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Kant's Writings on the State of Nature and Coercion: The Domestic Analogy and the Level of Analysis

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Immanuel Kant was born in the Prussian city of Königsberg (modern day Kaliningrad, Russia) in year 1724, where he produced scholarly work on a wide variety of subject matters including: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics etc. These writings came to have a profound influence on Western philosophy and established Kant as one of its most prominent thinkers (Scruton, 1997: 7-16). Despite Kant's reputation as a leading spokesman of the Enlightenment there was a serious lack of engagement with his work in the field of international relations. This all changed when Michael Doyle presented Kant's work on perpetual peace to a whole generation of IR theorists in the 1980's under the banner of the 'democratic peace thesis' (see Doyle, 1983). Ever since then Kant's ideas have been at the forefront of the ever expanding research on the 'liberal peace'. This essay will follow suit and engage with Kant's writings on international affairs but situate his thinking within debates regarding the 'domestic analogy' and the 'levels of analysis' instead. The argument is that the early Kant largely followed the domestic analogy when describing the state of nature between individuals and states which directly affected his views on coercion as well. The mature Kant however incorporated all the level of analysis into his writings and transcended but did not entirely abandon the domestic analogy.

This essay proceeds in three sections. The first section will engage with the early Kant and his work on the state of nature and the merits of coercion, followed by Hedley Bull's critique of the domestic analogy. The second section will highlight the evolution of Kant's thinking on the above mentioned themes and show how he abandoned a simplistic and reductionist domestic analogy by favoring a holistic approach to the attainment of perpetual peace. The third and final section will summarize the preceding arguments and argue for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of international politics.

Kant before 1793

As has already been mentioned, Kant's writings on the state of nature and coercion are rather inconsistent. To clear up any potential confusion that might arise from this fact, Georg Cavallar, makes a helpful, but not a flawless distinction between Kant's published work before 1793 and the ones that that appeared afterwards to highlight Kant's opposing positions (see Cavallar, 1999: 120-122 for minor anomalies). The earlier Kant is the subject of this section.

The pre-1793 Kant conceived the relation between the state of nature between individuals and that amongst states in largely Hobbesian terms. Following Hobbes, Kant assumed a direct analogy between the state of nature amongst individuals and the one between states. According to Kant, both states and individuals live in a constant insecurity in the state of nature because of its lawless condition. This is a position Kant even held on to in his later writings (Hurrell, 1990: 186). In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant made this point succinctly; "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)" (Reiss, 1970: 165). Just as individuals had to establish a leviathan in order to escape this 'barbarous freedom' states must also submit themselves to a common power (*gemeinschaftliche gewalt*) in order to avoid the horrors of war (Cavallar, 1999: 114).

Kant's Writings on the State of Nature and Coercion: The Domestic Analogy and the Level of An

Written by Arash Heydarian Pashakhanlou

Kant maintained that the coercive power of this central authority was fundamental to the enforcement of international law and the establishment of a general political security (*öffentliche staatsicherheit*) (Reiss, 1991: 49). This reading of the early Kant is reinforced in the following passage of his essay 'On the Common Saying', where he advocates for: "a state of international right, based upon enforceable public laws to which each state must submit" (Reiss, 1991: 90).

The position Kant adopts in his earlier writings is known as the 'domestic analogy' within the IR literature (see Suganami, 1989). In the doctrine of the domestic analogy experiences of individuals are equated with the experiences of states. It is based on the belief that these actors only can escape their state of nature by subjecting themselves to a united power (Bull, 1995: 44).

The leading theorist of the 'English School', Hedley Bull, formulated a devastating critique of the domestic analogy. He advanced three arguments against it. First, the modern international system is not equivalent to the state of nature. The armed forces of states provide for external and internal security and norms and values constrain state behaviour. The combination of these factors creates a more benign international order and makes it fundamentally different to the unconstrained state of nature. Second, the existence of a leviathan is not the only source of order. Other factors such as reciprocal interests, a sense of community or the formulation of a general will can also contribute to a more orderly international system. Hence, other instruments besides external sovereignty can ameliorate the state of nature amongst states. Third, states are qualitatively different from human beings. Even if we agree that the existence of a sovereign is vital to the individual in the state of nature, it is not necessarily true for political order between states. Unlike individuals, states have an internal sovereignty and control resources over a recognized territory with which they can create the conditions of the good life domestically (even the early Kant was fully aware of this point). Also, states are much less vulnerable to violent attack than individuals; it is far easier to kill a single person than to eliminate an entire state, even in the nuclear age (Bull, 1995: 44-49). In sum, Bull concludes that the state of nature amongst individuals is qualitatively different from the one between states and the latter needs to be analysed on its own terms. Even though Bull's critique of the domestic analogy largely (but not entirely) applies to the early Kant it becomes mainly (but not wholly) irrelevant if we consider Kant's writings after 1793 which is the subject of the next section.

Kant after 1793

Kant developed a new concept of the international federation after 1793 which owed less intellectual debt to Hobbes. Kant did however not entirely abandon the domestic analogy; rather he revised it and moved beyond its parameters in some respects.

Kant's change of mind is apparent in his classic essay *Perpetual Peace* from 1795 where he advocated a federation of nations (*völkerbund*) instead of an international state (*völkerstaat*) with coercive power (Reiss, 1991: 102). Indeed he came to regard coercion as antithetical to his peace project. Kant argued that the idea of coercion would be in contradiction with the principle of the right of nations and undermine states right to independence (Williams, 1983: 250). Furthermore, Kant became more sensitive to the differences between the individual and state level. This is evident when he argues that individuals without a state cannot live justly and have therefore a moral obligation to force others into a central authority. On the contrary he maintained that once states have been established they have formed a provisional justice internally which prohibits them from coercing other states that also possess this form of justice into a federation (Williams, 2006: 35). The right of coercion that exists between individuals in the state of nature does therefore not apply to states. This impression is reinforced when Kant asserts that all states are free to join the federation, highlighting that it is a voluntary association and not a coercive one (Reiss, 1991: 96). Moreover, Kant insists that the federation can be "dissolved at any time", meaning that its preservation cannot be maintained by the use of force (Reiss, 1991: 171). Indeed, Kant contends that the means through which the federation is established is just as important as the end it is supposed to achieve. The Kantian morality is antithetical to the Machiavellian. Kant suggests that the use of organized violence is irreconcilable to the attainment of peace and would only perpetuate the state of nature amongst states. Therefore, only peaceful means can be utilized for the establishment of the federation. The path towards an international federation must rely upon consent, agreements and treaties not force and coercion (Cavallar, 1999: 126-127).

Kant's Writings on the State of Nature and Coercion: The Domestic Analogy and the Level of Analysis

Written by Arash Heydarian Pashakhanlou

In this regard Kant moves beyond the domestic analogy. He differentiates between the state of nature between individuals where coercion is permitted but regards it as strictly forbidden in interstate relations. Another differentiation Kant makes between the two levels of analysis is that the relationships between states are far more complex and multifaceted than that between individuals in the state of nature. "In the rights of nations we have to take into account not only the relation of one state toward another as a whole, but also the relation of individual persons of one state toward the individuals of another, as well as toward another state as a whole" (Gregor, 1999: 482).

The final proposition Kant presents for the attainment of perpetual peace is a sophisticated normative construct which embraces all the Waltzian images; the individual, the state and the character of the international system (see Waltz, 1959). At the first image, human nature's limitations present itself with its 'malevolence' and 'self-seeking inclinations' and is the main obstacle for the realization of the perpetual peace (Gregor, 1999: 335, 343). However, in contrast to Hobbes, Kant has a dualistic and dynamic conception of human nature where moral and ethical improvements are possible and in fact needed to attain perpetual peace (Williams, 1983: 276-278). According to Kant, the formation of stable political communities is within the capacity of individuals and it can subsequently help to constrain people to become good citizens (Gregor, 1999: 335). Through this affirmation Kant effectively links the first image to the second image. The importance of the state in Kant's political philosophy cannot be overstated as he conceives the loyalty and culture of the nation to be essential for perpetual peace (Williams, 1983: 274). Kant also advocates for a specific domestic order. The republican constitution is privileged since he is convinced that they by nature are primed for peace which is the final part of Kant's second image analysis (Zens, 1993: 116). On the third level, Kant is well aware of the problems with international anarchy that subjects states into a state of nature. He tries to escape the realist logic of anarchy by establishing a federation of states which can be regarded as a mixture of a collective security and a security community (see Booth and Wheeler, 2008) to ameliorate interstate relations (Hurrell, 1990: 197). Even though Kant argues against the formation of a world state which would effectively eliminate the state of anarchy amongst states on technical, pragmatic and moral grounds, it nevertheless seems to be his ideal. It is not inconceivable to suggest that Kant would privilege this form of international political community when the world has by gradual evolution managed to overcome the technical, pragmatic and moral problems that existed during his time and largely continues to exist today (Cavallar, 1999: 130).

As this examination shows the later Kant still relies on a thin domestic analogy but ultimately formulates a powerful normative political doctrine which incorporates all the levels of analysis. This is why Hedley Bull's critique of the domestic analogy loses much of its sting when we consider Kant's writings after 1793.

Conclusion

This essay has compared and contrasted the state of nature amongst individuals with the one between states, as well as its implications on the role of coercion in Kant's political philosophy. The conclusion drawn from this analysis was that the earlier Kant made extensive use of the domestic analogy and saw coercion as necessary precondition for perpetual peace, in contrast to the mature Kant. Indeed, the first section highlighted Kant's largely Hobbesian use of the domestic analogy which led Kant to conclude that only a centralised authority with coercive power could create the condition for perpetual peace. The earlier position of Kant was criticised by Bull's charges against the domestic analogy on three accounts. The modern international system is not in an unrestrained state of nature, external sovereignty is not the only source of order and states are qualitatively different from human beings. The second section focused on Kant's writings after 1793 where he revised his position. The mature Kant relied considerably less on the domestic analogy and argued forcefully against coercion in the federation of states. Indeed, he considered violent means as contradictory to the end his political philosophy was striving to achieve. Kant ultimately offered a holistic and eloquent solution to international peace, drawing upon all the three levels of analysis, the individual, the state and the character of the international system through which he transcended the simplistic domestic analogy.

This essay has utilised analytical concepts from international relations to assess the political philosophy of Kant. It has shown what a productive enterprise this task can be by shedding new light on one of the great contributions made to the social sciences. Unfortunately, this method of investigation is rarely pursued in an increasingly specialized social science which "divides the unique human experience into artificial spheres that each claim importance over the others, and underplaying the inseparable links of each with the other" as Immanuel Wallerstein

Kant's Writings on the State of Nature and Coercion: The Domestic Analogy and the Level of Anarchy

Written by Arash Heydarian Pashakhanlou

rightly points out. Kant who taught courses on a wide range of topics such as international relations, poetry, astronomy and law at the University of Königsberg would have most certainly agreed with this approach. He did not even see the need for distinct epistemologies in different fields (Schouten, 2008: 5).

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