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Source: *International Journal*, Summer, 1999, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Summer, 1999), pp. 463-481

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd. on behalf of the Canadian International Council

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40203406>

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ANTONIO FRANCESCHET

The ethical foundations of liberal internationalism

LMMEDIATELY AFTER THE COLD WAR several optimistic assessments emerged about the future of world politics, in sharp contrast to the assumptions rooted in political realism that had guided the discipline of international relations (IR) throughout the cold war. According to some, liberal internationalism was undergoing a renaissance.¹ More cautious voices have understandably been raised since then. Of course, realists have had a direct stake in contesting the increased tenability of liberal ideas. Some have pointed to the recurrent conflict in Yugoslavia and elsewhere, while others have argued that the peaceful features of

This essay was awarded the Marvin Gelber prize. Established in recognition of the abiding interest of Marvin Gelber in international affairs and of his many years of service to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, the prize is awarded annually to a superior article by a junior Canadian scholar on a subject in the area of international affairs and foreign policy.

Antonio Franceschet is a Grant Notley Memorial Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Alberta. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, University of Ottawa, 31 May-2 June 1998. The author thanks Susan Franceschet and David Long for helpful comments and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a fellowship.

¹ On optimism about the renewal of liberal internationalism, see Richard N. Gardner, 'The comeback of liberal internationalism,' *Washington Quarterly* 13 (summer 1990), 23-39; and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon 1992). Within international relations a similarly optimistic view can be found in Charles W. Kegley, Jr, 'The neoliberal challenge to realist theories of world politics: an introduction,' in Kegley, ed, *Controversies in International Politics: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge* (New York: St. Martin's 1995). For a useful discussion of liberal international theory, see Richard A. Matthew and Mark W. Zacher, 'Liberal international theory: common threads, divergent strands,' in *ibid*, 107-50.

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the post-cold war world are superficial and historically contingent.² Nonetheless, even those who are somewhat sympathetic to liberalism have urged continued deliberation and debate about its substantive principles rather than uncritical celebration. Two who take this stance are Stanley Hoffmann and Craig N. Murphy. According to Hoffmann, who can be characterized as a realist-sceptic, the most recent resurgence of liberal internationalism masks a deeper 'crisis' in its ranks because a cluster of tensions and unresolved paradoxes in the liberal world-view have not - perhaps cannot - be reconciled. Echoing the thought of Isaiah Berlin, Hoffmann suggests that liberal internationalism succumbs to the 'the fallacy of believing that all good things can come together.'³ Writing from a Gramscian perspective, Murphy claims some sympathy with the reformist aims of liberal internationalism. However, he argues that liberalism's many (unfulfilled) promises of peace and freedom obscure fundamental conflicts between classes and, moreover, among states and regions.⁴

These important warnings about the limitations of liberal internationalism are familiar to students of IR. They recall the tangled web of realist and marxist-derived criticisms in E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939). The liberal myths of a *laissez-faire* economy and a 'harmony of interests' among classes and states were, according to Carr, 'utopian.'⁵ Unlike Hoffmann and Murphy, however, Carr imposed more coherence on his contemporary internationalists than actually existed. Recent scholarship demonstrates that he assembled a strawman out of the diverse views held by many liberal internationalists of the interwar years.⁶ The irony of Carr's place in IR theory is that he obscured and glossed over several important political divisions among internationalists in order to argue that they did the same. Whether

2 William Pfaff, 'Is liberal internationalism dead?' *World Policy Journal* 10 (autumn 1993), 5-15. See also John Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: instability in Europe after the cold war,' *International Security* 15 (summer 1990), 5-56.

3 Stanley Hoffmann, 'The crisis of liberal internationalism,' *Foreign Policy* 98 (summer 1995), 167. See also Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969), 118-53.

4 Craig N. Murphy, *International Organization and Industrial Change: Global Governance Since 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press 1994), 13-22.

5 E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Edinburgh: R & R Clark 1942), 54-80.

6 See, for example, the contributions to David Long and Peter Wilson, eds, *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed* (Oxford: Clarendon 1995).

intended or not, his characterization of internationalism became typical in the post-World War II construction of the discipline of IR.

My argument is that the recent re-ascendence of liberal internationalist theory should not overshadow the important division and debate within the tradition. The deepest and most important division is ethical and is concerned with whether or not the sovereign state is compatible with the highest of liberal goals, individual freedom. It is useful to explore why this ethical question has been obscured in many accounts of the liberal theoretical tradition and to demonstrate why the ethics of state sovereignty and individual freedom are implicit in the much more salient issue of *how* to reform international politics. There are two important reasons why the contested ethical core of liberal internationalism is likely to receive more scholarly attention. First, changes within the historical evolution of liberal internationalism make it difficult to avoid ethical questions. Second, the development of 'critical' theory within the discipline of IR more generally has made such questions a legitimate and important activity.

LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM AND THE MECHANICS OF REFORM

As Michael W. Doyle notes, '[t]here is no canonical description of liberalism.'⁷ Nonetheless, most scholars place the ethical goal of individual 'freedom' at its centre.⁸ Of course, conceptions of freedom have varied historically among liberals.⁹ Moreover, there are other important ethical concerns typical of liberalism that arguably support, and are dependent upon, freedom. For example, liberals have placed much stock in the importance of legal 'equality' and political 'participation.' A concern with 'progress' has been measured against the realization of these terms.

In the many recent discussions of liberal internationalism's revival, the concept of freedom is often mentioned - and then quickly forgotten. Although freedom is held to be crucial to understanding the

⁷ Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton 1997), 206.

⁸ See John Gray, *Liberalism* (2nd ed; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1995), 56-8; James Meadowcroft, 'Introduction,' in Meadowcroft, ed, *The Liberal Political Tradition: Contemporary Reappraisals* (Cheltenham & Brookfield: Edward Elgar 1996), 4.

⁹ See Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*; and some of the contributions to Zbigniew Pelczynski and John Gray, eds, *Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy* (London: Althone 1984).

specifically *liberal* origins and character of this approach to world politics, its realization does not seem to have any obvious or inherent connection to fulfilling the *internationalist* agenda.¹⁰ This raises a series of questions. Is it possible that liberals - just like realists - think that the international realm is recalcitrant when it comes to moral ends such as freedom? Is the sovereignty of states an impossible foil to the universalization of individual liberty? Can freedom be spoken of only within the state? Is the fact that IR is typically concerned with states, and not individuals, sufficient reason to restrict liberalism's main ethical concern to domestic politics?

I do not think that the answer to any of these questions is necessarily affirmative. Liberalism does not simply fall into the same ontological traps and moral exclusions based on state sovereignty that characterize realism. Although liberals have often shared the preoccupation of realists with war and the existence of power politics, they are different precisely because they believe that co-operation among peoples and states is an achievable goal. Nevertheless, many contemporary liberal scholars leave the impression that the possibility of interstate co-operation and peace is not intrinsically connected to a larger moral duty or ethical purpose. My argument is that internationalists have generally purged any *explicit* concern with the ethical goal of universal freedom because they have been (excessively) preoccupied with the mechanics of rational change within an international system dominated by sovereign states. In other words, liberal internationalists have privileged questions of *how* to reform international relations over *why* and for *what* purposes.

As indicated earlier, Carr's account of the interwar 'utopians' contributed to certain stereotypes of liberal internationalism in the discipline, the most important being that liberals have an entirely harmonious view of interstate politics. The problem with this image is that it is untrue, or, at the very least, too simplistic; not all liberals subscribe to the 'harmony of interests' fallacy.¹¹ Carr's damning appraisal of his

10 See, for example, Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 207; Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs,' in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven A. Miller, eds, *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1996), 3-53; and Robert O. Keohane, 'International liberalism reconsidered,' in John Dunn, ed, *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 165-94.

11 Immanuel Kant, for example, did not view harmony as the nature of international politics. See Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Kant, liberalism and war,' *American Political Science Review* 56 (June 1962), 331; Pierre Laberge, 'Kant on justice and the law of nations,' in David R. Mapel and Terry Nardin, eds, *International Society: Diverse Ethical*

liberal contemporaries overlooks the extent to which liberals view international politics not as harmonious but as extraordinarily anarchic, unstable, and dangerous. This point is crucial in explaining why the ethical issue of freedom is generally obscured within discussions of liberal internationalism.

As Richard K. Ashley notes, the anarchic nature of international politics is especially important for liberal internationalists.¹² Contrary to the realist tradition, anarchy inspires a project for the reform of the international system and its principal agents, sovereign states. The most important feature held in common by internationalists has traditionally been that the anarchic states system can and ought to be reformed in a way that resembles - albeit imperfectly - the liberal vision of domestic political society.¹³ Liberals have regularly used the 'domestic analogy' to formulate international reform.¹⁴ Nevertheless, liberal internationalism typically restricts the reform of anarchy insofar as it rejects world government. The realist dichotomy that world politics is necessarily *either* an anarchic 'state of war' based on maxims of 'self-help' *or* a peaceful order created by a world government is disavowed. In seeing this as a false choice, liberal internationalists are commonly depicted as searching for a way to transcend the contradiction between the internal and external sovereignty of states.¹⁵

The vision attributed to internationalists of the need to reform anarchic international relations in line with liberal conceptions of domes-

Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998), 83. According to Peter Wilson, even Norman Angell, one of Carr's most direct targets, was more complicated: 'though he did believe in a harmony of interest and free trade ... this was a long-term not a short-term interest. Carr's critique of the doctrine of a harmony of interests was based on a short-term analysis of the interests of the "status quo" powers vis-à-vis the "revisionist" powers,' 'Introduction,' Long and Wilson, eds, *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis*, 9.

12 Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the sovereign state: a double reading of the anarchy problematique,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17(summer 1988), 238-40. This paragraph draws on Antonio Franceschet, 'Sovereignty and freedom: Immanuel Kant's liberal internationalist "legacy,"' *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming).

13 See Hoffmann, 'Crisis of liberal internationalism,' 161.

14 Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy in World Order Proposals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), 6.

15 See Kjell Goldmann, *The Logic of Internationalism: Coercion and Accommodation* (London & New York: Routledge 1994), 1. On the distinction between internal and external sovereignty, see F.H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (2nd ed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 158.

tic political society potentially masks great disagreement.¹⁶ Even when scholars do acknowledge differences within liberal internationalism, the debate is generally restricted to the question of *how* to reform anarchy. The 'domestic analogy' is crucial to understanding this debate because the competing liberal instruments with which to pursue individual freedom within the state have been directed outward as mechanisms for domesticating the international realm. And yet, the ethical goal of individual freedom - an explicit motivation for domestic political reform - quickly loses its salience when liberals debate questions concerning international relations. This 'amnesia' about the ethical purposes of specifically *liberal* international reform is becoming more difficult to sustain, for reasons discussed in the next section.

There is, of course, no actual debate among liberals across the history of international thought. Many thinkers are retrospectively categorized as liberal internationalists despite the fact that they would neither recognize nor identify with the term. There are, however, rival intellectual constructions of what such a debate might resemble and what its terms would likely be. Here I will give two different recent examples. Both Michael Doyle and David Long give accounts of how liberal internationalism is divided.¹⁷ Although Doyle is less sensitive than Long to the historical variability and complexity of liberal internationalism, I think both display a long-standing tendency to privilege the mechanics of reform over its ethical justification.

Doyle constructs a debate among three categories of liberal thought: institutional, commercial, and internationalist.¹⁸ He concedes that the intellectual division of liberalism - or any other body of thought - is contestable.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it is with some reservations that he accepts Kenneth Waltz's classic typology of the 'Three Images' to differentiate types of international liberalism.²⁰ Doyle states that no single thinker

¹⁶ James L. Richardson, 'Contending liberalisms: past and present,' *European Journal of International Relations* 3(1997), 14.

¹⁷ Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*; Long, 'Conclusion: inter-war idealism, liberal internationalism, and contemporary international theory,' in Long and Wilson, eds, *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis*; and Long, *Towards a New Liberal Internationalism: The International Theory of J.A. Hobson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).

¹⁸ For reasons that will become evident, Doyle claims that only one variety of liberal thought, Kantian, is 'internationalist.'

¹⁹ Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 27-9.

²⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: a Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press 1959).

understands IR exclusively through the First Image factors of human nature, the Second Image cause of domestic organization, or the Third Image condition of international anarchy.²¹ And yet, he argues that each thinker ultimately locates his/her explanations of, and prescriptions for, international politics within one of these Images.

Those to whom he refers as 'institutionalists' follow the examples of John Locke and Jeremy Bentham.²² Locke claims that the 'inconveniences' of pre-political life drive individuals into political society. The lack of stable (property) relations creates conflict in a generally peaceable state of nature. When individuals enter into a social contract they do so only if the form of sovereignty secures their natural rights within a prudent and stable institutional framework. Individual misperception, fear, and insecurity are allayed by a democratically representative politics within the state. Locke derives his perception of interstate relations from this understanding of domestic politics. International society is not necessarily in a state of war, if only the institutions can be established to remove misunderstanding and poor judgement on the part of states. Bentham, too, stresses the importance of 'personal decision and moral judgement' by state leaders, thus drawing 'closely on the effects of human nature.'²³ According to Doyle, the institutionalist mechanisms of reform follow from this First Image perception of IR. Anarchy is domesticated by the gradual removal of any 'inconveniences' that prevent state actors from perceiving correctly what is in conformity with natural rights (Locke) or calculations of the greatest good (Bentham).

The Second Image thinkers in Doyle's categorization of liberalism are 'commercial pacifists.' Surprisingly, they are less concerned with regime type than with the benefits of capitalist exchange: '[c]ommercial pacifism rests on the view that market societies are fundamentally against war.'²⁴ The so-called deeper cause of peace here is commerce rather than merely democracy or representative government. Doyle pays close attention to Adam Smith and Joseph Schumpeter. The mechanism of commerce works as follows: free trade and the global dispersion of wealth foster greater interstate peace. Moreover, the rejection of mercantilism and the strict limitation on state interference in

²¹ Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 30-3.

²² *Ibid*, 213ff.

²³ *Ibid*, 226.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 230.

private, entrepreneurial interests restricts those sovereign states that would impose wars upon individuals and thereby impede the pursuit of happiness. Commercial liberalism is more sophisticated than institutionalism because it does not rely merely upon the discretion of individual sovereign states to perform correctly their natural moral duties or utilitarian calculations.²⁵ The domestication of anarchy is not left to the constructive interventions of liberal-minded statesmen, but is instead a 'structured outcome of capitalist democracy.'²⁶

Despite the 'improvement' of commercial pacifism, Doyle claims that the most developed form of liberal thought is a Third Image variant for which he (misleadingly) reserves the tag 'internationalist.' It is curious that this ostensibly superior category of liberal thought is associated with only one thinker, Immanuel Kant. Although Kant certainly advocates the institutional and commercial mechanisms noted above, he roots them within a larger analytical framework. Doyle points out that Kant is sceptical about the ability of individual sovereigns or rationally motivated capitalist exchange to tame anarchy. These mechanisms are necessary but insufficient causes of peace. What Kant teaches us, according to Doyle, is that we must understand international reform at a *systemic* level²⁷ because the most severe cause of interstate conflict is *mere* anarchy and the 'interactive' dynamics that this absence of a global authority creates.

Of course, Kant does not prescribe a global Leviathan.²⁸ His chief mechanism for reform ultimately permits the continuation of anarchy - but, paradoxically, this lawlessness among states is progressively 'tamed and made subject to law rather than to fear and the threat of war.'²⁹ The mechanism is a dialectic of social and anti-social forces that gradually pushes sovereign states into a situation to which they have a natural aversion: a lawful peace federation among republican states. Kant does not deny the importance of individual and domestic vari-

25 *Ibid*, 233-4, 249-50.

26 This is especially the case with Schumpeter, *ibid*, 250.

27 *Ibid*, 251-306. See also Wade L. Huntley, 'Kant's third image: systemic sources of the liberal peace,' *International Studies Quarterly* 40(March 1996), 45-76.

28 See, for example, Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch,' in Hans Reiss, ed, *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), 113.

29 Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 254.

ables (both institutional and commercial); indeed, the existence of representative republican regimes and free markets are *conditio sine qua non* of reform. Rather, the combination of competitive and co-operative forces that are inherent in the international sphere means that peaceful outcomes do not depend merely upon the application of the 'domestic analogy' to interstate relations. Instead, these relations are domesticated gradually by natural *qua* historical forces located within the existing system of (increasingly numerous republican) states.

Doyle's tripartite division of liberal IR theory is not without its difficulties. The most important is that it is ahistorical. By using Waltz's stylized Three Images, he reduces the diversity of liberal thought to more-or-less coherent 'teams' that do not capture the concrete changes that the liberal tradition has experienced over three hundred years. As a consequence, liberals from entirely different contexts are potentially placed into categories with other thinkers with whom they would not agree on so many other crucial aspects of politics: for example, state intervention in the economy, political enfranchisement, national self-determination, and international intervention. Indeed, it is remarkable that, with the exception of Schumpeter, Doyle overlooks entirely the variety of twentieth century liberal internationalism. This is a curious omission given the hegemonic status ritually attributed to liberal ideas in the early part of this century.

A different account of liberal internationalism is provided by David Long, for whom the tradition must be rooted in an understanding of its historical evolution. Long holds that the political centre of all properly 'liberal' positions is the commitment to challenge vested interests and arbitrary authority.³⁰ He contends that, although there are several ways to divide liberal internationalist thought, the most important split is between classical and 'new' liberalism, a terminology adapted from Michael Freeden's work on the evolution of British liberalism.³¹ Freeden claims that, as liberal ideology developed, a cleavage occurred because the original *laissez-faire* commitments served merely to protect the vested interests of certain sections of political society. A 'new' radical liberalism, exemplified in the thought of L.T. Hobhouse, J.A.

30 David Long, 'The Harvard School of liberal international theory: a case for closure,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 24(winter 1995), 502.

31 Michael Freeden, *New Liberalism: an Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon 1978).

Hobson, and John Maynard Keynes, among others, emerged to promote a greater role for the state, the increased rational organization of the economy and society, and - most importantly - a positive conception of individual freedom.³²

In applying this analysis to liberal internationalism, Long claims a similar division over how to reform international relations. The classical modes of reform were free trade (associated with David Ricardo and Richard Cobden); international law (Bentham); republican domestic constitutions (Kant); a League of Nations (Kant and Woodrow Wilson); and national self-determination (Wilson; Giuseppe Mazzini). According to Long, these mechanisms are similar to the extent that they all embrace a *laissez-faire* stance towards the economy and/or international organization.³³ The difficulty with this stance is that it is too *formal* - it optimistically overlooks the *material* requirements of peaceful change. Long claims that this optimism was 'shattered' by the Great War, causing a crisis within internationalism.³⁴ In this context, a 'new' internationalism emerged to challenge the separation of politics and the economy and to advocate greater international regulation of and intervention in both the economy and interstate relations. The arrival of alternative liberal stances towards international affairs enabled a markedly different twentieth-century agenda for reform. Long points to both the postwar dominance of 'embedded liberalism' and the influence of David Mitrany's non-statist 'functional' approach to international organization as evidence of 'new' activist liberal stances.³⁵

In contrast to Doyle, Long's account offers a wider range of mechanisms for international reform that compete with - and still challenge - the classical assumptions of liberals. Nevertheless, it is my contention that, like most accounts of the competing strands of liberal internationalism, both scholars over-emphasize the 'problem-solving' dimensions of the tradition. By focusing on the mechanics of reform, important questions about the ethical foundations of liberalism are obscured.

32 Long, 'The Harvard School,' 491.

33 Long, 'Conclusion: inter-war idealism,' 312-4; Long, *Towards a New Liberal Internationalism*, 183-4.

34 Long, 'Conclusion: inter-war idealism,' 313.

35 Long, *Towards a New Liberal Internationalism*, 185.

This is by no means to suggest that the mechanics of reform are entirely disconnected from questions of justification - they are intimately related. Rather, it is that the long-standing debate on 'how' to reform international relations should be rooted more explicitly within a debate about the ethics of individual freedom and state sovereignty.

THE ETHICS OF FREEDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY:

AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM

Despite the recent growth of interest in ethics and IR, the debate has not received adequate attention. Although the importance of individual freedom in defining the content of liberal internationalism has been suppressed, the ensuing analysis claims that this need not be the case because the (ultimately contested) ethical core of internationalism is implicit within the debates about mechanisms addressed above. In addition, recent developments in liberal internationalism and the discipline of IR generally point to a greater prominence for ethical contestation in the future.

Underneath the debates among liberals about 'how' to domesticate international politics a deeper, unresolved moral issue lingers. In my view, what is ultimately at stake in the various and conflicting prescriptions regarding the mechanisms of reform is the moral end shared necessarily by all truly liberal strains of international thought: does the sovereign state enable or impede the overarching goal of individual freedom? In this debate, the question of mechanism is subordinate to, and judged by, an ultimate ethical standard or justification.

Historically, this question has been much more salient in theoretical reflection about liberalism in the so-called 'domestic' context. Although sovereignty provides a political and legal framework that enables freedom from the coercion of others, its awesome power is a constant threat - the state can impose arbitrary and intolerable ends on the very same individuals, thus negating liberty altogether. In contrast to Hobbes' philosophy of the state, subsequent thinkers - many of whom are now classified as 'liberals' - debated 'how' to ensure that individuals consent to (or even make) the laws under which they are to live. Liberals have thus been crucially divided over whether the state is compatible with individual liberty and to what extent sovereignty aids or impedes its realization. It is significant that this seemingly mechanical or 'problem-solving' question never lost its explicitly ethical character in political philosophy.

The tension between freedom and state sovereignty is equally intractable and divisive when considered in an international context.³⁶ To amplify the troubling question of sovereignty's compatibility with individual freedom, it is necessary to reconsider the main cleavages among internationalists. The traditional perception of liberals is that the sovereign state's proclivity to make war is oriented by illiberal *purposes* and/or results in illiberal *consequences*. As for purposes, it is typically thought that the monarchic, aristocratic, mercantilist, and militarist classes capture the state and initiate wars for their narrow ends.³⁷ Such adventures are enabled by the closed nature of the decision-making processes used by non-liberal forms of state sovereignty. Much more crucial, however, are the consequences: such wars destroy the grounds of individual freedom by imposing high (material and other) costs on citizens - the highest of which is life itself. In this context, the *internationalized* version of liberalism's sovereignty/freedom ethical dilemma traditionally is concerned with whether or not the state (and, collectively, the states system) is capable of (self)-reform towards the goal of promoting and protecting individual freedom.

To a limited extent, it is possible to differentiate liberals on this issue by referring to the 'domestic analogy.' That is, some liberals are much more optimistic and confident about the chances of reforming and limiting the sovereign state's powers and juridical scope by fixing individual rights and duties through the appropriate constitutional arrangements. The sovereign state's existence, shape, scope, and powers are contingent upon and justified by individual freedom. It is here that varying conceptions of 'popular sovereignty' become coeval with liberal notions of legitimate rule. If a state transgresses the established boundaries of individual freedom, it is no longer truly 'sovereign' because it has violated the popular will upon which it is grounded. Rebellion and revolution are then justified.³⁸ At any rate, state sovereignty is considered to be largely compatible with individual freedom insofar as it is constituted and legitimated correctly.

Nonetheless, it is unclear whether this type of liberal optimism about sovereignty extends into the so-called 'international' context. As

36 This paragraph draws on Franceschet, 'Sovereignty and freedom.'

37 See Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs,' 5-6.

38 See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1980), chap XIX.

was pointed out earlier, liberals such as Locke, Bentham, and (to a certain extent) Kant hold that institutional reform can occur successfully among sovereign states. The possibility of freedom through state sovereignty is affirmed if states are seen as capable of transforming their internal constitutions and, as a result, the anarchic relations among them. International law, organizations, and regulatory institutions are the mechanisms that mediate between the external and internal sovereignty of states; they act as a 'surrogate' for a world government and thus serve a quasi-constitutional function.³⁹ This particular ethical resolution within liberal internationalism is, as Hoffmann has suggested about the tradition in general, 'best at performing...negative tasks.'⁴⁰ Individual freedom is ultimately promoted by the co-ordinated effort of states to refrain from intervening in each other's political affairs. The ethical bias of this particular position is found in a statement by Doyle: 'The basic postulate of liberal international theory holds that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention. Since morally autonomous citizens hold rights to liberty, the states that democratically represent them have the right to exercise political independence. Mutual respect for these rights becomes the touchstone of international liberal theory.'⁴¹ But this claim is too sweeping. Other ethical stances within liberal internationalism are much more ambivalent - if not outright sceptical - about the ultimate compatibility of sovereignty and freedom.

In the first section of this article it was noted that the 'commercial pacifists' in particular looked not to what states could 'do' to domesticate anarchy, but what they should refrain from doing. Anti-mercantilist free-traders such as Adam Smith and Richard Cobden, for example, were much less confident about the state as a pro-active force domestically - and this carried over into their views of international relations. Wealth, welfare, and the moral improvement of both the individual and the species could be spontaneously generated by private interactions in civil society. Nonetheless, this classical liberal or *laissez-faire* scepticism about the state does not go so far as to challenge its existence. Although the state is not a direct instrument of individual freedom, sovereignty is viewed largely as a 'necessary evil.' Therefore, in

³⁹ See Kant, 'Perpetual peace,' 104-5 and 129.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, 'The crisis of liberal internationalism,' 164.

⁴¹ Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs,' 10.

spite of an initial scepticism about the state's compatibility with individual freedom, commercial pacifists ultimately share the view that, as long as the *source* of sovereignty is correctly fixed in the 'popular will' (of the bourgeoisie!), the prognosis for progressive international reform is positive.

A much deeper distrust of sovereignty can be found in liberals who realize that, *because of the international context*, states are not adequate to the task of self-reform and cannot, therefore, function to secure individual freedom. To a large extent, Kant's *Perpetual Peace* anticipates this sentiment because, as mentioned above, he conceives interstate anarchy as too hostile and competitive for states purposefully to reform their relations. For one thing, (illiberal) sovereigns would likely make exceptions for themselves from any peace agreements reached, and, therefore, all other states would necessarily have to engage in strategic action to defend themselves. As a result, Kant claims that states are unlikely merely to *will* reform: 'a state which is self-governing and free from all external laws will not let itself become dependent upon the judgement of other states in seeking to uphold its rights against them.'⁴² Given this restraint, Pierre Laberge notes that 'one understands why, so as not to despair, Kant needed a philosophy of history according to which nature brings nations where they do not want to go.'⁴³ History is a 'guarantee' of nature's teleological intentions; conflict and slow moral learning across generations will push sovereigns into a federative peace league.⁴⁴

It is crucial to grasp that, although Kant thinks that states are the agents who will progressively transform their relations, they do so largely despite their conscious intentions and desires.⁴⁵ It is very important to note that Kant's so-called 'guarantee' of international reform did not rest exclusively on the discretionary agency of states or on the 'popular' sovereignty of the people. He grasped that these were insufficient grounds for optimism without some other mechanism that transcended entirely these particularisms.

Liberal optimism in the state - and any residual Kantian faith in historical teleology, for that matter - was challenged in the early twentieth

⁴² Kant, 'Perpetual peace,' 103, 117.

⁴³ Laberge, 'Kant on justice and the law of nations,' 98.

⁴⁴ Kant, 'Perpetual peace,' 108-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

century when all of the traditional liberal mechanisms of international reform could not prevent major wars. When liberalism's 'promised land' failed to appear, the result was 'shattered optimism.'⁴⁶ Nonetheless, from this lost confidence came not merely a change in liberal tactics for reform, but also a profound *ethical* shift. The conventional liberal belief in individual freedom through state sovereignty was no longer entirely hegemonic. For example, the advent of non-statist mechanisms of reform, such as David Mitrany's 'functionalism,' indicates the belief that a world of states constrains and negates the realization of individual freedom. For this reason, as Charles Pentland notes, functionalism views reform as occurring 'not through, above or beyond, but despite the nation-state.'⁴⁷

In light of the above analysis, two related claims follow. First, historical changes within liberalism over the past century complicate and divide its ethical foundations. Second, these foundations are likely to become even more contested in light of recent developments in the discipline of IR.

The traditional liberal resolutions of the sovereignty/freedom dilemma have over the past century become increasingly problematic and hence, at least in principle, subject to debate for three main reasons. First, the 'domestic analogy' used so frequently by liberals eventually fails as a reliable compass of international reform. As we saw in the case of Kant, not all liberals view the dynamics of domestic and international politics as inherently similar. Although for Kant the domestic/international divide was somewhat spurious, he realized that, as a basis on which to conceive the necessary conditions for international transformation, *analogy* was far too weak. On a related issue, it is becoming less clear that the procedures for reform derived from any particular political society, even liberal ones, can be legitimately projected abroad as the universal standard of global governance. The hubris of such a project frequently clashes with a world order that is far more culturally pluralistic than was the case two centuries ago.⁴⁸ In sum, prescriptions for domestic reform do not consistently reveal how sovereignty relates to freedom internationally.

⁴⁶ David Long, 'Conclusion: inter-war idealism,' 315, 313.

⁴⁷ Charles Pentland, *Integration Theory and European Integration* (London: Faber and Faber 1973), 81.

⁴⁸ Jens Bartelson, 'The trial of judgement: a note on Kant and the paradoxes of internationalism,' *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (June 1995), 260-2; Long, 'The Harvard School of international theory,' 505.

Second, and even more crucial, liberal understandings about the requirements of 'freedom' have not remained stable over time and are likely to be further contested in the future. Quite simply, the ethical core of liberalism has been a contingent symbol. Liberals have varied on whether freedom consists of an essentially 'negative' space, free from interference, or a more 'positive' conception of self-actualization and social welfare.⁴⁹ Accordingly, it is no small wonder that there is little consensus on the state's capacity for self-reform, given that liberals disagree on the adequate standards for its measurement (that is, how do we know freedom has been achieved?).

Third, the nature of 'sovereignty' has become increasingly subject to different interpretations within liberalism. Traditionally, the question was whether sovereignty could be made compatible with freedom because the former was viewed as an essentially neutral principle of effective and legitimate power. As long as a state's sovereignty was located firmly in the 'people,' it was assumed that reform could eventually remove the contradiction between domestic order and international anarchy. The political upheavals and wars of this century have challenged this assumption. As a result, many liberals became much more aware of the problems inherent in the *territorial* dimensions of sovereign statehood.⁵⁰ Whether or not the source of sovereignty is rooted in the 'people' may be of secondary importance to whether it is fixed in territorially exclusive domains that exclude other people. Both in terms of the anarchy problematic and social justice, some liberals of the 20th century have viewed the territoriality of states as a difficulty that cannot be overcome merely by enhancing democratic representation within a determined geographic space. In this context, the liberal internationalist reform project can no longer merely be one of overcoming the contradictions between the internal and external sovereignty of states.

These three considerations create many potential difficulties for liberal internationalism, if not a severe 'crisis,' according to Hoffmann and others. However, there are a couple of positive implications in these difficulties. First, they point to the historical complexity of liberalism - not all thinkers of an internationalist bent have responded

49 John A. Hall, *Liberalism: Politics, Ideology and the Market* (London: Paladin Grafton 1988), 49ff.

50 Michael J. Smith, 'Liberalism and international reform,' in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, eds, *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 211, 216.

uniformly to the challenges. Therefore, there is no reason to think that contemporary and future internationalist theorizing is a homogeneous mass. This would merely recreate a version of Carr's stereotype. Second, and more crucially, if the three points enumerated above are taken seriously, the ethical core of liberal internationalism will necessarily become an explicit topic of debate. It is no longer possible for the (contested) normative commitments of liberals to remain obscured by the mechanisms of international reform.

Despite the signs of an emerging debate about the adequacy and limits of state sovereignty vis-à-vis the goal of freedom, not all scholars perceive its importance. Some prefer to restrict any discussion of liberal internationalism to the level of 'problem-solving' mechanisms.⁵¹ Others, such as Doyle, differentiate sharply between the 'normative' and 'explanatory' dimensions of liberalism, and give pride of place to the latter.⁵² Andrew Moravcsik has even attempted to restrict liberalism to a purely analytical framework of inter-state bargaining.⁵³ The difficulty with these contemporary attempts at IR theory is two-fold. First, in trying to create purely socio-scientific or explanatory accounts of reality they purge the ethical core of liberalism from their frameworks. Moravcsik, for example, describes his version of liberalism as 'non-utopian' (an unintended homage to Carr?) and 'non-ideological' (as if that were possible).⁵⁴ In short, when ethical purposes are proscribed, there is precious little that is liberal in these claims to theory. Second, in removing ethical concerns from discussion, these approaches merely delay necessary reflection on the three problematic issues listed above. Unsurprisingly, these approaches have tended to accept uncritically established traditions in liberal theory that tacitly support the fundamental congruence of state sovereignty and individual freedom. The state is an unquestioned mechanism for international reform. Such elaborate attempts at 'issue-avoidance' can only intensify rather than address the signs of crisis that people such as Hoffmann identify within the tradition.

Fortunately, changes in IR theory in the past decade suggest that the ethical core of internationalism will receive the attention it deserves.

51 See, for example, Goldmann, *The Logic of Internationalism*, x-xiii.

52 Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 17-18.

53 Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking preferences seriously: a liberal theory of international politics,' *International Organization* 51(autumn 1997), 513-53.

54 *Ibid*, 513-4.

The recent renaissance of liberal perspectives in the field is not monolithic. The development of 'critical' approaches in IR challenges the dominant epistemological and ontological assumptions of the discipline. Although the majority of accounts of liberal theory reflect traditional assumptions, there have been some tentative attempts to articulate a 'critical' liberal internationalism. Scholars such as Long, James L. Richardson, and John MacMillan suggest that the inherent emancipatory potential of internationalism can and ought to be renewed.⁵⁵ Andrew Linklater has suggested that a (reconstructed) internationalism is compatible with the aims of critical theory, especially because they both begin with 'the premise that the emancipatory project ought to be more central to the field.'⁵⁶ A critical internationalism would do a lot to move the debate from an excessive preoccupation with the mechanisms of reform and (re)place liberalism's ethical core at the centre of discussion. Although such attempts are at a promising early stage in development, they will become much more important in light of the inability of the positivist and statist forms of liberalism that dominate IR scholarship to give an adequate account of a globalized world order. That is, if the conditions of individual freedom can no longer be conceived exclusively within a framework of sovereign states, the ethical aspirations of liberalism will prove increasingly difficult to realize within the categories and assumptions of previous historical experiences.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this article I claimed that the discipline of IR was experiencing a revival of liberal internationalism. This revival will not and should not go unquestioned or unchallenged. The conventional - and largely valid - criticism of liberalism is that it obscures important political conflict among classes and states. There are, of course, other important charges against liberal society - ones that focus on exclusion and subordination based on race and gender. These conflicts are largely masked by the ideal of formally equal and free rights-bearing citizens

⁵⁵ See, for example, Long, 'The Harvard School of international theory,' 504; Richardson, 'Contending liberalisms,' 18-28; John MacMillan, 'A Kantian protest against the peculiar discourse of inter-liberal state peace,' *Millennium* 24(winter 1995), 549-62; and John MacMillan, "'The power of the pen": liberalism's ethical dynamic and world politics,' *Millennium*, 27(winter 1998), 643-67.

⁵⁶ Andrew Linklater, 'The question of the next stage in international relations: a critical-theoretical point of view,' *Millennium* 21(spring 1992), 98.

under a neutral state.⁵⁷ In my view, the spirit of these criticisms is not entirely incompatible with the approach of this paper, which has been to examine conflicts within liberal internationalism.

Just as the re-ascendence of internationalism should not obscure important political divisions and contestation in world politics generally, the divisions within the liberal political tradition must be treated seriously. To mask the divisions in either sphere would lead to a quick and premature exhaustion of liberalism's emancipatory and critical potential. I have argued that an excessive focus on the question of 'how' to reform international relations obscures a much deeper and important ethical issue: if - and to what extent - state sovereignty is compatible with individual freedom is open to further debate and scrutiny. Based on the analysis above, the evolution of liberalism suggests that the traditional (statist) resolutions to this question can no longer be accepted as dogma, especially if the overarching concern with freedom is the standard by which the organization of politics is to be determined.

To a large extent, what is at stake is whether the state's functional utility is profoundly limited in securing autonomy under contemporary global conditions. On this issue current liberal internationalist theory is divided between a 'conservative' or status-quo stance that seeks merely to deepen and widen the alleged domesticating effects of sovereign states based on democratic representation principles and a 'radical' and cosmopolitan version that envisages great limits of the statist framework for individual emancipation and the decreasing importance of state sovereignty altogether. Nonetheless, the discovery of alternative frameworks for individual autonomy in a changing world order is an important, yet by no means the definitive, problem for contemporary liberals. Such endeavours ultimately depend upon a much more difficult and thorny set of questions about the nature of human freedom itself.

⁵⁷ See David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1987), 267-99; and Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1989).