

RES POPULI CLUB

STRATEGY

ACTION 2. THE INTERNATIONAL CITY-STATE. COMMON PREJUDICES THAT WE WILL HAVE TO FACE AND PROPOSALS AND ARGUMENTS TO OVERCOME THEM. COMMENTS ON TEXTS OF KANT.

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Action 2: propose the international city-state as an alternative status for specific cities (cities whose history, ethnic composition or geographical location makes them suitable for such status) and develop a plan for the integration of nation states and international city-states into an international state.

Common prejudices:

1. The nation is and must be the foundation of the state.
2. Nations must be kept separate, each on its own territory.
3. The nation state is and must be the only natural and original subject of international law.
4. Nation states may associate and cooperate with each other, but they must not unite to form a single state.
5. The most powerful nations must dominate the others.

Our proposals and arguments:

1. The city is the classical foundation of the state and must be promoted as an alternative to the nation.
2. The city can and must be a place where people of different nations live together.
3. The international city-state must be recognised by international law as a natural and original subject alongside the nation state and as an alternative to it.
4. Nation states and international city states can and must unite to form one single state: an international state, and international law must favour this union.
5. The most powerful nations must not dominate the others. International law cannot be satisfied with recognising that dominance, it must favour the means to overcome it: the international state.

Comments on texts of Kant:

Text 1: "Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose" (1784):

"5th Thesis: The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a **universal civic society** which administers law among men."

"6th Thesis: This problem is the most difficult and the last to be solved by mankind."

"7th Thesis: The problem of establishing a **perfect civic constitution** is dependent upon the problem of a lawful external relation among states and cannot be solved without a solution of the latter problem."

"8th Thesis: The history of mankind can be seen, in the large, as the realization of Nature's secret plan to bring forth a **perfectly constituted state** as the only condition in which the capacities of mankind can be fully developed, and also bring forth that external relation among states which is perfectly adequate to this end."

"9th Thesis: A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history according to a natural plan directed to achieving this **civic union of the human race** must be regarded as possible and, indeed, as contributing to this end of Nature."

Text 2: "For Perpetual Peace. A philosophical sketch" (1795):

"There is only one rational way in which states coexisting with other states can emerge from the 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. But since **this is not the will of the nations, according to their present conception of international right** (so that they reject *in hypothesi* what is true *in thesi*), **the positive idea of a world republic cannot be realised**. If all is not to be lost, this can at best find a **negative substitute** in the shape of an enduring and gradually expanding **federation likely to prevent war**. The latter may check the current of man's inclination to defy the law and antagonize his fellows, although there will always be a risk of it bursting forth anew. *Furor impius intus – fremit horridus ore cruento* (Virgil). [Wicked frenzy rages savagely with blood-stained mouth], Aeneid 1, 294-96.

Comments:

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is considered the central figure of modern philosophy. He reconciles rationalism and empiricism in a synthesis that avoids the excesses of both. He defends the possibility of a universally valid knowledge based on reason and empirical evidence and opposes moral relativism. In his Critique of Pure Reason (1782) he defines the principles and rules to which reason must conform, and sets limits to it. In his Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morality (1785) and his Critique of Practical Reason (1788) he formulates, in the form of categorical imperatives, the moral rules that should guide human action: "Act according to that maxim that can become universal law" and "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, both in your own person and in the person of any other, always as an end, never as a means". In other words, act in such a way that your actions are an example to humanity; do not use others, or yourself, as a means to your ends. Kant denies that the end justifies the means and defends the duty to tell the truth in any case. These rules apply in both the private and public spheres, which places him at the antipodes of Machiavelli and Locke.

In politics he is a republican and a defender of representative government and the separation of powers. In For Perpetual Peace (1795) he formulates the requirements that states have to fulfil to achieve peace; the first of these being: "The civil constitution of each state must be republican". As was usual among the intellectuals and political theorists of his time, he considered representation to be the great innovation of modernity and rejected direct democracy as a form of despotism. This prejudice against direct democracy is typical of the Enlightenment and, unfortunately, is still in force today. Machiavelli, on the other hand, as a Renaissance man, admired ancient republics and considered direct democracy an indispensable element of any well-constituted republic. As for the separation of powers, Kant considered it a fundamental requirement of the republican constitution; that is why he admired the US constitution, where the separation of powers is a fundamental principle, and criticised the English constitution, where there is no separation of powers. Kant is fully correct in his judgement of the English constitution, as in it the powers are merged, as Bagehot recognised in his

study *The English Constitution* (1867). People today confuse separation of powers with division of functions. Separation of powers only exists when those who hold executive, legislative and judicial office are elected by the people. If this rule is not observed, power is concentrated in the executive and the other two powers depend on it; and so, there is a division of functions, but no separation of powers.

One of Kant's great achievements was to continue the tradition of classical cosmopolitanism, something that no other modern philosopher had done before him and that no one did after him, except Hana Arendt. This tradition begins with Socrates (470-399), who, according to Plutarch (46-120), considered himself a citizen of the world (κοσμοπολίτης): "I am neither Athenian nor Greek, but a citizen of the world"; it continues with Diogenes of Sinope (412-323), Zeno of Citium (334-262) and the Stoics and inspires the great political unification projects of Antiquity. Alexander (356-323) founded international cities wherever he went. Rome granted its citizenship to all the peoples it conquered; it made the world a city, a common homeland for various peoples, as Rutilius Namatianus (4th-5th centuries) said. With Rome, as Polybius (200-118) had seen, history acquired universal meaning for the first time. This tradition was interrupted at the end of Antiquity and no longer reappeared until Kant. Medieval scholasticism and later the natural law school of the Modern Age (Suarez, Grotius, Pufendorf) contributed to the development of international law, but said nothing about the political unification of mankind. The rationalists of the 17th and 18th centuries (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz) did not address the subject either, except for a timid proposal by Leibniz for the creation of a European confederation (1677). Castel de Saint-Pierre, a French clergyman and diplomat, goes further in his *Project for Universal Peace* (1712) and proposes a federation of European states, an idea that would influence Kant. The British empiricists (Hobbes, Locke, Hume), all great defenders of the nation state, made no proposal to this end. After Kant, none of the great philosophers continue that tradition. Hegel and the German idealists are all nationalists. Marx is universalist, but he does not propose anything about political unification. Neither do Comte and the positivists, nor the vitalists (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger). Only Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) deals with the subject in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, although not as the main subject, but in connection with other subjects.

Kant has influenced internationalist jurists and politicians and, through them, the modern projects of federation of nations: the League of Nations (1919-1946), then the UN (1945-present), the European integration (1957-present), etc. These projects and similar ones in various areas of the world (Mercosur, Central American Union, ASEAN, West African Union) are, as Kant himself anticipated, "negative substitutes" for the international state, and were, or are, therefore designed with the express purpose of leaving the power of nations intact, which makes political union impossible, however much it may be one of its major objectives.

In *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784), Kant proposes 9 revolutionary theses, each one formulated in a brief and lapidary way, and followed by an explanatory commentary. There he states undeniable truths with an honesty, strength and conviction never seen before: the meaning of history is the political unification of mankind; this is the end that Nature wants for man, Nature's secret plan; the realisation of this union is the most difficult problem to solve and the last to be solved by mankind; for this, mankind must first solve how to subject the states to an external power; only united can mankind fully develop its potential... The terms he uses to refer to such a political union vary for each thesis: "universal civic society", "perfect civic constitution", "perfectly constituted state", "civic union". Why does he use different terms in each paragraph? Obviously, because of rhetorical conventions: to avoid repeating the same words, but also - I believe - to leave the subject open, as befits a philosophical proposal. In any case, what is clear is that the idea he has in mind is that of an international state (Völkerstaat), not a federation of nations (Völkerbund).

However, in *For Everlasting Peace* (1795) he favours a federation of nations. The second final article of the text is entitled: "The law of nations shall be based on a federation of free states". There he explains that the union he proposes is a federation of nations, not an international state, and this because an international state would imply the fusion of nations into a single nation, and that is not the aim. What happened between 1784 and 1795 to make him change his mind? Probably the adverse reactions of the people to the 1784 writing had made him moderate his views and content himself with a less ambitious proposal. I can imagine philosophers, jurists, politicians, and other friends telling him that his idea is very noble and beautiful, but unworkable because people have a very strong emotional bond with their nation. Comments that everyone repeats today as well. Kant gives in and renounces his international state. However, in the last paragraph of the Second Final Article, he tells us what he really thinks about the issue: he says that only an international state can ensure perpetual peace; that, however, nations do not want that because it does not respond to their idea of international law and that, therefore, the "positive idea" of a "world republic" cannot be realised. What can be realised, he says, is a "negative substitute": a federation of nations, but he warns that such a federation does not solve the problem and that war can break out at any time. In conclusion, Kant says, nations reject in hypothesis what is true in thesis; in other words, they reject an incontestable truth simply because it does not respond to their false dogmas and prejudices.

That this federation of nations is ineffective in ensuring peace is proven by the experience of the League of Nations, which was unable to prevent the Second World War, and of the United Nations, which, despite all its advances with respect to its predecessor, cannot prevent wars either and is subject to the interests of the five most powerful nations.

Kant's mistake was to settle for a proposal that he knew positively was ineffective in achieving his goal. Why did he do this? I believe that Kant, despite his faith in the international state, had not entirely broken the emotional bond with the nation; that is why he was able to defend a proposal that leaves the power of nations intact.

The nation, like the principate, is firmly rooted in the human psyche. The gregarious instinct of the human being, which we share with animals, makes us live in flocks, each in its own territory and in permanent rivalry with the others. The nation is a manifestation of that instinct. Just as strong is man's sense of belonging to his nation as is the animal's sense of belonging to its flock or herd. In man this feeling is expressed in the form of veneration for the nation and the symbols that represent it. The nation becomes an idol and an object of cult. This idolatry is inherent in all forms of nationalism that have existed and continue to exist.

The only way out of the vicious circle of the nation is by cutting by the root the emotional bond with it and promoting the international state. That is the purpose of the Club. And we must not fall into Kant's mistake of settling for a negative substitute (federation of nations) which we know will not achieve its goal, namely to establish one law for all mankind. We need to revise Kant's proposal and give it a new foundation that will make it possible. That new foundation is the city-state, which is linked to the tradition of classical cosmopolitanism. Kant intended to create an international state by uniting nation states. That international state was expected to be a kind of nation of nations. That does not work. Nation states are driven by centrifugal forces that prevent the formation of a nation of nations. The most they admit to is the federation of nations. The city-state can unite people of different nations because it does not seek to create a nation of nations, but a city for people of different nations. That city exercises a centripetal force. What unites its citizens is not nationality but citizenship. But that city must be independent of any nation state, that is why it is a city-state. If it depended on a nation state because it is part of its territory or is subject to its sovereignty, it would be subject to the centrifugal force that moves the nation state. The city-state must be on the same level as the nation state. And international law must recognise it as an alternative to the nation state.

Today the only possible form of state is the nation state. I propose that the city-state be recognised alongside it, and that those cities whose history, ethnic composition or geographical situation makes them suitable for that status can become city-states. These city-states would be the capitals of the international state, some at the level of a world sub-region, others at the level of a world region, and one at the world level. Around these capitals would be united the nation states and other city-states. The centripetal forces of the city-states would be greater than the centrifugal forces of the nation states, and the international state would be united, administering law among men and avoiding war among nation states, as Kant proposed.

Kant is wrong when he says that the international state involves the merging of nations into a single nation, and he is wrong because, as I have just explained, this is not necessarily the case. The city-state does not entail the fusion of nations into a single nation. Its foundation is not the nation, but citizenship. It is open to people of different nations. It is not intended that these people should give up their national origins and become members of a new nation. It only offers them the possibility of living together as citizens of the same city, whatever their national origins. Kant did not see this alternative. That is why he settled for the "negative substitute" for the international state: the federation of nations. We can take over from Kant and go further. We can realize his proposal. It is not a fantasy. It is possible.

Apart from Kant, we are inspired by Hannah Arendt. In the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950), she writes

"Human dignity needs a new guarantee, which can only be found in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must embrace the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities."

Our proposal responds to this vision:

- New political principle: the international state as an alternative to the federation of nations.
- New law on earth: one single law for all humanity as an alternative to the "law" of the strongest (the interests of the five strongest nations of the United Nations).
- Newly defined territorial entities: the international city-states.

We can also take over from Hannah Arendt and go further. This is not a fantasy. It is possible.