

## Clashing ideologies — A dialogue between Kant and Marx over the features of a global society

*[31st January 1920. World War I has ended. The Treaty of Versailles has been signed. The League of Nations has been formed. Immanuel Kant lays out his philosophical sketch of Perpetual Peace to a group of people in a salon. Karl Marx is in attendance and pulls Kant aside for a debate. Marx has already published the Communist Manifesto.]*

**Marx:** In this political climate, is it not naivety to wish for *Perpetual Peace*? Are you oblivious to what man has done over the past five years? Is it not fully against your philosophy?

**Kant:** Yes, the recent events have left me scarred, but no, I am not naïve. In fact, now is the most important time to stand by my philosophy. It is my duty to enlighten the masses against the horrors of what we are doing. If not, the global society will face an even greater existential crisis.

**Marx:** What do you base your vision of a global society on? What assumption does your *Perpetual Peace* rest upon?

**Kant:** Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. If unattained, all my philosophical tenets are worthless. I believe it can be explained using the fundamentals of your philosophy too.

**Marx:** Is enlightenment a by-product of the bourgeoisie?

**Kant:** It is. Enlightenment is achieved when man abolishes his self-incurred immaturity<sup>2</sup>. However, the abolishment is difficult. The bourgeoisie makes the proletariat rely on them. They make their life “easy”. Why would proletariat bother if their capital relations seemingly serve them well? This is what makes enlightenment difficult. Individuals are too slow to attain it. However, the public has a higher chance of getting enlightened. An enlightened individual can use their public reason<sup>3</sup> and share their views with the rest. They have the power to motivate others.

**Marx:** I agree with your comparison. By controlling all means of production, the bourgeoisie has left no choice but for the proletariat to be dependent, and only a class uprising of the proletariat could overthrow the current system.

**Kant:** However, enlightenment alone is not enough. The fundamentals of perpetual peace also rely on its preliminary articles as I outlined before.

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<sup>1</sup> Kant described Enlightenment in his essay, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” which was written prior to *Perpetual Peace*.

<sup>2</sup> Immaturity is reliance on others, and not on one’s self knowledge and understanding. This is self-incurred if it is due to lack of resolution and courage, and not ignorance.

<sup>3</sup> Kant differentiates between private and public reason. Private is what we do under our official working conditions. Public is what we do based on our beliefs, regardless of who we are employed under.

- Marx:** I agree that most preliminary articles are correct. Article one denounces future wars. Wars fought in history, and the one we lived through, are always of bourgeois interest. The bourgeoisie have destroyed all ties to society and family, where deaths for capital gains become collateral damage. True peace can be attained only if the wars of the bourgeoisie no longer exist. Article two denounces the acquisition of independent states. Why is this necessary if not to take over the resources to increase production? It leads to the destruction of artists and craftsmen of that acquired state, replacing them with machinery. Article three denounces standing armies. Armies are merely tools to fulfil the abovementioned aims. Article four denounces national debt, and article six denounces dishonourable strategies of war. These make me laugh, as they showcase the competition within the bourgeoisie themselves. They are willing to destroy their own class for monetary gain. They have no class consciousness. Worst of all, the proletariat who fought in the wars gained nothing. The soldiers were left to suffer; the women who supported the industries went back to their prostituted status in families.
- Kant:** Your understanding is correct, but why leave article five? Independence of states from external interference is extremely important as well.
- Marx:** Yes, but your condition is a myth. You claim that interference is not justified unless there is an internal conflict, in which case external states can provide support to either side. However, the class conflict is omnipresent in every state. The communists must therefore support the proletariat in every state to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Therefore, article five becomes redundant in a global society.
- Kant:** I understand your opinion, but why is your global society based on “overthrowing” the bourgeoisie? Remember, revolution is a short-term measure. The thinking and mindset must change for true reform to take place. My preliminary articles do not divide the world into black and white, like you do.
- Marx:** Your ideals sound good, but only on paper. Revolution is of the utmost importance. The bourgeoisie are upgrading their industries at an astonishing rate. What all the past civilisations failed to achieve together in terms of production, the bourgeoisie have done in less than a century. What good is your “slow reform” if the working class continuously struggles through it? Only a revolution can overtake the bourgeois growth. This is the only way to create a peaceful global society.
- Kant:** Revolutions will only make global society more unstable. For the sake of argument, let us first consider how your global society is structured. I will then explain why your class revolution will fail.
- Marx:** The class revolution will not fail because there will no longer be class antagonism after the revolution. The main aim is complete abolishment of private property. Without it, the bourgeoisie class cannot exist. To achieve that, I have ten tenets which can be applied to most states.
- Kant:** Yes, I am aware. The main theme you support is centralisation of power in the hands of the state. Whether it concerns fiscal resources, communication, transportation, credit, or manufacturing. Are you not contradicting yourself? This revolution of yours merely creates another political power, which is the state.

- Marx:** It may appear so, but that is not true. The state is a communist state, which has rebelled against class itself. Over time, the concept of class will vanish, which removes all political power, and its notion will become meaningless.
- Kant:** Your belief is folly. The state will become the ruling class simply because of the power vested in its hands. This is why revolution alone is not sufficient. It must come with thinking. Thinking in the form of my definitive articles. The first one is in line with your goal: freedom and equality for all members of a society, and dependence upon a common legislation. This resembles the communist state you want to create. The differences will vanish, and everyone will rely on the state for legislation. The same can be applied to the federation of free states, in my second definitive article. Lastly, universal hospitality must be upheld. Obeying these three will make a truly global society, which is peaceful at its heart. You simply assume that once your revolution has finished, the state can control everything and maintain equality. However, my three definitive articles are more important. They serve the interest you desire as well, without a revolution, without loss of lives.
- Marx:** You, like many other philosophers, think you work for the people. However, your articles tend to bourgeoisie interests. Your global society vests power in the government, which, unlike the proletarian communist state, can be motivated by bourgeoisie intentions. The first article does not abolish class. It simply says all classes will be treated the same. That is not enough. As long as classes exist, one will always be oppressed by the other. The second article hopes that different states can coexist. However, as I mentioned before, the bourgeoisie have competition within themselves. The intention to be part of a federation will not be for peace, but rather to satisfy their fiscal goals. Lastly, your third article is impossible! Hospitality will be based on whether the visitor improves the means of production. Anything else, and he will no longer be "peaceful". Do you see your mistake? Your global society does not guarantee perpetual peace at all. Wars can break out at any time because it does not fully abolish the bourgeoisie. My global society, on the other hand, ensures that once communism is established, it will only prosper to strengthen it. No other form of governance would ever be required.
- Kant:** First, I will address your criticism of the definitive articles. My articles are designed against the backdrop of an enlightened society. Such a society will act rationally and will not fall in the folly you describe. Such a society cannot be brought about by a revolution, as revolution does not fully enlighten the people. You are still following the loud voices of others; critical thinking is absolutely necessary. Secondly, if you truly believe that no other form of society will be needed after communism is established, you misunderstand human nature. Humans continuously develop. Neither our generation nor your future communist generation can impose conditions on the next generation that will prevent their growth. While your ideals or mine may serve the interests of people today, they might fail to do so tomorrow. Assuming they will forever hold up is merely boasting of our own prowess and ignores reality. You cannot stop or change what is inherent in human nature.
- Marx:** How can you guarantee your perpetual peace then?

**Kant:** I cannot<sup>4</sup>. However, if we can enlighten the masses, they will be able to formulate their own articles, be it preliminaries or definitive. As our discussion has shown, the foundations of both our principles align closely with one another. I understand you. Your motives are correct. However, revolution is not the way to go. Enlightenment is. In fact, by discussing your ideas with me, you are exercising your public reason. You have been enlightened. Do not prevent the next generation from attaining this blessing. Use your power to enlighten people against the harmful nature of the bourgeoisie, but do not make them slaves to your ideology.

*[The discussion ends with Kant reigning over Marx's ideas. Marx leaves the salon dissatisfied, but not fully against Kant.]*

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**AI Tool Declaration:** I used GPT-4.1 and Grammarly AI to check grammatical errors in my writing. The structure, flow, ideas, and arguments are created by me without any AI use. I am responsible for the content and quality of the submitted work.

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<sup>4</sup> Kant had this viewpoint while discussing enlightenment. While not directly seen in his perpetual peace sketch, it is reasonable to assume he remained committed to it, as he references enlightenment in his sketch.

## **Bibliography**

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