

# Colour blind kant the racist eurocentric politics essay



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## A contribution to the critique of Kant's Perpetual Peace

Kant's writings including 'Perpetual Peace' has justified the White intervention in non-European states because Kant and other philosophers of the West thought that there is only one civilization with capital 'C' is European and the rest of the world are to be civilized and made to be like Europeans. Though, Kant wrote this peace some two centuries ago but the resonance of his writings can be seen even today in the USA intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq where the USA is importing democracy. The imperialism functions not only through economic exploitation and political dominance but also imposition of universalism which is always secretly coded.

In the following sections, I will discuss first (1) the summary of Kant's Perpetual Peace, (2) then I would also bring to light the works of Kant as an anthropologist through the works E C Eze and Tsenay Serequeberhan and Uday Singh Mehta. After that I will take up (3) Sudipta Kaviraj's critique of Sequential Theory of Modernity to argue that there is multiple modernities which will be a reply to all those Euro-centric philosophers including Kant who thought there is just one civilization-European and the rest of the world have to imitate it. From this I will move to (4) debate regarding democratic peace theorists who argue that democracies do not fight with each other and I will also try to provide my critique to this formulation. Finally I will (5) conclude that Kant's writing was Eurocentric and somehow this 'moral' philosopher could not rise above prejudice against non-Whites by justifying intervention whose direction implication resulted in tragedy after tragedy.

Unfortunately, the civilizing mission of the West is not over, decades after the period of decolonization.

I thank my teacher Professor Jyati Srivastava for her encouragement and guidance to choose this topic. I am indebted to Professor Nivedita Menon with whom I discussed this issue. She gave me such a critical insight that my earlier draft was thoroughly revised.

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## **Perpetual Peace**

Kant begins his Perpetual Peace essay by saying that (1) “ No Treaty of Peace shall be Held Valid in Which There is Tacitly Reserved Matter for a Future”. [Kant, 1795]. Here Kant says that peace can not be achieved even though there is a peace agreement. Kant said that lasting peace cannot be achieved when two parties have reached any truce because they were “ exhausted” to fight war any longer. Although they are carrying hostilities for the future. Kant said such kind of agreement can only bring about peace for short duration. In the words of Kant;

“ When one or both parties to a treaty of peace, being too exhausted to continue warring with each other, make a tacit reservation (reservatio mentalis) in regard to old claims to be elaborated only at some more favorable opportunity in the future, the treaty is made in bad faith, and we have an artifice worthy of the casuistry of a Jesuit.” [Emphasize mine, Kant, *ibid*]

I think here Kant says that there should not be a truce because the warring parties have reached the state of exhaustion at the same time they are keeping old claims (old disputes) in the heart which will be taken up when the situation will be favorable. Such kind of attitude by states will fuel hostilities for ever and any kind of peace agreement will be short-lived.

In the second article of section one, Kant says, "No Independent States, Large or Small Come Under the Dominion of Another State by Inheritance, Exchange, Purchase, or Donation". [Kant, *ibid*]. Kant says that the states are not like a property which could be inherited or grafted somewhere else. However, it is to be noted that Kant is using adjective "Independent" before states and only independent states are not to be inherited. Those who are not independent are not protected by Kant. It means many of non-European states were allowed to be intervened! Apart from that who has power and authority to decide which country is independent or not? Of course, Kant has given the reasonable, enlightened White to decide which country is independent and which not.

In the third article, Kant says, "Standing Armies (miles perpetuus) Shall in Time Be Totally Abolished" .[Kant, *ibid*] It is great to say such thing that there should not be an army because an arms race does not provide security. This has been liberals' lip service for centuries but in reality the most deadly armed states are those whose foundation is also based on liberal democracy. How could then it be justified? Here Kant is providing moral commentary which has a very few takers and the process of arms race and militarization has not stopped since the rise of nation-states and days of colonialism. One of the pillars of colonialism is based on military expansions .  
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In the fourth article, Kant deals with credit systems and debts and how it could create problem for states. “ National Debts Shall Not Be Contracted with a view to the External Frictions of States”. [Kant, *ibid*]. Here Kant says that “ to forbid this credit system must be a preliminary article of perpetual peace all the more because it must eventually entangle many innocent states in the inevitable bankruptcy and openly harm them. They are therefore justified in allying themselves against such a state and its measures”. [*ibid*]

In the fifth article, Kant talks about interference. “ No State Shall by Force Interfere with the Constitution or Government of Another State”. [Kant, *ibid*]. Here Kant says that there should not be a forceful intervention at the same time he also provides an exception to his own law. Notice this Kant’s line:

“ But it would be quite different if a state, by internal rebellion, should fall into two parts, each of which pretended to be a separate state making claim to the whole. To lend assistance to one of these cannot be considered an interference in the constitution of the other state (for it is then in a state of anarchy) . But so long as the internal dissension has not come to this critical point, such interference by foreign powers would infringe on the rights of an independent people struggling with its internal disease; hence it would itself be an offense and would render the autonomy of all states insecure.”

[Emphasize mine, Kant, *ibid*]

It should be worth noticing that on the one hand Kant has prohibited interference in the internal matter of another state but at the same time he has also exempted colonial masters for their civilizing mission in non-

European states, saying that if their “ internal rebellion”, “ to lend assistance” would be justified. Today the USA is doing the same thing in Afghanistan and Iraq and it has justified its action by citing volatile condition in other states. We should not forget that the British colonial masters in India has also created such kind of stereotypes by saying that Indian womens were living in abysmal conditions and Indians were effeminate to rule over. [Mill, 1975]

In the six article of section, Kant discusses that even during the war there should not be such violation of laws that peace becomes impossible in the future. “ No State Shall, during War, Permit Such Acts of Hostility Which Would Make Mutual Confidence in the Subsequent Peace Impossible: Such Are the Employment of Assassins (percussores), Poisoners (venefici), Breach of Capitulation, and Incitement to Treason (perduellio) in the Opposing State”. [Kant, ibid]. Here Kant makes a strong case that parties in war should desist from using destructive means and methods.

After discussing section I, let me briefly discuss section II of Perpetual Peace in which Kant talks about republican constitution and league of nations. Let me begin with Kant’s notion of republican constitution.

Kant says, “ The Civil Constitution of Every State Should Be Republican”. [Kant, ibid]. Kant here prefers republican constitution and links it to peace. According to Kant, the republican constitution is based on the principles of freedom and in such a constitution there is possibility of peace because the rulers need to get the consent of the citizens before a war is declared. ” If the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be

declared (and in this constitution it cannot be the case), nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war". Here he makes a clear statement that a republican form of government is accountable to citizen and the it cannot take a decision on its own. That is why a republican form of government would not easily go for war because the public opinion of the people would be against the war. This is the very basis of democratic peace theorists who argue that democracies have never warred on each other. But I do not think that when Kant is taking about perpetual peace he is in anyway thinking on the line of democratic peace theorists. For me the liberals are misreading Kant because Kant does not only make distinction between republican form of government and democratic one. Kant is even critical of the democratic form of government. Kant says:

Of the three forms of the state, that of democracy is, properly speaking, necessarily a despotism, because it establishes an executive power in which ' all" decide for or even against one who does not agree: that is, " all", who are not quite all, decide, and this is a contradiction of the general will with itself and with freedom." [Kant, *ibid*]

In the second definitive article of Perpetual Peace, Kant says, ." The Law of Nations Shall be Founded on a Federation of Free States". [Kant, *ibid*]. Here Kant is concerned about overcoming war and conflict at international level. He says that states would enter into a league of nations based on rights to secure their security and the states " are distinct states and are not amalgamated into one" as happened within a state. But see in the following

line how Kant is so prejudiced against the non-White.

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When we see the attachment of savages to their lawless freedom, preferring ceaseless combat to subjection to a lawful constraint which they might establish, and thus preferring senseless freedom to rational freedom, we regard it with deep contempt as barbarity, rudeness, and a brutish degradation of humanity. Accordingly, one would think that civilized people (each united in a state) would hasten all the more to escape, the sooner the better, from such a depraved condition. But, instead, each state places its majesty (for it is absurd to speak of the majesty of the people) in being subject to no external juridical restraint, and the splendor of its sovereign consists in the fact that many thousands stand at his command to sacrifice themselves for something that does not concern them and without his needing to place himself in the least danger. The chief difference between European and American savages lies in the fact that many tribes of the latter have been eaten by their enemies, while the former know how to make better use of their conquered enemies than to dine off them; they know better how to use them to increase the number of their subjects and thus the quantity of instruments for even more extensive wars.[Kant, *ibid*]

Notice how great 'moral' philosopher Kant uses the terms for non-white and justifies intervention. "Savages" in their "lawless freedom" are "thus preferring senseless freedom to rational freedom". This is that the Western philosophers have thought about the non-White people and they never treated them equals. Edward Said has vividly described creation of 'Orientalism' and treating the non-White what the white are not like savage, emotional, not enlightened etc. [Said, 1971]. In the following section, I will be dealing with this issue once in some detail when I would look at Kant as



anthropologist and his works. Let me touch that last article of Perpetual Peace. "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality" [Kant, *ibid*].

## **Kant as Anthropologist/Racist**

Kant is widely known as a liberal philosopher who treats individual as an end. Apart from that Kant that human are moral beings because they could self-reflect, use power of reason and they may not be perfect but they can strive towards perfectibility. However, Kant also thought anthropology in Germany as a teacher of geography and anthropology for as long as forty years. Nigerian born American philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze said that how Kant is generally known in mainstream that he was a "pure" philosopher whose philosophy was colour blind but it is overlooked that he has also given racial theories.

"This scholarly forgetfulness of Kant's racial theories, or his raciology, I is attributable to the overwhelming desire to see Kant only as a 'pure' philosopher, preoccupied 'pure' culture and color-blind philosophical themes in the sanctum sactorum of the traditions of Western philosophy. Otherwise, how does one explain the many surprised expressions I received while researching this work: Kant? Anthropology? Race? The Kant most remembered in North American academic communities is the Kant of the Critiques. It is forgotten that the philosopher developed courses in anthropology and/ or geography and taught them regularly for forty years from 1756 until the year before his retirement in 1792". [Eze, 1997]

What is worse, the “ great moral philosopher” did characterize people on the basis on colour. He said hat the Europeans are white, the Asians are yellow, the Africans, black and North Americans, red. [Eze, 1997]. He even says that American Indian , Hindu, African lack talent. Even he said that the non-Europeans lack characters.

Taking skin color as evidence of a “ racial” class, Kant classified humans into: white (Europeans), yellow (Asians), black (Africans) and red (American Indians). “ Moral” geography (which might as well be called ‘ cultural geography”) studies the customs and the mores held collectively by each of these races, classes, or groups. For example, some elements in the the “ moral geography” taught by Kant included expositions on culture, such as the “ knowledge” that is customary to permit theft in Africa, or to desert children in China or to bury them alive in Brazil or for Eskimos to straggle them. [Eze, 1997: 115]

Apart from that he also believes that only the white-Europeans are capable of profess in arts and science and others are not fit for these. He also calls the white superior and the black inferior.

After briefly discussed Kant, the philosopher who advocated federation of states, world citizenship and the anthropologist who gave prejudiced and raciological theory of race that paves the way for intervention in non-European societies by the colonial masters in the garb of spreading enlightenment. I would argue that the Kant’s writings are full of racists remarks and a sense of superiority over non-White. This is the very ideology behind the colonialism and its root can be traced to Kant’s writings including

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Perpetual Peace. The first problem with Kant is his forming an opinion about the non-white world by blindly believing travelers' accounts and considering them as a piece of reality. Much of the orientalist's notion of Asian histories and culture are distorted because they all drew on traveler's accounts. That is why great minds like Hegel, Kant, Weber and even Marx could not distanced themselves from their prejudices about non-White societies. Uday Singh Mehta, in his seminal work, has shown that how the project of empire is concealed in the language of liberalism and enlightenment. Now I will deal with Kaviraj's work very briefly which can help us understand the issue of civilization and modernity in order to have better grip over Kant's writings.

Sudita Kaviraj has critiqued, in his seminal essay ' An Outline of Revisionist Theory of Modernity' the with the transformation of modern Europe there was also " growing superiority of the newly emergent European civilization". According to Kaviraj, earlier European Christian civilizations was one of many civilizations like Hindu or Chinese but ' after the change European self-definition altered this usage crucially and, contrasted the civilised society of Europe with other societies which were rude..[Kaviraj, 1990" 503]. And thus European modernity came be be regarded as universal and the rest of the world has to follow them blindly because they are backward and rude. This has been the recurrent theme of Enlightenment philosophy in Europe. And Kaviraj further augues that there is a logic of self-differentiation in modernity. He says the more modernity expands and spreads to different part of the world the more it becomes differentiated and plural.

After discussing Kant's Perpetual Peace and Eorocentricism, let me briefly touch upon liberal democratic peace theories debate before I conclude this <https://assignbuster.com/colour-blind-kant-the-racist-eurocentric-politics-essay/>

paper. Because, liberal scholars are rooting their philosophy in Kant's Perpetual Peace. I would argue that democratic peace theory is nothing but a sham.

## **Democratic Peace Theory**

In this section, I will give positions of John Owen and and Christopher Layne. While Owen defends democratic peace theory that two liberal democracies do not fight drawing their inspiration from Kant's work, Layne criticizes peace theory from realist perspective. But my criticism of Owen should not be misunderstood as being realist. I am also a severe critique of realism which believes in the myth of the threat being external and there is cohesion from internal angle. The biggest failure of realism is that today the most casualties are not done by forces outside but due to issues like poverty, illness, ecological degradation etc. Now let me begin with liberal peace theorists main arguments.

According to Owen, democracies don't attack each other. In other words, democratic theorists believe in the proposition that democracies don't fight with other. That is why the supporters of this peace theory believe that the best way to ensure security and peace is to support the advancement of democracy elsewhere. This has been the hallmark of USA foreign policy, particularly after the end of the Cold War when it was claimed that there is an end of history and liberal democracy with capitalist market have triumphed over all other systems. Further, the democratic peace theory says while liberal states do not fight with another liberal states on the other hand liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states. In the words of

Owen [2000: 926]

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When liberals run the government, relations with fellow democracies are harmonious. Liberals believe that democracies seek their citizens' true interests and that thus by definition they are pacific and trustworthy. Non-democracies may be dangerous because they seek other ends, such as conquest and plunder. Liberals thus hold that the national interests calls for accommodation of fellow democracies, but sometimes calls for war with non-democracies .

The philosophical grounding of democratic peace theory is that since there is free speech guaranteed to citizens in a democracy so citizens would not allow war to take place because in war it is the citizens who would have to bear the costs. According to the supporters of democratic peace theory, liberalism is universalistic, tolerant, cosmopolitan philosophy. Liberalism's ends are life and property and toleration and it believes that all nations and people are free. It is also conducive for peace because liberal democracies are believed to be "reasonable", "predictable" and "trustworthy" because the citizens of the state govern them.

Owen on the other hand also characterize illiberal states which are threat to peace and they must be made to be liberal because these states are "unreasonable", "unpredictable", "potentially dangerous", "ruled by despots" with ends as "conquest", "intolerance", and "impoverishment".

Owen in his article also provides some of hypothesis about democratic peace theory. (1) "Liberal democracy will only avoid war with state that if believes to be liberal". (2) "Liberals will trust states they consider liberal and mistrust those they consider illiberal". (3) "When liberals observe a foreign state

becoming liberal by their own standards, they will expect pacific relations with it. Liberals will not change their assessments of foreign states during crises with those states unless those states change their institutions. (4) “Liberals elites will agitate for their policies during war-threatening crises.”

After discussing democratic peace theory, let me briefly touch upon what are major criticisms of it from realist perspectives. Realists believe that democratic peace theory is ‘fantasy’, “permanent peace between liberal democracy is not possible”, foreign policy must be based on imperatives of power politics not on morality and ethnics, even the liberal democratic states could not desist themselves from getting involved in power-struggle and balancing each other. Layne Christopher [2000] has said that democratic peace theory is a ‘myth’ and said “realism is superior” to democratic peace theory.

## **Conclusion**

After giving both the arguments in favour and against of democratic peace theory, I would like to say that democratic peace theory is another face of dominance by the West, particularly the USA in non-White world. The problem with democratic peace theory is that if evidence is given that two democratic states fought, they would argue at least one of them was not liberal that time. That is why I would not go into that trap that whether a state was liberal or illiberal at one point of time. My arguments are that most of violence in modern period particularly in 20th century has its root in the West who are also champion of democracy. Is it not that the same Enlightened people from the white world created mess everywhere from the Africa, America to Asia. These are same colonial masters who Kant’s <https://assignbuster.com/colour-blind-kant-the-racist-eurocentric-politics-essay/>

perpetual peace has inspired them to civilize the rest of the world but in this process they came under economic, political and cultural dominance. Today all the regime change, arms race, bombings, killings are somehow result of policies of these 'enlightened' people who swear by democracy but they don't have any problem if there is "friendly" authoritarian regime elsewhere. While I am critique the West I should not be misunderstood that I am siding with post-colonial elites. Today, they are not far behind imitating their colonial masters as a result colonialism has gone but colonial policies and apparatus continue to hunt post-colonial society. Let me state my position once again neither Kant nor today's champions of democracy are at concerned with peace and democracy in true sense. They are all using it as pretext to arm-twist elites in post-colonial societies and install favorable governments. This centuries are full of examples which say that hostilities between liberal states are not over and the theorists of democratic peace by harping on exporting democracy are hiding contradiction and crisis in their own society. Hunger, poverty, racial discrimination, concentration of wealth, ecological damages are problems which has also gripped liberal western states but they are more concerned about problem outsides. This should also not be misunderstood that I am implying that non-Western society are better. But all the change should evolve and come through its own struggle and churning. Imposition and export will never do. I reject democratic peace theory because the theorists whom they are banking on (Kant) was himself racist, Eurocentric and anti-democratic because of his prejudices against non-White and women.