

AN ESSAY ON LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a system of thinking that promotes the belief in individual freedom and equal rights. It highly favours the rule of law and private property with the exchange of goods and ideas. Liberalism allows people to pursue their individual goals and fully exercise their rights as long as they do not infringe other people's rights. Liberalism is a historical ideal, with early enthusiasts such as Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Later advocates of liberalism have combined it with other ideals such as democracy to produce concepts such as democratic liberalism forwarded by Professor Michael Doyle. This review will look into the contributions of Michael Doyle, John Owen and authors Smith, Hadfield and Tim Dune in their book 'Foreign policy' to the concept of liberalism, its merits and demerits as well as what can be done to make it better.

Michael Doyle talks of the concept of Liberal internationalism, liberal imperialism and liberal pacifism. He connects this with the statement by President Ronald Reagan during a speech in the British parliament regarding individual liberty. President Ronald Reagan had said that countries that are founded on respect for individual liberty exercise restraint and peaceful intentions. He then went ahead to announce a 'crusade for freedom' and a 'campaign for democratic development' (Reagan, 1983).

Michael Doyle believes that peace and democracy are two sides of the same coin. President Ronald Reagan was just one of the many who denounced authoritarian leaders and totalitarian governments as making for wars. Michael Doyle cites representation of citizens in democracies as a way of ending war. This is because when citizens bear the burden of choosing their leaders, what the elected do is presumed to be what the people want, hence in one way or the other wars

become impossible. Hence, claims Michael Doyle, liberal states are resultantly peaceful, bringing about the idea that democracy and peace are two sides of the same coin.

Liberalism however can still result in aggressive behaviour through liberal reasoning. Michael Doyle attributes this statement to an argument by Immanuel Kant. This is due to the differences between liberal pacifism and liberal imperialism. Regarding liberal pacifism, Michael Doyle agrees with Joseph Schumpeter that it is as a result of the interaction of capitalism and democracy (Schumpeter, 1919). Schumpeter argues that capitalism discourages war as the population is in a state of democracy, rationalism and individualism. Few states would think about going to war as they would only be gaining very little. Minds of the populations in democratic nations are focused on production. This is unlike states ruled by war profiteers and military aristocrats that seek to gain from the effect of war.

When it comes to liberal imperialism, Michael Doyle turns to Thucydides and Niccolo Machiavelli who argue that establishing states fit for imperial expansion is the best way to ensure survival of a state. Machiavelli's republic, according to Michael Doyle is a mixed republic. It is neither a democracy, which may easily degenerate into a tyranny nor is it a foundation of modern liberal views of human rights. According to Machiavelli, his idea of state is based on popular liberty and political participation (Machiavelli, 1950).

Finally, Michael Doyle focuses on liberal internationalism, the simultaneous effect of liberal states, in spite of whether they are pacifist or imperialist. One of the legacies of liberal internationalism is the pacification of foreign relations (Streit, 1938). Michael Doyle points out that during the nineteenth century, Britain and the United States engaged in near continual strife, but after the reform Act of 1952, each finally understood their sovereignty and resolved their

disputes. Several alliances later, the 'pacific federation' as named by Immanuel Kant which was established by liberal societies. Here the predictions of liberal states are borne out where they exercise peaceful restraint and existence of separate peace.

Another modern scholar, John Owen also makes crucial contributions on democratic liberalism. John Owen says that democratic liberalism embodies constitutional government, representative institutions, minority protection, human rights, and roles from private property and civil society. John Owen views liberal democracy as a revolutionary idea as played out in South Africa, South Asia and Latin America. Owen outlines the numerous effects of democratic liberalism which he says include promotion of peace and mutual respect among peoples.

At higher levels of participation in democratic liberalism, human rights are protected and state repression is resultantly decreased. John Owen also points out that in times of famine; states that exercise democratic liberalism encourage protection of mass populations from state indifference during national disasters. Democratic liberalism does not harm growth; it increases human capital, lowers inflation, and as a result enables economic stability, all which are positively associated with economic growth (Streit, 1938).

The only downside of liberal democratism is that without proper guidance, it will result in crusades and misguided interventions good example is in the 'liberation' of Iraq during the President Bush administration of The United States of America. John Owen also observes the possibility of conflict between liberal and non-liberal societies. The same characteristic values of international respect for individuals and shared interests will similarly result in problems. John Owen gives the example of US-Russian and US-Chinese strained relations as a pointer to the difficulties of international liberal democracies.

The above views in my opinion to the most extent ring true. With liberalism and its subclasses the world has had a chance at peace. Fewer wars have been witnessed with the independence and allowing of free thinking among individuals of states. The economic growth that has been experienced in the era of liberalism is tremendous. There is free trade and countries have goods flowing into them as if they were their own. Trade is actually the highest beneficiary of the concept of liberalism. Human rights are now recognized among individuals and their breach is taken seriously. For instance the international criminal court is trying former Liberian President Charles Taylor for human atrocities committed during his rule as president of Liberia. The same can be said of trials of militia who executed people during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia as the United Nations and the current government of Cambodia ratified the trials. Not to be forgotten are the trials taking place regarding the war between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda (Reagan, 1983).

This however does not mean that liberalism has been the best way for states to conduct themselves. The invasion of Iraq and its assumed liberation that ended with the prosecution of former president Saddam Hussein was not the best example of assisting states to liberalise. This was a sure downplay on sovereignty of a nation hence the element of restraint was lost. I agree with John Owen that democratic liberalism should be put under control and scrutiny to avoid crusading where governments without a strict rule of law will end up taking power by force and suppressing citizens' rights (Reagan, 1983).

References

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