

This paper engages with and defends Kant's long overlooked argument for the balance of power as moral principle constitutive of a free international order with implications for the morality of war and peace, as well as economic coercion and diplomacy.

The paper develops this thesis in the context of contemporary neo-republican internationalism (for example Philip Pettit, Cécile Laborde, Miriam Ronzoni), but the argument applies more broadly to anyone who accepts that it is possible to be a free person only in a free state and a free state is possible only in a free international order. This rules out most forms of institutional cosmopolitanism but covers a wide range of other positions on what constitutes a free international order where states retain at least some moral status whether instrumental or intrinsic.

Contemporary neo-republican internationalists argue a free international order requires internally free states situated in international institutions to ensure external non-domination. Thus far Kant agrees. For Kant the free international order requires states shall be republics (internally free) and stand in relations of (external) non-domination to each other as 'powers' facilitated by a congress of states (an international institution).

When it comes to the balance of power, contemporary neo-republican internationalists extend the idea of 'anti-power' from the free republic to the international order to secure non-domination. This cashes out as support for the balance of power as a temporary and anti-hegemonic strategy for establishing effective international institutions. By contrast Kant argues for a moral right to a thoroughgoing and permanent balance of power between all states is a positive principle of a free international order

In 1797's *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant does this by affirming a moral right to a balance of power for all states: "Accordingly, this is also the basis of the right to a balance of power [*das Recht des Gleichgewichts*] among all states" (6:346)

Kant's argument combines a series of claims:

- States stand in external relations to each other: "In relation to other peoples, however, a state is called simply a *power*" (6:311)
- These external relations should be non-dominating: "not in order to meddle in one another's internal discussions but to protect against attacks from without" (6:344) and "as states, they already have a rightful constitution internally and hence have outgrown the constraint of others" (8:355)
- An imbalance of power is a condition of domination: "one state's increase of power could threaten others" which is "a wrong to the lesser power merely by the *condition* of the *superior power*, before any deed on its part" (6:346)
- Therefore, states have a right to a balance of power and this gives states the right to enforce a free and peaceful international order by creating a balance of power using military, economic, and diplomatic means: "three powers, the *power of armies*, the *power of alliances* and the *power of money*" (8:345)

Kant's account of the balance of power goes beyond the republican internationalist account of a temporary strategy designed to prevent the rise of a dominating hegemonic state for two reasons:

1. On-going participation in the congress of states (international institutions) is free only if a direct state-to-state balance of power obtains because it can only be a "a voluntary coalition" (6:351) and not held together by threats
2. A balance of power must obtain systematically between all states, including between those in anti-hegemonic alliances as well as any other international institutions because "a violation of right on *one* place of the earth is felt in *all*" (8:360)

Kant's permanent and thoroughgoing conception of the balance of power is not a strategic claim but a morally necessary condition of a free international order – **a free state cannot be subject to an imbalance of power.** This establishes an irreducible element of a free international order comprising the direct external relations of states to each other as powers. This has the consequence that **a free international order cannot be realised by international institutions alone.** If this is right, then many existing international institutions remain dominating and will continue to do so until a balance of power is achieved.

In the final section, I consider three case studies to elucidate the consequences of adopting the balance of power as a moral principle.

First, 'Neutral State', in which I argue that the balance of power is unlikely to obligate a hitherto neutral state to change that stance or even begin aggressively pursuing a balance of power through military or other means except in very particular circumstances.

Second, 'Resource Discovery', in which the discovery of a natural resource in a state changes its economic power with the potential consequences of upsetting an existing balance of power. It might seem counter intuitive to think a state which discovers natural resources then acquires new obligations – imagine a (formerly) poor state who might now acquire obligations to a rich state – but I argue that given the stakes are war and peace, life and death, it is not unreasonable to expect the state of factor its obligation under the balance of power into its deliberations.

Third, 'Joining an Alliance', in which I tackle head on an implication of my view which many would find objectionable: that there may be a moral obligation on states to refrain from joining an alliance if it would upset the balance of power. This might be thought to offend against the self-determination of states. I counter that a balance of power is a condition for self-determination not a restriction on it.

If it is asked whether the paper is interpretive or seeks to investigate the balance of power itself as a moral issue, the answer would have to be: yes! The aim of the paper is to *think with* Kant about the conditions necessary for a free international order when states have moral status and develop the consequences for the applied question of the role the balance of power should play in our moral deliberations about war and peace, economy, and diplomacy in the international order.