

Zum ewigem Frieden

I.Kant

October 16–20, 2016

Kant is not easy to read, and this short pamphlet is no exception. In spite of a mere fifty pages of text it is almost impenetrable. It is written in a contorted style of a legal scribe, more commanding to pay close attention than an invitation to do the same. The goal he sets seems impossible, namely that of truly eternal peace, i.e. no mere armistices.

He makes distinctions. A state is different from a piece of land on which it may be situated. The latter can be seen as a possession to be had and traded, while the state is a community of people who can be commandeered by no one but themselves. Thus no state can forcibly intervene in the affairs of another state. This makes one curious as to the publication of the pamphlet and sure enough the latest edition is 1796 just after the final partition of Poland. He also prohibits the practice of standing armies, which only work as provocations, but seems to have no objection to the training of a national militia to defend the home country. Furthermore he advocates that the constitutions of states should be republican. A key notion is that of *Völkerrecht* which should be distinguished from mere *Privatrecht* that leads to everyone against everyone else. The emergence of nations meant the monopoly of the right to use force and the ability to enforce that monopoly. But among independent nations there is no such overriding force (although this is often seen as something desirable as expressed by the wish for a world government, of which UN is a feeble attempt, although of course fraught with dangers of its own) thus the restraint from warfare has to rest on a different basis, and I guess the tentative answer to that is hidden somewhere in the text. This leads to the question of whether there is any incompatibility between ethics and politics, and he concludes that there is none. In fact he states the Formula *Alle Maximen, die der Publizität bedürfen (um ihren Zweck nicht zu verfehlen), stimmen mit Recht und Politik vereinigt zusammen*, meaning that the need for publicity automatically requires a general consensus.

The problem he sets for mankind to solve, in this short sketch, is a truly difficult one, yet he remains hopeful, after all it is not an idea without content, but a task one may approach piecemeally.

May 1, 2017 **Ulf Persson:** *Prof.em, Chalmers U.of Tech., Göteborg Sweden* ulfp@chalmers.se