

Kant and the Kantian paradigm in international relations*

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Although few in number and limited in scope, Kant's writings on international relations have had a lasting influence and have given rise to a wide range of interpretations. Kant's famous pamphlet, *Perpetual Peace*, has been seen as advocating federalism, world government, a League of Nations-type security system and outright pacifism. Underlying much of the debate on Kant lies a divergence over the relationship between what might broadly be called the 'statist' and the 'cosmopolitan' sides of Kant's writings. On one side, there are those who argue that Kant is primarily concerned with order at the level of interstate relations. Kant, it is argued, did not want to transcend the state system but to improve it. He wanted to subject the international anarchy to law and to find a solution to the problem of war but in a way which would not sacrifice the essential autonomy and independence of states.

This view stresses Kant's explicit and clear-cut rejection of world government. It emphasizes the value that Kant places on the autonomy of states and his insistence on the importance of non-intervention. It points to the extent to which progress depends not on grandiose plans for the reform of the state system but on the internal improvement of states and, in particular, the achievement of republican government. It underlines the limited nature of Kant's view of cosmopolitan law. And, most crucially, it argues that, when Kant speaks of a 'federation of states', he is thinking only of a loose league of republican states that have come together for the sole purpose of abolishing war.

The tendency to downplay the universalist and cosmopolitan side of Kant's writings and to focus on his ideas in *Perpetual Peace* for a limited association of independent states received strong backing from one of the most influential single interpretations in English, that of F. H. Hinsley, in *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, first published in 1961.¹ Hinsley's central argument is that earlier commentators 'have assumed that he [Kant] envisaged more than he did.'² Hinsley stresses that Kant did not see the solution to the problem of war in terms of a merger of states:

It was no more logical to hope to solve the international problem by the supersession of the states than it would have been to try to end the civil strife by the abolition of individuals.³

He then argues that, when Kant speaks of a 'federation of states', he is thinking only

* I am grateful to John Vincent, Peter Lyon and Benedict Kingsbury for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, (Cambridge, 1980), ch. 2. See also his *Nationalism and the International System* (New York, 1973), ch. 4.

² Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, p. 69.

³ *Ibid.* p. 62.

of a loose league of republican states that have come together for the sole purpose of abolishing war.

Everybody knows that he did not advocate world government or the complete but less . . . universal merger of states: he explicitly rejects this solution. But because of his use of such phrases most people firmly believe that he advocated international federation in our modern sense of the term as the only alternative . . . This is not the case. He derived these phrases from the word *foedus* and used that to mean 'treaty', which is what it still means. Like the Founding Fathers when they constructed the American Constitution, he was envisaging the replacement of the existing imperfect, customary international law by a structure of international society based on a treaty between independent states.⁴

W. B. Gallie sees Kant's federation as a 'bond of mutual non-aggression' where 'their [the states'] union or "free-federation" must be of the barest kind, confined to the repudiation of war-like or war-making acts against each other'.⁵

Complete non-interference in the internal affairs of every signatory state seemed to him an essential precondition of faithful adherence, by any sovereign state, to the treaty which he proposed. Kant, the first systematic internationalist, was thus one of the most steadfast 'statists' in the history of political thought.⁶

There are, however, others who view Kant in very different terms and who have taken Kant as the paradigm for the existence of a cosmopolitan or universalist tradition in international relations. This characterization originated with the ideas of Martin Wight and was subsequently developed by Hedley Bull.⁷ The Kantian tradition was set in contrast to a Hobbesian tradition that viewed international politics as a state of war and a Grotian tradition which viewed international politics as taking place within an international society. Bull stressed that Wight's 'traditions were merely paradigms, to which no actual thinker did more than approximate'.⁸ Moreover, in his unpublished lecture notes, Bull pointed to the contrast between the universalism in *The Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* and the more limited proposals adopted in *Perpetual Peace*. Nevertheless, according to Bull, Kant 'does hold out a universal republic as an ideal', in which, following the domestic analogy, the international anarchy would be resolved by the creation of a *civitas gentium* and only reluctantly comes to accept the 'negative substitute' of a pacific federation.⁹ More importantly, the use and widespread acceptance of the term

⁴ Ibid. p. 66.

⁵ W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of War and Peace* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 10 and 20.

⁶ Ibid. p. 21. Other writers who tend towards a more statist view of Kant, particularly on the limited nature of Kant's federations, include Ian Clark, *Reform and Resistance in the International Order* (Cambridge, 1980), ch. 2; Patrick Riley, *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Totowa, NJ, 1983), especially pp. 118–19; and to a lesser extent, Howard Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 1985), especially ch. 10.

⁷ See Hedley Bull, 'Society and Anarchy in International Relations', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London, 1966); Martin Wight, 'An Anatomy of International Thought', *Review of International Studies* 13, 3 (July 1987); Hedley Bull, 'Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations', *British Journal of International Studies* 2, 2 (July 1976); Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London, 1979), pp. 25–6; and Brian Porter, 'Patterns of Thought and Practice: Martin Wight's "international theory"' in Michael Donelan (ed.), *The Reason of States* (London, 1978). The universalist or cosmopolitan view of Kant is not of course limited to Bull and Wight. For a survey of earlier views of this kind, see Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, p. 374 and Gallie, *Philosophers of War and Peace*, pp. 9 and 144. For a further interpretation along these lines which relates Kant to the broader tradition of cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth century, see Thomas Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought* (Notre Dame, 1977), pp. 124–5.

⁸ Bull, 'Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations', p. 106.

⁹ Unpublished lecture notes on Kant which formed part of a series on 'International Thinkers'.

'Kantian' makes it legitimate to examine the relationship between Kant and the tradition or paradigm that he is—albeit imperfectly—held to embody. In addition, the broader debate over the relevance of trying to discern such traditions provides further justification.

There are three main elements of this Kantian tradition that are relevant to this argument. First, there is the belief that the interstate system is of only derivative significance and that international life should be viewed instead in terms of a global society of mankind and of the existence of transnational ties linking all human beings.

The dominant theme of international relations, on the Kantian view, is only apparently the relationship among states, and is really the relationship among all men in the community of mankind—which exists potentially, even if it does not exist actually, and which when it comes into being will sweep the system of states into limbo.¹⁰

Second, there is the claim that there are no unresolvable conflicts of interest between peoples and that conflict results either from a lack of enlightenment or from the malevolent actions of those with a vested interest in fostering conflict. Third, there is the stress on the importance of morality in international life and, above all, on the moral imperative to move towards a more peaceful world even if this involves the creation of a new form of international political organization:

these imperatives enjoin not coexistence and cooperation among states but rather the overthrow of the system of states and its replacement by a cosmopolitan society.¹¹

Martin Wight summarizes the Kantian tradition as follows:

They [the Kantians] will answer the question, What is international society? in such a fashion as this: international society is none other than mankind, encumbered and thwarted by the archaic fiction of an international society composed of sovereign states. States are not persons, they have no wills but the wills of the individuals who manage their affairs, and behind the legal facade of the fictitious Society of Nations is the true international society composed of men.

... this third pattern of ideas is distinguished by two master-premises: firstly, that the existing state of affairs, the existing arrangements of international life, are invalid and illegitimate; secondly, that they are going to be modified or swept away by the course of events itself.¹²

This article seeks to reassess the balance between the statist and cosmopolitan elements of Kant's thinking on international relations. The first section examines Kant's view of the international system and considers the possible solutions discussed by Kant to the problem of war. In particular, it reassesses the claim that Kant was solely interested in a limited pacific federation without any power to enforce the law. The second section examines the relative roles of individual moral improvement, the emergence of republican states and the impact of an international federation in Kant's view of how progress towards a more peaceful world might be achieved. The final section argues that, whilst the statist view of Kant is more broadly correct, the reaction against Kant's universalism and cosmopolitanism has been carried too far; and that, whilst Kant did believe in the state system, he believed in more than the state system.

¹⁰ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 25.

¹¹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 26.

¹² Wight, 'The Anatomy of International Thought', pp. 223–4.

Kant's view of the international system

A convenient starting point in a discussion of Kant's views on international relations is to consider his conception of the state of nature. Both for states and individuals, Kant, echoing Hobbes, presents a bleak picture of chronic and unmitigated insecurity. He is completely consistent on this point.

Peoples who have grouped themselves into states may be judged in the same way as individual men living in the state of nature, independent of external law; for they are a standing offence to one another by the very fact that they are neighbours.¹³

Insecurity is not simply a question of actual fighting or even the frequency of war. Rather insecurity is a fundamental characteristic of the state of nature. As Kant puts it in *Perpetual Peace*:

But man (or an individual people) in a mere state of nature robs me of any security and injures me by virtue of this very state in which he coexists with me.¹⁴

It is the 'very lawlessness of his state' which constitutes a 'permanent threat to me'.¹⁵ Or, as he puts it in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: 'in their external relationship with one another, states, like lawless savages, exist in a condition devoid of right. . . . this condition is one of war (the right of the stronger), even if there is no actual war or continuous active fighting (i.e. hostilities)'.¹⁶ Or again in *Theory and Practice*:

Nowhere does human nature appear less admirable than in the relationship which exists between peoples. No state is for a moment secure from the others in its independence and its possessions.¹⁷

For Kant, human beings can only enjoy moral freedom in an organized society regulated by law. Such a society is the precondition for moral progress and indeed it is the means by which morality is reflected in history. 'The highest purpose of nature—the development of all natural capacities—can be fulfilled for mankind only in society'.¹⁸ The state of war between states constitutes a twofold obstacle to the achievement of moral progress through law. In the first place, war itself is incompatible with any conception of morality. It is 'the source of all evils and moral corruption' and Kant never tires of denouncing the evils of the state of war: 'We regard this as barbarism, coarseness and brutish debasement of humanity'.¹⁹ Secondly, the need to solve the problem of war, or at least to explore possible solutions, is so central because of Kant's belief in the inseparable connection between domestic and international society. So long as the international anarchy continued, all attempts at establishing political liberty domestically would be frustrated. 'The problem of

¹³ *Perpetual Peace*, in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 102. Unless otherwise stated all references are to this edition and the following abbreviations will be used: *Perpetual Peace*: PP; *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*: IH; *On the Common Saying: 'This May be True in Theory but it does not Apply in Practice'*: TP; *The Metaphysics of Morals*: MM; *The Contest of the Faculties*: CF. Original German texts are from Immanuel Kant, *Werke in Sechs Banden* (Wiesbaden, 1960).

¹⁴ PP, Reiss, p. 98.

¹⁵ PP, Reiss, p. 98.

¹⁶ MM, Reiss, p. 165.

¹⁷ TP, Reiss, p. 91.

¹⁸ IH, Reiss, p. 45.

¹⁹ CF, Reiss, p. 183 and PP, Reiss, p. 103.

solving a perfect civil constitution is subordinate to the problem of a law-governed external relationship with other states, and cannot be solved unless the latter is also solved'.²⁰ Perpetual peace therefore becomes the 'supreme political good'.²¹

This point is worth stressing because it immediately sets Kant apart from that broad tradition in Western political thought in which the resolution of anarchy in domestic society through the creation of a state is considered sufficient—or at least all that can be reasonably hoped for. Kant thus stands in sharp contrast to Hobbes who does not follow through the logic of the analogy between international anarchy and the condition of individuals in the state of nature by suggesting the need for some wider political organization or some kind of international social contract. As Hedley Bull puts it:

On the contrary, the sovereign powers, which, facing outward, create the international anarchy are the same sovereign powers which, facing inward, provide the possibility of social life. The international anarchy may have its problems, but for Hobbes, perhaps, the price is worth paying.²²

This notion that international anarchy can be tolerated is one which Kant totally repudiates. As we have seen, he denies that social life is possible without first tackling the international state of war. The exact kind of 'law-governed external relationship' varies from work to work. Yet Kant's universalism is nowhere more apparent than in his wholehearted rejection of the partial view of moral and political progress whereby a solution to one part of the problem (i.e. the creation of domestic society) is merely the precondition for another (i.e. the international anarchy).

How might this 'law governed external relationship' be achieved? One possible answer might seem to lie in the application of existing international law. Kant's attitude towards international law is not as completely dismissive as some of his statements seem to suggest. It is of course true that, for Kant, all existing international law—the law of those 'sorry comforters' Grotius, Pufendorf and Vattel—represents in itself an insufficient basis on which to build progress towards a more peaceful world. Holding law to be based on the command of the sovereign, Kant, like Hobbes, believes that international law can only be conditionally or provisionally valid until the state of nature has been abandoned.

In view of the strength of this belief, it is perhaps surprising how much space Kant devotes to existing international law and how closely his treatment of the subject should follow the arguments of that 'sorry comforter', Emerich de Vattel. In his most thorough discussion of the subject in *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant deals with various aspects of international law as it then existed: the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*), the laws in war (*jus in bello*), the law after war and the laws of peace. Like Vattel, he argues that, as far as the law that is directly applicable to states is concerned (Vattel's 'voluntary law'), no one state can sit in judgement over another and there can be no such thing as a just or unjust war. As he puts it in *Perpetual Peace*, 'neither party can be declared an unjust enemy'.²³ Justice in international life is necessarily subjectively defined.

In the state of nature, the *right to make war* (i.e. to enter into hostilities) is the permitted means by which one state prosecutes its rights against another. Thus if a state believes that it

²⁰ IH, Reiss, p. 47.

²¹ MM, Reiss, p. 175.

²² Hedley Bull, 'Hobbes and the International Anarchy', *Social Research* 48 (Winter 1981), p. 727.

²³ PP, Reiss, p. 96.

has been injured by another state, it is entitled to use violence, for it cannot in the state of nature gain satisfaction through *legal proceedings*.²⁴

According to this permissive system of law, in addition to ‘an actively inflicted injury’, Kant again follows Vattel in accepting the justification of wars waged in the interests of maintaining the balance of power. Speaking of an ‘alarming increase in the power of another state’, Kant argues that:

This is an injury to the less powerful state by the mere fact that the other state, even without offering any active offence, is more powerful . . . On this is based the right to maintain a balance of power among all states which have active contact with one another.²⁵

As regards *jus in bello*, Kant’s attitude is more complex. On the one hand, he calls this the ‘most problematic task of international law’, ‘For it is very difficult to form any conception at all of such rights and to imagine any law whatsoever in this lawless state without involving oneself in contradictions’.²⁶ Yet, on the other hand, Kant goes some way towards accepting restraints on the conduct of war that derive their effect from reciprocity and the recognition of mutual interest.

The attacked state is allowed to use any means of defence except those whose use would render its subjects unfit to be citizens. For if it did not observe this condition, it would render itself unfit in the eyes of international right to function as a person in relation to other states and to share equal rights with them.²⁷

One reason why Kant devoted time and space to discussing existing international law may relate to his belief that the achievement of a more satisfactory ‘law governed external relationship’ was a long-term goal that could only be reached gradually and with much difficulty. In the meantime, Kant appears to see some merit in existing international law that draws its force from common interest and reciprocity. This is clear from the Sixth Preliminary Article in *Perpetual Peace*:

6. ‘No state at war with another shall permit such acts of hostility as would make mutual confidence impossible during a future time of peace. Such acts would include the employment of *assassins (percussores) or poisoners (venefici)*, *breach of agreements, the instigation of treason (perduellio)* within the enemy state, etc.’

These are dishonourable stratagems. For it must still remain possible, even in wartime, to have some sort of trust in the attitude of the enemy, otherwise peace could not be concluded and the hostilities would turn into a war of extermination (*bellum internecinium*).²⁸

This article represents, for Kant, a law ‘of the strictest sort’ that could be implemented immediately (i.e. in a continuing state of anarchy) and that would be ‘valid irrespective of differing circumstances’.

Yet, despite this qualification, the crucial point for Kant remains that all existing international law represented an inadequate basis on which to make progress towards perpetual peace. Thus in *Perpetual Peace* he argues that existing international law ‘cannot have the slightest legal force, since states as such are not subject to a common external constraint’.²⁹

²⁴ MM, Reiss, p. 167.

²⁵ MM, Reiss, p. 167.

²⁶ MM, Reiss, p. 168.

²⁷ MM, Reiss, p. 168.

²⁸ PP, Reiss, p. 96

²⁹ PP, Reiss, p. 103.

Since the state of nature among nations (as among individual human beings) is a state which one ought to abandon in order to enter a state governed by law, all international rights, as well as all the external property of states such as can be acquired or preserved by war, are purely *provisional* until the state of nature has been abandoned.³⁰

This stress on the insufficiency of existing restraints on international behaviour is also visible in Kant's discussion of the balance of power. In *The Idea for a Universal History* Kant appears to accept the necessity for 'a law of equilibrium [*ein Gesetz des Gleichgewichts*] to regulate the essentially healthy hostility which prevails among states'.³¹ He speaks of 'a principle of equality [*Gleichheit*] governing the *actions* and *counter actions* of these energies, lest they should destroy one another'.³² Yet, although important, the balance of power is too fragile an institution on which to base any hopes of perpetual peace.

For a permanent universal peace by means of a so-called *European balance of power* is a pure illusion, like Swift's story of the house which the builder had constructed in such perfect harmony with all the laws of equilibrium that it collapsed as soon as a sparrow alighted on it.³³

Because of this fragility the task for Kant is not to supersede the balance of power, as Kenneth Waltz maintains, but rather 'to *reinforce* [my emphasis] this law by introducing a system of united power, hence a cosmopolitan system of general political security'.³⁴

Thus, for Kant, neither existing international law nor the balance of power provided an adequate answer to the problem of war. He is very clear in arguing that peace must be formally established: 'Peace can neither be inaugurated nor secured without a general agreement between nations'.³⁵ What kind of 'general agreement' does Kant then examine? The most logical way to end the lawless state of nature, according to Kant, would be to form an international state [*Völkerstaat*] through a universal union of states [*ein allgemeiner Staatenverein*]:

There is only one rational way in which states coexisting with other states can emerge from a lawless condition of pure warfare. Just like individual men, they must renounce their savage and lawless freedom, adapt themselves to public coercive laws and thus form an international state (*civitas gentium*) which would necessarily continue to grow until it embraced all the peoples of the earth.³⁶

Yet, whilst theoretically optimal, Kant is all too aware of the problems that such a solution would entail. In the first place, says Kant, such a solution is 'not the will of nations according to their present conception of international right'.³⁷ This may well be true but it is nevertheless an odd objection because it is directly contradicted by Kant's philosophy of history. As we shall see, central to his view of progress is the argument that nature 'compels us to follow a course which we would not readily adopt by choice'.³⁸ Secondly, such a solution is held to be inapplicable because states

³⁰ MM, Reiss, p. 171.

³¹ IH, Reiss, p. 49.

³² IH, Reiss, p. 49.

³³ TP, Reiss, p. 92.

³⁴ TP, Reiss, p. 90, and Kenneth Waltz, 'Kant, Liberalism and War', *American Political Science Review* 56 (1961), p. 338.

³⁵ PP, Reiss, p. 104.

³⁶ PP, Reiss, p. 107.

³⁷ PP, Reiss, p. 105.

³⁸ TP, Reiss, p. 90. See also PP, Reiss, p. 112.

are different to individuals. 'For as states, they already have a lawful internal constitution and have thus outgrown the coercive right of others to subject them to a wider constitution in accordance with their present conception of right'.³⁹ Again, whilst the prohibition of coercion may be accepted, there does not seem to be any reason here why a state should not voluntarily decide to merge its sovereignty within some larger body.

In the third place, a state is an organic entity and Kant points to differences in language and religion as factors which separate states and prevent them from intermingling.

For a state, unlike the ground on which it is based, is not a possession (*patrimonium*). It is a society of men which no one other than itself can command or dispose of. Like a tree, it has its own roots, and to graft it onto another state as if it were a shoot is to terminate its existence as a moral personality . . .⁴⁰

Although still far from the emphasis on cultural and linguistic uniqueness that is found in early German nationalist writers such as Herder or Hamann, Kant shows here that he is closer to the modern conception of the nation than is often supposed.

Kant's fourth and most powerful argument against the idea of an international state is that it is both impractical and contrary to the idea of freedom. As he puts it in *Perpetual Peace*:

For the laws progressively lose their impact as the government increases its range and a soulless despotism, after crushing the last germs of goodness, will finally lapse into anarchy.⁴¹

Or, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*:

But if such an international state of this kind extends over too wide an area of land, it will eventually become impossible to govern and thence to protect each of its members and the multitude of corporations this would require must again lead to a state of war.⁴²

The point is made most graphically in a little quoted footnote to *Religion within the Limits of Reason*:

Each separate state, so long as it has a neighboring state which it dares hope to conquer, strives to aggrandize itself through such a conquest, and thus to attain a world empire, a polity wherein all freedom, and as a consequence virtue, taste, and learning, would necessarily expire. Yet this monster in which laws gradually lose their force, after it has swallowed all its neighbors, finally dissolves of itself, and through rebellion and disunion breaks into many smaller states. These, instead of striving toward a league of nations, a republic of federated free nations, begin the same game over again, each for itself, so that war, the scourge of humanity, may not be allowed to cease.⁴³

Kant even goes so far in the same passage to argue that 'war is not so incurably evil as that tomb, a universal autocracy'.

Kant therefore doubts the viability and desirability of an international state and, in consequence is drawn like Rousseau and many others, to consider the possibility of a

³⁹ PP, Reiss, p. 104.

⁴⁰ PP, Reiss, p. 94.

⁴¹ PP, Reiss, p. 113.

⁴² MM, Reiss, p. 171.

⁴³ *Religion within the Limits of Reason*, in Carl Friedrich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant* (New York, 1949), p. 381.

federation of separate states.⁴⁴ Yet the exact nature of such a federation varies from one work to another. In the Seventh Proposition of *The Idea for a Universal History* (1784) Kant introduces the idea of a federation. He speaks of man 'abandoning the lawless state of savagery and entering a federation of peoples [*Völkerbund*] in which every state, even the smallest, could expect to derive its security and rights not from its own power or its own legal judgements, but solely from this great federation'.⁴⁵ On the one hand, Kant is clearly speaking here of a plurality of states ('every state, even the smallest'). Yet on the other, it seems clear that this federation would have the power to administer the law, both in terms of the authoritative interpretation of common rules and the enforcement of those rules. The sovereignty of the participating states would be qualified by the constitution of the federation and its power to enforce the law. Law and security would derive 'from a united power and from the law-governed decisions of a united will [*von einer vereinigten Macht und von der Entscheidung nach Gesetze des vereinigten Willens*]'.⁴⁶ The emphasis on coercive force is also visible in a further statement in the same section: 'Men are compelled to reinforce this law by introducing a system of united power, hence a cosmopolitan system of general political security'.⁴⁷ Finally, in the Ninth Proposition, Kant talks of a plan of nature which aims at 'a perfect civil union of mankind [*Pläne der Natur, der auf die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung der Menschengattung abziele*]'.⁴⁸ The phrase '*bürgerliche Vereinigung*' is the same phrase with which Kant earlier describes the need for a domestic civil society based on coercive laws.

In *Theory and Practice* (1793) Kant at first rejects the idea of a 'cosmopolitan commonwealth under a single head [*ein weltbürgerliches gemeines Wesen unter einem Oberhaupt*]' because of the danger of such a state leading to 'the most fearful despotism'.⁴⁹ Instead, he favours a 'lawful condition of federation with a commonly agreed international law [*ein rechtlicher Zustand der Föderation nach einem gemeinschaftlich verabredeten Völkerrecht*]'.⁵⁰ Yet only two pages later Kant's argument brings him back to the necessity of international law being based on coercion [*Zwangsgesetze*].

And there is not possible way of countering this [war and the will to subjugate others] except a state of international right, based on enforceable public laws to which every state much submit.⁵¹

The German leaves no doubt: *mit Macht begleitete Gesetze*—laws accompanied by force. Criticizing those who ridicule the idea of St Pierre and Rousseau, Kant goes on to argue that 'we should proceed in our disputes in such a way that an international

⁴⁴ Interpretations of Kant are complicated by the variety of German terms (*Völkerbund*, *Föderation*, *Föderalität*, *Verbindung*, *Genossenschaft*), by the tendency to translate many of these terms with the single word 'federation', and by the preconceptions that arise from modern usage. This article uses the general term 'federation' but endeavours to demonstrate the different kinds of organizations or associations that Kant was discussing in his various works on the subject. It should also be pointed out that Kant's own usage is not always helpful. For instance, the phrase *Völkerbund* is used in *The Idea for a Universal History* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* to describe two very different kinds of organization.

⁴⁵ IH, Reiss, p. 47.

⁴⁶ IH, Reiss, p. 47.

⁴⁷ IH, Reiss, p. 49.

⁴⁸ IH, Reiss, p. 51.

⁴⁹ TP, Reiss, p. 90.

⁵⁰ TP, Reiss, p. 90.

⁵¹ TP, Reiss, p. 90.

state may be inaugurated'.⁵² Here then, in a work published only two years before *Perpetual Peace*, Kant begins with the idea of a limited federation but ends up, as in *The Idea for a Universal History*, arguing for the necessity of some form of universal political system able to enforce the law.

Kant was attracted by the idea of some form of universal political system able to enforce the law for two reasons. Firstly, because coercive enforcement seemed to represent the most effective way of abolishing war. Secondly, and more importantly, because of his belief that even though an international government or a federation able to enforce the law might be impractical, such ideas help us to discern the principles on which our more limited efforts towards a peaceful world should be based.

But if an international state of this kind extends over too wide an area of land, it will eventually become impossible to govern it and thence to protect each of its members, and the multitude of corporations this would require must again lead to a state of war. It naturally follows that *perpetual peace*, the ultimate end of all international right, is an idea incapable of realization. But the political principles which have this aim, i.e. those principles which encourage the formation of international alliances designed to *approach* the idea itself by a continual process, are not impractical.⁵³

Kant is quite consistent in arguing that 'a perfect solution is impossible', because, to quote a famous passage, 'Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of'.⁵⁴ Thus Kant speaks in *Perpetual Peace* of an 'infinite process of gradual approximation'.⁵⁵ Yet the idea that an impractical ideal can provide a valid guide to action raises a major problem. If the conditions of the ideal solution cannot be fulfilled, and indeed have serious drawbacks, it does not necessarily follow that a second-best solution based on similar principles will be able to provide an answer. After all, the League of Nations remains a clear example of an attempt to reform the international system that not only failed to work according to its original premises but constituted an active obstacle to the maintenance of order by more traditional means.

In *Perpetual Peace* (1795), however, the conclusion of Kant's argument is very different. As many of Kant's commentators have shown, the emphasis of this work lies in rejecting the 'positive idea of a world republic' in favour of the 'negative substitute in the shape of an enduring and gradually expanding federation likely to prevent war'.⁵⁶ The federation is here a 'federation of free peoples', 'a particular kind of league which we might call a pacific federation'.⁵⁷ Kant is at pains to underline the need to maintain the independence of states and to uphold a strict principle of non-intervention. This is particularly clear from the second and fifth Preliminary Articles. The need to find a 'law governed external relationship' remains as strong as ever, but the 'amalgamation of the separate nations under a single power' is rejected in favour of a '*föderative Vereinigung*'.⁵⁸

This federation does not aim to acquire any power like that of the state, but merely to preserve and secure the *freedom* of each state in itself along with that of all the other

⁵² TP, Reiss, p. 92.

⁵³ MM, Reiss, p. 171.

⁵⁴ IH, Reiss, p. 46.

⁵⁵ PP, Reiss, p. 130.

⁵⁶ PP, Reiss, p. 105.

⁵⁷ PP, Reiss, pp. 102 and 104.

⁵⁸ PP, Reiss, p. 113.

confederated states, although this does not mean that they need to submit to public laws and to a coercive power which enforces them as men do in the state of nature.⁵⁹

The sole purpose of this federation will be to abolish war, although its powers to do so will be strictly limited. The force of the federation will derive from its ability to secure and guarantee peace between its members and to set an example which others will be drawn to follow. In *Perpetual Peace*, such a federation appears to Kant to be the limit of what is possible given the constraints of state sovereignty and the importance of state autonomy on the one hand and the need for a lawful framework for international relations on the other.

The conditions which must be fulfilled before any kind of international right is possible is that a *lawful state* must already be in existence. For without this, there can be no public right, and any right which can be conceived of outside it, i.e. in a state of nature, will be merely a private right. Now we have already seen above that a federative association of states whose sole intention is to eliminate war is the only *lawful* arrangement which can be reconciled with their *freedom*.⁶⁰

Kant's discussion of the international problem in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) follows the main lines of the argument developed in *Perpetual Peace*, but with an important difference of emphasis. Listing the main elements of international law, Kant repeats the argument for a limited federation.

Thirdly, it is necessary to establish a federation of peoples [*Völkerbund*] in accordance with the idea of the original social contract, so that state will protect one another against external aggression while refraining from interference in one another's internal disagreements. And fourthly, this association [*Verbindung*] must not embody a sovereign power as in a civil constitution, but only a partnership [*Genossenschaft*] or confederation [*Föderalität*].⁶¹

Kant is insistent that this 'union of several states designed to preserve the peace [which] may be called a *permanent congress of states* [*Staatenkongress*]' should be seen as 'a voluntary gathering of various states which can be *dissolved* at any time, not an association which, like that of the American states, is based on a political constitution and is therefore *indissoluble*'.⁶² The major difference with *Perpetual Peace* is that the emphasis here is placed on the protection of the confederated states against outside aggression rather than simply maintaining the peace between them.⁶³ This points to a basic dilemma. Unless such a federation is able to become truly universal, its effect is merely to rearrange the units within the international anarchy, rather than overcome that anarchy. Indeed by making the units larger and more powerful the potential dangers of the state of war may actually be increased.

There are two further points that emerge from Kant's discussion of a limited federation in *Perpetual Peace* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. First, the purpose of such a federation is indeed a limited one. Kant appears to argue that a purely rhetorical renunciation of war will help create the necessary confidence to allow

⁵⁹ PP, Reiss, p. 104.

⁶⁰ PP, Reiss, p. 129.

⁶¹ MM, Reiss, p. 165.

⁶² MM, Reiss, p. 171.

⁶³ This takes Kant closer to Rousseau's view of the need for a confederation as the only way of safeguarding small and politically virtuous states against the vicissitudes of the international anarchy. See Stanley Hoffman, 'Rousseau on War and Peace', *American Political Science Review* 57, 2 (June 1963), pp. 327–31.

nations to settle their differences by peaceful means and, perhaps in time, lead them to accept a more developed form of federation. Michael Doyle suggests that international law helps the cause of peace by providing a 'guarantee of respect'.⁶⁴ International law enshrines the mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of states, reinforces normative barriers to the use of force and helps increase the expectation of cooperative and mutually beneficial behaviour. Yet whilst there are clearly important Kantian arguments in favour of the beneficial effects of international law, the exact role of Kant's free federation remains unclear. In Doyle's persuasive reconstruction of Kant's argument the federation seems to have only symbolic importance, certainly with no institutional embodiment but with hardly any legal character either. Indeed Doyle argues that a *de facto* 'pacific union' has existed for the past 180 years without any formal treaty or federation.⁶⁵ What we are left with, then, is Kant's belief that, whatever its weaknesses, the creation of such a limited federation would shift attitudes to war and reinforce normative constraints on the use of force—something which has indeed occurred and to which the League, the Kellogg Pact and the United Nations (for all their weaknesses) have contributed.

The second point about Kant's ideas for a limited federation is that the problem of war is abstracted from all other aspects of international relations. There is very little indication, apart from vague references to arbitration, as to how all the conflicts and pressures that are the underlying causes of war can be regulated. Some have regarded it as an example of Kant's positive realism that his federation is concerned only with the abolition of war. But it is hard to believe that a rhetorical renunciation of war will mean a great deal unless more attention is paid to the political context within which differences and conflicts will continue to arise.

Two conclusions emerge from this first section. In the first place, there is no single Kantian solution to the international problem. Kant's writing on the subject is characterized by a tentative and exploratory approach and he is keenly aware that all solutions involve trade-offs and costs. Second, it is clear that Kant is not solely concerned with the kind of limited pacific federation stressed by Hinsley and others. In *Perpetual Peace* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant does indeed reject both world government and a federation with the power to enforce the proscription of war. Yet in both *The Idea for a Universal History* and *Theory and Practice* Kant's universalism is much stronger and he embraces both the idea of some kind of universal political system and a federation with the power to enforce the law.

Kant's view of progress to a peaceful world

Yet how is progress towards perpetual peace possible? Kant's answer is usually seen in terms of his insistence on the pacific tendencies of republican governments. Yet, whilst clearly important, both his analysis of the causes of war and his discussion of possible solutions embrace all three of the 'images' developed by Kenneth Waltz: the character of individual human beings, the nature of domestic society and the constraints of the international anarchy.⁶⁶ One of the most important features of

⁶⁴ Michael Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, 3 (Summer 1983), p. 230.

⁶⁵ Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs', p. 227.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York, 1959).

Kant's thinking is his awareness that any progress towards solving the problem of war must come to terms with each of these three sets of problems. Indeed, the real importance of republican government is that it provides the link between the three levels.

War for Kant is the result of factors at all three levels. One level, it is the product of human nature. Kant shares with Hobbes a pessimistic view of man and rejects Rousseau's notion that man's propensity for evil is the result of the malign influence of society. He speaks of the 'depravity of human nature' or of man's 'selfish and animal tendencies'.⁶⁷ 'War itself does not seem to require any particular kind of motivation for it seems to be engrained in human nature'.⁶⁸ On a second level, the frequency of war is clearly influenced by the character of domestic governments. Kant never tires of denouncing the bellicosity of despots, referring to 'heads of state (who can never have enough of war)' or the 'warlike inclinations of those in power', or the ruler whose glory lies 'in his power to order thousands of people to immolate themselves for a cause which does not truly concern them'.⁶⁹ On a third level, although Kant is less explicit than Rousseau in depicting the constraints of the security dilemma, he nevertheless argues that war is a fundamental and intrinsic characteristic of the international anarchy that exists between states.

The starting point for Kant's answer as to how peace will be achieved concerns his stress on domestic reform.⁷⁰ Some aspects of this reform are military. Kant, for instance, wants to disband standing armies because they are expensive, politically oppressive and fuel arms races: 'For they constantly threaten other states with war by the very fact that they are always prepared for it. They spur on the states to outdo one another in arming unlimited numbers of soldieriers . . .'.⁷¹ More important is his emphasis on achieving an optimal arrangement of the civil constitution'.⁷² Kant believes that republics will be less inclined to engage in wars. By the term republic Kant means a constitutional state with a separation of the executive and legislative and with some degree of representation of the active citizens. Why should a republic be 'by its nature inclined to seek perpetual peace'?⁷³

The first reason is a purely mechanistic argument based on the assumption that the 'people' are more naturally inclined to peace than their bellicose rulers. Peace will be more likely in a republic because of the power of the citizens to restrain the aggressive tendencies of their leaders.

If, as is inevitably the case under this constitution, the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared, it is very natural that they will have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise. For this means calling down on themselves all the miseries of war.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ PP, Reiss, p. 103, and IH, Reiss, p. 42.

⁶⁸ PP, Reiss, p. 111.

⁶⁹ PP, Reiss, pp. 95 and 103. On how widespread was the view that war was the sport of kings see Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal*, pp. 112–17.

⁷⁰ Exactly how domestic reform is to be achieved remains a problem for Kant. This is due partly to his denial of the right of rebellion. It is also due to his belief that 'the problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is *dependent* [my emphasis] upon the problem of a law-governed relationship between states'. There is a chicken and egg dilemma here that Kant never fully resolves.

⁷¹ PP, Reiss, p. 94.

⁷² IH, Reiss, p. 48.

⁷³ PP, Reiss, p. 104. There is a large literature dealing with the nature of Kant's republics. See especially Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, chs. 5–8.

⁷⁴ PP, Reiss, p. 100.

... each state must be organized internally in such a way that the head of state, for whom the war actually costs nothing (for he wages it at the expense of others, i.e. the people), must no longer have the deciding vote on whether war is to be declared or not, for the people who pay for it must decide ... For the people will not readily place itself in danger of personal want (which would not affect the head of state) out of a mere desire for aggrandizement, or because of some supposed and purely verbal offence.⁷⁵

The 'miseries' of war are in part the risk of death and injury but they also refer to the increasing economic costs of war.

The increasing culture of states ... must likewise cause increasingly high expenditure on standing armies, which must be kept in constant readiness and equipped with ever more numerous instruments of warfare. Meanwhile the price of all necessities will steadily rise, while no one can hope for any proportionate increase in the corresponding metal currencies. No peace will last long enough for the resources saved during it to meet the expenditure of the next war, while the invention of the national debt, though ingenious, is an ultimately self-defeating expedient.⁷⁶

It is clearly important that the people should directly experience the costs of war. This is one of the reasons why Kant favours militias rather than professional armies. It also partly explains his attack on the financing of war through the accumulation of debt—an argument which very closely follows that of Adam Smith.⁷⁷

The second reason for Kant's preference for republican government is more subtle and has been underestimated by many commentators. Kant does not accept the naive liberal assumption that the 'people' are always peaceful or virtuous. Progress towards perpetual peace is ultimately dependent on the moral progress of individuals. Yet such progress in turn can only come about within a good political constitution. 'In the same way, we cannot expect their moral attitudes to produce a good political constitution; on the contrary, it is only through the latter that the people can be expected to attain a good level of moral culture'.⁷⁸ As Dick Howard points out: 'Kant argues that the Republic is the *only* political form that is capable of instancing the harmony of morality and politics'.⁷⁹ This, then, is the link between the first and second images. By providing the framework within which moral progress is possible, republican government is an essential step on the road to perpetual peace.

What kind of moral improvement and education does Kant point to? First, and most fundamentally, there is the straightforward but powerful moral imperative to find a means of abolishing war.

Now, moral-practical Reason within us pronounces the following irresistible veto: *There shall be no war* ... Thus it is no longer a question of whether perpetual peace is really possible or not, or whether we are not perhaps mistaken in our theoretical judgement if we assume that it is. On the contrary, we must simply act as if it could come about (which is perhaps impossible), and turn our efforts towards establishing that constitution which seems most suitable for this purpose.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ TP, Reiss, pp. 90–1.

⁷⁶ TP, Reiss, p. 90.

⁷⁷ See Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Chicago, 1976), II, pp. 462–3. See also pp. 338–9, 444–6 and 455–6.

⁷⁸ PP, Reiss, 113.

⁷⁹ Dick Howard, 'Kant's Political Theory: The Virtue of his Vices', *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (December 1980), p. 346.

⁸⁰ MM, Reiss, p. 174.

This kind of generalized moral imperative has always been open to the realist criticism that it cannot in itself provide a viable guide as to *how* war should be ended. But this moral passion to abolish suffering and sin lies at the heart of Kant's view of progress. Moreover, the forceful and repeated restatement of the immorality of war serves an essential purpose in helping to shape the normative climate of international relations. Despite the claims of many realists, Kant is right in arguing that attitudes to the use of force can change and do, at least to some degree, affect state behaviour.⁸¹

The second moral capacity that Kant stresses is the ability to learn from experience and to act on the realization that, unless the international anarchy is reformed, increasingly destructive conflict is inevitable. The ability to learn from experience is a central feature of Kant's moral view. He believes man to be neither wholly evil nor wholly virtuous. On the one hand, there is man's egoism, his desire to live as an individual and his innate inclination to aggression. On the other, Kant's whole moral philosophy is based on the assumption that human beings are capable of discovering and acting upon universally valid moral imperatives. Thus man, for Kant, 'possesses a great moral capacity' and is 'animated by respect for right and duty'.⁸² Kant's view of progress is based essentially on the dialectical process by which the asocial and evil qualities act as a constant stimulus to the need to create and maintain a more peaceful and law-governed society.⁸³

Nature should thus be thanked for fostering social incompatibility, enviously competitive vanity and insatiable desires for possession or even power. Without these desires all man's excellent natural capacities would never be roused to develop.⁸⁴

Wars, tense and unremitting preparations and the resultant distress which every state must eventually feel within itself, even in the midst of peace—these are the means by which nature drives nations to make initially imperfect attempts, but finally, after many devastations, upheavals and even complete inner exhaustion of their powers, to take the step which reason could have suggested to them even without so many sad experiences—that of abandoning their lawless state of savagery . . .⁸⁵

It is war itself, the memory of past suffering and destruction and, above all, the ever-present possibility of slipping back into such a state that forms the essential driving force behind Kant's view of progress. At times Kant slips back into the common but rather simplistic eighteenth-century providential view of history and progress, best exemplified by Lessing's *On the Education of the Human Race*. In addition, there is the more serious problem that, however dangerous the status quo, the *necessity* of reforming it does not provide an adequate guide to the *viability* of doing so.⁸⁶ Yet, for the most part, Kant's realistic view of man's propensity of evil provides the essential backcloth against which his views on the possibility of progress towards perpetual peace must be judged. Inverting the common liberal emphasis on human goodness, Kant stresses man's selfish instincts and the catastrophes and wars to which they inevitably give rise as the essential features of 'Nature's hidden plan'.

⁸¹ For a recent assessment of the impact of ethical constraints on international behaviour, see James Lee Ray, 'The Abolition of Slavery and the End of International War', *International Organization* 43, 3 (Summer 1989).

⁸² TP, Reiss, p. 92.

⁸³ There is a large literature dealing with Kant's philosophy of history. See especially, Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, ch. 1; G. A. Kelly, 'Rousseau, Kant and History', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968); and E. L. Fackenheim, 'Kant's Concept of History', *Kant-Studien* 48 (1956–7).

⁸⁴ IH, Reiss, p. 45.

⁸⁵ IH, Reiss, p. 47.

⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis of the realist critique of utopianism, see Clarke, *Reform and Resistance*, ch. 2.

The third kind of moral improvement concerns the gradual process by which individuals become increasingly able to see themselves as part of a global community of mankind, a 'universal cosmopolitan existence'. This level of cosmopolitan right was not to have any political embodiment and Kant believed that its effect could be seen most visibly in the growth of trade and commerce. Yet Kant firmly believed that, whilst obligations to the nation state would not (nor should not) disappear, the range of moral obligation could expand beyond the state and that individuals could develop a growing sense of moral interdependence. '[A]s culture increases and men gradually come closer together', this would lead 'toward a general agreement on the principles for peace and understanding'.⁸⁷

The moral improvement of the individual and the benefits of republican government are also strengthened by the material advantages of peace. Thus we find in Kant a clear example of the common liberal argument that the growth of peaceful trade relations and economic interdependence between states will make war less likely, firstly because it is based on naturally congruent interests, and secondly because it raises the costs of war and makes it increasingly counterproductive.

For the *spirit of commerce* sooner or later takes hold of every people, and it cannot exist side by side with war . . . Thus states find themselves compelled to promote the noble cause of peace, though not exactly from motives of morality.⁸⁸

And in addition, the effects which an upheaval in any state produces upon all the others in our continent, where all are so closely linked by trade, are so perceptible that those other states are forced by their own insecurity to offer themselves as arbiters, albeit without any legal authority, so that they indirectly prepare the way for the great political body of the future.⁸⁹

He also follows the liberal tradition in believing that unfettered economic activity is surest way of both maximizing wealth and guaranteeing political freedom.

Furthermore, civil freedom can no longer be so easily infringed without disadvantage to all trades and industries, and especially to commerce, in the event of which the state's power in its external relations will also decline . . . If the citizen is deterred from seeking his personal welfare in any way he chooses which is consistent with the freedom of others, the vitality of business in general and hence also the strength of the whole [state] are held in check.⁹⁰

Kant is, however, closer to Smith than to Cobden in his awareness that the economic strength of the state must be protected and that economic interdependence is not an unlimited blessing. Thus in contrast to earlier natural lawyers such as Vitoria, there is for Kant no inherent right to trade. The conditions of universal hospitality are limited and Kant praises China and Japan for laying down very strict conditions on communication and trade with the European nations. More importantly, trade must be conducted in the interests of one's own people 'and not for the advantage of strangers and the encouragement of the industry of others, because the State without the prosperity of the people would not possess sufficient power to resist external enemies or to maintain itself as a commonwealth'.⁹¹

Kant's emphasis on the importance of change at the level of both the individual and domestic society allows him to overcome a basic dilemma that faces all

⁸⁷ *Eternal Peace*, in Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Kant*, p. 454.

⁸⁸ PP, Reiss, p. 114.

⁸⁹ IH, Reiss, p. 51.

⁹⁰ IH, Reiss, p. 50.

⁹¹ *Principles of Political Right*, quoted in Waltz, 'Kant, Liberalism and War', p. 334.

international reformers who take as their starting point the idea of a Hobbesian state of nature.

The case for world government, as it is made out by Kant and others, begins with the proposition that sovereign states are in a Hobbesian state of nature, from which they need to escape by subordinating themselves to a common government. But if states are indeed in a Hobbesian state of nature, the contract be means of which they are to emerge from it cannot take place. For if covenants without the sword are but words, this will be true of covenants directed towards the establishment of universal government, just as it will hold true of agreements on other subjects.⁹²

By focusing on the need and possibility of progress of both individuals and states, Kant is able to envisage a situation in which states will be able to cooperate in a way which was previously impossible.

Yet Kant could never be satisfied simply with the moral improvement of individuals and of domestic society. Only when the international anarchy itself had been reformed through a formal agreement between states was progress towards perpetual peace possible. Here is the second role for republican governments and the link between the second and third images: the idea that a morally and politically well-organized republic will form the essential focal point around which a federation of states can be built. 'For if by good fortune one powerful and enlightened nation can form a republic (which is by its nature inclined to peace), this will provide the focal point for a federal association of other states'.⁹³

Progress towards perpetual peace is therefore based on both moral improvement and self interest, on a combination of factors working at the level of the individual, domestic society and the international system. Michael Doyle has given an account of how these factors can be combined to explain the generally peaceful relations that have in fact increasingly existed between liberal states over the past 200 years.⁹⁴ For Kant, though, the validity of his ideas was only partially based on the evidence of what he called 'history proper'. Kant argued consistently that we should assume progress to be possible because it is a moral duty, a categorical imperative unconditionally binding on all men by virtue of their rational nature.

This progress may at times be *interrupted* but never *broken off* . . . History may well give rise to endless doubts about my hopes, and if these doubts could be proved, they might persuade me to desist from an apparently futile task. But so long as they do not have the force of certainty, I cannot exchange my duty (as a *liquidum*) for a rule of expediency which says that I ought not to attempt the impractical (i.e. the *illiquidum*), since it is purely hypothetical.⁹⁵

Kant: statist or cosmopolitan?

It is clear that there is much strength in a narrower, 'statist' view of Kant. He rejects very emphatically both the desirability and the viability of any move towards world

⁹² Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 262.

⁹³ PP, Reiss, p. 103.

⁹⁴ Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs'. My interpretation differs from Doyle's in laying greater weight on Kant's belief in the moral improvement of individuals and on the specific role of various types of federations that Kant discusses.

⁹⁵ TP, Reiss, p. 89. This brings out once more the primacy of moral considerations in Kant's view of international relations. As Pierre Hassner has said, Kant's political ideas were 'une philosophie politique sans politique'. Pierre Hassner, 'Les concepts de guerre et de paix chez Kant', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 11 (September 1961), p. 642.

government. He is very much aware of the need for states to defend themselves and to maintain their economic, political and military strength. In contrast to the earlier quotation from Bull, the moral imperative for Kant enjoins the cooperation and coexistence of states and rejects the idea of overthrowing the state system. He is concerned not with abolishing the society of states but with improving and perfecting it. In many ways Kant aims at what Barry Buzan has called a 'mature anarchy', where 'the benefits of fragmentation could be enjoyed without the costs of continuous struggle and instability' and where stability rests both on the internal strength and cohesiveness of states and on the universal acceptance of each others' independence and legitimacy.⁹⁶

Moreover, the means of that improvement have a great deal to do with strengthening the international legal order and with building on the mutual rights and duties that exist between states rather than peoples. As we have seen, Kant is not completely dismissive of existing international law. More importantly, the limited pacific federation that he discusses in *Perpetual Peace* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* is indeed designed to underwrite international law in such way as to protect the autonomy and independence of states. This points to a view of international order that is in fact much closer to Bull and Wight's depiction of the Grotian or international society tradition. In addition, Kant's concern with the internal arrangements of states need not be seen, as it sometimes is, as subversive of interstate order, but rather as another means of perfecting it. First, because of this belief that peacefully inclined republican states represent the only means whereby a stable system of independent states can be maintained. Second, because of the extent to which constitutional states which guarantee the moral and political rights of their citizens remove an important element of instability and add to the legitimacy of the state system as a whole.

Kant's views on non-intervention provide an important measure of the degree to which he is primarily concerned with inter-state order. The principle of non-intervention, after all, underpins much of what Michael Walzer has described as the 'legalist paradigm' and of what Charles Beitz has characterized as 'the morality of states'.⁹⁷ Kant explicitly upholds the principle of non-intervention in the fifth preliminary article in *Perpetual Peace*: '5. No state shall forcibly interfere in the constitution and government of another state'.⁹⁸ The only exception that he was prepared to allow was when internal discord had led to the state breaking up into two parts 'each of which set itself up as a separate state and claimed authority over the whole'.⁹⁹

Carl Friedrich has claimed another exception, which, if true, would alter Kant's position very significantly: 'Kant would probably have asserted the right of other powers to intervene when a people is being deprived of its civil constitution by a totalitarian *coup d'état*'.¹⁰⁰ There is, however, no textual basis for this assertion and Kant's argument seems to run in exactly the opposite direction. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant accepts (speaking of colonialism) that 'there are plausible

⁹⁶ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear* (London, 1983), pp. 96–7.

⁹⁷ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (London, 1980), especially Part II, and Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, 1979).

⁹⁸ PP, Reiss, p. 96.

⁹⁹ PP, Reiss, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Carl Friedrich, *Inevitable Peace* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 178. On this point, see R. J. Vincent, *Non-Intervention and International Order* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 56–8.

enough arguments for the use of violence on the grounds that it is in the best interests of the world as a whole'. Although this is said in relation to colonialism, his denial of this principle seem to carry more general weight.

But all these supposedly good intentions cannot wash away the stain of injustice from the means which are used to implement them. Yet one might object that the whole world would perhaps still be in a lawless condition of men had had any such compunction about using violence when they first created a law-governed state. But this can as little annul the above condition of right as can the plea of political revolutionaries that the people are entitled to reform constitutions by force if they have become corrupt . . .¹⁰¹

More telling still is this attack on both the use of force and on confederations that seek to reform the internal structure of other states:

Although war is not so incurably evil as that tomb, a universal autocracy (*or even as a confederacy which exists to hasten the weakening of a despotism in any single state*) [my emphasis], yet . . . war creates more evil than it destroys.¹⁰²

Kant is clearly aware here of the problems which his denial of the right of rebellion domestically and his upholding of rigid principle of non-intervention internationally have both for the emergence of republics and the spread of his pacific federation.

Why does Kant uphold such a rigid principle of non-intervention? First, because of his belief that international legal restraints buttressed by a federation represent an indispensable bulwark against the dangers of the international anarchy. Second, because of his belief that states—or at least republican states—represent values and fulfil purposes that deserve to be protected. Although Kant is not clear about exactly what constitutes a state worthy of inclusion in international society, he stresses two elements. First, as we have seen, the extent to which a state embodies a particular linguistic, historical and cultural identity. Second, and more important, the fact that states provide the social framework for individual freedom.

The free citizens of a civil state share a common interest, but this common interest is not derived from the overbearing concern and care of a paternalist government. Rather what individuals have in common derives from their status as independent inhabitants of the same country . . . They share, therefore, a common culture for whose existence they owe a debt to past generation, and, at the same time, they have a duty to ward future generations to preserve this culture and the freedoms that have been won. In this way the extent of civil freedom an individual enjoys within his state becomes a matter of national pride. Liberty becomes something more than merely an abstract political principle. Since it is enjoyed within the confines of a particular state it becomes the attribute of a particular people or nation. The individual can only be free if he is a member of a free nation . . .¹⁰³

Third, the rigidity of Kant's position does not stem solely from the fear of damage to international society that might follow from permitting intervention in exceptional circumstances. Rather it results also from his approach to the foundations of morality and his refusal to accept that there could be any exceptions to a universal moral law.¹⁰⁴ This rigidity is indicative of a broader problem in Kant's argument. He never fully faces up to the tension that exists in the real world between a moral code that is

¹⁰¹ MM, Reiss, p. 173.

¹⁰² *Religion within the Limits of Reason*, in Friedrich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant*, p. 381.

¹⁰³ Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the weaknesses of this argument, see H. B. Acton, *Kant's Moral Philosophy* (London, 1970), pp. 60–5.

both intensely individualist and cosmopolitan and a view of politics that continues to accord special status to the sovereign state. He is thus an uncertain guide to the political and moral conflicts which inevitably arise between the demands of the morality of states on the one hand and of cosmopolitan justice on the other.¹⁰⁵

Yet, whatever its weaknesses, the rigidity of Kant's position directly contradicts Bull's depiction of the Kantian tradition as one in which '[T]he rules that sustain coexistence and social intercourse among states should be ignored if the imperatives of this higher morality require it'.¹⁰⁶ It also goes against the idea that the importance of ideological homogeneity need involve interventions, crusades or coercion to 'convert the heretic'.

And yet the cosmopolitan and universalist side of Kant cannot be so thoroughly rejected. Kant did believe in the state system but he believed in more than the state system. Cosmopolitanism for Kant did not mean the abolition of nations and national frontiers but it did mean that his view of man's moral, and to a certain extent political, rights and duties could not be encompassed solely within a Vattelian society of states based on what Vattel called 'the natural liberty of nations'.

In the first place there is the fact that his ideas for a federation were not limited solely to a loose league of republican states that had signed a metaphorical treaty to abolish war. Kant was at times drawn to the view that self-enforcement might not be adequate and that a more developed federation might have to form a part of a working system of peace. This would of course still be a 'state system' but the existence of centralized power, the ability to determine and enforce the law and the corresponding limit on state sovereignty would represent a major structural reform of that system. International law would no longer derive from pragmatic consideration of common interest between independent sovereignties but rather from the 'united power and the law-governed decisions of a united will' as he puts it in *The Idea for Universal History*.

Secondly, there is an important sense in which Kant is concerned primarily with individuals and does view the interstate system as of derivative significance. The starting point of Kant's moral and political philosophy is after all with the moral freedom and autonomy of the individual. From that base he is then led to consider the kinds of domestic society and international society that are necessary for that freedom to be safeguarded. Similarly, the impulse for progress towards perpetual peace comes largely from the individual: from the moral outrage at the destructiveness of war, from the ability to learn from experience, and from the gradual moral improvement of mankind.

Although Kant saw freedom in terms of obedience to moral laws that we discern within ourselves, he believed also that those moral laws were universally valid. As Howard Williams has argued, Kant believed very strongly in the moral unity of mankind and in the existence of a global ethical commonwealth.¹⁰⁷ This was not a 'juridico-civil condition', that is, 'the relation of men to each other in which they all alike stand socially under *public coercive laws* (which are, as a class, laws of coercion)'.

¹⁰⁵ On this point, see James Fishkin, 'Theories of Justice and International Relations: The Limits of Liberal Theory', in Anthony Ellis (ed.), *Ethics and International Relations* (Manchester, 1986) and the debate between Michael Walzer and David Luban in Charles Beitz et al. (eds.), *International Ethics* (Princeton, 1985), Part IV.

¹⁰⁶ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, pp. 260–8.

But rather:

An ethico-civil state is that in which they are united under non-coercive laws, that is, *laws of virtue* alone . . .

Further, because the duties of virtue apply to the entire human race, the concept of an ethical commonwealth is extended ideally to the whole of mankind . . .¹⁰⁸

This presumption of universality is of course problematic. Even more than in the case of natural law theorists (who at least laid claim to the discovery of a system of values independent of individual will), neither the generalized nature of Kant's categorical imperative and nor the subjective character of his approach to morality represent a convincing challenge to the historical and cultural variability of moral beliefs.¹⁰⁹ The problem of moral conflict—between conflicting obligations, between ends and means and between competing moral codes and world views—has always been a central feature of attempts to apply morality 'beyond the state' but it poses a particular difficulty both for Kantian ethics in general and their application to international relations in particular.

Third, the global society of mankind has a reality that is not solely based on universal moral laws. This is where Kant's discussion of cosmopolitan right comes in. Cosmopolitan right exists 'in so far as individuals and states, coexisting in an external relationship of mutual influences, may be regarded as citizens of a universal state of mankind [*Menschenstaat*]'.¹¹⁰ Kant underlines the limits of this cosmopolitan right. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* he makes it clear that 'this is not a *legal community of possession* . . . nor a community of ownership'.¹¹¹ In *Perpetual Peace* he states that it is limited to 'the conditions of Universal Hospitality'.¹¹² Hospitality includes the right of access, of safe shelter and, most important, the duty to maintain the conditions within which commerce and peaceful intercourse between peoples are possible.

This right, in so far as it affords the prospect that all the nations may unite for the purpose of creating universal laws to regulate the intercourse they may have with one another, may be termed cosmopolitan (*ius cosmopolitanicum*).¹¹³

Kant saw the reality of this global society in the trade and economic interdependence that existed between states and in the transnational ties between individuals on which this was based. In the first place, transnational ties of this kind generated powerful ties of mutual interest that Kant believed would provide an important—if self-interested—impulse towards peace. Kant does appear to see the free interaction of peoples as leading naturally to harmony. There is nothing of Rousseau's insight that distributional conflicts will remain and that states will become ever more concerned with the relative gains created by interdependence.¹¹⁴ Second, Kant

¹⁰⁸ *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Friedrich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant*, pp. 405–6.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of this problem, see Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (London, 1982), especially ch. 7.

¹¹⁰ PP, Reiss, pp. 98–9.

¹¹¹ MM, Reiss, p. 172.

¹¹² PP, Reiss, p. 105.

¹¹³ MM, Reiss, p. 172.

¹¹⁴ Let us add finally that, though the advantages resulting to commerce from a great and lasting peace are in themselves certain and indisputable, still, being common to all States, they will be appreciated by none. For such advantages make themselves felt only by contrast, and he who wishes to increase his relative power is bound to seek only such gains as are exclusive', Rousseau, *Judgement on Saint-Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace*, in M. Forsyth et al. (ed.), *The Theory of International Relations. Selected Texts* (London, 1970), p. 160.

believed that the reality of these ties would lead to the growth of the 'spirit of enlightenment' and to increasing agreement on the principles on which the peaceful and orderly relations between states should be based. This spirit would draw men away from 'its rulers' self-seeking schemes of expansion'.¹¹⁵ Third, Kant believed that these ties were creating a sense of moral interdependence that buttressed the moral laws of his ethical commonwealth.

The peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*.¹¹⁶

Finally, particularly in *The Idea for a Universal History* where his universalism is at its strongest, Kant holds out great hopes that the embryo of this global society that he sees in his own time will develop in the future.

Although this political body exists for the present only in the roughest of outlines, it nonetheless seems as if a feeling is beginning to stir in all its members, each of which has an interest in maintaining the whole. And this encourages the hope that, after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest purpose of nature, a universal *cosmopolitan existence*, will at last be realized as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop.¹¹⁷

Whilst Kant is certainly much more of a statist than the characterization of the Kantian tradition would suggest, the continuing interest of his work is strengthened by the tension between the two sides of his writings. This tension remains unresolved and there are many difficulties with the answers that Kant gives and with his fascinating but frustrating combination of rigorous moralism and political realism. Yet much of his achievement in the history of thought about international relations rests on his attempt to come to terms with *both* the deep-rootedness and benefits of statism on the one hand *and* the increasing moral and practical demands of cosmopolitanism on the other; from his recognition that the conventional separation of domestic political and moral theory from what happens 'beyond the state' is both practically and logically untenable; and from his awareness that change and progress should not be viewed as a stark choice between the continuation of the state of war in which the logic of the security dilemma is endlessly reproduced on the one hand and the complete transcendence of the state system and its replacement by some form of universal political organisation on the other.

Kant, then, does not consistently advocate a single solution to the problem of war but is concerned to explore the strengths and weaknesses of various solutions. On the one hand, the status quo of international anarchy was unacceptable to Kant and was becoming more so as the destructiveness of war increased. On the other, the theoretically optimal solution of an international state was unattainable, would involve the loss of the state's positive functions as the provider of localized order and the focus for linguistic and patriotic loyalties, and would soon degenerate into a condition of universal oppression. Any solution between the two would have to be based on a tenuous and problematic balance between the reality of state sovereignty and the need to provide a firmer basis for those institutions and obligations that work to curb the excesses of that sovereignty.

¹¹⁵ IH, Reiss, p. 51.

¹¹⁶ PP, Reiss, pp. 107–8.

¹¹⁷ IH, Reiss, p. 51.

Kant was a realist in that he was aware of the positive functions of the state system and the practical difficulties of trying to reform, let alone transcend, it. But he was a cosmopolitan in that he was also very much aware of the limits of the state system and of the existence of rights and obligations that bound all individuals as individuals and not as citizens of particular states. The difficulty of finding a politically and morally acceptable bridge between statism and cosmopolitanism remains a central challenge to the creation of a viable international order. Indeed the contemporary relevance of Kant's work is strengthened by the validity of his prediction that the imperatives of economic modernization and the increasing destructiveness of war would make both the limits of the society of states and the obligations of a cosmopolitan morality ever more important.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ An interesting indication of the reemergence of Kantian perspectives can be seen in the following quotation by the Soviet philosopher Iu. A. Zomoshkin: 'This ideal [general disarmament] is expressed as a moral law, a categorical imperative in the sense of the term used by I. Kant, whose profound reflections upon the role of the ideal have become especially precious in our time. It is an imperative which emerges as the voice of duty and conscience, as a moral-legal "maxim" possessing general, universal significance', Iu. A. Zomoshkin, 'Ideal iadernogo razruzeniia i problema ego realizatsii (filosofskie i psikhologicheskie aspekty)', [The ideal of nuclear disarmament and the problem of its realization—philosophical and psychological aspects], *Voprosy Filosofii* 1 (1988), p. 90.