to reconcile these three sets of liberal rights. He asserts that a reconciliation has taken place in the form of a political order that is committed to four essential „institutions“ that are accepted both by laissez-faire and social welfare liberals. First, citizens possess juridical equality and certain fundamental civic rights (freedom of religion, freedom of expression etc.). Second, the sovereigns of liberal states are representative legislatures deriving their authority from the consent of the electorate and not from external authority of other states or internal authority based on special prerogatives of monarchs, military juntas etc. Third, the economy rests on a recognition of the right to private property, including the ownership of the means of production. Hence, a liberal state cannot be based on an economy of state socialism or state capitalism, but market socialism can satisfy liberal demands. Fourth, economic decisions are mostly taken by the forces of supply and demand, and not by state bureaucracies\textsuperscript{156}.

Doyle advances the thesis that the four principles of liberalism that reconcile the demands of laissez-faire and social welfare have never had a domestic success that was more apparent than nowadays: „Never have so many people been included in, and accepted the domestic hegemony of, the liberal order; never have so many of the world’s

\textsuperscript{153} Religion Within the boundaries of Mere Reason.

\textsuperscript{154} Doyle, „KLLFA“, 206 (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 206 and 207.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 207 and 208.
leading states been liberal, whether as republics or as constitutional monarchies. Indeed, the success of liberalism as an answer to the problem of masterless men in modern society is reflected in the growth in the number of liberal regimes from the three that existed when Kant wrote to the more than forty that exist today. Doyle continues with providing empirical evidence for his claim by counting the number of liberal states over the years. The criterion for being a liberal state in his classification is based on the four mentioned institutions that are described as essential. The findings are the following: in the 18th century three liberal regimes, between 1800 and 1850 eight, between 1850 and 1900 thirteen, between 1900 and 1945 twenty nine, and after 1945 forty nine. It deserves mention that Doyle wrote his article in 1983, i.e. before the collapse of state-socialism in Central and Eastern Europe. As we know, this collapse was followed by a further increase in number of liberal states. Clearly, there is strong evidence for the steady increase in number of liberal regimes over the years. The question is why. As already noted, Doyle does not make an effort to answer it, shifting his attention to the issue of „liberalism’s foreign record“ – a record that he describes as „more obscure“.

In spite of this „obscurity“, liberal states have apparently not engaged in war against each other: „Even though liberal stats have become involved in numerous wars with nonliberal states, constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another. No one should argue that such wars are impossible; but preliminary evidence does appear to indicate that there exists a significant predisposition against warfare between liberal states. Statistically, war between any two states is a low probability event in a short period of time, whereas war between any two adjacent states might be somewhat more likely. But the absence of war among liberal states, adjacent or not, for some two hundred years is a significant finding. Moreover, when fighting a war, all liberal states turn out to be on the same side. Doyle gives us an explanation for this „liberal pacification“, developing his argumentation along the lines of Kant’s ZEF.

First, however, he disputes the Realist notion in international relations, according to which wars are prudent because of the general insecurity of states (which are considered to be in a condition paralleling individuals in a Hobbesian state of nature): „If preventive wars are prudent, the Realists’ prudence obviously cannot account for more than a century and a half of peace among independent liberal states, many of which have crowded one another in the center of Europe.“ Second, he notes that liberal theorists in general have offered inadequate explanations for liberal pacification. Some have

157 Ibid., 209.
158 Ibid., 212.
159 Ibid., 213.
160 Ibid., 217. For a useful discussion of liberal ideas on intervention and nonintervention, a discussion Doyle was familiar with when writing his article, consult: Charles Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
161 Doyle, „KLLFA“, 220.
argued that democratic states are inherently peaceful, because in these states it is the citizens who rule the polity and who suffer the costs of war. Other liberals have argued that laissez-faire capitalism and its rationality is incompatible with the irrational nature of war. A third type of liberals have come up with the idea that peace is the natural effect of trade and that, therefore, liberal states with their orientation to commerce are naturally disinclined to wage war. Doyle notes that none of these explanations account for the fact that liberal states are peaceful only in relations with other liberal states.\(^\text{162}\)

According to Doyle, it is Kant who provides us with the best explanation for liberal pacification. Kant, namely, argues that “perpetual peace” will be guaranteed by the ever-widening acceptance of three “definitive articles” of peace. When all states have accepted those articles in a metaphorical “treaty” of perpetual peace, this condition will have been established. The definitive articles are the following:

(1) The civil constitution of the state must be “republican“. By republican Kant means a political society that successfully combines moral autonomy, individualism and social order. In such a society, juridical freedom is preserved because the morally autonomous individual is by means of representation a self-legislator making laws that apply to all citizens equally (including himself), while tyranny is avoided because the individual is subject to laws he does not also administer.

(2) Liberal republics will progressively establish peace among themselves by means of the “pacific union“. This union comes into being as a “treaty of the nations among themselves“.

(3) A cosmopolitan law is to be established in order to operate in conjunction with the pacific union.

This cosmopolitan law is to be limited to “conditions of universal hospitality“.\(^\text{163}\)

(1) Kant argues that the aggressive interests of absolutist monarchies are curbed once the habit of respect for individual rights is engrained by republican government. If the consent of citizens is required to engage in war, it is to be expected that, being aware of the devastation of war and its costs, they will be reluctant to give such consent. Moreover, waging war in order to enhance domestic support will be a less likely motivation of governments that derive their legitimacy from their accordance with law and representation. Finally, the regular rotation of office in liberal democratic polities is a device that ensures that personal animosities among heads of states do not develop into a lasting and self-perpetuating source of inter-state tension.\(^\text{164}\)

(2) A necessary ingredient of the pacific union is publicity. Internationally, free speech and the accurate communication of political conceptions to foreign peoples are essential to establish and preserve mutual respect. Furthermore, domestically just

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162 Ibid., 225.

163 Ibid., 226, 227. Doyle’s interpretation of the definitive articles is a proper reference to Kant’s corresponding statements in ZEF (Ak. 8).

republics, which rest on consent, presume other states to be just and consensual as well, thus deserving accommodation\textsuperscript{165}.

(3) Cosmopolitan law adds material incentives to the first two commitments. The right to universal hospitality, namely, is a solid basis for the spirit of commerce to be established in every state, thus impeding it to resort easily to war\textsuperscript{166}.

None of these three sources of peace, however, is alone sufficient. Only in combination with each other, they connect the characteristics of liberal states with a lasting peace in the international arena. In Doyle’s words: „Liberal states have not escaped from the Realists’ „security dilemma“, the insecurity caused by anarchy in the world political system considered as a whole. But the effects of international anarchy have been tamed in the relations among states of a similarly liberal character. Alliances of purely mutual strategic interest among liberal and nonliberal states have been broken, economic ties between liberal and nonliberal states have proven fragile, but the political bond of liberal rights and interests have proven a remarkably firm foundation for mutual non-aggression. A separate peace exists among liberal states“\textsuperscript{167}.

It follows from the preceding paragraphs that Doyle has indeed succeeded not only in providing strong empirical evidence for the increase in number of liberal states through the years, as well as for the thesis that liberal states apparently do not engage in mutual wars, but also in presenting a cogent explanation for the latter fact. As we have seen, this explanation is based on Kant’s three definitive articles from ZEF. The question is now how to explain the first finding, i.e. why liberal states are steadily increasing in number. Interestingly, for this explanation we can also find Kantian foundation – this time not in ZEF, but in RGBV. Central to the explanation is the concept of the „ethical commonwealth“, elaborated on extensively in RGBV. Since it is useful to understand it in relation to perpetual peace, I will elaborate on both concepts in the section that follows.

**KANT’S POSITIONS ON PERPETUAL PEACE AND THE ETHICAL COMMONWEALTH**

When dealing with Kant’s conception of how a future world society might look like, it is of primary importance to have a proper understanding of both perpetual peace and the ethical commonwealth. The essential question whether we are gradually moving closer to the historical stage marked by these two concepts, Kant answers affirmatively. In fact, he uses them to describe what might be understood as Kant’s account of the „purpose of history“.

Kant envisions the future world as one in which, in addition to our material perfection, it is also moral perfection that nature requires of us. The true value of humanity’s material advance is not only its future prosperity, but also its greater ethical capacity.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 230.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 231.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 232 (emphasis added).
\end{itemize}
That what applies to the moral realm of the individual, has a similar reflection on the polity he lives in, as well as to humankind in general. No matter how disordered or evil the world might appear to us, the same force which worked amongst individuals to bring about an organized, free and just civil society must eventually find its materialization in the international realm as well. This materialization will, in its final instance, take the form of perpetual peace. The moral realm of the individual thus extends to the community (polity) he lives in, as well as to the international community of states.

The ethical commonwealth in the community of humanity and perpetual peace in the community of states are two essential concepts of Kant’s political philosophy. In fact, he views them as nothing less than the purpose of history. Thus, the Kantian conception of history is fundamentally a moral one. The alternative to the view of history serving a purpose would be to accept the possibility of humans facing a historical regression. This regression would ultimately lead to a descent into barbarism. In its final instance, the understanding and affirmation of historical progress is thus motivated not by empirical or theoretical but by moral consideration. Consequently, the ethical commonwealth and perpetual peace as the essential elements of the final stage of humanity’s historical progress are also morally motivated.

History, however, does not possess an end in itself. The same applies to nature. But Kant’s argument is that the make-up of our reason necessitates that we suppose that they are purposeful. In fact, that is the only way for the human mind to understand them completely. Hence, Kant postulates that our comprehension of history is the comprehension of a process that serves a good purpose. It is duty that is the reason for this postulation, since the alternative would be historical regression. In addition to that, conceiving history in a teleological sense gives us the advantage of not only understanding it, but also of opening up the potential of realizing a purpose in the future development of humanity. Through postulating a teleological moral pattern in history, it becomes possible to envision future society as increasingly being imbued with morality. That has also its repercussions for the future of politics: the political realm can be expected to be increasingly permissive for the moral realm. Consequently, it can be argued that Kantian history is nothing less than the development of justice.

Kant believes that nature and morality find themselves in a mutually supporting relationship in the pursuit of perpetual peace. Morality steps in, namely, to provide what nature cannot provide, whereas nature or Providence steps in to offer what morality cannot. What morality cannot achieve of itself are the external conditions under which peace might be possible. But Kant believes that nature can. On the other hand, it is the moral politician who will provide what nature cannot provide: the will to take advantage of external conditions to attain an enduring peace.

Kant favours a federation of states in the relatively near future, believing that a universal state might be possible only at some later stage of development of humanity. A universal state is thus the final objective of political history, while a federation of states is an intermediate stage on this historical path. Being an element of the purpose history serves, the universal state is something to which humanity ought to be striving. But individual human beings are also not supposed to remain idle. On the contrary, they ought to fulfil their moral duties as humans. Providence will then come to their aid in
approaching a just society and international order. This order will culminate at some
stage in a universal state. Justice and peace have to be instituted, therefore, as a result of
conscious moral choice. Obviously, Kant has to rely on the moral improvement of hu-
manity as the necessary element in its path toward justice and perpetual peace.

What is the precise role of the ethical commonwealth? As we have seen, Kant’s
political plan for perpetual peace depends on moral progress of the human. Political
and moral progress, however, converge on the same objective. That is the objective of
the ethical commonwealth, which Kant outlines most extensively in his RGBV. There
he argues that one of the essential moral messages Christianity contains is a call for the
unity of humanity. The ultimate purpose of human progress is, according to Kant, that
“man ought to leave his ethical state of nature in order to become a member of an ethical
commonwealth”\textsuperscript{168}. This commonwealth would be “a union of men under merely moral
laws which have a special and unique principle of union (virtue)\textsuperscript{169}. It is a commonwe-
thalth that is an extension of Christianity’s call for the unity of humanity.

The idea of the ethical commonwealth is already anticipated in Die Grundlage
zur Metaphysik der Sitten (GMS)\textsuperscript{170} and Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft (KPV)\textsuperscript{171}. In
both works, Kant refers to the summum bonum, or to the highest good, which can only
be realized in a flawless community of human beings. In KPV Kant speaks about the
achievement of the „highest good in the world“ as the necessary object of a will deter-
minable by the moral law. In GMS, he uses the term „Kingdom of ends“ to describe the
community of morally perfected humans\textsuperscript{172}.

In an existing (political) commonwealth all the citizens are in an ethical state of
nature, whereas the concept of the ethical commonwealth implies a moral society. Such
a society ideally extends to humanity in general. An ethical commonwealth Kant des-
cribes therefore as „a world republic under the laws of virtue“ (emphasis added)\textsuperscript{173}. Such a
commonwealth is an objective that only God can fully achieve. Kant: „Indeed, the mem-
bers of such an ethical commonwealth would be the people of God“\textsuperscript{174}. No matter how
unachievable the goal of an ethical commonwealth appears to us, it is again Providence
that will give us the necessary aid, but „only if we apply ourselves wholeheartedly to the
task of moral improvement and the creation of an ethical commonwealth“\textsuperscript{175}.

\textsuperscript{168} RGBV (first edition of 1793), 126.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{170} Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.
\textsuperscript{171} The Critique of Practical Philosophy.
\textsuperscript{172} GMS (first edition of 1785), 75.
\textsuperscript{173} RGBV, 132.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 133.
The final purpose of politics is thus also the development of an ethical community in which individuals are guided by the duties of virtue. The highest political good and the highest moral good can only be achieved simultaneously. And that can occur solely in a world community. The political extension of such a community is a universal republic or world state. Hence, political leaders have a duty to look beyond politics and right to ethics for conceptualizing their actions. This conceptualization has to proceed with the idea of the world state in the back of their minds.\(^{176}\)

In sum: according to Kant, assuming the ethical commonwealth and perpetual peace is not only the moral duty of the human, but also the purpose of history – a purpose that is gradually coming nearer. But how does this position Kant has developed relate to our main question? How can it account for the steady increase in number of liberal states in the world?

**A POSSIBLE SOLUTION**

The line of reasoning I propose is the following. A precondition for acting intentionally in a just manner is to be free. Without being free, one cannot act in a just manner because he wills so, but only because he is forced to. A truly just act, on the other hand, is one that is performed on the basis of our free will. The issue of justice is thus to a significant degree an issue of freedom. In line with this idea, Doyle’s first finding that the number of liberal states is steadily increasing, translates into the finding that ever greater portions of humanity have the capacity to act intentionally in a just manner. Hence, an increase in number of liberal states means both an increase in number of peaceful states, as well as a surge of societies in which individuals and communities can act intentionally in a just manner. Being free translates into having the capacity to be intentionally just and together they appear to translate into being more peace-loving. Consequently, the trend that Doyle observed in the last two hundred years boosts the thesis that, at least in that period, Kant’s conceptions of the ethical commonwealth and perpetual peace have been slowly coming nearer.\(^{177}\) A Kantian explanation of this trend would be attributed to a (supposedly) augmented tendency in humans to act on the basis of the categorical imperative (i.e., from duty), while it is Providence that gives such humans the necessary aid in furthering justice and peace. Consequently, humanity gradually approaches that what Kant conceptualized as the ethical commonwealth and perpetual peace. An increase in number of liberal states only indicates that an essential precondition is being created for

\(^{176}\) For a contemporary formulation of the alleged inevitability of a universal state, it is of interest to consult Alexander Wendt, „Why a World State is Inevitable“, *European Journal of International Relations* 9 (2003): 491-542. Wendt proposes a teleological theory which asserts within the next 100-200 years a universal state is inevitable (491-92).

\(^{177}\) This thesis has to be regarded in the perspective of an overall trend during the last two centuries. Only then is it possible to counter the argument related to the horrors of the two World Wars and totalitarian systems of the 20th century.
these two conceptions to become reality one day, i.e. for the attainment of a just world that Kant supposes. This precondition is freedom. Enriching Doyle’s article with the elements that are elaborated on in the preceding paragraphs would amount to upgrading it with an argument it failed to provide: an explanation of the increase in number of liberal states in the world. Doyle gave us cogent empirical evidence for this increase, as well as for the fact that liberal states apparently do not engage in warfare against each other. He persuasively explained the latter finding employing Kant, but did not even attempt to account for the former finding. This article is an endeavor to do precisely that: to propose a Kantian understanding of the steady rise of liberal polities.

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ZASTO SE POVEČAVA BROJ LIBERALNIH DRZAVA?
KANTIJANSKA DOPUNA MAJKLA DOJLA

Sažetak:

Majkl Dojl (Michael Doyle) je u svom poznatom članku „Kant, liberalna nasleđa i spoljni poslovi“ („Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs“) naveo kantovske razloge za empirijski nalaz da su liberalne države nesklone da vode međusobne ratove, ali nije objasnio svoj drugi empirijski nalaz o porastu broja liberalnih država tokom poslednja dva veka. Ovaj članak pokušava da Dojlovu argumentaciju nadopuni upravo po tom pitanju, pružajući razloge za porast broja liberalnih država - i to opet na osnovu Kantove političke filozofije. Posebna pažnja se u tom kontekstu posvećuje ne samo Kantovom razumevanju „večnog mira“, već i njegovom konceptu „etičke zajednice“, a koji razvija u delu Religija u granicama čistog uma (Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft).

178 For my account of the relationship between freedom and justice in light of their historical development, useful is: Vojin Rakic, History and Future of Justice (Belgrade: Fakultet organizacionih nauka and VVMZ, 2004).