


Chapter 1

Immanuel Kant, IR Theory's Big Bang, and the Pursuit of Perpetual Peace

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ABSTRACT

Florence is the birthplace of politics as an academic discipline; Niccolo Machiavelli published his Prince there in 1532, which has had a considerable impact on the development of our discipline. However, the suggestion that Aberystwyth is the birthplace of international relations is hardly convincing, for it is where E. H. Carr worked on The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939, which undermined the idealism of our discipline. This chapter asserts that the Big Bang that defined our most noble aims occurred much earlier, in Königsberg in 1795, thanks to Immanuel Kant, who expanded our scientific horizons with the belief that we should pursue enduring peace among nations. This was not a naïve assumption that economic incentives liberate social reality from warmongers but rather a clever project of republican values discouraging humanity from waging wars. Nonetheless, some overlook the pragmatic essence of the Kantian project.

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INTRODUCTION

“It was right then that I started thinking about Thomas Jefferson on the Declaration of Independence and the part about our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I remember thinking how did he know to put the pursuit part in there? That maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue and maybe we can actually never have it. No matter what. How did he know that?”

Chris Gardner, The Pursuit of Happiness (2006)

The primary pursuit of our discipline is to resolve international conflicts peacefully; scholars can collaborate to establish a global architecture of power based on mutual peace and stability. The essence of our discipline predisposes us to be optimistic about preserving peace, but this is not the case with Edward Hallett Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Wilson, 1998, p. 1), which attempted to strip our discipline of any idealism by concealing Immanuel Kant's sociopolitical project and its philosophical insights within his newly formulated framework of interaction between leading approaches.

I argue in this chapter that preserving the current structure of our discipline, framing it as if it were launched in Wales at the beginning of the twentieth century, cleverly conceals previous debates and creates a diversion. Carr managed to conceal at least four centuries of early scientific deliberations, especially those from Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1523) to Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). I argue that our discipline did not magically emerge with the founding of the first professorship of international relations at Aberystwyth University (Willson, 1998), which was irrelevant regarding the strengths of our ideas; the actual Big Bang of our discipline dates back to Kant's efforts to discredit Machiavelli and his teachings, which led to the foundation of international relations as an academic endeavor that continues to this day. Kant's *Perpetual Peace* marks the first significant publication in the discipline's history and continues to resonate; the same cannot be said of Carr's magnum opus.

Although liberal IR thinkers portray Kant as the founder of IR liberalism, they often treat Kant's ideas superficially and instrumentally or ignore the magnitude of his project's political aspects, equating his idealism with naivety or utopianism. The Kantian philosophical project prohibits most interventions in the internal affairs of independent countries; nonetheless, he is frequently portrayed as a naïve bard of humanitarian intervention and a just war theorist who always offers his stamp of approval for the forceful overthrow of dictators. Many IR theorists seem to limit their comprehension of Kant to a few passages of *Perpetual Peace* (Scruton, 2004).

Despite this limitation, Carr's introduction of the paradigm of great debates is necessary to our literature, as it simplifies our debates and makes them more accessible to the general public. Carr was also correct that the circumstances that led

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