

Towards a Critical Theory of Democratic Peace

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Abstract. The Democratic Peace research programme remains a prominent and influential strand of International Relations theory. It occupies a central place in the discipline, both as a dominant version of liberal internationalism, and as a supposedly paradigmatic case demonstrating the strengths of positivist scholarship. Nonetheless, Democratic Peace scholarship has been challenged by recent real world events, notably the belligerent behaviour of democratic states during the so-called ‘War on Terror’, and the use of its findings to justify the US led invasion of Iraq. In this regard, Democratic Peace research has struggled to deal with the ethical and practical consequences of its work, as the focus has been on empirically observable and testable problems that fit within the remit of positivist social scientific practice. Responding to this state of affairs, it is argued here that there is a pressing need to further extend and pluralise existing scholarship by incorporating approaches which commence from different ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points. While there are multiple possibilities, Frankfurt School Critical Theory has great potential to contribute to an expanded research agenda. The article outlines what a Critical Theory approach to the study of Democratic Peace would entail, highlighting the substantial contribution it can make.

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Introduction

Little over two hundred years ago, Alexander Hamilton, in penning the sixth *Federalist Paper*, reflected on ‘visionary, or designing men who [...] advocate the paradox of perpetual peace’, observing that, ‘the genius of republics, say they, is pacific’. Hamilton immediately dismissed this proposition:

Have republics in practice been less addicted to war than monarchies? Are not the former administered by men as well as the latter? Are there not aversions, predilections, rivalships, and desires of unjust acquisition, that affect nations, as well as kings? Are not popular assemblies frequently subject to the impulses of rage, resentment, jealousy, avarice, and of other irregular and violent propensities?¹

¹ Alexander Hamilton, ‘Federalist Paper 6’, in G. W. Carey and J. McClellan (eds), *The Federalist Papers* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), pp. 23–4.

Hamilton briskly concluded that, ‘there have been, if I may so express it, almost as many popular as royal wars’.²

Today it is the optimism of Immanuel Kant, rather than Hamilton’s scepticism, which has prevailed amongst a large proportion of academics and policymakers. Indeed, one of the most significant developments in International Relations (IR) theory over the last three decades has been the rapid rise to prominence of the Democratic Peace research programme, as well as the transferral (and arguably transmogrification) of its findings into foreign policy discourse and practice. In recent years, however, Democratic Peace Theory has been challenged by real world events, most notably the actions and rhetoric of the US during the presidency of George W. Bush. What has become more evident is an under-explored ‘dark side’ to democratic peace, evidenced in phenomena such as democratic wars.³ Furthermore, Democratic Peace scholarship has been implicated with the deeply unpopular war in Iraq, as its findings were utilised to justify, and perhaps even motivate, the actions of America and its allies.⁴ These challenging developments have led to calls for an expanded and more reflexive research agenda.⁵ Acknowledging this state of affairs, the argument presented here considers some key limitations in existing work as a necessary step towards pluralising existing scholarship. To further this goal, it is proposed that Frankfurt School Critical Theory can be productively applied to the study of Democratic Peace. This complementary approach has the potential to address certain ontological, epistemological and methodological problems that restrict much existing work. To be clear, it is not suggested that a Critical Theory framework should supplant current scholarship. Rather, it represents one way to broaden and diversify this important field of research.

The argument will proceed as follows. First, the development and trajectory of the Democratic Peace research programme is situated within the context of ongoing attempts to validate IR as a science. Second, it is suggested that rather than confirm positivism’s place in the discipline, Democratic Peace scholarship actually illustrates some of its contradictions and tensions. These difficulties have restricted existing research and limited the kind of findings possible. In particular, it has left Democratic Peace Theory unable to engage in the normative questions it gives rise to, such as the means-ends dilemma over defending and extending Democratic Peace. To address such shortcomings, a complimentary approach

² Ibid., p. 24.

³ Anna Geis, Lothar Brock and Harald Müller (eds), *Democratic Wars: Looking at the Dark Side of Democratic Peace* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁴ Both Ish-Shalom and Smith have demonstrated how democratic peace research was incorporated into neo-conservative thinking, and used by the Bush administration in explicating its actions. The actual role of the theory in legitimating, and perhaps even motivating, the Iraq war is a very difficult issue and largely beyond the scope of this article. See Piki Ish-Shalom, ‘Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism: The Democratic-Peace Thesis and the Politics of Democratization’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:4 (2006); Piki Ish-Shalom, ‘“The Civilization of Clashes”: Misapplying the Democratic Peace in the Middle East’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 122:4 (2007–2008); Tony Smith, *A Pact with the Devil: Washington’s Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁵ Brent Steele, ‘Liberal-Idealism: A Constructivist Critique’, *International Studies Review*, 9:1 (2007); Anna Geis and Wolfgang Wagner, ‘How Far is it from Königsberg to Kandahar? Democratic Peace and Democratic Violence in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming); ‘Roundtable: Between the Theory and Practice of Democratic Peace’, *International Relations*, (forthcoming).

based on Frankfurt School Critical Theory is presented. It is argued that diversifying the study of Democratic Peace in this manner offers great potential for generating a different and valuable set of insights. In concluding, the consequences of the argument for the Democratic Peace research agenda are considered.

Democratic Peace and scientific man

The development of the Democratic Peace research programme has been considered extensively elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here.⁶ Nonetheless, for the argument that will be made, it is necessary to consider how Democratic Peace scholarship has been influenced and shaped by sociological and disciplinary factors within academia. In particular, a defining characteristic of the research programme is that it has been developed by scholars working in a neo-positivist tradition, who have sought to substantiate their claims mainly through quantitative studies. This has allowed for the growth of a strong literature highlighting the distinctiveness of democracies within international politics, most notably that they largely behave peacefully towards each other. While recognising these important findings, the (neo) positivist commitments underwriting most existing scholarship have also restricted the kind of insights possible.

The ideational milieu usually identified for the rise of Democratic Peace research is the fall of the Berlin wall, the ‘triumph’ of democracy over communism, and the new found ascendancy of liberal thought.⁷ Commonly missed, however, is another key contextual dimension, one internal to the academic discipline of IR and arguably just as determinative. Work on Democratic Peace emerged during the so-called ‘third debate’ between positivist and post-positivist perspectives.⁸ The empirical results of Democratic Peace research – heavily grounded in the dominant deductive-nomological model of positivism – offered a powerful affirmation of this approach right when its hegemonic status was under sustained challenge.⁹ The robust dyadic finding shored up the positivist centre against post-positivist attacks by strengthening claims that IR could be considered a ‘normal science’. In this regard, Jack Levy famously suggested that the ‘absence of war between democracies comes *as close as anything* we have to an empirical law in international relations’.¹⁰ To be clear, almost all Democratic Peace scholars have presented their findings as probabilistic, not deterministic. Chernoff’s judgment is representative: ‘the fact that the dyadic hypothesis has come to be accepted based on sound methods of reasoning is significant but does not guarantee that it expresses any unassailable or

⁶ For an excellent up to date overview of the literature, see Geis and Wagner, ‘From Democratic Peace to Democratic Distinctiveness’.

⁷ Ish-Shalom, ‘Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism’; Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁸ Yosef Lapid, ‘The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 33:3 (1989).

⁹ As understood here, a basic definition of ‘positivism’ centres on the following five tenets: (1) the unity of the scientific method; (2) naturalism or phenomenalism; (3) empiricism; (4) value freedom and, (5) instrumental knowledge. Gerard Delanty, *Social Science: Beyond Constructivism and Realism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997), p. 12.

¹⁰ Jack Levy, ‘Domestic Politics and War’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18:4 (1988), p. 662, emphasis added.

ultimate truth'.¹¹ While recognising the qualified nature of most claims made, it is still presented along the lines Levy suggested: probably the closest IR has come to generating results equivalent to the natural sciences. The dyadic peace may not be a complete scientific law. Nonetheless, it has, or is perceived to have, law like properties, and this shapes how it is understood and responded to within and beyond the discipline. Indeed, much like Riker's claim that 'Duverger's law' demonstrated that the accumulation of knowledge was possible in Political Science, and hence, it should be considered a 'normal science',¹² the dyadic democratic peace finding may perform a similar function in IR.

That positivist IR scholars have had such difficulty in identifying clear cases of scientific progress makes the law like findings of Democratic Peace Theory all the more significant. In this regard, notable is Van Belle's claim, 'democracy's influence on war and other forms of violent international conflict is an exemplar of what political scientists consider to be a theoretically progressive research program'.¹³ This builds on Chernoff's suggestion that: 'cumulation and consensus in international relations, along with many other fields in the social sciences, have been slow in coming. [...] Democratic peace studies show that such a body of knowledge is possible'.¹⁴ From this observation, Chernoff draws two conclusions about the role of positivism in IR. First, these robust findings refute post-positivist arguments that IR cannot be a science.¹⁵ Second, 'given that progress in this area of empirical international relations inquiry has occurred, it is reasonable to assert that progress is possible – *ab esse ad posse* – in other areas of the field as well'.¹⁶ Even if Democratic Peace Theory does not claim to provide a strict empirical law, its findings are sufficient – according to the different measures Chernoff proposes – to be regarded as an unambiguous example of scientific progress. This reflects an underlying function of Democratic Peace research in IR, whereby it powerfully asserts and maintain positivism's central place in the discipline.

The limits of positivist Democratic Peace theory

If one considers Democratic Peace research in more detail, however, a paradoxical situation soon appears. While the scholarship has operated to reinforce and strengthen positivism's central place within mainstream IR, the manner in which its findings have been generated actually point to crucial limitations and shortcomings in such approaches. Positivist accounts have generated considerable insights and have created much needed space for exploring the way democracy interacts with

¹¹ Fred Chernoff, 'International Relations, Paleontology, and Scientific Progress: Parallels between Democratic Peace Studies and the Meteor Impact Extinction Hypothesis', *International Studies Perspectives*, 9:1 (2008), p. 93. See also, Bruce Russett, 'Democracy, War and Expansion through Historical Lenses', *European Journal of International Relations*, 15:1 (2009), p. 11.

¹² William Riker, 'The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science', *American Political Science Review*, 76:4 (1982).

¹³ Douglas Van Belle, 'Dinosaurs and the Democratic Peace: Paleontological Lessons for Avoiding the Extinction of Theory in Political Science', *International Studies Perspectives*, 7:3 (2006), p. 287.

¹⁴ Fred Chernoff, 'The Study of Democratic Peace and Progress in International Relations', *International Studies Review*, 6:1 (2004), p. 49.

¹⁵ Chernoff, 'The Study of Democratic Peace', pp. 50–1.

¹⁶ Chernoff, 'The Study of Democratic Peace', p. 72.

international politics, yet basic ontological and epistemological commitments introduce important constraints on the accounts they provide.

Most Democratic Peace theorists subscribe to a ‘dualist’ account of the relationship between the observer and what is being studied.¹⁷ As in the natural sciences, the researcher is regarded as being separate from, and ‘outside’, the object examined. One of the most persistent and persuasive criticisms of positivism has been precisely on this belief in a unity of the sciences. In contrast, an interpretivist position argues that when considering the social realm, the distinction between subject and object is fundamentally different, as a reciprocal relationship exists between the two.¹⁸ The researcher is unavoidably operating ‘inside’ the social realm that he or she seeks to observe. Steele, drawing on Giddens’ notion of the ‘double hermeneutic’ of social life, and Oren, using Gewirth’s categories of ‘self-fulfilling and self-destroying prophecies’, both make essentially the same point in reference to Democratic Peace scholarship: insofar as researchers reciprocally interact with the objects they are studying, they help to alter and (re)create this reality.¹⁹ Observers do so by giving meaning and significance to what they seek to describe and explain: a ‘Democratic Peace’ does not exist ‘out there’; it becomes real and tangible through being labelled and described as such. Democratic Peace cannot be a ‘brute fact’ in Searle’s terminology, it is partly constituted through being identified and explained by the researchers that ‘observe’ it.²⁰ Simply put, studying Democratic Peace unavoidably involves a different interaction between subject and object, compared to the natural sciences that positivism seeks to emulate.

Holding to a ‘dualist’ understanding has necessarily influenced the Democratic Peace research programme and the results it has produced. By discounting how scholars may impact on what they are observing, there has been a widespread inability or unwillingness to consider how their findings interact with the phenomena they are studying. Yet Democratic Peace does not simply exist ‘out there’, it only comes into existence through the categories used to identify and define it. Moreover, as agents react to these observed empirical patterns – that established liberal democracies rarely, if ever fight each other – their new behaviour is liable to alter or falsify the empirical observation which had been valid until that point. The widespread dissemination of Democratic Peace research, which has led to it directly entering mainstream policy and public discourse in the US and elsewhere, has subsequently influenced actors’ perceptions of the relationship between democracy and peace.²¹ Ignoring this reciprocal interaction between Democratic Peace scholarship and the real world phenomena it seeks to account for has encouraged a problematic tendency of insufficiently engaging with the political consequences of their work.²² Scholars cannot necessarily be held liable for the way their research is

¹⁷ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘Hunting for Fossils in International Relations’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 7:3 (2006), pp. 100–1.

¹⁸ There have been suggestions that this is the case in the natural sciences as well.

¹⁹ Steele, ‘Liberal-Idealism’; Ido Oren, ‘Can Political Science Emulate the Natural Sciences? The Problem of Self-Disconfirming Analysis’, *Polity*, 38:1 (2006).

²⁰ Jackson, ‘Hunting for Fossils in International Relations’, p. 101.

²¹ One prominent commentator notes that, ‘the statistical evidence in support of the idea that democracies rarely fight wars with one another is so strong as to have prompted a rich and forceful literature that commands a notable impact on foreign policy decision making’. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, ‘Domestic Politics and International Relations’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 46:1 (2002), p. 5.

²² Ish-Shalom, ‘Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism’.

used and potentially abused, but this does not absolve them of all responsibility.²³ The broad dissemination of Democratic Peace findings and their transferral into the political sphere – a process which these scholars have often actively participated in – generates a need to be sufficiently reflexive about the nature and consequences of these processes.²⁴

The limitations of the positivist tenets that inform much Democratic Peace research are further witnessed in the attempt to employ objective, value-free understandings of central concepts. A majority of work has been in the form of quantitative, large N studies,²⁵ which has led to a reliance on a number of key data sets and the definitions they adopt. In operationalising democracy, *Polity* is now the most commonly used data set, while the *Correlates of War* project (CoW) is the dominant source for determining war and peace in the international system.²⁶ For both Chernoff and Van Belle, the widespread agreement over how democracy, peace and war are understood is a sign of scientific progress.²⁷ While employing standard definitions and data sets does allow for greater commensurability between studies, it comes at a price. Political concepts – such as democracy, war and peace – are heavily contested, and their meanings are diachronically and synchronically variable. These framing concepts are deeply infused with historical and normative contestation, and all bely straightforward interpretations. As such, definitional processes cannot be neutral or objective, and the accounts to emerge from studies framed by these terms can never simply reflect empirical realities.²⁸ Cavallar makes this point in strong fashion: ‘we decide upon the outcome of our research and reasoning the moment we define democracy’.²⁹ The observation that follows is that hegemonic understandings of framing concepts restrict the kind of phenomena that can be perceived. And ‘the more universal it [the definition] is, the fewer new or alternative “facts” will emerge’.³⁰ Thus, in a certain sense, *contra* Chernoff and Van Belle, definitional consensus may actually inhibit knowledge generation.

²³ Piki Ish-Shalom, ‘Theorizing Politics, Politicizing Theory, and the Responsibility that Runs Between’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 7:2 (2009); ‘Roundtable: Between the Theory and Practice of Democratic Peace’.

²⁴ Piki Ish-Shalom, ‘Theorizing Politics, Politicizing Theory’; Christopher Hobson, ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’, *International Relations* (forthcoming).

²⁵ Chan notes that, ‘the democratic peace proposition is arguably one of the most robust generalisations that has been produced to date by this research tradition’. Steve Chan, ‘In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise’, *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41 (1997), p. 60.

²⁶ Chernoff, ‘The Study of Democratic Peace’, p. 56; Van Belle, ‘Dinosaurs and the Democratic Peace’, pp. 292–3. For the Polity IV project, see: {<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>}, and for the Correlates of War project, see: {<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>}. All pages accessed on 18 June 2009.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57–65; Van Belle, ‘Dinosaurs and the Democratic Peace’, pp. 292–4.

²⁸ Consider this response by R. J. Rummel to the question, ‘But can you really apply today’s definition of democracy to previous centuries?’. ‘The fundamental question about any definition is: Does it work? Does it define something in reality that predicts something else? If we have so defined an x such that it regularly predicts to y, then that is a useful and important definition of x. [...] Moreover, we have statistics. That there have been no wars between democracies since, say, 1816, is statistically significant.’ It is completely tautological, however, to justify the definition used in terms of statistics and the results produced, as these outcomes are predicated on the definitions first employed. See R. J. Rummel, ‘Q and A on Democracy and War’. Available at: {<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/PK.APPEN1.1.HTM>}; accessed on 2 June 2008.

²⁹ Georg Cavallar, ‘Kantian Perspectives on Democratic Peace: Alternatives to Doyle’, *Review of International Studies*, 27:2 (2001), p. 238.

³⁰ Eike Gebhardt, ‘A Critique of Methodology’, in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 377.

Political concepts cannot be value-free and neutral, as much as positivist Democratic Peace researchers may hope. In choosing certain understandings over others, the work contains an unavoidably normative dimension. Consensus over definitions of democracy, peace and war does not result in objectivity, but the dominance of particular conceptions and specific viewpoints. Not only does this operate to obscure the normative preferences embedded within the research, by failing to acknowledge that such value judgments are necessarily present, the extent to which findings may also legitimate certain actors, institutions and practices within politics is obscured. The manner in which framing concepts contain a degree of subjectivity is not the main problem, as to some extent, this is unavoidable. Nonetheless, the political and normative preferences embedded within key concepts can create difficulties if not recognised and responded to, as they do impact on the type of claims made and the conclusions drawn.

Democratic Peace research has been strongly shaped by operating within the confines of the neo-positivist epistemology and methodologies that still prevail in mainstream IR. There has been a comfortable tendency to accept these basic foundations without fully considering the consequences of such choices.³¹ In this sense, Democratic Peace Theory is a 'problem solving theory' *par excellence*. Despite being somewhat stark, Robert Cox's well worn distinction between 'problem solving' and 'critical' theory is a productive way of thinking about the issue. It serves as a reminder that while the prevailing approach undoubtedly has its advantages and uses, the unquestioned assumptions on which it is based are not without costs.³² The nature of international politics is taken as a given, the role scholars may play in (re)creating existing practices is obscured, and the normative dimension of their theories is lost. Framing the issue in this manner indicates that Democratic Peace scholars have not been sufficiently reflexive about the role their findings may play in the world they are studying, nor have they properly considered the normative dimensions of their research.

Thanks to a common neo-positivist starting point the Democratic Peace research programme exhibits a high degree of homogeneity and consensus, and this has encouraged a certain accumulation of knowledge. Thus, from a social scientific perspective it appears to have 'progressive' traits. Nonetheless, this lack of pluralism restricts the potential of the research programme, while problems emerge from a refusal to fully investigate or expand on the hegemonic assumptions that ground most existing scholarship. And by steadfastly refusing to consider how their work interacts with the world they observe, Democratic Peace scholars have been handicapped in dealing with feedback loops between theory and practice. Notably, this has led to an insufficient appreciation of the possible darker sides of Democratic Peace, such as democratic wars and civilising missions in the name of democracy.³³ Proponents since Doyle have been cognisant of such dangers, but these were downplayed, especially as the monadic thesis gained more adherents

³¹ Notable exceptions are Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The Imperial Peace: Democracy, Force and Globalization', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:4 (1999); Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey (eds), *Democracy, Liberalism, and War* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001); Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 7.

³² Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', *Millennium*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 128–30.

³³ Christopher Hobson, 'Democracy as Civilisation', *Global Society*, 22:1 (2008).

during the liberal *zeitgeist* of the 1990s.³⁴ These more problematic dimensions have become especially pertinent following the Bush administration's use of Democratic Peace findings to explicate war in Iraq. Yet it would be a mistake to discount this case as an aberration. Rather, the manner in which Democratic Peace Theory has been implicated in American attempts to justify coercive democratisation reflects key difficulties emerging from the ontological and epistemological commitments that define the existing research programme.

Means and ends in Democratic Peace Theory

The more widely accepted dyadic version of Democratic Peace Theory identifies a zone of peace existing between established liberal democracies.³⁵ Based on the identified empirical pattern, it can be expected that a growth in liberal democracies will lead to an increase in interstate peace. Moreover, some theorists argue that there will be a 'tipping point' when a 'critical mass' of democracies exist, whereby the structure of the international system can be reformed along democratic lines.³⁶ Russett notably proposed that, 'if this chance for wide democratization can be grasped and consolidated, international politics might be transformed'.³⁷ Weart was even more optimistic, claiming that a 'preponderance of democracies will transform the entire system of international relations'.³⁸ The near global movement towards democracy across the twentieth century implies that this is the direction history is progressing in.³⁹ While recent events, such as the deeply contentious behaviour of the US and the return of autocratic powers, has dented the confidence of liberals, an abiding faith remains. Notably, Deudney and Ikenberry have recently concluded that, 'liberal states should not assume that history has ended, but *they can still be certain that it is on their side*'.⁴⁰ This reflects an ongoing and thoroughly optimistic prognosis: through the growth of liberal democracy, a more peaceful and progressive international order will emerge, and the Kantian vision of perpetual peace can come closer to reality.

An accompanying dark side to this encouraging picture of democracy and peace spreading across the globe and reforming international politics has been less

³⁴ Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 50; John Macmillan, 'Beyond the Separate Peace', *Journal of Peace Research*, 40:2 (2003), pp. 233, 237.

³⁵ 'Though critics dispute about the reasons, there is now scholarly near-consensus for the basic empirical claim that rarely over the past century or two have democracies fought one another.' Russett, 'Democracy, War and Expansion through Historical Lenses', p. 11.

³⁶ Ewan Harrison, 'Waltz, Kant and Systemic Approaches to International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 28:1 (2002), pp. 159–60; Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, 'A Kantian System? Democracy and Third-Party Conflict Resolution', *American Journal of Political Science*, 46:4 (2002), pp. 752–53.

³⁷ Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 138.

³⁸ Spencer Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 296, emphasis added.

³⁹ The standard measure used to demonstrate this shift is the Freedom House surveys. Available at: {<http://www.freedomhouse.org/>} accessed on 5 October 2007. See also, Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 13–26.

⁴⁰ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'The Myth of the Autocratic Revival: Why Liberal Democracy Will Prevail', *Foreign Affairs*, 88:1 (2009), p. 93, emphasis added.

considered, but remains present. Non-democracies that resist the march of history become both *'behaviourally'* and *'ontologically threatening'*.⁴¹ Not only do non-democracies stand in the way of the progressive reformation of international politics, they pose an ongoing threat to the existing zone of peace. In responding to this problem, coercive democratisation appears as *one possible solution*. The zone of peace can be expanded by force, if it does not continue to extend naturally. This logic is one of 'ultimate ends', as the prospect of protecting and furthering the Democratic Peace trumps qualms over the means used. Such ends-means thinking treads an extremely slippery slope, as Max Weber made clear:

In the world of realities, as a rule, we encounter the ever-renewed experience that the adherent of an ethic of ultimate ends suddenly turns into a chiliastic prophet. Those, for example, who have just preached 'love against violence' now call for the use of force for the *last* violent deed, which would then lead to a state of affairs in which *all* violence is annihilated.⁴²

This is not to suggest that Democratic Peace scholars are 'chiliastic prophets', though some of the political actors who have employed their findings may well be. Yet latent in the theory is the *potential* for such thinking to emerge, as the end of defending and expanding Democratic Peace comes to countenance coercive and violent means.

The findings and subsequent policy recommendations of Democratic Peace proponents tend to have an inherently expansive quality: if liberal democracies are the key to a more peaceful international order, this form of government should be encouraged, it is just a matter of how. Obviously Democratic Peace Theory is compatible with peaceful and limited forms of democracy promotion, which is what almost all researchers advocate.⁴³ Nonetheless, coercive democratisation remains one distinct path that follows directly from the findings and logic of the theory.⁴⁴ What these differing responses reflect is a means-ends dilemma that lies at the heart of Democratic Peace Theory: *what means does the end of perpetual peace justify?* This is something existing accounts are incapable of answering, as it is a fundamentally normative issue, and thus excluded from consideration. As an ethical question, it is beyond the scope of positivist Democratic Peace research, which attempts to restrict itself to observation and explanation. Yet there is no straight forward, neutral way of ascertaining the right balance between means and ends in establishing, protecting and extending Democratic Peace. The basic, purposive questions of 'how should we act in these circumstances?' and 'what do we want?' are unavoidable. It is impossible to objectively answer these questions. The problem is that the Democratic Peace research programme gives little consideration or guidance for considering these issues.

Democratic Peace Theory has developed in such a manner that it has largely excluded or ignored the complex purposive and ethical issues which arise from its findings. This deficiency is most noticeable in the means-ends dilemma that

⁴¹ Hobson, 'Democracy as Civilisation', p. 93.

⁴² Max Weber, 'Politics as Vocation', in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 122.

⁴³ For instance, see Bruce Russett, 'Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace', *International Studies Perspectives*, 6:4 (2005).

⁴⁴ This claim *does not* extend to Kant's thought. Whether this kind of civilising logic is present in Kant is disputed and beyond the scope of the argument.

emerges over protecting and promoting the zone of peace, but it is certainly not limited to this. Richard Price highlights another challenging normative question, one that stems from the self/other differentiation which occurs in establishing and identifying a separate peace:

What does one make of practices that at once contain elements of progressive change that are not to be summarily discounted – such as peaceful relations among the powerful industrialized democracies – yet at the same time are predicated on or produce the conditions of possibility for other forms of exclusion, hierarchy, inequality, repression, or violence?⁴⁵

What if a democratic zone of peace is actually premised on, and partly constituted through, the existence of a corresponding non-democratic zone? If this is the case, how should protecting Democratic Peace be prioritised against other values, such as pluralism and the right of communities to self-determination? Democratic Peace researchers are likely aware of such normative dilemmas, but epistemological and methodological commitments result in such questions being sidelined or insufficiently considered. And on the infrequent occasions that these scholars do explicitly argue against crusading for democracy,⁴⁶ their warnings are not well grounded or sufficiently worked through. Sustained normative and purposive reflection is needed, yet this is precisely what lies beyond the scope of existing research.

Given this major deficit in normative theorising, there is a definite irony in Immanuel Kant's role as figurehead of the Democratic Peace research programme. Beyond the striking fact that the supposed founder of *Democratic Peace Theory* explicitly dismissed democracy,⁴⁷ it is significant that Kant arrived at his conclusions in *Perpetual Peace* through a form of reasoning at odds with the majority of work he has recently inspired. In this regard, Cavallar makes the important observation that most studies utilising Kant's theory turn it 'upside down', wrongly emphasising the empirical over the normative.⁴⁸ This is reflective of a more pervasive malaise in modern Democratic Peace research, whereby a complex set of ethical and purposive issues are excluded by focusing on empirically observable and testable problems that fit within the remit of positivist social scientific practice. The result is an increasingly barren theory, shorn from the deeply normative roots of the Kantian legacy misleadingly laid claim to.

Critical Theory and Democratic Peace

The positivist commitments that shape Democratic Peace Theory leave it poorly equipped to engage with the normative and purposive questions it raises. Yet

⁴⁵ Richard Price, 'Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics', *International Organization*, 62:2 (2008), p. 206.

⁴⁶ For example, Russett, 'Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace'.

⁴⁷ This is beyond the scope of the argument, but it is not merely a matter of semantics. Kant was explicit that perpetual peace *cannot* come about between democracies. It is republics that are needed, as a democracy is 'necessarily a despotism'. Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', pp. 99–102. Modern theorists are much too quick to elide Kant's republics with 'our' democracies. For a rare exception, see John Ferejohn and Frances McCall Rosenbluth, 'Warlike Democracies', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 52:1 (2008), pp. 6–10.

⁴⁸ Cavallar, 'Kantian Perspectives', p. 248.

without tackling such matters, the Democratic Peace research programme will remain incomplete, and it will continue to struggle with engaging in the real world consequences of its findings, notably the way these are adapted to the ends of political actors. As such, there is a need to further extend and pluralise existing scholarship by incorporating alternate approaches, ones better equipped to handle these kinds of issues. While there are multiple possibilities, it is proposed here that Frankfurt School Critical Theory has great potential to contribute to an expanded Democratic Peace research agenda.⁴⁹

More than a quarter of a century after the work of the Frankfurt School was introduced into the discipline, 'Critical International Relations Theory' remains a vibrant approach.⁵⁰ Indeed, one source of inspiration for this body of thought is the same theorist most Democratic Peace scholarship commences with: Immanuel Kant. For those working in the Frankfurt School tradition, Kant was the first 'critical' theorist because 'rather than merely systematize the substance of knowledge, Kant focused on the *conditions* of knowing'.⁵¹ Applying Critical Theory to the study of Democratic Peace has both ameliorative and substantive functions. In terms of the former, there is an attempt to directly respond to the limitations examined above. A Critical Theory perspective is not subject to the same kind of constraints as a positivist approach. As such, it offers a different way of examining how democracy, war and peace interact, notably providing a perspective that allows for more sustained engagement with normative and purposive questions. In advocating the use of Critical Theory, it is necessary to stress that it is not being claimed it is superior and should supplant existing research. Rather, it is a complementary perspective capable of providing an alternate and valuable set of insights. Commencing from a position of theoretical pluralism, drawing on the Frankfurt School is one way of assisting in the extension and diversification of the current Democratic Peace research programme.

At the heart of Critical Theory lies the method of immanent critique, a form of analysis that derives 'from a nonpositivist epistemology'.⁵² It is worth quoting Herbert Marcuse at length, as he provides an excellent description of what the approach entails:

The power of negative thinking is the driving force of dialectical thought, used as a tool for analyzing the world of facts in terms of its internal inadequacy [. . .] 'Inadequacy' implies a value judgment. Dialectical thought invalidates the *a priori* opposition of value and fact by understanding all facts as stages of a single process – a process in which subject and object are so joined that truth can be determined only within the subject-object totality. All facts embody the knower as well as the doer; they continuously translate the past into the present.⁵³

⁴⁹ This has also been suggested by Andreas Hasenclever and Wolfgang Wagner, 'Introduction. From the Analysis of a Separate Democratic Peace to the Liberal Study of International Conflict', *International Politics*, 41:4 (2004), p. 469; Geis and Wagner, 'From Democratic Peace to Democratic Distinctiveness', p. 29.

⁵⁰ Special issue on 'Critical International Relations Theory after 25 years', *Review of International Studies*, 33:S1 (2007); Richard Wyn Jones, 'Introduction: Locating Critical International Relations Theory', in R. Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

⁵¹ Gebhardt, 'A Critique of Methodology', p. 380.

⁵² Robert Antonio, 'Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 32:3 (1981), p. 332.

⁵³ Herbert Marcuse, 'A Note on Dialectic', in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 445.

Inspired by Hegel's response to Kant and its subsequent reformulation by Marx,⁵⁴ the Frankfurt School approach sees the dialectic of history as providing the benchmark for critique and understanding. The analysis is derived from existing historical structures and standards. Normative theorising is not eschewed, but embraced as a necessary part of comprehending the social world. As part of this, there is a denial that strict objectivity is possible, or even desirable, in the social sciences.

There are three core components that make up the Frankfurt School approach: historical sociology, normative inquiry, and praxeology.⁵⁵ These are closely interconnected; the historical and normative analyses interact through the method of 'immanent critique', which in turn creates space for praxeological thinking. Linklater explains:

The normative realm refers to the nonarbitrary principles that can be used to criticize existing social practices and to imagine improved forms of life; the sociological realm refers to the analysis of the historical development of these principles in past intersocietal systems and in the contemporary society of states; the praxeological realm considers the moral capital that has accumulated in the modern era and that can be exploited to create new forms of political community.⁵⁶

This formulation is helpful in thinking about how the Frankfurt School can be applied to the study of Democratic Peace. Each component will be considered in more detail and in doing so, the kind of insights and findings provided by a Critical Theory perspective will be sketched out.

Historical sociology

Arguably the most significant contribution Critical Theory can make to existing Democratic Peace scholarship stems from the historical method it employs. The historical sociological account provided is one much richer and more nuanced than the quantitative analyses that have dominated, as well as being more holistic than qualitative work, which are case study based. In comparison to most existing research, which takes the international system – and the states that compose it – as a given, historical sociology examines how modern international politics came into being and historically evolved. Thus, it allows for Democratic Peace to be contextualised in reference to the international order in which it is embedded. This perspective enables consideration of how the behaviour of democratic states has interacted with, and been shaped by, larger international structures that have come into being and been reconstituted over time. For example, is contemporary Democratic Peace predicated on prior processes of state formation defined by violence and war-making? If so, this may alter how we think about contemporary attempts to extend the zone of peace. Alternatively, do global modes of production undermine the possibility for a larger democratic zone of peace to exist by inhibiting the possibilities for semi-peripheral and peripheral states to become

⁵⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), part 1.

⁵⁵ Andrew Linklater, 'The Changing Contours of Critical International Relations Theory', in R. Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).

⁵⁶ Linklater, 'The Changing Contours of Critical International Relations Theory', p. 25.

democratic? Put another way, does capitalism prevent a wider democratic peace? To date, Democratic Peace scholarship has engaged with the relationship between democracy and capitalism in a limited manner, focusing primarily on whether it is capitalism and not democracy that explains the dyadic peace. Less attention has been given to the opposite suggestion: does the global economic system actually work to prevent or constrain the potential for greater interstate peace? In this regard, Critical Theory's post-Marxist roots leave it well equipped to provide a more expansive way of exploring how capitalism shapes Democratic Peace.

Critical Theory distinguishes itself by refusing to unquestioningly accept the present state of affairs, as such a habit can subtly operate to reinforce the *status quo*.⁵⁷ Instead, it explores the historical conditions that account for the emergence and current shape of the international order. In terms of Democratic Peace research, this points to a more expansive diachronic perspective. Properly understanding the current shape of any Democratic Peace requires first appreciating its conditions of possibility, namely, how the current relationship between democracy and peace was first able to come into being. Contemporary conceptions of democracy and peace, and how they interrelate, are not natural or inevitable, but historical artefacts. Coming to terms with this observation entails engaging in the broader historical development of democracy itself, something deeply embedded within the diachronic structure of international politics.⁵⁸ There is a strong material dimension to this story: the outcomes of wars, from civil to worldwide, helped to create the conditions within a Democratic Peace could subsequently exist. These processes had an equally important ideational component, insofar as the way the idea of 'democracy' has changed diachronically, and been related to concepts such as 'war' and 'peace', has been central in creating the conditions for a Democratic Peace to subsequently be observed and labelled as such.

In foregrounding the historicity of the present, the historical sociological approach employed by Critical Theory illustrates the central role played by contingency. What a focus on contingency suggests is that any Democratic Peace which may exist, in the past or present, is far from historically assured or secure. This perspective is the exact opposite of attempts to establish the Democratic Peace as a law like proposition, a position which mediates against reflexivity and obscures that peace is not a natural condition but must be consciously constructed and maintained.⁵⁹ And in recognising the historically contingent character of Democratic Peace, one must first acknowledge a much more basic fact: *the current ascendance of democracy itself is historically unique*. Democracy is a particularly fragile and uncertain achievement, and the contemporary era represents the first

⁵⁷ Ulrich Beck, 'Critical Theory of World Risk Society: A Cosmopolitan Vision', *Constellations*, 16:1 (2009), p. 20.

⁵⁸ Christopher Hobson, 'Beyond the End of History: The Need for a "Radical Historicisation" of Democracy in International Relations', *Millennium*, 37:3 (2009).

⁵⁹ Butterfield's historical description of international order can be extended to democratic peace: it 'is not a thing bestowed upon by nature, but is a matter of refined thought, careful contrivance and elaborate artifice'. Herbert Butterfield, 'The Balance of Power', in M. Wight and H. Butterfield (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 147.

time in modern international politics that it has been the dominant form of state and method of rule. This suggests that Democratic Peace will continue to rest uneasily on the shoulders of democracy.⁶⁰

Liberal democracy's present positioning – both in ideational and institutional terms – is a remarkable and unlikely achievement, one that contrasts strongly with the historical record. Acknowledging the uniqueness of the current situation leads towards a much more considered and subtle understanding of one of the most basic cornerstones of Democratic Peace: democracy. It proposes that democracy is not as fixed or unshakeable as a majority of liberal scholars tend to presume, and that relying too heavily on the *ceteris paribus* assumption would be unwise. A limited, separate peace may now be a historical reality, but this should not make us overly confident about the future. Democracy itself is a complex and fluctuating entity, and its health will influence the possibilities for the continued existence and nature of Democratic Peace. Indeed, even if democracy itself does not disappear – as happened in the international system of ancient Greece – it may change into a different form, one that no longer contains the ingredients that help create a dyadic peace. For instance, in seeking to explain the lack of Democratic Peace in ancient Greece, Russett proposes the key difference is that another kind of democracy existed there, one that lacked modern institutions such as representation, separation of powers, checks and balances.⁶¹ This kind of argument has a direct bearing on the contemporary situation, if the claims of scholars such as John Keane have substance, who argues that representative democracy has been superseded by a new form he calls 'monitory democracy'.⁶² The larger point that emerges from this discussion is the need for a more reflective position on democracy, with an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of history informing how we appreciate its contemporary role in international politics.⁶³

The kind of account produced by a historical sociological approach clearly distinguishes itself from the quantitative studies that have dominated research to date. Rather than taking the definitions of key concepts as constant, as positivist Democratic Peace Theory does, insights are derived through examining the shifting nature of core terms. For instance, in ancient Greece the logical pairing were not democracy and peace, but democracy and war, with Athens being simultaneously the most democratic and most warlike power. This association, carried down through history by readings of Thucydides,⁶⁴ was seemingly confirmed with the rebirth of democracy in the French Revolution. The close relationship between perceptions of French aggression and its nascent democratic constitution were epitomised in Lord Auckland's explanation that war against France was necessary, 'to prevent her from giving to Great Britain, and to her allies, all the wretchedness

⁶⁰ This contrasts strongly with the kind of account suggested in Deudney and Ikenberry, 'The Myth of the Autocratic Revival'.

⁶¹ Russett, 'Democracy, War and Expansion through Historical Lenses', pp. 20–3.

⁶² John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), part 3.

⁶³ This perspective argues against the determinism and absolutism Steele finds in much Democratic Peace scholarship. Steele, 'Liberal-Idealism', pp. 43–44.

⁶⁴ In earlier work with Antholis, Russett downplays the numerous examples in Thucydides of war between different *dēmokratia*, most notably between Athens and Syracuse. Bruce Russett and William Antholis, 'Do Democracies Fight Each Other? Evidence from the Peloponnesian War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 29:4 (1992), p. 430. For a critique, see Eric Robinson, 'Reading and Misreading the Ancient Evidence for Democratic Peace', *Journal of Peace Research*, 38:5 (2001).

and horrors of a wild democracy'.⁶⁵ For the vast majority of democracy's past it has been this notion of democracy as violent, warlike and aggressive that has dominated. Democracy has been viewed in an overwhelmingly negative light: an archaic, anarchic form of government, dangerous to both its citizens and its neighbours. In this regard, Kant's unflattering description of democracy was in keeping with prevailing conceptions. Illustrative is Maistre's damning assessment of democracy following the French Revolution:

To hear these defenders of democracy speak, one would think that the people deliberate like a senate of sages, while in fact judicial murders, hazardous undertakings, extravagant choices, and above all foolish and disastrous wars are eminently the accompaniment of this form of government.⁶⁶

Today democracy may be closely associated with peace, but this is a historical rarity. Such diachronic variation in democracy's meaning and significance – similar processes can be charted with war and peace – is significant insofar as whether democracy is understood as warlike (as in ancient Athens), anarchic and violent (as in the French Revolution), or stable and peaceful (as currently understood), will have important consequences for threat perception, the chances of democratic zones of peace to exist, and more basically, what being a democracy means. Through appreciating that such concepts have had varied meanings and usages at different moments in time, and by considering how they have altered historically, we also gain insight into how the realities they operated within changed, as concepts play a key role in shaping social practices and structures.

Normative theory

The historical component of a Critical Theory approach shows that the current order is not fixed or immutable, but ultimately a product of human thought and agency, and thus liable to future change and revision. It is informed by Marx's observation that historical structures may shape but not forestall the possibility for agent-driven change: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please.'⁶⁷ From this perspective, normative theory is meant to be a guide for actors seeking to bring about political and social improvement. As Linklater explains, 'critical theory is opposed to theoretical positions which stress political necessity and historical inevitability, and which fail to enlighten human subjects about the existence of alternative political arrangements'.⁶⁸ Critical theorists explicitly engage in ethical and purposive reflection as a way of considering realisable and more progressive futures.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Emma Vincent Macleod, *A War of Ideas: British Attitudes to the Wars Against Revolutionary France, 1792–1802* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), p. 44.

⁶⁶ Joseph de Maistre, 'On the Nature of Sovereignty', in Richard Lebrun (ed.), *Against Rousseau* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 152.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, {<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>} accessed on 25 March 2009.

⁶⁸ This differentiates itself from both hard teleological versions of liberalism and cyclical realist accounts. Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 21–2.

In Critical Theory's critique of positivism the decision to exclude normative theorising is seen to leave 'traditional theory' barren and incomplete. Horkheimer argued that:

According to the philosophy of the average modern intellectual, there is only one authority, namely, science, conceived as the classification of facts and the calculation of probabilities. The statement that justice and freedom are better in themselves than injustice and oppression is scientifically unverifiable and useless.⁶⁹

Critical Theory opposes such a position, consciously incorporating normative theorising as part of its analysis. When applied to Democratic Peace research, it pushes us to ask, and attempt to answer, difficult questions. For instance, what is the value of a limited, separate peace existing, if these same democracies behave belligerently towards those excluded? Phrased slightly differently, if Democratic Peace and democratic wars are intimately connected,⁷⁰ how do democracies reconcile themselves with this state of affairs? How are the goods produced by the former weighed against the negative consequences of the latter? And if democracy does indeed generate peace, what place should it be accorded amongst competing values and interests? Should democracy be promoted as a way of furthering the *grundnorm* of peace, or should the rights of states to self-determination be respected, even if they choose non-democratic paths? Given that Democratic Peace has a certain homogenising logic to it – as its expansion is predicated on the adoption of a certain kind of democratic form – is the goal of interstate peace worth sacrificing a pluralist international order for? These are just some of the normative questions that Democratic Peace findings give rise to. It is time they are engaged with in a more sustained and substantive manner.

The liberal bent of most Democratic Peace scholarship results in a particular normative vision generally being favoured: a stable, peaceful state system made up of liberal democracies. Despite underwriting much of the analysis, this normative preference remains largely implicit and thus, not properly justified or worked through. Yet it cannot be presumed that this is a vision which all automatically subscribe to: for some liberalism offers a limited and incomplete form of democracy, others regard it as a culturally particular method of rule that has little purchase beyond the West. Even interstate peace, which may seem like a goal that would be universally subscribed to, may simply reflect the interests of satisfied, *status quo* powers. As such, Democratic Peace Theory could be strengthened through a fuller engagement with its underlying *telos*. Indeed, engaging in normative and purposive reflection would allow for the means-ends dilemma that arises from the findings of Democratic Peace research to be properly considered and responded to. A strong argument against an ethic of 'ultimate ends' and crusading for democracy can be made by exploring the tensions and problems that arise from employing means which undermine or contradict the stated democratic goal. Such a case can only be made, however, through explicitly engaging in normative theorising, something most existing scholarship has unwisely avoided. Critical Theory offers a compatible way of responding to this situation.

⁶⁹ Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) and *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974), p. 24.

⁷⁰ Geis, Brock and Müller (eds), *Democratic Wars*.

Critical Theory is explicitly committed to the extension of democracy as part of its larger project of bringing about greater human emancipation.⁷¹ In contrast to the implicit position in support of liberal democracy that shapes the Democratic Peace research programme, critical theorists have been far more sceptical of this model, and ultimately look for ways that more inclusive and socially just kinds of democracy can be cultivated. Central to the critique levelled against liberal democracy is the argument that the economic realm is prioritised at the expense of the political, with the market restraining the sphere within which democracy can operate. The emancipatory potential of democracy is undercut by its alliance with, or subservience to, capitalism. In this regard, Critical Theory expands the Democratic Peace research agenda by asking how the capitalist system may shape or constrict any Democratic Peace in existence. This would potentially provide a markedly different account from the liberal one, in which liberal political and economic spheres are seen as mutually reinforcing and playing a positive role in generating peace.⁷² Investigating and challenging the dominant reading of the role played by the market in facilitating democracy and peace would form part of a rethinking and pluralisation of conceptions of democracy in current research, thereby countering the tendency to view it solely through a liberal, procedural lens. A Critical Theory framework contains a clear normative preference for strengthening and furthering democracy, while remaining open to what it has, does, and can mean. Indeed, from this perspective liberal democracy may no longer be an end, but rather a means towards a more emancipatory version of democracy.

The central role accorded to normative theorising within Critical Theory is informed by a denial of the possibility for complete scholarly objectivity. As Marcuse put it, 'empirical reality is constituted by the subject of thought *and* action, theory and practice'.⁷³ For critical theorists this process is inevitably historical, as knowledge is embedded within societal structures that are reconstituted over time. Knowledge of the social world is always 'situated', theory is unavoidably political.⁷⁴ This may be a well worn point, but it remains salient, especially given that Democratic Peace scholars have tended not to engage extensively with the way they research has been employed by political actors.⁷⁵ The ongoing recursive relationship that exists between theory and reality necessitates that scholars are sufficiently self-reflexive about Democratic Peace research. There is an onus to acknowledge the normative and political dimensions of our work, and to seriously consider how it may impact on the world being studied. As Price observes, 'the potential social malleability of the world in which sometimes anything does seem to be possible, ought to make one modest in one's claims, and underscore the necessary humility in one's ethics, whether as practitioners and especially as observers'.⁷⁶ Democratic Peace scholarship should not be excluded from such considerations.

⁷¹ James Bohman, 'How to Make a Social Science Practical: Pragmatism, Critical Social Science and Multiperspectival Theory', *Millennium*, 31:3 (2002), p. 501.

⁷² Russett and Oneal, *Triangulating Peace*.

⁷³ Herbert Marcuse, 'On Science and Phenomenology', in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 475.

⁷⁴ Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 128.

⁷⁵ Ish-Shalom, 'Theorising Politics, Politicizing Theory, and the Responsibility that Runs Between'.

⁷⁶ Price, 'Moral Limit and Possibility', p. 218.

It is not being suggested that positivist Democratic Peace scholars are politically naive, or that they are unaware their scholarship may be put to use in unintended ways by actors with differing purposes. Yet their epistemological and methodological commitments leave them ill-equipped to deal with such issues, especially if claims of objectivity and disinterestedness are maintained. The findings clearly have political consequences, legitimating and helping to justify the position of democracies (both domestically and internationally), as well as providing a rationale for democracy promotion and democratisation, coercive or otherwise. As such, the study of Democratic Peace cannot be a completely neutral exercise. In this regard, the advantage of Critical Theory is that it allows for directly engaging with the complex purposive questions and ethical dilemmas that necessarily arise. Existing scholarship may be aware of these issues, but sidelining them is unsatisfactory: more sustained consideration is needed, and this is what a Critical Theory inspired perspective can provide.

Praxeology

The praxeological dimension of a Critical Theory approach to Democratic Peace builds on the historical and normative analyses, seeking to identify the possibilities for progressive and emancipatory change present in the current order. As Linklater puts it, ‘critical praxeology should aim to highlight the moral deficits of international society and to stress immanent possibilities and desirable directions’.⁷⁷ While precise policy recommendations are rarely offered, it does lay the groundwork for them. Far from being alien to Democratic Peace Theory, Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* can be taken as an exemplar of critical praxeology, insofar as it ‘focused on the pressures that had compelled human beings to humanize their international relations and on the specific measures they could take in the future to make world politics comply with their highest ethical ideals’.⁷⁸ Contemporary critical theorists considering Democratic Peace would still subscribe to the ethic that informed Kant’s account, but would likely differ on the solution he proposed. Kant’s vision of a federation of free republics is premised on the existence of sovereign states, yet the goal of human emancipation may require that the contemporary international system eventually be transcended.

The praxeological dimension further distinguishes a Critical Theory inspired approach from existing liberal accounts, as a gap appears between the end being worked towards. Whereas liberals seek the extension and confirmation of interstate peace between liberal democracies, critical theorists would regard this as insufficient, as the resultant order would still be based on unjust forms of exclusion. Relevant here is the work of scholars such as Andrew Linklater and James Bohman, who have investigated the possibilities for political community and democracy beyond the current states system.⁷⁹ Notably, Bohman has argued that, ‘the current situation shows that the democratic peace is not a genuine one, but

⁷⁷ Linklater, ‘The Changing Contours of Critical International Relations Theory’, p. 42.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁹ Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community*; James Bohman, *Democracy Across Borders: from Dêmos to Dêmoi* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

one whose dynamic requires the discovery of the means by which both democratic states and the international system may become more democratic in a mutually reinforcing way'.⁸⁰ To do so, he suggests that democracy must be extended to the transnational level. While this may seem considerably more demanding than the liberal aim of interstate peace, Bohman argues it is the only way for real peace to be generated. The cumulative impact of globalisation is such that the lack of conflict between states is not sufficient to create conditions of genuine peace. A larger Democratic Peace needs to be constructed through democracy existing at both the national and global levels. In a quite fundamental sense, the way we conceive of democracy and peace needs to be revised to adjust these to global historical forces.

As the praxeological component relies on the historical and normative analyses, it is difficult to do anything more than sketch out in a suggestive manner what it may look like in a critical theoretical study on Democratic Peace. Bohman's work gives one possible example of the form it may take. Driven by a desire to dismantle unjust forms of exclusion and replace them with conditions more conducive to human autonomy, it is likely that a critical theory perspective would regard the liberal conception of Democratic Peace as lacking. Not only is the end of an interstate peace insufficient, the means of achieving this goal through the promotion and extension of state level democracy is an outdated strategy, ill-suited to the present historical moment defined by the continued rise of globalising and cosmopolitan forces. From this perspective, liberals set their sights too low; theirs is a satisfied peace, shorn of true emancipatory intent. Rather than a world of democracies, in which democratic behaviour at the state level uncomfortably coexists with a non-democratic international order, the end should be a democratic world, where democracy is no longer limited to the state. The ultimate *telos* (understood in a non-linear and non-deterministic sense) should be global democracy, where democratic practices inform behaviour at all levels of politics.

Conclusion

The Democratic Peace research programme remains one of the most prominent and influential strands of IR theory at present. It occupies a central place in the discipline, both as the dominant version of liberal internationalism, and as the supposedly paradigmatic case demonstrating the strengths of positivist scholarship. Nonetheless, the research has suffered from a lack of pluralism and a tendency not to properly engage with normative and purposive questions. The study of Democratic Peace is in need of renewal and extension, and there is an onus on scholars working in different theoretical traditions to engage seriously with the claims being made. The argument here has been an attempted opening in this direction.

Some of the most pressing shortcomings in existing Democratic Peace scholarship have been established through a kind of imminent critique, whereby the

⁸⁰ James Bohman, 'Beyond the Democratic Peace: An Instrumental Justification of Transnational Democracy', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 37:1 (2006), p. 128.

argument first demonstrated internal contradictions within positivist Democratic Peace Theory, and then proceeded to offer a viable, immanent solution emerging from Frankfurt School thought. This article has outlined what a Critical Theory inspired research agenda to Democratic Peace entails, and how it offers an important and complimentary alternative. Like existing accounts, this Critical Theory framework undoubtedly has its weaknesses. It lacks the parsimony and elegance of positivist scholarship, and would also struggle to provide an equally clear and straightforward set of policy prescriptions. Nonetheless, it is highly likely that the benefits to be derived from employing Critical Theory will far outweigh any potential side effects, especially as it is meant to complement, not replace, current scholarship. The value of applying a Frankfurt School approach have been amply demonstrated in related IR subfields,⁸¹ the time is ripe for it to be applied in a sustained manner to the study of Democratic Peace.

⁸¹ Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005).