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Critical Thinking Paper- Week 4: Liberal and Social Theories

In the article “The Dream of Democratic Peace” John Harper discusses his issues with the idea of a perfect democracy in the United States. He believes that democratic peace is only a historical hypothesis, which is defined as “a set of propositions based on past experiences” (Harper 117). America’s past experience has been represented as the feeling of unity with other countries who share a similar political structure. The flaw with this is that America does not rely on these other countries until they are in a predicament, and Harper believes this can lead to a security threat. This can be proven through historical examples: the United States was threatened during the Revolutionary War and in World War II, where they received assistance from Louis XVI in France and Stalin in the Soviet Union. The US also has “friends” who they rely on that are non-democratic, but they are helpful because they are reliable and dependent on America’s protection. During World War II, the United States was helped by the world’s least democratic countries. If a state were to have a democracy it would not make them more reliable for America, because they will only be reliable with the US’s protection. This is further explained by Harper through example: “Japan, Germany, and Italy have respected, and to a degree emulated, the United States, but they became reliable partners because the United States defeated them, helped rebuild them, and protected them from an outside threat” (Harper 118). In summary, the only reason reliable partnerships are formed truly has nothing to do with democracy, but instead it has to do with self-interest.

After discussing the flaws of the Democratic Peace Theory, a solution to these imperfections must be put into place. Harper considers three fundamentals of what a sound foreign policy should look like. Similarly, Immanuel Kant has an entire three-step method to obtaining peace, which he gave around two-hundred years prior to John Harper's methodology. Kant's first solution theorizes that states should come together to create a world federalization where they could develop rules in order to assist with cooperation between nations (Pevehouse, 2019, p.78). Second, he believes that to gain peace, the solution comes from the internal policies of individual governments. Finally, Kant feels that trade should be enforced, because it can essentially lead to peace. This is because he believes conflict is less likely to occur between countries if it would disrupt the trade processes that would enhance their wealth and success (79). Kant and Harper's liberal ideologies of how to obtain peace and fluidity can be juxtaposed, since they both advocate for peace in a three-step manner. Harper's first thought on how to obtain a sound foreign policy is to acknowledge that countries are always going to do things for their own self-benefit and it really has nothing to do with democracy. It is almost as if he is saying that every good deed a country does to another country has an ulterior motive to benefit them later. He then states that a solid foreign policy must be created with the knowledge of how other countries see the United States. This has to do with how these other countries seek assistance from America, but they do not want to adopt their policies. Therefore, the United States must accept others' policies and views as to not strike war by idealpolitiking, which is the attempt to universalize ideology (Harper 120). He wraps up his suggestions by emphasizing that the United States must base their policies off of who they have historically been in the past, which he says is a state who does things for their own benefit (121). Harper specifically refers to the United States, but these theories can be utilized by any country.

The Democratic Peace Theory expresses the idea that democracies are said to be more peaceful. In reality, peace does not come from one democracy, but rather it comes from the interactions between two democracies. This is because two democratic nations rarely go to war with each other. Kant believed that democratic nations are more peaceful than authoritarian nations, but this is not true, as they fight just as many wars as each other (Pevehouse, 2019, p. 86). Just because democracies will not fight against each other, that does not mean that they will not fight against authoritarian nations. In theory, it would make sense for every state to make the transition to democratic, because then, there would be no one to fight against. Although this would cause more peace in the long-term, the transition to a democratic country will cause conflict in the short term (87). This idea can be directly correlated to Harper's idea of countries' only motive being self-interest, which can also be shown today in current events (Harper 120). With the recent victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan after their attack on Kabul, Pakistan has displayed pride in this defeat. This is an unexpected reaction, as Pakistan was recently an American ally against the Taliban. The reason for Pakistan's side-swapping was for self-benefit. Pakistan realized that Afghanistan could provide assistance for them to defeat India, their ultimate rival (Perlez 1). Not only was Harper's warning of self-interest was evident in this specific case, but the need for instant gratification played a role in Pakistan's decision to side with the Taliban as well (Harper 120). Pakistan remained with the United States to help them beat India, but once the United States pulled out of Afghanistan, Pakistan immediately took the next opportunity to try and defeat their nemesis. Siding with Afghanistan could benefit them in the short term, but continuing an ally with the democratic America, would ultimately result in peace for them. This is exactly the idea behind democratic peace and why it is so hard to achieve (Perlez 1).

Through looking at historical examples, it is evident that self-interest undeniably plays a role in the way countries behave. Harper identifies the flaws of the democratic peace theory and what must be recognized in order to obtain peace, while Kant suggests solutions for democratic peace. It is important for countries to reflect on previous events and adapt in order to succeed. The one flaw that has been proven to never cease or that looks as if it will cease, is self-interest. In summary, countries will always have a method to their madness, whether it will be detrimental to anyone else or not.

Works Cited

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