

Are Liberal Peoples Peaceful?*

LEIF WENAR

Philosophy, University of Sheffield

and

BRANKO MILANOVIC

Economics, World Bank

ARE liberal societies peaceful? Many liberals believe so, and John Rawls argues their case. Rawls holds that truly liberal societies are *satisfied*: they will not go to war for the sake of power, territory, riches, glory, or to spread their religion. “Their basic needs are met, and their fundamental interests are fully compatible with those of other democratic peoples . . . There is true peace among them because all societies are satisfied with the status quo for the right reasons” (LoP, p. 46).¹ Rawls also offers a striking explanation for this thesis of liberal satisfaction: it is the *internal* political structures of liberal societies that make them *externally* non-aggressive.

We believe that there are serious difficulties both with Rawls’s thesis that liberal societies are peaceful and with his explanation for why they might be so. Rawls has not established that liberal societies “will have no reason to go to war with one another” or with other peaceful states (LoP, p. 19). Moreover we hold that there are good grounds—even within Rawls’s own view—for doubting this pacific element of the liberal self-image.

The plan of this article is as follows. First, we present Rawls’s taxonomy of societies and his general theory of foreign policy. Second, we check the democratic peace literature to see whether it offers *prima facie* support for Rawls’s vision of a peaceful world. Third, we set out the three internal features of liberal societies that allegedly make them peaceful. These three features are a commercial orientation, an indifference to economic growth, and a lack of desire to impose a comprehensive world-view on other societies. We then examine these three features critically, arguing that the first and third features do not rule out the pursuit of an aggressive foreign policy, and that the second feature is unlikely to be a feature of a liberal society. We then consider Rawls’s attempt to explain away historical examples of liberal aggression by attributing the aggressiveness to

*The authors would like to thank the Editor of this journal and three anonymous referees for their very perceptive and constructive suggestions concerning this article. We are grateful to them.

¹In this article all parenthetical page references indicated by “LoP” are to Rawls (1999).

flaws in these liberal societies' internal political structures. We offer an alternative understanding of foreign policy-making in a liberal polity, and argue that liberal aggression results not from flaws but from permanent features of democratic institutions. In the last section, we speculate on two final motivations for a liberal society to pursue an aggressive foreign policy: inequality and insecurity.

I. RAWLS'S TAXONOMY AND GENERAL THEORY OF FOREIGN POLICY

Rawls's taxonomy distinguishes three types of societies. *Liberal peoples* are internally liberal: they give high priority to securing familiar liberal rights and liberties for all of their citizens, and take steps to ensure that all citizens have at least adequate means to exercise those rights and liberties. *Decent peoples* are not liberal: they may for example be non-democratic, and they may restrict high office to adherents of a dominant religion. Yet decent peoples are respectable members of the international community. They secure at least basic human rights for all of their citizens, and they ensure that the interests of minority communities and women are represented within their political processes. Both liberal and decent hierarchical peoples are "well-ordered" societies. *Outlaw states* are characterized either by aggressive behavior toward other societies, or by serious violations of the human rights of their own citizens, or by both.²

Within this taxonomy a society counts as liberal because of its internal structure, and a society can qualify as an outlaw because of its aggressive foreign policy. Therefore it is conceptually possible for a society to be internally liberal and externally outlaw.³ However, on Rawls's general theory of international relations a truly liberal outlaw state is quite unlikely to occur. Rawls's general theory traces the foreign policy of each society back to the design of its domestic political institutions and the character of its domestic political culture. A truly liberal society will be peaceful because of the virtues of its constitution and its citizenry. When such a society achieves fully the conditions of internal justice and stability, its external relations will reflect its internal satisfaction.

The aggressive propensities of an outlaw state will flow from what Rawls sees as failures in its domestic institutions and political culture. For instance, in explaining the warlike nature of early modern Spain and France as well as Nazi Germany, Rawls writes:

Their fault lay in their political traditions and institutions of law, property, and class structure, with their sustaining religion and moral beliefs and underlying culture. It is these things that shape a society's political will (LoP, p. 106).

²Rawls's fourth and fifth types of society—"burdened societies" and "benevolent absolutisms"—will not concern us here. Rawls is careful in his terminology to distinguish "peoples" from "states"; we will mostly follow him in this, and will use "society", "country", and "polity" as neutral terms.

³Indeed Rawls admits the possibility of a liberal outlaw society (LoP, p. 91).

Similarly, England, Hapsburg Austria and Sweden “fought dynastic wars for territory, true religion, for power and glory, and a place in the sun. These were wars of Monarchs and Royal Houses; the internal institutional structure of these societies made them inherently aggressive and hostile to other states” (LoP, p. 8). Rawls also explains the imperialistic wars waged by Britain, France, and Germany before World War I by how the class structure within each of these countries led to a desire (supported by military and commercial interests) for ever more colonies (LoP, p. 54). Even the aggressiveness of ancient Athens is attributed to its autocratic institutions (LoP, p. 28, fn. 27).

Rawls’s linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy contrasts sharply with Realist approaches to international relations, which portray states as politically identical black boxes distinguished primarily by their military and economic power.⁴ On Rawls’s view each country has a character set by its domestic political life. While the internal political flaws of some societies drive them toward violence, the perfected characters of others (the liberal ones) will make them very reluctant to fight. Rawls says that the two main ideas of his law of peoples are that injustice *within* societies causes the great evils of human history including unjust war, and that these great evils can be eliminated by eliminating social injustice (LoP, pp. 6–7).

II. RELATION TO DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY

Rawls’s ideal of a peaceful liberal people does not preclude a liberal society going to war. As Rawls says, a liberal people will fight in self-defense, and may intervene in other countries for the sake of stopping very serious violations of human rights (LoP, p. 8). However, liberal peoples will not, Rawls says, fight each other. This is because each liberal people has domestic political arrangements that leaves it satisfied with its own situation. Liberal peoples will not war with one another, “simply because they have no cause to” (LoP, p. 8). Indeed liberal peoples are not only satisfied *with each other*. Liberal peoples will tend not to war with decent peoples or even with outlaw states (except to defend themselves or their allies or to stop egregious human rights violations) (LoP, p. 49). Liberal peoples are, because of their internal characters, *intrinsically* non-aggressive: they are satisfied *in themselves*.⁵

⁴E.g., Morgenthau 1948, Waltz 1979.

⁵Rawls’s theory is what scholars of international relations call a “monadic” theory (liberal peoples will not act aggressively toward any other nation) rather than merely a “dyadic” theory (liberal peoples will not act aggressively toward peoples that resemble them). We bypass this terminology, since the label “monadic” might suggest wrongly that peacefulness can be a non-relational property (by “monadic” most authors in fact mean “obtains across all dyads of which the democratic nation is a member”). However, as we will see “monadic” theory is nowhere near as well supported in the literature as “dyadic” theory, and is often denied even by the democratic peace theorist that Rawls most often cites in support of his view (Doyle).

Rawls hopes to gain support for his vision of a peaceful world from the “democratic peace hypothesis”: the hypothesis that democracies have not gone to war with each other in the past.⁶ Rawls cites the empirical literature on this hypothesis with approval:

The absence of war between major established democracies is as close to anything we know to a simple empirical regularity in relations among societies. From this fact, I should like to think the historical record shows that a society of democratic peoples, all of whose basic institutions are well-ordered by liberal conceptions of right and justice . . . is stable for the right reasons (LoP, pp. 53–4).

Rawls says that the validity of the hypothesis is “crucial” for his law of peoples to be able to address the problem of war (LoP, p. 8). In this section we take a first look at how much the empirical literature on the democratic peace supports Rawls’s vision of peace among satisfied peoples.

Rawls is correct that the historical absence of war between major established democracies is robustly confirmed in the empirical literature, even across studies using different criteria for what counts as “democratic” and what counts as “war”.⁷ Yet there is a great distance between this historical pattern and Rawls’s thesis about satisfied peoples. One gets an initial sense of how great this distance is by noting that even Realists accept the historical correlation between democracy and peace. However, Realists hold that this correlation has little to do with democracy (much less with liberal satisfaction).

Realists first note that there were too few democracies before World War II to test for a statistically significant relationship between democracy and peace, especially since few of the extant democracies in that period were in a position to fight one another. Realists then attribute the peace among democracies after World War II to American dominance in the western hemisphere. They observe that after World War II the United States had the power to impose its will in the Americas and in Europe, and followed an explicit strategy of enforcing peace so as to advance its interests (roughly: peace in the Americas furthered US economic interests, and peace in western Europe prevented the European wars that had threatened US security interests since the nineteenth century). For Realists, the democratic peace is better described as an American imperial peace, obtaining contingently among democracies.⁸ This Realist peace is not one that has obtained for what Rawls would regard as “the right reasons”.

Many democratic peace theorists reject this Realist explanation of the history of democratic peace, believing instead that democracy itself helps to explain the

⁶Doyle (1983), Chan (1997), and Ray (1998) review the large literature on the democratic peace.

⁷E.g., Ray 1995, Maoz 1998, Weart 1998, Oneal and Russett 1997.

⁸Farber and Gowa 1997, Rosato 2003, pp. 599–600. We cite Realists not to endorse their thesis, but to give a sense of the range of explanations in the literature for the correlation between democracy and peace. One counterargument to the Realist position could be that a similar Soviet hegemony did not preclude armed conflicts within their “empire” (East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, and Czechoslovakia 1968).

history of democratic peace. However, even among these theorists few if any would commit to Rawls's strong thesis. The empirical regularity that has been observed is that *democratic states have not gone to war with each other*. Rawls's thesis is that *liberal and decent peoples will not start wars because they are satisfied peoples*. Rawls's thesis is four steps removed from the historical phenomena. Rawls changes "democratic" to "liberal"; he changes "liberal" to "liberal and decent"; he changes "have not gone to war" with "will not start wars"; and he adds his distinctive explanation of the phenomena in terms of satisfied peoples. Focusing on only one of these changes—the change from "liberal" to "liberal and decent"—shows how distant Rawls's thesis is from empirical democratic peace theory.

Rawls's thesis is more ambitious than anything in the empirical literature because it encompasses both liberal and decent peoples. Rawls's vision of a perpetually peaceful global order sees a society of liberal and decent peoples living alongside each other without armed conflict, engaging in trade, and settling any differences they might have through negotiation and multi-national mediation. For this vision to be viable, Rawls must explain why both liberal and decent peoples will be reliably non-aggressive in their foreign policies.

Once Rawls has argued that liberal peoples are satisfied, he gets the extension to decent peoples very easily—essentially by stipulation. Rawls simply *defines* decent peoples as being satisfied: that is, he defines decent peoples as unwilling to fight wars of aggression. Any non-liberal society that engages in aggressive wars is not decent; it is rather an outlaw state (LoP, p. 64).⁹ Having demonstrated to his own satisfaction that liberal societies are peaceful, and having defined decent societies as peaceful, Rawls believes he has shown that his ideal of a peaceful, law-governed world of liberal and decent societies is a "realistic utopia" (LoP, p. 6).

This is a line of argument that many democratic peace theorists will find uncongenial, even accepting Rawls's premise that internal political structure explains a society's foreign policies. Decent peoples are peaceful, Rawls says. But why? Rawls has not stated what features of the internal political structure of decent peoples make them non-aggressive. Whatever these features are, it seems unlikely that they are the same three features that Rawls claims make liberal peoples non-aggressive. The three features that Rawls alleges make liberal peoples non-aggressive (and that we will examine shortly) are that liberal peoples have a commercial character, that they can be indifferent to economic growth, and that they lack a unifying comprehensive doctrine which they might otherwise be tempted to spread. Yet Rawls has given no reason for us to think that decent societies will be either commercially-minded or indifferent to economic growth.

⁹Rawls describes only one type of decent society: a "decent hierarchical society". It is this type of decent society that he defines as peaceful. Rawls keeps another kind of decent society "in reserve" without describing it; but there is no reason to think that he would allow that any decent society could act aggressively.

And his ideal type of a decent society, “Kazanistan,” is unlike a liberal society in that it *does* have a unifying “comprehensive doctrine” (it is Muslim). Even on Rawls’s own terms, the peacefulness of decent peoples remains unexplained.

Moreover, many democratic peace theorists will be unwilling in principle to extend the explanation for a democratic peace to include non-democracies of any sort. For these theorists it is features of *democratic politics in particular* that explain why democracies are peaceful. For example, some theorists suggest the deliberative character of democratic politics forces elites not to rush into a war.¹⁰ Others say that the publicity inherent in democratic debates hinders democracies from launching surprise attacks, or that this publicity effectively signals the resolve of the people to potential opponents.¹¹ Others theorize that democratic elites need to provide more public goods in order to stay in office, and so are less likely to engage in potentially costly adventures abroad.¹² These theorists will object to Rawls’s attempt to stipulate the peacefulness of decent peoples, because decent peoples lack just the democratic features that these theorists appeal to in explaining the democratic peace.

Furthermore, to support his vision of peace among satisfied peoples Rawls needs to establish not only that decent peoples will not attack liberal peoples, but also the converse.¹³ Michael Doyle argues forcefully that both theory and history work against Rawls on this point: “Liberal states are as aggressive and war prone as any other form of government or society in their relations with nonliberal states”.¹⁴ Doyle’s thesis is that liberal peoples will create “a separate peace” with each other, in part because they *trust each other as liberal peoples*. So Doyle explicitly rejects Rawls’s attempt to use the democratic peace to establish liberal peacefulness toward non-liberals:

Can Rawls appeal to the stability of the democratic peace thesis to support respect for decent hierarchicals, as he did for tolerance and peace among liberal peoples? It doesn’t appear so. Liberals respect other liberal governments because those governments represent individuals who deserve respect. But that very logic of representative respect that generates tolerance for fellow liberal peoples generates suspicion of governments that systematically remove themselves from democratic accountability to the majority. If those governments will not trust their own publics, why should *we* trust them? The record of war and cold war between liberals and non-liberals lends support to this . . .¹⁵

¹⁰Owen 1997, pp. 41–43.

¹¹Russett 1993, pp. 38–40; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, pp. 802–03.

¹²Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, pp. 215 ff.

¹³Although the democratic peace hypothesis is robustly corroborated by the empirical evidence, the evidence that democracies are peaceful with respect to non-democracies is much weaker. Rummel (1995) is the main outlier supporting the “peaceful democracy” thesis. (All of these empirical studies are rendered even less conclusive from a Rawlsian perspective by the difficulty of coding the historical record as to which side initiated a conflict (given the possibility of, e.g., pre-emptive strikes against undeterable attacks), and because the data on conflict do not separate out those conflicts motivated by a concern to stop severe abuses of human rights.)

¹⁴Doyle 1983, p. 225.

¹⁵Doyle 2006, p. 114; see also Rousseau et al., 1996, pp. 527–28.

Doyle's dissent lines up with the bulk of the democratic peace literature, and shows how little support Rawls can draw from this literature for his thesis of pacific liberal-decent relations.¹⁶

To summarize: even putting Realists to one side, most theorists of the democratic peace will not accept Rawls's bare stipulation that nondemocratic decent peoples will be as peaceful toward democracies as democracies are toward each other. Moreover even sympathetic theorists like Doyle deny the logic behind Rawls's transition from inter-democratic peace to democratic-decent peace. And, to complete the skepticism toward Rawls's thesis, we now add that no empirical theorist of any persuasion will wish to commit to the final proposition necessary for Rawls's imagined world to be stably at peace: that some (non-rigged) subset of non-democratic peoples will act peacefully toward one another.¹⁷

Rawls cannot simply gesture to the empirical literature on the democratic peace in support of his strong thesis that liberal and decent peoples will be satisfied. Even when we focus only on the extension to decent peoples we see that Rawls's thesis either goes beyond the democratic peace literature or that it cuts against its grain. To show that his law of peoples actually describes a "realistic utopia," Rawls therefore needs to provide *independent* theoretical arguments for his strong thesis that liberal peoples will be satisfied in themselves. Rawls needs to provide independent arguments for believing that Doyle is mistaken when he says that, "Liberalism is not inherently 'peace-loving'; nor is it consistently restrained or peaceful in intent".¹⁸ If Rawls can produce independent arguments for believing that liberal peoples will be satisfied in themselves, there might be hope for extending these independent arguments to provide what *Law of Peoples* lacks, which is an explanation of why decent peoples will be satisfied as well.

III. RAWLS'S EXPLANATION FOR THE SATISFACTION OF LIBERAL PEOPLES

Liberal peoples, Rawls argues, will be satisfied in themselves because they have no *interest* in launching aggressive wars. When Rawls catalogues the interests of a liberal people, triggers for aggression are noticeably absent. A liberal people will have an interest, Rawls says, in guaranteeing its own security, in preserving its territory, in safeguarding the well-being of its citizens, in protecting its free institutions and culture, in assuring justice for all of its citizens and for all

¹⁶Further, as a referee for this journal has noted, liberal peoples may have difficulty trusting that a currently decent country will remain decent. Since the leaders of decent societies face weaker institutional checks than leaders of democracies, it may be easier for them to start acting as outlaws. This uncertainty may increase the "security dilemma" of a liberal society and make it more prone to attack pre-emptively.

¹⁷Doyle (2006, pp. 115–18) hazards that "a handful" of extant states such as Oman or Bhutan might approach Rawls's description of decent hierarchical societies. However, neither Doyle nor any other theorist that we are aware of has ventured to extrapolate from these few uncertain data points to a hypothesis of an "inter-decent peace".

¹⁸Doyle 1983, p. 206.

peoples, and in maintaining its self-respect by insisting on formal equality in its relations with other peoples (LoP, pp. 29–30, 34–35). There is nothing in this list of interests that would lead a liberal people to fight for land or glory, for domination or ideological supremacy. There is nothing that other countries have that a liberal people will wish to obtain through violence, and (except for extreme cases of human rights violations abroad) a liberal people will be content to maintain its armed forces solely for self-defense.

Rawls asserts that the limited interests of a liberal people makes it unwilling to engage in adventures abroad, and that the internal political structure of a liberal people generates only these specific interests. Rawls's explanation of why this internal political structure generates only non-aggressive interests centers on three features of a liberal people. First, a liberal people will have a commercial character; second, a liberal people will be indifferent to economic growth; and third, a liberal people will tolerate religious diversity. We survey each of these three features briefly before discussing each more fully in the next section.

First, on commerce, Rawls cites the tradition of “*moeurs douces*” theory stretching back to Montesquieu:

Commercial society tends to fashion in its citizens certain virtues . . . [and] commerce tends to lead to peace . . . We might surmise that democratic peoples engaged in commerce would tend not to have occasion to go to war with one another. Among other reasons, this is because what they lacked in commodities they could acquire more easily and cheaply by trade (LoP, p. 46).

The citizens of a trading culture tend to have a “sweeter” temperament, and they are unwilling to fight for what they can buy. A liberal people made up of such citizens, Rawls suggests, will not be inclined to go to war for material gains such as territory or treasure.

Indeed, second, not only are liberal peoples unwilling to war for economic gain, they may be positively indifferent to economic growth as such. “Greater national wealth” is notably absent from Rawls's list of the fundamental interests of a liberal society. In fact, “increasing relative economic strength” (along with enlarging empire, winning territory, and gaining national prestige) is a feature of states to which Rawls *contrasts* liberal peoples (LoP, p. 28). Rawls says that once a liberal people has achieved internal justice it can go “stationary” and reduce its real rate of savings to zero (LoP, pp. 106–7). He says that, “The thought that real saving and economic growth are to go on indefinitely, upwards and onwards, with no specified goal in sight, is the idea of the business class of a capitalist society” (LoP, p. 107, fn. 33). Liberal peoples will not go to war for greater wealth, because a liberal people as such does not *want* greater wealth.

Nor, third, will liberal peoples begin ideological conflicts. Liberal constitutional democracies have no state religion or other “ruling comprehensive doctrine,” so they will not be moved to try to convert other societies to any such

doctrine (LoP, p. 46). Rather, liberal peoples are internally tolerant of various comprehensive doctrines. Since liberal citizens think it unreasonable to impose religious or other world-views on each other, they support a polity which has no such world-view to impose on other societies.

In sum, Rawls argues that a liberal people—being a commercial, non-acquisitive, and non-sectarian people—will have no interest in acting aggressively abroad. Its inner character will leave it, as he says, entirely satisfied. Rawls of course does not deny that there have been occasions on which Western democracies have engaged in aggressive behavior: the historical record clearly shows that such episodes have occurred. However, this does not disprove the thesis that liberal societies are intrinsically peaceful. It shows, Rawls says, that these non-peaceful democracies were *imperfectly liberal*. Rawls says that when a democracy fails to be peaceful, “My guiding hypothesis leads me to expect to find various failures in [that] democracy’s essential supporting institutions and practices” (LoP, p. 53). A perfectly liberal people will be perfectly satisfied within itself; only an internally flawed liberal society will start trouble abroad.

Do Rawls’s arguments provide compelling reason for thinking that liberal societies—because of their internal nature as commercial, non-acquisitive, and tolerant—can live in harmony with their liberal and decent neighbors? There are, we believe, several reasons to think not.

IV. RAWLS’S THREE REASONS FOR THE SATISFACTION OF LIBERAL PEOPLES

A. COMMERCE

The view of “doux commerce” has, since Montesquieu, been ventured as an explanation of why trade and war are unlikely to mix. Trading nations will shun aggression because aggression would be disruptive of commerce. Trade also affects citizens’ attitudes (“moeurs”), making commercial people “softer,” more “polished,” and more considerate of other people’s customs and interests. From the change in personal characteristics occasioned by commerce springs the change in the character of the people and finally the change in the foreign policy of the nation.

The theory that commerce leads to external peacefulness was broadly shared during the last episode of globalization at the turn of the twentieth century. It found its most famous expression in Norman Angell’s 1909 bestseller *The Grand Illusion*, which proclaimed that the commercial interdependence of European powers had become so great that the outbreak of war between them could not be expected. War, Angell argued, would run counter to the commercial interests of large and powerful segments of the population in the potentially belligerent countries: it would be unprofitable. The devastation of World War I brought a

temporary end to theories asserting that commercial interdependence leads to peace—though such theories have re-emerged in the current episode of globalization.¹⁹

At around the same time that many parts of European society held the notion that “war is unprofitable,” another segment of the ideological spectrum advanced precisely the opposite doctrine. This doctrine is reflected in the dictum that “trade follows the flag”. The argument was based on the history of European imperialism and colonialism up through the 19th century when military conquest of Africa and parts of Asia was thought necessary to bring these countries into the commercial orbit of the West. The most famous example of trade following the flag was Commodore Perry’s putting an end to Japan’s isolationism. But while Perry’s tactics were spectacular they were not substantively different from the Western approaches to China, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. The conquest and exploitation of the Congo provides a particularly dramatic and bloody example of this doctrine. This imperial aggressiveness was caused, in Hobson’s and later Lenin’s view, by the commercial needs of capital, which required external markets and control of foreign natural resources and labor to offset either domestic underconsumption (according to Hobson) or the declining rate of profit (according to Lenin).²⁰ The crux of both of these influential theories is that trade is facilitated by war, and the data tend to bear them out:

The imperialism of Europe’s great powers between 1815 and 1975 provides good evidence that liberal democracies have often waged wars for reasons other than self-defense and the inculcation of liberal values. Although there were only a handful of liberal democracies in the international system during this period, they were involved in 66 of the 108 wars listed in the Correlates of War (COW) dataset of extrasystematic wars. Of these 66 wars, 33 were “imperial,” fought against previously independent peoples, and 33 were “colonial,” waged against existing colonies.²¹

The “commercial” grounds for liberal people’s peacefulness can thus be shown to be more controversial than Rawls presents them to be. A more balanced view is that commercial forces can pressure toward either war or peace depending on the circumstances.²² We will ourselves present a model toward the end of the article in which commercial ties are one factor that lessens the likelihood of war

¹⁹See Oneal and Russett 1997, Mousseau et al. 2003. See also Doyle’s (1997, pp. 230–50) cautious discussions of the “commercial pacifism” of Adam Smith and Joseph Schumpeter.

²⁰Hobson 1903, Lenin 1916. See also the neo-Hobsonian analyses of the connection between commercialism and imperialism in Snyder (1991).

²¹Rosato 2003, p. 588.

²²See Moravcsik (1997, pp. 528–9): “As theory rather than ideology, commercial liberalism does *not* predict that economic incentives automatically generate universal free trade and peace—a utopian position critics who treat liberalism as an ideology often wrongly attribute to it . . . but instead stresses the interaction between aggregate incentives for certain policies and obstacles posed by domestic and transnational distributional conflict. The greater the economic benefits for powerful private actors, the greater their incentive, other things being equal, to press governments to facilitate such transactions . . . Liberal [international relations] theory focuses on market structure as a variable creating incentives for both openness and closure”.

between democracies. But this model does not portray liberal peoples as “satisfied”: that is, unwilling in principle to fight for their economic interests.

It is open to Rawls to deny that the major imperial powers like Britain and France were “liberal enough” during the period 1815–1975 for their wars to count against his thesis of liberal satisfaction. For example, he might say that colonial states are nearly always racist states, and so cannot be liberal. Rawls can only make this move, however, at the high cost of relinquishing the historical data from this period that support his “historical trend” thesis that liberal societies will be satisfied. One cannot have it both ways. Moreover, as we will now show the one characteristic that Rawls attributes to liberal peoples that could explain why they will not aggressively follow their economic interests abroad is a characteristic that commercially-minded liberal peoples are most unlikely to possess.

B. SATISFIED ECONOMIC NEEDS

Rawls’s second ground for the external peacefulness of liberal peoples is that liberal peoples as such have no desire for greater absolute wealth. “Greater wealth” is never listed among fundamental interests of peoples.²³ Rawls claims that once a people has achieved internal justice and formed a “well-ordered” society, “the aim is to preserve just (or decent) institutions, and not simply to increase, much less to maximize indefinitely, the average level of wealth, or the wealth of any society or any particular class in society” (LoP, p. 107). Rawls refers approvingly to John Stuart Mill’s ideal of the “stationary state” which envisages a national economy with a zero real rate of saving (LoP, pp. 107–8).

There are two main objections to the view that liberal peoples as such have no desire for greater wealth. First, it has no empirical support. Although one could adduce a few examples of societies which did not aim for greater absolute wealth (for example, China under the Ming dynasty, Japan up to 1867) these cases seem to be explained more by the domestic elite’s fear that trade would invite foreign meddling or generate revolutionary instability. In such cases, the ruling classes may indeed have opted for less wealth for all, including for themselves, in the belief that this would help them to sustain their rule. But these are examples of a trade-off for leaders between wealth and power, not evidence that a population’s desire for greater wealth *per se* is nil. Moreover, none of these examples concern liberal peoples. If there has ever been a liberal people that has not made greater wealth an explicit goal of national policy, we are unaware of it.

²³Rawls says repeatedly (LoP, pp. 32, 33, 34, 40) that the interests of liberal peoples are specified by their liberal principles of justice (for example, his own two principles of justice as fairness). He adds to this (LoP, p. 34) that a people also has an interest in a proper sense of self respect. This repetition bolsters the case for saying that Rawls does not see “increasing national wealth” as an interest of a liberal people.

At one point Rawls says that democratic societies will be less likely to go to war with each other to the extent that their internal political structures evidence five features: fair equality of opportunity, a decent distribution of wealth and income, society as the employer of last resort, universal health care, and public financing of elections (LoP, p. 49). Rawls's thought here may be that citizens in liberal societies that fulfill these conditions will be less likely to want further increments of wealth and income, and so will be individually "satisfied". A people made of satisfied individuals will be satisfied as well. If this is Rawls's argument, it also seems empirically suspect. Citizens of contemporary societies in which these five features are at least close to being met (for example, Norway, Luxembourg) are not economically "satisfied" in Rawls's sense, nor are these countries indifferent to increasing their absolute (and relative) levels of wealth.

Beyond being empirically suspect, there is a second and related reason that Rawls ought not ground the peacefulness of liberal societies on their indifference to greater wealth. This is that it conflicts with his first ground: the commercial nature of liberal peoples. Commercial societies always aim at greater wealth. It is precisely the desire for greater wealth that propels them to trade. Even if trade does sweeten the temperaments of commercial peoples, it also makes those peoples want to become richer. A commercial people could not be satisfied with a stationary state. So Rawls's second ground for liberal satisfaction is unlikely to apply to liberal peoples.

C. TOLERATION

Rawls's third ground for believing that liberal peoples will have no interest in launching aggressive wars is that a liberal people will have no wish to convert other societies to its ideology. On Rawls's understanding, a legitimate liberal constitutional order cannot be based on a state religion or any other "ruling comprehensive doctrine" (LoP, p. 46). Rather, citizens in a liberal society will support a "political" conception of justice for a variety of religious and philosophical reasons, forming an "overlapping consensus" that tolerates all reasonable views.²⁴ This internal toleration, Rawls believes, then translates directly into external peacefulness. Since liberal peoples will have no official religion (or other comprehensive doctrine) to impose on others, they will have no desire to "disseminate their institutions" abroad (LoP, p. 46).

Rawls's progression of ideas here is at best too quick. Even if a liberal society is not officially Catholic or Protestant (or Kantian), it is still politically *liberal*. Liberal citizens who tolerate each other's comprehensive doctrines will still hold liberal commitments to basic rights, to democratic participation, and even to toleration itself. Indeed for Rawls's domestic theories of liberal justice and legitimacy to be realistic, liberal citizens must hold to these liberal commitments

²⁴Rawls 1993, pp. 133–72.

quite strongly, believing them to represent “very great values”.²⁵ Yet these liberal commitments are not ones that all foreign societies share. For example, recall that Rawls’s decent peoples may well have undemocratic political systems, and they may restrict high office to adherents of some dominant religion. Rawls has given no reason to think that liberal citizens who believe very strongly in liberal rights and liberties will lack the desire to disseminate their *liberal* institutions to countries that do not have them.

The foreign policy of the United States shows that this is not merely a theoretical possibility. Rawls short-changes the “Wilsonian” tendency in US foreign policy. Wilsonians insist “that the United States has the right and the duty to change the rest of the world’s behavior, and that the United States can and should concern itself not only with the way other countries conduct their international affairs, but with their domestic policies as well”.²⁶ Wilsonianism has been a persistent and powerful strand in US foreign policy, showing itself most recently in official statements that America was justified in using military force for the sake of democratizing the Middle East. There is no doubt that Rawls would set himself firmly against this Wilsonian position in US foreign policy, and claim that liberal peoples should tolerate peaceful undemocratic peoples just as liberal citizens should tolerate reasonable citizens who hold to different faiths. Yet Rawls cannot plausibly assert that Wilsonianism only arises because of some flaw in American democratic institutions. For it is a deep commitment to the ideal of liberal democracy itself that inclines at least some Americans to want to see the “blessings of liberty” spread across the earth. Commitment to liberal political values cannot be portrayed as a failing of liberal citizens; such commitment is, as Rawls himself says, one of their most necessary virtues.

In fact one can conjecture that liberal peoples may become aggressively liberal even from what Rawls says about them in *The Law of Peoples*. Halfway through the book Rawls engages in a revealing discussion of human rights, and how these rights will feature in a liberal people’s foreign policy decisions (LoP, pp. 67–8, 78–80). He divides liberal citizens into two types with respect to their attitudes on human rights. Both types believe that it is appropriate for a liberal people to intervene abroad to check violations of what Rawls calls “human rights proper”, for example to stop a genocide. The first type of liberal citizen believes that a liberal people can be justified in pressuring other countries for the sake of promoting additional human rights, such as the right to democratic participation.²⁷ The second type believes that coercive measures in favor of democracy abroad are inappropriate (this is Rawls’s own view). Rawls says that both types of liberal citizen are reasonable, and gives no reason to think that

²⁵Rawls 1993, pp. 139, 169.

²⁶Mead 2002, p. 138. See also Owen 1997.

²⁷The right to democratic participation is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21. This is not a right that Rawls holds to be a human right “proper”—it is rather, he seems to suggest, a liberal aspirational right (LoP, p. 80, fn. 23).

those with a more expansive view of human rights will not form a majority within any given liberal people (LoP, p. 67). He thus gives no reason to doubt that a liberal people may be preponderantly composed of the type of citizen that sees the promotion of the human right of democratic participation as a worthy national goal. We therefore have grounds within Rawls's own theory to argue that a liberal people composed only of reasonable liberal citizens may indeed go to war for the sake of promoting liberal democracy abroad.

V. DOES LIBERAL FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING DIFFER FROM DOMESTIC POLICY-MAKING?

A. FLAW OR FEATURE?

So far we have questioned Rawls's attempts to link certain internal features of liberal societies with a peaceful foreign policy. We have argued that liberal societies cannot be expected to have such features, or that if they do have such features these features will be insufficient to support the thesis of liberal satisfaction.

We are now in a position to go further. We will now argue that certain internal features of liberal societies positively dispose them to intervene forcefully in other countries' affairs. We should expect the character of liberal peoples to be only inconsistently peaceful. Indeed we can expect liberal peoples to be characteristically aggressive, at least toward certain (non-outlaw) peoples, in circumstances that are not uncommon.

Rawls admits that his liberal peace hypothesis might appear to run afoul of some historical facts. Peoples that are as liberal as any we have known have not shied from invading countries that could not plausibly be seen as outlaws. The incessant US involvement in Central and Latin America, punctuated by a number of military invasions and direct aggressive interferences in domestic affairs (for example, Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic) goes back more than a century. The US has not hesitated to replace decent or even democratic governments with more pliant regimes, nor were such actions limited to the distant past or the Western hemisphere. Since World War II, the US has intervened in Iran, Guatemala, Guyana, Brazil, Chile, and Nicaragua to bring about the downfall of a democratically-elected government. In all cases (except Nicaragua) the US replaced these democratic governments with American-backed authoritarians such as the Shah in Iran and Pinochet in Chile.²⁸

Moreover the US is not the only "well-ordered" society to have engaged in such policies. Almost the entire nineteenth century colonial drive by France and Great Britain was conducted while these countries were ruled by democratically-elected governments, after the introduction of an extensive or full

²⁸Rosato 2003, pp. 590–91.

(male) franchise.²⁹ This drive continued in the first half of the 20th century, most notably for the French during the Algerian and Vietnamese wars, and for the British in the severe repression of the “Quit India” movement and the Kenyan and Malay counter-insurgencies. The UK and France took their last colonial stand together during the Suez crisis of 1956. The situation in France remains even today broadly unchanged in the sense that French military involvements in Africa (e.g., Chad, Ivory Coast) are driven—in the face of general public indifference—by small groups that have particular economic interests in these African nations.

Faced with these types of examples, Rawls appeals to flaws in the internal political structures of the nations that took the aggressive actions. He points particularly to flaws in the processes that ensure fair elections, and to flaws in the provision of relevant information to the public. These flaws, he says, have historically allowed powerful economic interests to capture a liberal society’s foreign policy agenda for their own purposes, instead of allowing the people themselves to decide what foreign policy their country should pursue. Speaking of the covert operations in Chile, Guatemala, etc., he writes: “Covert operations against them were carried out by a government prompted by monopolistic and oligarchic interests without the knowledge or criticism of the public” (LoP, p. 53, cf. 49). And he laments more generally an insufficient “public financing of elections and ways of assuring the availability of public information on matters of policy . . . to ensure that representatives and other officials are sufficiently independent of particular social and economic interests and to provide the knowledge and information upon which policies can be formed and intelligently assessed by citizens” (LoP, p. 50). In short, Rawls holds that the aggression of liberal democracies through history has been caused by their being insufficiently liberal and insufficiently democratic.³⁰

This “internal flaws” strategy again leaves Rawls in a somewhat uncomfortable dialectical position. To support his hypothesis of the liberal peace he freely draws on the historical data which show that actual democratic societies have had a low propensity to go to war with each other. Yet faced with instances where these same democratic societies have acted aggressively toward non-democracies, or toward democracies in ways that fall short of all-out war, he blames the aggression on these same democracies not living up to a political ideal that seems rarely to have been realized (if indeed it ever has). Rawls is of course

²⁹According to Polity database which grades countries’ democracy levels on a scale from –10 (full autocracy and no civil rights) to +10 (full democracy), both France’s and Great Britain’s estimated democracy levels were 7 or 8 throughout the period from 1877 (1880 for Great Britain) to 1918. After 1918 their levels went, of course, even higher.

³⁰See Forsythe 1992. One may argue that Rawls’s choice of historical cases is a bit biased. While he does mention Vietnam, other examples are relatively small “covert” operations. Yet the US was, in addition to Vietnam, also a major player in the Korean War (even if it was officially fought under the aegis of the United Nations). Snyder’s (1991, pp. 206–9) analysis of US involvement in Korea and Vietnam stresses the capture of US foreign policy by a coalition of pro-war interest groups and the “ambivalent interest” of the wider population.

not the first theorist to use those parts of the historical record that support his thesis while trying to explain away the parts that do not. Yet Rawls's specific attempt to attribute liberal aggression to imperfect elections and uninformed publics is particularly unpersuasive. The liberal propensity toward foreign aggression is not a *flaw* in liberal institutions, it is a *feature* of liberal institutions that we should expect to manifest itself within all liberal societies at least when certain circumstances obtain. We begin this argument by considering the similarities and differences in the ways in which liberal polities form their domestic and foreign policies.

B. FOREIGN POLICY FORMATION

We argue that domestic and foreign policies in a liberal society are formed in a similar way. Citizens in liberal societies do not change their objectives when considering domestic and foreign policy. Nor do citizens change the means they use to pressure their government to further their objectives. Yet because the actors (especially the *number* of actors) differ in domestic and foreign policy contexts, there are substantial differences in the nature of the outcomes.

On this model both foreign and domestic policies in liberal societies are formed by interest groups that, within a constitutional framework, vie for the ability to implement their own agendas. This is a standard characterization of democracy,³¹ and it translates readily into a framework for analyzing the foreign policies of democratic nations.³² In the domestic arena, the density of interrelations between individuals is very high. By “density of interrelations” we mean the “intertwining of individual lives”³³ such that a given political decision will seldom be neutral for the majority of actors: in most cases it will affect the interests of many individuals. Some individuals may benefit from the policy, others may lose. Individuals will form groups that attempt to turn policy decisions in directions that favor their interests.³⁴ The interests of these various groups are in turn held in check by the interests of opposing groups and by the strength of domestic institutions (the judiciary, legislatures, the media). Domestic policy rarely evolves without being subjected to the intense scrutiny of competing perspectives. Generally, an outcome will be reached through some form of consensus which gives to every group some stake in a policy, or through a compromise.

³¹E.g., Schumpeter 1942; Aron 1965; Buchanan and Tullock 1969.

³²Keohane 1984. See Moravcsik 1997, p. 518: “The state is not an actor but a representative institution constantly subject to capture and recapture, construction and reconstruction by coalitions of social actors. Representative institutions and practices are the critical “transmission belt” by which the preferences and social power of individuals and groups are translated into state policy”.

³³Cohen and Sabel 2006, p. 163.

³⁴Interests are understood as broadly as possible: they can include material interests, but also other interests which individuals or groups feel strongly enough about to try to influence policy (e.g., the advancement of a religion, or the defense of some ascriptive group).

When we look at foreign policy formation, the processes do not change but the type and number of actors involved do. Since individuals who belong to two different peoples by definition do not live under a single political authority, their degree of “shared destiny” will be less. So too will be their shared culture, history, and—what is crucial for our thesis—the density of their interconnections. Among different democratic peoples who share historical ties, who have significant trade with each other, and who maintain a broad range of cross-border contacts, the density of these interconnections might approach the within-nation density. We call such densely interconnected societies “politically proximate societies” (or just “proximate societies”). One can think of a sliding scale of interconnectedness to measure proximity, ranging from societies who have a high density of connections to those who have fewer connections and further on until these links become relatively rare.³⁵

Because of the many relationships that exist between a democratic society and societies proximate to it, foreign policy formation relative to proximate societies may differ little from domestic policy formation. Many domestic interest groups will be concerned about the effects of foreign policy on a proximate society, and will form coalitions in an effort to influence foreign policy toward that country. Foreigners will also form their own coalitions with local citizens who share their interests, and these coalitions will attempt to turn national policy their way.³⁶

As we move to policy decisions that affect relationships between a democratic society and non-proximate societies, with whom little is shared, we are sliding down the scale of interconnectedness. What distinguishes foreign policy from domestic policy in such cases is that active interests regarding decisions that affect non-proximate foreigners are not shared by a large number of domestic constituents. Low density of interconnectedness between the two peoples means that only a relatively small number of domestic groups will care about how foreign policy affects the non-proximate society, while most will be unaffected by (and thus uninterested in) this particular foreign policy issue. This in turn means that the small number of groups concerned with the issue will not be kept in check by countervailing domestic interests (or domestic-foreign coalitions). David Landes sees imperial policies to be the effects of such causes:

One does not need a business class or an economic system to create a demand for empire. All one needs is a few interested people who can reach the ears or pockets of those who command. It is sufficient for the others to stand passively by, absorbed by their own cares or convinced that their opinions are of no weight anyway—as often they were. For imperialism was in large measure built on the *fait accompli* . . . with the state always ready to pull its nationals’ chestnuts out of the fire.³⁷

³⁵Cohen and Sabel 2006.

³⁶Rawls speaks of “affinity” among peoples—a sense of social cohesion and closeness (LoP, pp. 112–13). Such affinity may be correlated to our explanatory variable: political proximity among societies.

³⁷Landes 1961, p. 505.

A corollary of this view is that in some cases the interests of the groups that have captured foreign policy-making may be such that these groups will benefit from an aggressive stance pursued by their government. Such an aggressive stance may be needed to protect their interests abroad (say, in controlling the resources of a foreign country, being able to invest there under preferential conditions, etc.). Since these decisions will affect very few of their co-nationals, these groups may be able to convince their government to pursue the aggressive policies.³⁸ We allow for the fact that in such cases those foreigners who may be adversely affected by the policy in question will also try to find domestic supporters (among the liberal citizens) to resist the aggressive policies. But the lack of interconnectedness may prevent them for reaching enough people and mounting an effective counter-campaign. Here clearly, foreigners with greater interconnectedness with “our” liberal society will be much more successful.

C. RELATIONSHIP TO DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY

This view of foreign policy formation—which explains how liberal societies may, in some instances, adopt aggressive foreign policies—accords with the democratic peace hypothesis. This is because democratic societies will often be politically proximate to each other, and as such the decision-making in each of them with respect to the other will come to resemble domestic decision-making. Aggressive policies which may be favored by one section of the population will be kept in check by countervailing interests of other groups. It will accordingly be more difficult to design aggressive policies against “proximate” societies with whom the density of interconnectedness is high.

We distinguish between Rawls’s broader thesis of the liberal satisfaction—which should ordinarily rule out wars with other societies, liberal or not—from the thesis of democratic peace, which only rules out wars *between* liberal societies. The democratic peace is obviously a more restricted thesis compatible with the existence of aggressive liberal policies toward non-liberal polities. We believe to have shown why the broader thesis of liberal satisfaction is unlikely to be true. In addition, we believe that conflict between two liberal societies cannot be excluded in principle. We put forward the following hypothesis: the democratic peace will be likely to hold to the extent that two democratic societies trade, share historical experience, and maintain cross-border contacts. But the democratic peace will be precarious to the degree that two democratic societies lack trade, common historical experience, and cooperative links among their citizens.³⁹

³⁸In a comparative study on influences on US foreign policy, Jacobs and Page (2005) conclude that internationally oriented business interests have the strongest influence on policy, followed by experts in think-tanks and academia, labor groups, and (far behind on most issues) the general public.

³⁹Compare Moravcsik (1997, p. 532): “Liberal theory predicts that democratic states may provoke preventive wars in response to direct or indirect threats, against very weak states with no

Moreover, as far as the relationship between a liberal society and non-proximate societies is concerned, we have argued that this may be, at times, dominated by the aggressive policies of the liberal society. There are no principled grounds to believe that a liberal people will never be aggressive. And of course our hypothesis makes no commitments regarding the peacefulness of nondemocratic countries, either toward democracies or toward each other.

It is not open to Rawlsians simply to assert that Rawls's version of liberalism leaves no room for factionalism and foreign policy capture as we have described. Our model rests on a perfectly standard model of policy formation in a democracy, which is a model that fits the real practice of existing democratic states. If Rawlsians believe that there is some mechanism in an ideal liberal democratic society that would prevent foreign policy being formed in the ways we have described, it is incumbent on them to say what this mechanism is and how it works. No such mechanism is described in *Law of Peoples*, and this is too important a point to rest content with any theorist's intimation that such a mechanism might exist.

VI. SELF-RESPECT AND SECURITY

So far we have examined Rawls's view that there are features of liberal societies that can be expected to make such societies chary of launching aggressive military actions. We have argued that Rawls has either not proved that the characteristics he points to are features of liberal societies, or not proved that these characteristics would result in a propensity toward peace. Indeed we have argued that certain features of a liberal society might rather incline it toward aggression in certain circumstances. In this section we put all of these arguments aside, and return to Rawls's original description of a liberal people. We argue that—even as Rawls describes them—liberal peoples have two interests that might lead them to attack their neighbors without the provocation of a military threat or a severe violation of human rights. These two interests are not specific to liberal societies—these are interests that liberal societies share with all others. Nevertheless the energies behind these interests might well be enough to drive a liberal people to wreck a liberal peace.

A. SELF-RESPECT

We first ask whether the citizens of a liberal society could press for war because they feel damaged in their self-respect. The answer to this question will

great power allies, or in peripheral areas where the legal and political preconditions for trade and other forms of profitable transnational relations are not yet in place". See also the references to the democratic peace literature in footnote 19 above supporting a correlation between peace and the "connectedness" or proximity of democracies.

necessarily be speculative, due to the difficulty of evaluating the role of self-respect in motivating any action. However, we believe that a sharp sense of inferiority might be one factor amongst others that could push a liberal people toward an aggressive foreign policy. As Rawls says liberal peoples, like all peoples, have a “proper self-respect of themselves as a people” (LoP, p. 34). A liberal people might well find its self-respect damaged, especially in a global order of the kind that Rawls envisions.

To see why, we must first dispense with the presumption that in Rawls’s society of peoples the liberal peoples will be rich peoples. This presumption has some justification in the world as we know it, but as we have seen on Rawls’s understanding a liberal people as such will have no interest in continuous economic growth. Once a liberal people has obtained internal justice and stability, it can (and, according to Rawls, probably should) aim for an economic “steady state”. And there is in Rawls’s theory no reason to suspect that non-liberal peoples will be similarly disinterested in growth (one could perhaps imagine a more decent but still acquisitive China or Singapore). So in the realistic utopia that Rawls imagines, some liberal societies may well find themselves at the bottom of the economic heap.

Moreover, in Rawls’s world the inequalities between peoples may come to be quite great. In fact within Rawls’s theory there are no limits to how great international economic inequality may become. Rawls’s law of peoples does require a “social minimum” for all peoples—a “burdened society” that falls below this minimal standard for maintaining legitimate institutions must be assisted by other peoples. Yet given that all peoples have attained this minimal level, the economic inequality that the theory permits between peoples is unlimited.

Rawls’s relaxed attitude toward international economic inequalities is of a piece with his general downplaying of wealth as a motivation in international contexts.⁴⁰ Insofar as Rawls admits that a people might be concerned with its wealth relative to other peoples, he suggests that it is within the control of each people how far up the scale of relative wealth it wants to be. Rawls says that after a people has achieved the international economic minimum, no feelings of inferiority could be justified:

For then each people adjusts the significance and importance of the wealth of its own society for itself. If it is not satisfied, it can continue to increase savings, or, if that is not feasible, borrow from other members of the Society of Peoples (LoP, p. 114).

⁴⁰For example, when Rawls lists the motivations for individuals to migrate from one country to another, he mentions persecution, political oppression, starvation, and population pressure—but *not* wage differentials between countries (LoP, p. 9). This seems a significant omission, given the contemporary experience of the United States and the European Union at their borders.

This passage suggests a rather extraordinary thesis about the control that each country has over its relative position in the international economic order. Rawls speaks as if, for example, any lower-middle income country such as Lithuania or Botswana could simply ‘decide for itself’ that it wished to become richer than other countries—and that it could thereafter better its relative position just by increasing saving or borrowing. No theory of international political economy supports this very strong thesis. Moreover even if Rawls’s thesis here were correct, it seems a contingent matter whether it could by itself rule out unchosen international inequalities. Imagine, for example, that all peoples ‘decide for themselves’ that they wish not to be in the bottom quartile of the international distribution of GDP per capita.

When we put aside this rather extraordinary thesis about national economic control, we are left with a Rawlsian international order in which economic inequalities may grow unrestrained and in which some liberal peoples may well be involuntarily on the bottom of the distribution. In such circumstances, it does not seem entirely unrealistic to suppose that relatively poor liberal peoples might well feel some affront to their self-respect. To deny this possibility one would have to lean very hard on the idea that citizens of different countries form “non-comparing groups” as far as relative economic prosperity goes.⁴¹ Even if it is correct that *today* international inequalities do not much bother the global poor, Rawls would have to maintain that they *never* can, regardless of how great these inequalities become, how much information technology improves, and so on.⁴² Were the United States to sink past the point where it is as poor relative to China as China is now relative to the United States, a feeling of injured self-respect might be one factor that pushed Americans toward some kind of aggressive action (perhaps in coalition with other peoples) to try to redress this balance.

B. SECURITY

The second interest that liberal peoples share with all peoples, and that might lead toward external aggression, is security. All peoples have an interest in security, and even a liberal society that perfectly realized Rawls’s conditions for internal stability and justice could still be susceptible to security-based arguments for an aggressive foreign policy. The use of the “Bush Doctrine” of pre-emptive strikes in the lead-up to the Iraq war is a contemporary illustration of how an advanced democracy can be drawn into launching a military action by appeal to

⁴¹Rawls 1971, pp. 441–2.

⁴²Beitz 2001, pp. 104–05. Rawls might here attempt to invoke a technical sense of “self-respect” that will be satisfied whenever a people is a formally equal member of the society of peoples. But such a definitional move would not avoid our assertion that there is some motivational force (however labeled) that can be triggered by being at a low position within a highly unequal economic distribution among peoples, and that might impel a people toward aggressive foreign action.

national security.⁴³ Rawls admits the possibility that the government of a liberal people might use an appeal to security to justify at least *covert* operations abroad—although again he implies that this can only happen when flaws internal to the liberal polity in question keep the people from knowing what is really going on:

Though democratic peoples are not expansionist, they do defend their security interest, and a democratic government can easily invoke this interest to support covert operations, even when actually moved by economic interests behind the scenes (LoP, p. 53).

Whether Rawls is correct here we leave to the reader's judgment. We see little reason to follow Rawls in suggesting that the government of a liberal people could only appeal to security interests to justify covert operations, and that it could not also make such an appeal to justify a full-scale aggressive war. The question then becomes whether Rawls is right that only the government of a "flawed" liberal democracy could effectively make such an appeal. Faced, for example, with the massive domestic public support for the US invasion of Iraq, Rawls would have to claim either that the American people did not know what was happening, or that they were being manipulated by "economic interests behind the scenes"—*and in ways that could not possibly occur within a "non-flawed" liberal democracy.*

This seems implausible. Even if we stipulate that the US government manipulated the American public into supporting the Iraq war, such manipulation will surely be within the competence of any future government no matter how reformed the democratic polity of which it is a part. Because of the complex and secretive nature of security information, every public will to some extent have to take their government's word that a foreign threat exists. Moreover the concept of "security" is vague, allowing governments to characterize a wide range of situations (energy shortages, trade disputes) as presenting serious "threats to national security".

Rawls could of course say that the corrupting influence of money on the US electoral process allowed a government to be elected that was willing (perhaps "moved by economic interests behind the scenes") to manipulate the voters toward war, and that such a government could not be elected were the "flawed" electoral system reformed.⁴⁴ However, Rawls would then need to explain why the United Kingdom also invaded Iraq. The Blair government also primarily used

⁴³We stipulate that Saddam Hussein's regime would have counted as an outlaw state either because of its history of aggression or violation of human rights. The example is intended to illustrate how an appeal to security can draw a liberal democracy into launching aggressive military actions.

⁴⁴This seems to have been Rawls's view of why the Vietnam war was allowed to continue so long, even after (as he saw it) the American people no longer supported it. See Pogge 2007, pp. 19–21. Whether or not Rawls was correct about Vietnam, each war must be analyzed separately.

security-based arguments to justify the invasion, and British campaign finance laws are much closer to Rawls's own ideals for how such laws should be framed.⁴⁵

We see no reason to believe that even the most fairly-elected leaders of even the best-informed democratic publics will always resist the appeal to security as a justification for aggressive military action. Indeed the very intensity of the feelings behind the sentiments associated with security makes it seem likely that such leaders will continue to appeal to security interests to justify aggression in support of causes that they believe vital.

VII. CONCLUSION

We have, with some regret, found that Rawls's account of a peace among satisfied peoples describes an "unrealistic utopia". We have shown that the best social scientific research fails to support Rawls's hope that democratic and non-democratic peoples can live in peace. We have examined Rawls's three independent reasons for thinking that liberal peoples will be satisfied. We have argued that commercial societies have often been warlike instead of peaceful; that it is unlikely that liberal peoples will be uninterested in economic growth; and that absence of a societal comprehensive doctrine would not preclude a liberal people aspiring to impose the doctrine of liberalism itself. We have also suggested two additional societal interests (self-respect and security) that might push a liberal people into aggressive action abroad. Rawls has not provided compelling independent arguments for liberal satisfaction, and there are strong independent reasons to doubt his view.

Rawls rests his vision of a perpetual peace on the thought that liberal peoples "will have no reason to go to war". We have proposed an alternative understanding of how liberal polities form their foreign policies that explains why liberal peoples have been aggressive in the past and why even "perfected" polities may be aggressive in the future. In our model it is not the *nature of* but rather the *connections among* democratic peoples that keeps hostilities from breaking out between them. If this hypothesis is true, a liberal world is not in itself a peaceful world: it must be a connected world as well. Until that world emerges, we cannot expect liberal democracies to be as peaceful as many liberals believe them to be.

⁴⁵Rawls 2001, pp. 149–50. See also Doyle (2006, p. 114): "Rawls suggests that it was insufficiencies in the equal protection of rights or inadequacies in the social protections that ensured fair equality of opportunity (such as unemployment or health insurance) that made liberal polities subject to manipulative elites and therefore aggressive against non-liberal polities. But the evidence for this is indeterminate. Semi-socialist Sweden and Denmark are less militarily interventionist than (more) laissez faire U.S., but in modern times the UK, France, and Italy (all with better social insurance than the U.S.) are no less interventionist".

REFERENCES

- Angell, Norman. 1909. *The Great Illusion*. London: Heinemann.
- Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Democratie et Totalitarisme*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Beitz, Charles. 2001. Does global inequality matter? *Metaphilosophy*, 32, 95–112.
- Bueno de Mesquita, B., J.D. Morrow, R.M. Siverson, and A. Smith. 1999. An institutional explanation of the democratic peace. *American Political Science Review*, 93, 791–807.
- Buchanan, James M. and Gordon Tullock. 1969. *The Calculus of Consent*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Chan, Steve. 1997. In search of democratic peace. *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41, 59–92.
- Cohen, Joshua and Charles Sabel. 2006. Extra rempublicam nulla justitia? *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 34, 147–75.
- Doyle, Michael W. 1983. Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12, 205–35 and 323–53.
- Doyle, Michael W. 1997. *Ways of War and Peace*. New York: Norton.
- Doyle, Michael W. 2006. One world, many peoples: international justice in John Rawls's *The Law of Peoples*. *Perspectives on Politics*, 4, 109–20.
- Farber, Henry S. and Joanne Gowa. 1997. Common interests or common polities? Reinterpreting the democratic peace. *Journal of Politics*, 59, 393–417.
- Forsythe, David P. 1992. Democracy, war, and covert action. *Journal of Peace Research*, 29, 385–95.
- Hobson, John A. 1965. *Imperialism: A Study*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; originally published 1903.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Benjamin I. Page. 2005. Who influences US foreign policy? *American Political Science Review*, 99, 107–23.
- Keohane, Robert. 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Landes, David. 1961. Some thoughts on the nature of economic imperialism. *Journal of Economic History*, 21(4), 496–512.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. 1916. *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Vol. 22, 185–304 in *Lenin: Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress, n.d.
- Maoz, Zeev. 1998. Realist and cultural critiques of the democratic peace: a theoretical and empirical re-assessment. *International Interactions*, 24, 3–89.
- Mead, Walter Russell. 2002. *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*. New York: Routledge.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 1997. Taking preferences seriously: a liberal theory of international politics. *International Organization*, 51, 513–53.
- Morgenthau, Hans. 1948. *Politics Among Nations*. New York: Knopf.
- Mousseau, Michael, Håvard Hegre, and John R. Oneal. 2003. How the wealth of nations conditions the liberal peace. *European Journal of International Relations*, 9, 277–314.
- Oneal, John R., and Bruce M. Russett. 1997. The classical liberals were right: democracy, interdependence, and conflict, 1950–1985. *International Studies Quarterly*, 41, 267–94.
- Owen, John M. 1997. *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Pogge, Thomas. 2007. *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1993. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1999. *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, John. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ray, James L. 1995. *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

- Ray, James L. 1998. Does democracy cause peace? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1, 27–46.
- Rosato, Sebastian. 2003. The flawed logic of democratic peace theory. *American Political Science Review*, 97(4), 575–602.
- Rousseau, David, Christopher Gelpi, Dan Reiter, and Paul Huth. 1996. “Assessing the dyadic nature of the democratic peace.” *American Political Science Review* 90, 512–44.
- Rummel, R.J. 1995. “Democracies are less warlike than other regimes.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 1, 457–79.
- Russett, Bruce. 1993. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post Cold War World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schumpeter, Joseph. 2005. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London: Routledge; originally published 1942.
- Snyder, Jack. 1991. *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weart, Spencer R. 1998. *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.