

The Significance of Kant's Design of Perpetual Peace for the Contemporary Man¹

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1. Peace through World Federation

The design of a World Federation or a World Republic was conceived and formulated for the first time by Kant in his essay on *Perpetual Peace* in 1795. The dream of the universal peace is an old idea. It dates back to the Stoic philosophy and Christianity. It was resumed in the Middle Ages by Dante who identified in the Empire the institution that it was necessary to build in order to achieve peace.

But Kant's project, drawn up during the French Revolution, on the threshold of the era of democracy and nationalism, is deeply different from all previous peace plans. It was not conceived as a proposal to be submitted to an emperor capable of uniting a group of states within the borders of an empire, or to governments or diplomats to achieve a better balance of power. Kant upholds the idea that a lasting and universal peace presupposes the overcoming of state sovereignty and international anarchy and the formation of a federation, which would gradually embrace all the peoples of the earth.

2. Kant's Vision of Peace

Kant does not conceive peace simply as «the suspension of hostilities» in the interval between two wars (negative peace). This notion of peace remains, with few exceptions, undisputed in contemporary political culture. «The state of peace», Kant wrote, «is not a natural state», but rather something that «must be established» through a legal order enforced by a world authority superior to each individual state (positive peace).

By defining peace as a political organisation that «ends *all* wars forever»², Kant accurately identified the discriminatory factor

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¹ I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1983, p. 111.

² *Ibidem*, p. 117.

that separates peace from war and placed truce (the situation in which, though hostilities have ceased, the threat still remains that they may re-open again) on the side of war.

3. The Pre-requisites of Peace

In Kant's time, World Federation was a distant final goal. But the importance of his approach to peace lies in the identification of the main pre-requisites that only now are bringing universal and permanent peace nearer.

a) The first pre-requisite would be fulfilled when the experience of the devastation of war will have pushed nations «to give up the savage (lawless) freedom»³ and the intolerable situation of international anarchy; b) the second when the development of trade, «since the earth is a globe», will have forced humanity to resign themselves to live «in close proximity»⁴; c) the third when the evolution of mankind will have reached the stage of the formation of «a republican civil constitution»⁵, founded that is, on freedom and equality; d) the fourth when the emergence of a world public opinion will have allowed «a transgression of rights in *one* place in the world to be felt *everywhere*»⁶.

4. The Problem of Peace in the Contemporary World

All this shows that Kant was not a utopian. He was aware that the imperative of reason was not sufficient to persuade men to pursue peace.

a) World wars and the nuclear weaponry suggest that Kant was correct when he predicted that it is only the experience of the destructiveness of war that could persuade states to relinquish their savage freedom and bow to a common law. b) Moreover, the globalisation process brought about the erosion of national sovereignty and the need for new powers at regional and world level. c) Furthermore, after the fall of the fascist and communist regimes, a majority of UN member states is ruled by representative democracy, that is the pre-requisite of the extension of democracy to state relations, i.e. international democracy. The European Parliament is the laboratory of this new form of democracy. d) Lastly, thanks to the mass media, every day we

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

are informed about the events that occur all over the world. This is the basis for the formation of a world public opinion and a global civil society. These phenomena are aspects of the globalisation process that blurs the distinction between domestic and foreign politics. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court are examples of the tendency of international law to be applied to the individuals. These examples show that the international order has changed and can be changed even more radically.

5. The Topicality of Kant's Design

If this be correct, we can draw an important conclusion. The Kantian tradition, which remained dormant throughout the era of nationalism, is revived in the new phase of world history started with the end of Cold War. There are many scholars, e.g. Jürgen Habermas, David Held and Otfried Höffe⁷, who maintain that Kant's vision of a World Federal Republic is an answer to the problems raised by globalisation and the erosion of state sovereignty.

The creation of new forms of statehood at world level seems to be the only alternative to the mastery of the market system and the spread of violence. The universal goals of the constitutionalisation of international relations and international democracy provide the contemporary man with a guiding principle in the increasing confusion brought about by the process of globalisation.

6. Globalisation and the Crisis of the Realist Paradigm

The realist paradigm is based on the assumption that political life is torn between two spheres: domestic politics, where conflicts can be solved by legal means, and international politics, where conflicts are solved by violent means whenever diplomacy fails in settling peacefully international disputes. While within state borders governments hold the monopoly of power, at international level power is scattered among a plurality of sovereign states. Therefore, it is the structure of the international states system, characterised by the lack of a world

⁷ J. Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996; D. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order*, London, Polity Press, 1995; O. Höffe, *Demokratie im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, München, Beck, 1999.

political authority, that induces national governments to privilege the quest for security and to resort to war when negotiations fail. The top priority of state behavior at international level is the quest for security, to which all the other objectives – the observance of moral values and the rule of law – are sacrificed, if necessary.

The questionable hypothesis of the realist paradigm is that the nature of international relations cannot change. Sovereign states are conceived as the only institutions that provide security and political order and the exclusive protagonists of international politics.

As a matter of fact, power, national interest and security are relational and historical concepts. The globalisation process fosters the striving to transcend the division of the world into sovereign states. Globalisation brings about a «retreat of the state», to use an expression that Susan Strange employed to entitle a book⁸, that is one of the most important contributions to the comprehension of the current evolution of international relations.

In the contemporary world, civil society can no longer be defined as a subsystem of the state, as was the case in the 19th century and in Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*. Today the state is progressively becoming a sub-system of global society, that is made up by non-state actors such as multi-national corporations, NGOs, mass media, criminal and terrorist organisations and so forth. The novelty of the current situation lies in the fact that these new actors threaten the monopoly of power held by the states.

7. Globalisation and the Crisis of the Sovereign State

Globalisation is not promoted only by economic incentives, but also and particularly by an irresistible historical force, stronger than the will of any government or any political party: the force that is triggered by the evolution of the mode of production. It creates the material and cultural environment in which states and international relations develop. Every stage in the evolution of the mode of production seeks to satisfy basic human needs according to a specific form of the division of labor.

⁸ S. Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Historical materialism is based on the assumption that the first condition of human history consists of concrete individuals producing their means of subsistence. If we utilise this conception of history simply as a «canon of historical interpretation» (this expression was coined by Benedetto Croce⁹), the type of determinism exercised by the mode of production is not conceived as the sole factor influencing the nature of political, juridical, cultural and other phenomena. According to this explanatory scheme, determinism does not proceed only in one direction (economic determinism), but is compatible with the mutual influence of political, juridical, cultural factors on material production. For instance, Max Weber, who defined historical materialism as a fruitful ideal type that can orient the work of social researchers, in his works on the sociology of religion highlighted how the ethics of religions influenced the evolution of the economic systems¹⁰.

If we accept the idea of a mutual influence between the different factors that contribute to determine the course of history, we can consider the mode of production as the factor that has a decisive impact on the structure and the dimension of the state and international relations. More specifically a relationship can be established between the mode of production and the state dimension, and in particular between the agricultural mode of production and the city-state, between the first phase of the industrial mode of production (utilisation of coal and the steam-engine) and the nation-state, between the second phase of the industrial mode of production (utilisation of electricity, oil and the internal combustion engine) and the state of dimensions as big as entire regions of the world. With the scientific revolution of material production (and the revolution in telecommunications and transport) the World Federation becomes possible and necessary.

There is therefore a specific relationship between the globalisation process, which is nothing more than an economic and social integration process on a world scale, and the scientific mode of production. This process, as slow as its evolution may be, creates the economic and social basis for the formation of a global civil society and global forms of statehood.

⁹ B. Croce, *Materialismo storico ed economia marxista*, Bari, Laterza, 1918, p. 85.

¹⁰ M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1930.

8. European Integration and Globalisation

This means that European integration and globalisation belong to two different stages of the evolution of the mode of production: respectively the second stage of the industrial mode of production and the scientific mode of production.

In the 19th century, during the first stage of the Industrial Revolution, society could not be organised either regionally or universally. Consequently, state and democracy had to be organised at national level. The second stage of the industrial mode of production brought about the decline of the nation-states and pushed to the top of the world power hierarchy the US and the USSR, which had already acquired a regional dimension. Seeley's *Expansion of England* (written in 1883) states the problem clearly: «The United States and Russia [...] are [...] examples of the modern tendency towards enormous political aggregations, such as would have been impossible but for the modern inventions which diminish the difficulties caused by time and space». Therefore he formulated this extraordinary forecast: within «half a century [...] Russia and the United States will surpass in power the states called great as much as country-states of the sixteenth century surpassed Florence»¹¹.

Likewise, the European integration process weakens national governments, compels them to co-operate in order to solve together the problems they are unable to cope with separately, creates a European civil society beside national civil societies, establishes European institutions that represent a decision-making mechanism that depletes progressively national institutions. The process has advanced to such a stage that war among European Union member states has become inconceivable and the European Constitution is the focus of the current political debate in Europe. In other words, slowly and imperfectly something alike a European Federation is taking shape. While the process of European integration is underway and all the regions of the world are involved, to an unequal degree of development, in a similar process of integration, all the regions of the world are involved in a comprehensive process of integration on a world scale. There is an increasing number of important problems which even the most powerful state is unable to solve alone. From this stems the crisis of the sovereign state and the relevant need for international co-operation and

¹¹ J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, London, MacMillan, 1911, pp. 334 and 349-350.

development of international organisations.

On the other hand there is a close net of international organisations from the UN to the IMF and WTO. These anticipate even if they do not achieve world government, just as the European Community and the European Union are precursor institutions of the European Federation. Particularly noteworthy is the International Criminal Court which has inaugurated a new generation of international organisations, since its goal is the application of international law to the individuals. Therefore, I venture the suggestion that it may be conceived as a first step on the way of a World Federation.

9. The European Union as a New Form of Statehood at International Level

If decisions that are taken at international level must be effective and democratic, new forms of democratic government should be created above national governments. This is the way opened by the European Union, even though the process of European unification is not yet accomplished.

For instance, commercial policy is an exclusive EU competence as well as the monetary policy for the states which have adopted the euro. In these fields the European Union behaves more or less like a state. Moreover, the European Commission, to assure free competition, is endowed with an anti-trust authority.

If we consider that a single currency is the background condition that prevents international speculation and the public action of an anti-trust authority represents a remedy for competition distortions brought about by monopoly or oligopoly, we can conclude that this is what we need at world level to regulate globalisation.

10. The Need for International Democracy

Democracy, precisely because it is fragmented among many national states, too small to assure the economic development and torn apart by international conflicts, is not strong enough to prevent the authoritarian degeneration of its institutions. Only democracy can submit international relations, which are still the

arena of diplomatic and military clashes among nations, to popular control. As a matter of fact, democracy and independence can be reconciled only within the framework of federal institutions that must be created both at regional and world level. The analysis of the structures of international organisations shows that these are diplomatic machines within which governments pursue co-operation. But recently some of them have been enriched with parliamentary structures, which represent the response of national parliaments to the globalisation process and the erosion of their power. In other words, they attempt to shift parliamentary control over governments at international level. Most of them are made up of national parliamentarians, but the European Parliament, which represents the most advanced evolution of this category of international assemblies, is directly elected.

The European Parliament is the laboratory of international democracy. After its direct election it has increased not only its legislative powers but also its control powers over the Commission, understood as the potential European government. This means that the democratisation of the European Union has been a mighty tool for strengthening European institutions. On the whole, the lesson we can draw from history (and utilise for UN reform) is that both the strengthening and the democratisation of the institutions contributed to promote European unification.

11. The European Union: The Leading Country of International Democracy

There is no concealing the fact that the plan to bring globalisation under democratic control is meeting with formidable opposition not only on the part of the authoritarian regimes, but primarily on the part of the government of the United States, which will not let its power be lessened by the international organisations that it belongs to, nor by movements arising in the global civil society. This shows that, to be able to promote international democracy, it is not enough that a government has a democratic regime. This is a necessary but non-sufficient condition. The United States has such heavy world strategic commitments that it is unable to promote that design.

To defeat the opposition of the United States, a center of power must emerge with the capability of supporting the plan for a world democratic order. It is reasonable to believe that Europe will play such a role. The significance of European unification lies in the overcoming of the nation-state, a form of political organisation that develops strength relations with the other states. Therefore it is fairly safe to assume that the European Union does not have, and in the future the European Federation will not have, hegemonic ambitions. Although the European Union aspires to the independence of the United States, its objective will not be the replacement of the United States in the role of stabiliser of the world political and economic order. Europe will rather pursue a policy of co-operation with the United States, with the prospect of a joint management of the world order, open to participation of other groupings of states (the merging great regions of the world). On the other hand, Europe will hold sufficient power to relieve the United States of some of its overwhelming world responsibilities and thus it will have the authority to persuade it to support the democratic reform of the UN.

However, if it is to speak with a single voice, Europe must complete the process of federal unification. With a Parliament elected by universal suffrage, the European Union can become the leading country of international democracy. Thus, it will be more inclined than any other political organisation to promote this experiment in the other great regions of the world and at world level (democratisation of the UN through a World Parliament).