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**Author**

Patapan, Haig

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**Democratic International Relations:  
Montesquieu and the theoretical foundations of Democratic Peace Theory**

**Haig Patapan**

The article examines the extent to which Montesquieu's *doux commerce* thesis, which claims that commerce leads to softening of manners and therefore favours international peace, presents a challenge to democratic peace theory. It argues that Montesquieu's claim that peace may be due to commerce, and not democracy, provides a theoretical challenge to those scholars who argue that there is a Kantian virtuous triangle of democracy. The practical implication of this theoretical challenge concerns the way democratic peace theory has influenced the practice of international politics, especially American foreign policy. The article argues that Montesquieu's *doux commerce* thesis mediates between the contending claims of realism and liberal internationalism over the merits of democratisation as an essential means for securing peace.

Democracy, peace, commerce, democratisation, Montesquieu, Kant

Democracy is increasingly asserting its moral and political authority in international relations. Though its meaning and character continues to be contested, even by its strongest advocates, an increasing number of states feel compelled to claim to be democratic, in form even if not in practice.<sup>1</sup> Democracy's legitimacy and moral authority is usually defended in terms of its inherent virtues, including rights and freedoms, accountability and self-government, transparency and the rule of law.<sup>2</sup> But these virtues are predominately matters of domestic governance. What is the nature of democracy as a regime in the international context? Are democracies equally admirable in their foreign affairs? Is there indeed a unique *democratic* international relations?

These important questions have been addressed by students of international relations in the specific context of democratic peace theory. Based on statistical research and theories of liberal political philosophers, especially Kant, democratic peace theory has reached the view that though democracies are no more peaceful than other regimes generally, there is strong evidence that democracies do not wage war with each other. Though challenged by realist scholars (who argue that democratic peace is due to factors other than the nature of the regime, such as American hegemony), democratic peace theory has justified a democratic foreign policy that supports greater democratisation, on the premise that more democracies will mean a more peaceful world.

In this article I question the theoretical foundations of this democratic peace theory by returning to the writings of Montesquieu, a political philosopher who significantly shaped modern liberal constitutionalism. Montesquieu is best known for his theory of the separation of powers that influenced the American founders, determining the contours of American constitutionalism and subsequent international constitutional reforms based on the American model. Perhaps less well known, especially in international relations scholarship, is Montesquieu's *doux commerce* thesis, his argument that commerce leads to more gentle manners and thereby makes international relations between states more peaceful. *Doux commerce*, I would argue, is a provocative challenge to democratic peace theory's principal insight regarding the relations between states. It questions the core claim of democratic peace scholars by proposing that commerce, rather than democracy, leads to more peaceful international relations. Montesquieu in effect suggests that what has to date been regarded as democratic peace should more properly be understood as commercial peace. The important practical implication of this theoretical challenge concerns the character of democratic foreign policy and whether increasing commercial bilateral and multilateral ties may prove to be more

fruitful than the active pursuit of international democratisation in sustaining and supporting world peace.

In the first part of this article I provide a general overview of the scholarship on democratic peace theory. This research has been informed by a positivistic or scientific approach that has resulted in strong evidence for the view that though democracies are as likely to wage war as other regimes (i.e. there is no ‘monadic’ peace), in general they are less likely to wage war against other democracies (there is a ‘dyadic’ peace). To account for this fact scholars have turned to Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, to argue that a combination of democracy, institutions and commerce provides the basis for a ‘virtuous triangle’ of peace. In the second part of the article I outline a contending theoretical basis of democratic peace theory, Montesquieu’s *doux commerce* thesis that claims international peace is due principally to commerce, which makes manners ‘softer’, moderating the ambitions of empire and conquest. In the final part of the article I argue that it is useful to recover Montesquieu’s theory for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, I argue that Kant’s discussion of cosmopolitan right is concerned primarily with interactions between peoples and not simply market-oriented trade, and therefore cannot be the basis for the third ‘arm’ of the ‘Kantian Triangle’ that leads to peace as claimed by liberal scholars. It is Montesquieu, and not Kant, I claim, who provides the theoretical foundations for the argument that commerce, through a softening of manners, encourages peaceful international relations. In doing so, however, he presents a compelling challenge to this liberal scholarship by claiming that peace may be due principally to commerce and not democracy. Practically, to the extent that Montesquieu suggests that commerce may facilitate peace between democracies and non-democracies, he questions the single-minded and intransigent insistence on democratic regime change, making possible a more nuanced and therefore effective democratic international relations policy.

### **Democratic Peace and International Relations Thought**

Articles on democratic peace often begin by citing Levy’s (1989: 270) observation that the proposition democracies do not wage war with one another ‘is the closest thing we have to an empirical law in international relations’.<sup>3</sup> The significance of this claim lies in the serious challenge it presents to realists in international relations, who argue that the character of international relations is shaped more by the anarchic nature of the international system than states’ internal structures or norms. Thus most critics of the democratic peace theory, whether

questioning the methodological integrity or validity of the findings, or attempting to provide alternative causal accounts for the fact, have been ‘realists’ who have clearly seen the far-reaching implications democratic peace theory has for realism.<sup>4</sup> For example, Mearsheimer’s (1990) article on post-Cold war Europe, aptly titled ‘Back to the Future’, criticises ‘international peace theory’ in terms of the evidence cited, and gives a competing account based on his realist argument that ‘bipolarity, an equal military balance, and nuclear weapons have fostered peace in Europe over the past 45 years’ (Mearsheimer 1990: 51).<sup>5</sup> Thirteen years later Rosato (2003: 585) accepts that ‘Democratic peace theorists have discovered a powerful empirical generalization: Democracies rarely go to war or engage in militarized disputes with one another’. He rejects, however, the normative and institutional causal logic of the theory, and suggests as a possible explanation ‘imperial peace based on American power’, positing ‘American preponderance’ as the cause of stability and peace in both Europe and the Americas (Rosato 2003: 599-600).<sup>6</sup>

As this scholarship indicates, the salience of democratic peace theory in international relations lies not just in its contribution to our understanding of democracy or international relations; it is especially provocative because it seems to provide a methodologically robust, and therefore fundamentally powerful challenge to contemporary realism – democratic peace theory seems to have become the battleground for the competing schools of international relations thought. And the specific question at issue between the contending schools is the ‘why’ question – why democracies do not go to war. In attempting to answer this ‘why’ question, scholars in international relations have turned primarily to the political works of Kant.<sup>7</sup> In one of the earliest formulations, Doyle (1986) argues that the two-fold liberal legacy of liberal peace and liberal ‘impudence’ in waging wars against illiberal states can be explained by Kant’s liberal internationalism.<sup>8</sup> Kant’s three ‘definitive articles’ of peace in his *Perpetual Peace* (1795), according to Doyle (1986: 1157), ‘anticipates for us the ever-widening pacification of a liberal pacific union, explains this pacification, and at the same time suggests why liberal states are not pacific in their relations with nonliberal states’. Drawing on Kant, Doyle argues that perpetual peace is possible only when all nations accept the three Definitive Articles, requiring that a civil constitution be republican (First); the adoption of a pacific federation (Second); and a cosmopolitan law requiring universal hospitality, especially in the exchange of goods and ideas (Third).<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Russett and Oneal’s *Triangulating Peace* (2001) provides the most recent and influential example of Kantian theory informing democratic peace research. Russett and Oneal (2001: 71) propose

the idea of a ‘Kantian Peace’, that ‘is the result of multiple and overlapping liberal behaviours (democracy, economic interdependence, and international law and organizations)’. Their ‘Kantian Triangle’, showing the ‘virtuous’ interconnections between International Organisations, Democracy and Economic Interdependence, is a visual representation of their overall argument. It illustrates how any breakage in the triangle leads to a ‘vicious circle’ that would return us to a ‘Hobbesian system of insecurity, economic decline, and war’ (42). Kant, for Russett and Oneal, is the source for both the cultural and structural explanations for liberal peace. In their view democracies are reluctant to wage wars because the people know they will bear the full burden of the conflict, both in lives and resources. Moreover, democracies rely on the consent of citizens and are founded on the principles of publicity, transparency and informed consent. These common norms, supported by structural features, such as separation of powers and leadership accountability to the people, will favour non-violent resolution of disputes, especially with other democracies. These cultural and structural factors also explain the character of democratic wars – including the role of democratic interventions, covert operations, conflict management, success in wars and avoidance of civil wars (2001: 53-71). This Kantian theoretical foundation allows Russett and Oneal (2001: 272) to devote the concluding chapter of their book to providing their ‘prognosis for international relations in the twenty first century’. The main thrust of this discussion is the need to widen the ‘zone of stable peace’ by the successful integration of Russia and China into the Kantian system (2001: 271-305).

Because of the importance of Kant as a theoretical source for understanding liberal peace, it is striking that in his ready appropriation by democratic peace theory scholars, little attention has been paid to the subtlety and complexity of his thought and the larger context of his reflections.<sup>10</sup> As Gates et al. (1996: 64) put it, ‘It is a sad testimony to the state of DP [Democratic Peace] theorizing that so many authors hurriedly genuflect in front of the rumored content of this essay [*Perpetual Peace*] before delving into their various inductive pursuits. Kant's essay is the tip of a complex Enlightenment iceberg. It should be read carefully before it is extolled as a tribal idol’. Whatever the reasons for this limited familiarity with the extensive scholarship on Kant, democratic peace theory could usefully address those aspects of Kant that do not readily fit with the present research agenda. For example, as noted by a number of scholars, Kant writes of republics, not democracies.<sup>11</sup> The lack of familiarity with Kant’s works more generally tends to understate, if not neglect, his ‘realism’: it is arguable, for example, that he completes Hobbes’s project by insuring the international peace

that is necessary for sustaining Hobbes's domestic peace.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Kant's account of an improvident or at best neglectful Nature indicates that war becomes the necessary means for attaining perpetual peace. That the trajectory to peace, which is not inevitable, will involve wars makes it difficult for us to judge any one conflict as proof of his thesis.<sup>13</sup> Though Kant is an appropriate theoretical source for democratic peace theory, an exclusive focus on him has perhaps been at the expense of other potential theoretical explanations for dyadic democratic peace. An important alternative theoretical account, I contend, is provided by Montesquieu.

### **Montesquieu and *Le Doux Commerce***

Modern democracies are founded on trade and commerce. Is it possible that trade and commerce – not democracy – is the significant factor in encouraging peace? Perhaps 'democratic' peace is due solely to economic factors and should more accurately be described as commercial peace? One of the earliest and most sophisticated formulations of the view that commerce favours peace is found in Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), where in the language of contemporary scholarship, Montesquieu provides both 'normative' and 'structural' accounts of how commerce encourages peace.<sup>14</sup>

Montesquieu distinguishes between a commerce of luxury, often found in monarchies with a privileged nobility that seek to outdo each other in honour, from the commerce of economy, where the ethic of work and accumulation has beneficial effects on *moeurs*, understood generally as mores or manners. In the *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu argues that commerce and enlightenment soften *moeurs*: 'Commerce cures destructive prejudices, and it is an almost general rule that wherever there are gentle mores, there is commerce and that everywhere there is commerce, there are gentle mores' (XX, 1: 338). But why does commerce have such an influence? The spirit of acquisition, according to Montesquieu, reveals and reinforces the natural desire for security and property. In directing men and women to their material welfare, commerce shifts attention away from devotion to king or country, or even personal glory and salvation. It therefore encourages hard work, tolerance and love of peace. Importantly, a concern with one's own security, prosperity, in short, oneself, results in a new approach to others, an enlightened view about their plight, insecurity and weakness. In this new appreciation of a commonality, individuals realise their need for others, and how others need them. In this way a sense of common humanity and therefore mutual pity and compassion is engendered by increased human intercourse, not only towards neighbours, but by extension, foreigners. Consequently the treatment of all other individuals is softened as

one becomes capable of identifying oneself with them: ‘Knowledge makes men gentle, and reason inclines toward humanity: only prejudices cause these to be renounced’ (XV, 3: 249). ‘The natural effect of commerce’, according to Montesquieu, ‘is to lead to peace’. The spread of trade and the spirit of commerce will not only make nations interdependent, but nations are united on the basis of mutual needs (XX, 2: 338). And insofar as nations are preoccupied with riches, in this respect they comprise ‘but a single state of which all societies are members’ (XX, 23: 352). Thus our need for security and desire for comfort make possible a common humanity and thereby a more peaceful world. Montesquieu is aware that the liberal republicanism he favours has important limitations. Yet the benefits of commercial republics are evident when one compares them to the violence and *stasis* of ancient republics.

The powerful influence of commerce in modifying manners has important political and institutional implications for Montesquieu. Domestically, governments increasingly rely on revenue from commerce and therefore are compelled to protect it. The protection of labour, the maintenance of travel and transport, the securing of free exchange and market competition as well as enforcement of contracts becomes an important obligation. The spirit of commerce, which favours fairness, law-abidingness and thereby increasing prosperity and stability, supports the rule of law and importantly a constitutionalism based on separation of powers. Internationally, commercial relations encourage a new politics mediated by international law that abjures the spirit of martial conquest based on the desire for honour and luxuries in favour of a commercial spirit that favours defensive force. Montesquieu’s foreign policy therefore emphasises the importance of relying on international law to limit the scope of any conquest to preserve as much as possible the population and the social fabric of the conquered state. Montesquieu was nevertheless aware of the obstacles to such virtuous developments and was willing to acknowledge variety in political forms due to the extraordinary diversity of climate, mores and institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Montesquieu, according to Hirschman (1977: 60), was the ‘most influential exponent of the doctrine of the *doux commerce*’. Though Montesquieu was not an advocate of free trade, or a ‘capitalist’, we can trace his influence on thinkers as diverse as Adam Smith, Keynes and Schumpeter.<sup>16</sup> But how significantly different is Montesquieu’s *doux commerce* thesis from that adopted by liberal international scholars? Most democratic peace scholars focus on the nature of the regime and not on economic interdependence. Nevertheless some, such as Doyle (1983; 1986; 2005) and Russett and Oneal (2001), consider economic interdependence as the ‘third pillar’ or third arm of the liberal ‘triangle’ of democracy,



international organisation and economic interdependence. They argue that trade provides a more peaceful form of acquisition, making foreign conquest costly and unnecessary. Free international trade will foster economic relations between states, encouraging greater communication, and ties of interdependence between private actors and governments, promoting mutual understanding and cooperative political relations. Thus economic actors in each state have an interest in keeping peace, and will influence their leaders accordingly.<sup>17</sup> This seems very much like Montesquieu's *doux commerce* claim, yet these scholars do not refer to him, relying instead on Kant and 'classic liberals'.<sup>18</sup> But does Kant provide a theoretical basis for this third 'commercial' arm of peace? It is instructive in this respect to see how Doyle (1986), one of the early and influential interpreters of Kant for democratic peace theory, develops this link. Doyle interprets Kant's 'Third Definitive Article' as the basis for Kant's endorsement of commerce. In discussing Kant's formulation of the limits on the rights of hospitality he cites Kant: 'This "does not extend beyond those conditions which make it possible for them [foreigners] to attempt to enter into relations [commerce] with the native inhabitants' ( [ ] in original). As this citation shows, Doyle reads into the general ideas of 'relations' the more limited concept of commerce as market-oriented trade. Doyle subsequently supports this reading by discussing the 'sources' of the three definitive articles, the last of which is commerce: 'Lastly, cosmopolitan law adds material incentives to moral commitments. The cosmopolitan right to hospitality permits the "spirit of commerce" sooner or later to take hold of every nation, thus impelling states to promote peace and to try to avert war' (1161). Thus we get the general impression that Kant's third article mandates or requires the right of commerce.

Yet a closer reading of *Perpetual Peace* reveals a more complex understanding of commerce by Kant. The 'Third Definitive Article for Perpetual Peace' is primarily concerned with the cosmopolitan right of engagement with each other. But because these are rights and not acts of philanthropy, they are limited. As the heading to the Third Article indicates, Kant in this section discusses how '*Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality*'. Hospitality, according to Kant, is 'the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory' (Kant 1991: 105). Kant argues that there is no '*right of a guest to be entertained*', but there is the *right of resort*, to 'present themselves in the company of others'. 'But this natural right of hospitality, i.e. the right of strangers,' according to Kant, 'does not extend beyond those conditions which make it possible for them to *attempt* to enter into relations with the native inhabitants' (emphasis in original). As this

discussion indicates ‘relations’ in this context comprehends, but does not simply mean ‘commerce’ as Doyle seems to indicate. Indeed, as Kant’s discussion reveals, in some cases such trade improperly subverts the cosmopolitan right of general relations. Kant impugns *inhospitality*, specifically of the ‘civilised states of our continent, especially the commercial states’, where ‘the injustice which they display in visiting foreign countries and peoples (which in their case is the same as conquering them) seems appallingly great’. America, the Spice Islands, the Cape, East India are some of the countries where trading posts are set up by these countries, according to Kant, as an excuse to disenfranchise and conquer, leading to ‘the whole litany of evils which can afflict the human race’(Kant 1993: 106). Thus ‘China and Japan (Nippon), having had experience of such guests, have wisely placed restriction on them’. It is for this reason that Kant devotes his discussion to the rights of strangers. It is true that Kant takes up the ‘spirit of commerce’ in his ‘*First Supplement: On the Guarantee of a Perpetual Peace*’. But as we will see, commerce in this context is nature’s device to secure perpetual peace. The discussion in the *First Supplement* concerns how the ‘mechanical process of nature visibly exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men, even against their will and indeed by means of their very discord’ (108). Unlike the public rights (political, international and cosmopolitan), imposed as moral duties by practical reason, nature compels by using mechanisms of human inclinations. For example, our self-seeking inclinations lead to war, yet war compels people to submit to public laws and form republican states. It is in this context that Kant refers to commerce. Nature employs ‘mutual self-interest’ to compel states ‘to promote the noble cause of peace, though not exactly from motives of morality’(114). ‘For the *spirit of commerce*’, according to Kant, sooner or later takes hold of every people, and it cannot exist side by side with war. And of all the powers (and means) at the disposal of the power of the state, *financial power* can probably be relied on most’ (114). Commerce, like war, is merely another instrument nature deploys to guarantee perpetual peace. Indeed, as we saw in Kant’s discussion of the Third Article, commercial states are particularly prone to such cruelty and injustice. As a human inclination, the spirit of commerce is proof of Nature’s cunning in protecting cosmopolitan right. But as such it cannot be a right in itself. It would be incorrect, therefore, to claim that the Third article provides the basis for a right of commercial dealings for the simple reason that it confuses a right or moral duty, with a natural inclination. Thus it is theoretically incorrect to claim that Kant regards commerce as a cosmopolitan right, or that trade is the third arm of the Kantian Triangle. As Muthu (2003: 195) notes in his discussion of *commercium* in Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*,

Kant has a wider understanding of commercial relations: ‘It would be a mistake, in other words, to treat cosmopolitan right simply as a kind of bourgeois right, to view it as a concept that Kant uses in order to legitimate an early form of global capitalism’. Such an error may be due to the very complexity of Kant’s philosophy, or perhaps the anachronistic reinterpretation of Kant informed by ‘classical liberals’. Whatever the reason, the focus on Kant has resulted in the neglect of Montesquieu, the original source of the concept of *doux commerce*.<sup>19</sup>

In this light, Montesquieu offers a significant theoretical advantage in our examination of democratic peace. He provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for one aspect or ‘arm’ of contemporary scholarship on democratic peace. Moreover, to the extent that Montesquieuan constitutionalism, especially the idea of separation of powers, has been so influential in the evolution of modern liberal democracies, his conception of ‘republicanism’ is more consonant with contemporary notions of democratic governance.<sup>20</sup> But Montesquieu also presents a formidable theoretical challenge to contemporary liberal peace scholars. His *doux commerce* argument sees the origin of peace primarily in commerce and not democracy. Of course, as we have seen, he endorses the potential for liberal institutional reforms. But to the extent that the effects of commerce can be felt by countries with a variety of constitutional forms, Montesquieu would deny the necessity of the ‘virtuous’ triangle endorsed by liberal international scholars. Consequently, a research program based on Montesquieu would seek to explore the extent to which commerce, and not democracy, is the primary reason for international peace.<sup>21</sup> This question has been the subject of considerable historical and quantitative research that has focused on differences in comparative power, differential rates of economic and political development, and the influence of regional and international organisations.<sup>22</sup> Yet the evidence on liberal peace remains inconclusive. For example, in ‘The Classical Liberals Were Right’, Oneal and Russett (1997) find evidence that democracy and free trade do ameliorate international conflict, while Kim and Rousseau (2005), in ‘Classic Liberals Were Half Right (or Half Wrong)’, claim that though there is evidence for democratic peace, economic interdependence does not reduce conflict.<sup>23</sup> Certainly these claims have been challenged by realists, who argue that a state’s desire for prosperity will always be subject to its security needs. They claim that international competition makes it difficult for states to co-operate, leading to demands for comparative gain, while interdependence creates obligations, making states vulnerable and therefore leading to instability and potentially conflict.<sup>24</sup>

## **International Relations and Montesquieu's Moderation**

In addition to the theoretical advantages of recognising a Montesquieuian *doux commerce* thesis as a basis for future research, there are significant practical advantages in returning to Montesquieu as a theoretical source for our examination of democratic international relations. The practical implication of current Kantian or liberal peace theory is that, if democratic peace theory is true, then modern democracies should direct their considerable resources and military might to promoting democracy around the world as the most sensible and practical course for providing for their own security and ensuring international peace. It is this prospect that has been of most concern to realist scholars.<sup>25</sup> Layne (1994: 45-46) notes that 'Democratic peace theory has been widely embraced by policymakers and foreign policy analysts alike and it has become a lodestar that guides American post-Cold war policy'. He calls the theory 'dangerous' and its promise of a 'zone of peace' illusory. It is especially problematic for America because it 'panders to impulses which, however noble in the abstract, have led to disastrous military interventions abroad, strategic overextension, and the relative decline of American power' (47). For Layne, democratic peace theory has mesmerized American policy makers with its 'seductive – but false – vision of the future' (49). In a similar vein, Owen (1994: 87) refers to democratic peace as an 'axiom of U.S. foreign policy', noting how democratization was 'third pillar' of Clinton's foreign policy. The 'Bush Doctrine', according to recent commentators, has continued this form of American liberal internationalism.<sup>26</sup> The practical problems at stake can be seen in Rosato's (2003: 601) assessment:

Evaluating whether the democratic peace finding is caused by democracy or by some other factor such as American preponderance has implications far beyond the academy. If peace and security are indeed a consequence of shared democracy, then international democratization should continue to lie at the heart of American grand strategy. But if, as I have suggested, democracy does not cause peace, then American policymakers are expending valuable resources on a policy that, while morally praiseworthy, does not make America more secure.

For these scholars the ready acceptance of democratic peace theory poses a serious threat to American foreign policy and by implication, world stability and peace. More than an arcane debate in international relations, democratic peace theory seems to be an important locus for articulating and determining the most suitable course for present US foreign policy.<sup>27</sup>

It is here that Montesquieu provides a major advantage over Kantian peace theory. Montesquieu, though a liberal, does not argue that there is a moral duty to ensure perpetual

peace, or speculate whether Nature wills and guarantees such an outcome. At the same time he is not simply a Machiavellian or a Hobbesian, because he does advocate important institutional reforms that will ameliorate the potential for despotic rule domestically and moderate the dangers of international warfare. His understanding of commercial peace therefore provides the potential for a more measured democratic international relations policy. Though advocating reform and enlightenment, and therefore a willingness to censure harmful and prejudiced laws and practices, Montesquieu counsels caution and prudence in implementing abrupt changes in regimes. He observes that in doing the greatest good, ‘One feels the old abuses and sees their correction, but one also sees the abuses of the correction itself’ (Preface, xliv). Though advocating law and legality, Montesquieu expresses no specific regime preference because of his political and legal moderation, and due to his view that each nation had a ‘general spirit’, formed by the ‘climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners’ (XIX, 4: 310). Because the laws of one nation are unlikely to suit another, the government most in conformity with nature is that government whose particular disposition is best related to the disposition of the people for whom it is established (I, 1: 3-5). Therefore, the ‘spirit of moderation ought to be that of the legislator’, taking into account the specific disposition of the people. The implication of this form of moderation for international relations is that Montesquieu favours piecemeal, gradual evolution over systemic uprooting and replacement of traditional customs and practices because radical change and shocks to the ‘general spirit’ have the potential to be counter-productive. As a consequence, foreign policy informed by Montesquieu would moderate the realist-versus-liberal debate that dominates present scholarship.<sup>28</sup> It would also allow us to resist any form of dogmatic policy and encourage us to judge and evaluate the issue at stake in the context of the specific ‘spirit’ of each nation. In promoting this form of judgment or prudence, a Montesquieuan perspective would temper both realist fears and liberal ideals to forge a foreign policy that will genuinely encourage reform while ensuring peace and stability.<sup>29</sup>

### **Democratic International Relations**

The increasing importance of democracy both as a moral principle and as a political regime confirms the need for a more profound appreciation of its character in the international sphere. Is there a unique form of *democratic* international relations? Are democracy’s domestic virtues also to be found in its international relations? Are democracies more peace-loving?

International relations scholars have attempted to explore these questions in the context of monadic and dyadic democratic peace theories, arguing that there is strong evidence that democracies are peaceful with each other. In this article I have suggested that Montesquieu, with his claim that it is commerce and not democracy that moderates our powerful ambitions for glory and conquest, provides an alternative basis for explaining this peace. By providing a clear theoretical foundation for testing the claims of *doux commerce*, Montesquieu surmounts the apparently irresolvable doctrinal struggle between realism and liberalism that dominates the international relations scholarship on democratic peace. The practical implication of recovering Montesquieu's *doux commerce* thesis is the possibility of a more measured international relations policy. Montesquieu's moderation, aiming for liberal reform yet aware of the sometimes intractable obstacles in the path of regime change, provides both a reasoned realism and a more measured liberal internationalism in the formulation of democratic foreign policy. It therefore makes possible a form of prudence or practical judgment that allows us to reconcile the ever-present and unavoidable demands of national interest and democracy's virtues.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> On the 'three waves' of democracy see Huntington (1991) and Diamond (2002). For the claim that the post-1989 transitions in former communist states should be distinguished as a 'fourth wave' separate from Huntington's 'third' in southern Europe and Latin America, see Doorenspleet (2000); McFaul (2002); Tusalem (2007); and Welzel and Inglehart (2005).
- <sup>2</sup> On the 'four virtues' of democracy (freedom, prosperity, peace and martial effectiveness) see Reiter and Stam (2002: 1-9). On liberalism and its virtues see Macedo (1991); Galston (1991); Berkowitz (1999).
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kegley (1999: 80), who also cites Russett's (1990: 119-20) comment that this empirical regularity is 'one of the strongest non-trivial or non-tautological generalisations that can be made about international relations'.
- <sup>4</sup> On methodological based critiques see Gatzke (1998: 2000); on substantive critiques see Mearsheimer (1990), Copeland (1996), Gates et al (1996), Rosato (2003), Layne (1994), Spiro (1994), Faber and Gowa (1997), Gowa (1995), Thompson (1996), and Kegley and Hermann (1999). See Ray (2003: 241) on how in the Lakatosian sense 'realism and/or neorealism has been "falsified."'
- <sup>5</sup> Mearsheimer (1990: 48, footnote 70) traces the theory to Doyle (1983; 1986) who in turn draws heavily on Immanuel Kant's classic writings on the subject. On Doyle see the discussion below.
- <sup>6</sup> See also Rosato (2003: 585) and the *Forum* section on democratic peace in the *American Political Science Review*, 99 (3): 453-472. For comparable arguments see Farber and Gowa (1997); Gatzke (1998); and Layne (1994). Farber and Gowa (1997), for example, suggest that the Cold War largely explains the democratic peace finding.
- <sup>7</sup> Of course not all scholars have relied on Kant: see for example Owen (1994) who argues that it is liberalism, rather than democracy, that causes peace. Yet in explicating the meaning of liberalism Owen too draws on liberal thinkers (see his references to Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant at 93-94). Indeed, except for the reliance on simple self-interest (and not justice: 96) and the rejection of an inevitable 'perpetual peace' (125), Owen's thesis seems in all important aspects Kantian. We should note in this respect that democratic peace theory has been criticised for being 'theory poor' (Buono de Mesquita and Lalman (1992); Lake (1992); Gates et al (1996)), though of course there is no reason why research in this area cannot proceed 'inductively' (Gates et al 1996: 3).

- <sup>8</sup> See Doyle (1983) for his initial formulation of this argument.
- <sup>9</sup> This discussion draws on Doyle (1983). For his more recent work, emphasising the importance of having all three definitive articles for democratic peace, see Doyle (2005).
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, Doyle (1983: 226, footnote 24). On recent scholarship see Baum (2008), who provides a critique of Kant by turning to Bentham; Jahn (2005), who examines the liberal internationalism of Kant and J. S. Mill; Williams (2001) who seeks to recover greater insights from Kantian liberalism; Cederman (2001) who argues that there is democratic dialectical learning process; and Dixon (1994) who notes that there is diversity in approaches, ranging from his own Kantian liberalism, to Rummel's libertarian theory, to the rational choice approach of Lake (1992) and Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman (1992).
- <sup>11</sup> Spiro (1994: 52); Gates et al (1996: 13). Indeed, this scholarship does not generally acknowledge the significant differences between liberalism, democracy and republicanism.
- <sup>12</sup> On Kant's critique of Hobbes see Williams (2003); on Hobbes' international relations thought generally see Patapan (2009).
- <sup>13</sup> On the importance of anarchy and conflict as a key source of progress for Kant see Huntley (1996).
- <sup>14</sup> References to the *Spirit of the Laws* are to Montesquieu (1989) by book, chapter and page. I draw on Pangle's (1973: 200-248) succinct overview of Montesquieu's conception of commerce as well as Pangle (2010) and Rahe (2009). On Montesquieu more generally see Desserud (1999).
- <sup>15</sup> For an overview of Montesquieu's international relations see Rosow (1984).
- <sup>16</sup> As Hirschman (1977: 93-113) notes, Montesquieu's arguments are different from those of the physiocrats and the free-trade claims based on Adam Smith.
- <sup>17</sup> See generally Russett and Oneal (2001); Gleditsch (2008). Copeland (1996: 6) refers to the 'trade expectations'.
- <sup>18</sup> See the passing reference to 'classical scholars' in Oneal and Russett (1997). Russett and Oneal (2001: 128-9) refer to the French Physiocrats, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Paine and Richard Cobden. Most international relations scholars who turn to Kant do not appreciate sufficiently the long and complex intellectual history of liberal thought regarding the role of trade. Van der Haar (2010) notes the other major liberal source as Adam Smith, but takes pains to show the ambiguities in the liberal position, especially of Adam Smith and David Hume, regarding commerce.
- <sup>19</sup> Montesquieu influenced Kant directly (on Kant's sources in *Perpetual Peace*, including Vattel, Montesquieu and *The Federalist Papers* see Ossipow 2008) and mediately through Rousseau. As Gates et al (1996: 6) aptly put it: 'Why have not Rousseau and Montesquieu been more closely considered in the DP literature?' There are few international relations scholars who have examined Montesquieu's influence on international relations theory. See, however, Doyle's (1983: 225, footnote 23) passing reference; Rosow (1984) for a theoretical overview of Montesquieu's international relations thought, and Howse (2006) on the legal aspects of his internationalism. Deudney (2004: 317) examines the problem of federalism.
- <sup>20</sup> On Montesquieu's influence on the American founders see Rahe (1984).
- <sup>21</sup> This research will have two dimensions, the first examining the extent to which commerce does soften manners (which would include longitudinal studies examining the influence of commerce on manners, addressing themes such as civility and trust), and the second, which we address below, on the link between commerce and peace.
- <sup>22</sup> For an overview of the scholarship regarding 'economic conditionality' see Mousseau (2009), who argues that democratic peace can be explained by economic norm theory; and Russett and Oneal (2001: 125-156). See also Hegre (2000), who argues that the relationship between trade and peace depends on the level of development, and Gartzke (2007) on 'capitalist peace'.
- <sup>23</sup> For the extensive scholarship see Haar (2010, footnote 6). See also Barbieri and Schneider (1999), who examine recent literature that is more sceptical as to whether trade reduces conflict. Martin et al. (2006) argue that the view trade promotes peace is only partially true. They do, however, find 'robust evidence for the contrasting effects of bilateral and multilateral trade openness'. Mousseau et al. (2003) focus on contract theory, sociology and economics.
- <sup>24</sup> See Mearsheimer (1990: 42, footnote 60) regarding the international political economy literature; and Layne (1994: 10). Copeland (1996: 6) notes the realist's case that before the First World War European powers had reached unprecedented levels of trade, yet that did not prevent them from going to war.
- <sup>25</sup> Mearsheimer's (1990: 54-56) post-Cold war policy recommendations (American encouragement of limited nuclear proliferation, balancing of power by Britain and US in Europe and measures against hyper-nationalism in Europe) are clearly opposed to democratisation.
- <sup>26</sup> On the meaning of liberal internationalism see Ikenberry (2009). On the Bush doctrine see Jervis (2003); Hendrickson and Tucker (2005); Dueck (2004) and Monten (2005). For claims that the presidency of George

- W. Bush marks the demise of the era of liberal internationalism in America see the debate in a series of articles by Kupchan and Trubowitz (2007; 2010), and Chaudoin et al. (2010).
- <sup>27</sup> On American foreign policy traditions in general see Mead (2002); Lieven (2004); Kane (2008).
- <sup>28</sup> To the extent that Montesquieu emphasises the importance of mores and society for international relations, he may be said to anticipate modern ‘constructivism’. Indeed, it is possible that one of the theoretical sources of constructivism is Montesquieu, via Rousseau’s conception of society (Rousseau was greatly influenced by Montesquieu). On Rousseau’s theory of international affairs see Hoffmann and Fidler (1991); on constructivism generally see Wendt (1999); Kubáľková et al. (1998); Guzzini and Leander (2006).
- <sup>29</sup> For an indication of how it may be possible to negotiate between the necessary and persistent demands of stability and the ever-present ambitions for democratic reform see Kane and Patapan (2010).

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