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Unsocial Kant: The Philosopher and the Un-regarded War Dead

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The license to kill is fortified by the assumption that the life of a single servant of God is worth the life of a thousand citizens of otherness.

—Balachandra Rajan (9)

Although Immanuel Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* is critical of all wars, and deeply suspicious of what is too quickly called "peace," its immediate historical occasion is the withdrawal of Frederick William II from the War of the First Coalition. Having secured "more territory for his kingdom than any other sovereign in his dynasty's history" (Clark, *Iron Kingdom* 292), the Prussian king was anxious to abandon the anti-French alliance. In an unprecedented diplomatic move, he signed a separate treaty with France at Basle on

April 5, 1795, bringing hostilities with the revolutionary armies momentarily to an abrupt close. A regicide peace was at hand, much to the disgust of Prussia's former allies, for whom the endgame of the Holy Roman Empire was now in sight. Kant may well have hoped that the treaty would affirm republican France as the nation at the forefront of the cosmopolitan federation of states to come. Yet the human and material costs of this scheme had proven to be as enormous as its outcome was uncertain. Was this peace or a mere hiatus in the fighting? Prussia had given up all of its territories west of the Rhine, the plan being to join Austria and Russia in partitioning what remained of Poland in the east. As Bohman argues, the treaty was therefore an example of "the 'pure illusion' of the balance of power [that] does nothing to

change existing conditions between states or to create new conditions that would permit peace to become more than the temporary silence of weapons” (1-2). For Kant, the truce with France represents not a sabbatical from thought but the occasion for a robust interrogation of both the nature of war and the limits of peace.

With the controversy and uneasy expectations swirling around the Treaty of Basle in mind, and with the streets of Prussian towns once again brimming with returning and discharged soldiers, Kant uses his modestly subtitled “philosophical sketch” to ask a series of very immodest questions. The philosopher is careful to abstain from naming specific countries or principalities, perhaps to evade the Prussian censors but more likely to underline that his primary motivations for intervening in the public sphere at this vexed historical moment are moral and universal as much as they are political and particular. What shall we do when the war is over? If by an accident of history and by sheer superiority of force, we have succeeded—succeeded?—in killing our enemies, destroying their armies, and incapacitating their ability to resist or attack, if we have razed their towns, bankrupted their economies, and ruined their lands and animals, if we have humiliated their leaders, conscripted their men, and laid waste to their families, if we have prevailed or survived, more or less intact, for this moment at least, what then? What will there be left to say and how shall we think of ourselves and of the vanquished others when the deed is finally done? What comes *after*? What forms of remembrance and sociality will be permitted or required in the wake of war? If we proclaim ourselves victorious (and who but the victorious name themselves as such?), how will we comport and define ourselves? What new or supplemental forms of community coalesce at the instant that the war is declared to be at an end, regardless of whether it is in fact at an end? Does the end of war mean peace? For what is peace? Nothing seems less certain at this moment when we, the victors, are told and tell each other that everything is certain, that the mission is accomplished. What does peace look like and what does it feel like both to the victors and to the state philosopher who is in the pay of the victors? What is peace to *us*, the happy, happy few, who raise our voices together in triumph, but with the blood of thousands, and of tens of thousands, on our war-ringing and on our war-weary hands?

With daring and rigor, Immanuel Kant asks and explores these questions in his 1795 treatise on the end and the ends of armed conflict—not only “the most frequently read and directly influential” of his writings (Shell, “Bowling” 153), but also a vivid example of the experimental forms, tonal variations, and ironically knowing personae characterizing the culturally oriented (or “anthropological”) work of the philosopher’s last decade. What attracts my attention here is a suggestive aside that Kant makes about the nature and future of sociality not during wartime but in the strange, overdetermined period immediately following hostilities. In *Perpetual Peace* Kant thinks a great deal about the elimination of

war in general, but that does not prevent him from making consequential remarks about what happens and what ought to happen at the conclusion of *particular* wars. To call the period following war “peace” is for Kant extremely problematic, since an important part of his text argues that the cessation of armed conflict amounts to the continuation of war by other means. The difference between peace and pacification is finer than one of contrast, as the philosopher’s opening allusion to the repose of the grave vividly attests. What sovereign authority calls “peace” demands sustained critique when the end of war in fact means either the material preparation and diplomatic scheming for more war, or the cessation of armed conflict in one part of Europe so that its bloody business can be conducted in another part.

The Treaty of Basle is for Kant a case in point. When Kant speaks of armed conflict, and specifically of the complex ways in which modern war is not only fought on the battlefield but also inflects and pervades everyday life, he nevertheless tends to speak in large scale terms: for example, proliferating war costs and unredeemable war debts mortgage states to a condition of unending aggression, directing monies away from peaceable endeavours, the education of the citizenry chief among them (8:346; 319);¹ gross violations of right committed even in the most distant wars are, he insists as a matter of fact, felt everywhere and by everyone (8:360; 330).² Kant’s point is in part that war always comes home, and when it does, home is never the same because of it. But this broad cosmo-political focus throws into relief the rare moments in which the philosopher treats the relationships between wartime and the home front on somewhat more intimate terms. When war is concluded, he reminds his readers, it nevertheless returns to the streets of Königsberg or Berlin (or Paris or London) in the form of public acts of celebration and commemoration. To what end? The domestic afterlife of war raises alarms for the philosopher, who responds with a scouring pacifist intelligence:

At the end of a war, when peace is concluded, it would not be unfitting for a nation to proclaim, after the festival of thanksgiving, a day of atonement [*Busstag*], calling upon heaven, in the name of the state, to forgive the great sin of which the human race continues to be guilty, that of being unwilling to acquiesce in any lawful constitution in relation to other nations but, proud of its independence, preferring instead to use the barbarous means of war (even though what is sought by war, namely the right of each state, is not decided by it). Festivals of thanksgiving during war for a *victory* won, hymns that (in good Hebrew [*auf gut israelitisch*]) are sung to the *Lord of Hosts* [*Herrn der Heerschaaren*], stand in no less marked contrast with the moral idea of the father of human beings; for, beyond indifference to the ways nations seek their mutual rights (though this is sufficiently worthy of mourning [*traurig*]), they also introduce [*hineinbringen*] a joy [*Freude*] at having annihilated a great many human beings or their happiness [*Glück*] (8:357; 328; Translation slightly modified, after Shell [172 n.40 and n41]).

Now the immediate context for Kant's remarks, which contrasts two forms of post-war civic life, one actual and brutalizing, the other hoped-for and fantastic, is the philosopher's vigorous de-synonymization of the right of nations and the right to go to war. Although a commonplace of international law in Kant's own day, as indeed in the present, the belief that a state is free to pursue its maxims unilaterally through force struck the philosopher as unsound and immoral. Strictly speaking, state-sponsored violence against another state returns nations to the lawless condition of nature from which they emerged as states in the first place, obviously an untenable, regressive, and self-destructive situation. There can be no legal justification for the prosecution of war when, as Kant says so emphatically in *The Metaphysics of Morals*: "Now morally practical reason pronounces in us its irresistible *veto*: *there is to be no war*" (6:354; 491). That unimpeachable law explains why Kant rejects the rationalizations and explanations of the just-war theorists, whom he derides in *Perpetual Peace* as "sorry comforters" (8:355; 326). Especially given the size and capitalization of contemporary European armies, foreign policies predicated on violence are responsible for creating the conditions for nothing less than total war—that is, war that is no longer dynastic and putatively self-limiting, but potentially measureless and annihilating in nature: a "war of extermination" [*Ausrottungskrieg*] Kant calls it (8:356; 320), perhaps the first philosopher ever to wield this frightful term. Under these nightmarish conditions, Kant worries aloud, embattled states are doomed to tear themselves to pieces, consuming and expending their resources until there is nothing left. Europe's nations and peoples will indeed find a form of "perpetual peace," as Kant says, not in the kingdom of ends but in a "grave" so vast that it will bury victims and perpetrators alike.

It is at this charged point in his argument—the conclusion of the Second Definitive Article for Perpetual Peace—that Kant pauses to express his disapproval of victorious nations which, at the conclusion of a war, indulge in public proclamations of thanksgiving for having prevailed on the battlefield. Amid a wave of triumphal militarism and crass patriotism, Kant's remarks model a much more dispassionate outlook on the end of war. To be a philosopher and not to speak out against war-mongering, whether in peacetime or in wartime, is to risk a failure of nerve and a betrayal of purpose that Julien Benda will memorably call *La Trahison des Clercs*. Not in spite but precisely because of the fervour in the streets, Kant refuses to abdicate his responsibilities as one of the learned for whom war must remain the subject of vigilant and unceasing resistance. In a telling reversal of perspective, the philosopher momentarily shifts the focus from the grim spectacle of the sovereign who "commands many thousands to sacrifice themselves for a matter that is of no concern to them" (8:354; 326) to the "great many human beings" who die at the hands of those thousands. The slaughter of one's countrymen goes un-mourned by their master and commander; but what of the enemy dead, "annihilated" and otherwise unnoticed? Or worse: insofar as the others, "the great

many" others, are regarded by the victors at all, they are only remembered and regarded *as* the annihilated. If there is a fate worse than death, perhaps this is it. The fact that the philosopher speaks generally of dead *Menschen* rather than specifically of killed "soldiers" or "enemies" registers the degree to which modern war indiscriminately consumes both combatants and non-combatants, an unsettling prospect about which Kant had expressed muted concern as early as the *Critique of Judgment* (5:263; 146).

Kant says almost nothing about what peace might also be thought to bring, namely the enormous relief that comes from being spared the awful burden of sending more soldiers away to kill and be killed. The affects and social practices of the "festivals of thanksgiving" that concern him seem consolatory, pacific, and felicitous but in Kant's hands they are described as harbouring an aggression and a murderous nonchalance about lost lives. These public celebrations fix the war in the past tense, rather than orient thought towards its reverberating violence in the present. Kant's impatience with peace-time celebrations, and his symptomatic reading of what could be called the "mood" of these celebrations, is thus perhaps best understood in the context of his decision to reject just-war theory, "based as it is on a notion of war as a delimited event with identifiable decisions and actions, [and] to investigate the pre-existing conditions that lead to war and render military violence plausible or inevitable" (Favret 39). It is hard to know what unsettles the philosopher more: that nations remain utterly "indifferent" to the "barbarous means of war," and so behave like homicidal and conscienceless automata, *or* that the citizenry publically expresses *joy* [*Freude*], of all things, at their armies "having annihilated" so many of their enemies, and with them, any possibility of their present and future "happiness." To Kant's disgust, the old world's war dead are treated not unlike the conquered peoples of the new world: as he remarks on the next page, the vanquished count "as nothing" [*für nichts*] (8:358; 329). We are invited to think about the ways in which a lack of concern, on the one hand, and a fullness of feeling, on the other, are secretly connected in the heady days after the war is said to be over.

Peacetime affect may well be as complicated and impossible as wartime affect, the subject of a searchingly intelligent new book by Mary Favret. That Kant speaks of the enemy casualties losing their happiness *as well as* their lives is one of several sober reminders that the exterminated others are not mere abstractions but precious, singular creatures who once possessed desires and pursued hopes of their own. These are desires and hopes that would be all but forgotten if the philosopher did not at this instant make of them a kind of testament, barely audible over the sounds of rejoicing crowds. The testamentary function of the enemy dead is the phenomenon that I want to emphasize most in this essay, but for the moment let me point out that Kant regrets the destruction of their lost (or perhaps stolen) happiness in the same breath that he regrets the collective surge of what can

only be its horrid simulacra in the form of the victor's joy. I note too that Kant doesn't blame "the mob" or "the idiots," which are the philosopher's usual suspects when it comes to the matter of condemning disorderly and unseemly behaviour, but "festival" goes singing patriotic hymns—presumably members of the *Bürgertum* who look and sound like they are at that moment affirming and creating a kind of peaceful civic life, people not unlike Kant. (Kant's biographer, Gulgya, recalls that the philosopher complained that his intellectual work was constantly interrupted by the sound of hymns being sung by prisoners in the jail not far from his house in Königsberg, hymns that he felt the prisoners had been compelled to sing in any case, and so were not only noisy but also devoid of a good will [149]. That fine anecdote, which I have explored elsewhere [Clark 216-217], makes me think that the philosopher imagined the clamorous victors as prisoners as well—at large and in the streets and public squares, to be sure, yet incarcerated by a militaristic culture that required them to pay homage to the victorious sovereign rather than spontaneously enact respect for the "moral idea.")

The fact that his fellows could feel a thrumming pleasure in the deaths of others, or at least trade obediently in the *signs* of such pleasure, can only confirm Kant's long-held insistence that an authentically moral existence has nothing whatsoever to do with something as contingent, variable, and irrationally motivated as the pursuit of happiness. Publically endorsed and enforced expressions of joy help create a social consensus by putting affective forms of identification to use, while also proclaiming—as if by self-confirming fiat—the transition from the frightful indeterminacies of war to the supposed certainties of peace. But to Kant's ears, these celebrations, these patriot acts, sound atavistic, blood-thirsty, ostentatious, and unenlightened. Why does no one else hear victory hymns for what they are (he seems to be saying), namely the continuation of war by other means? Hoping to underscore his point, Kant notes that the victor's songs are not *like* the prayers of the victorious Israelites to the Lord of Armies.³ They *are* these supplications, and as such "stand in no less marked contrast with the moral idea of the father of human beings." Around him, Kant fears the incursion of an ancient political theology that threatens the very idea of a religion within the limits of reason alone. In parenthesis, he adds that those prayers are offered to God "in good Hebrew" [*auf gut israelitisch*]—a winking aside that confirms the degree to which the victory festivals feel distastefully alien to Kant.⁴ These gatherings mark the moment when an imagined rational, Christian, and peaceful European community leads itself astray from the path of Enlightenment. In so many words, according to the dogmatic "logic" of Kant's rhetoric, the gloating triumphalism of the victor amounts to the becoming-Jewish of Europe, even the coalescence of a certain "Israel" within a certain "Prussia." Jews and Judaism are not to blame for Europe's self-incurred immaturity and its warring particularisms, not quite, yet they remain somehow

blameworthy, and Kant presumes that his readers will know exactly how.

In using his best German to disavow one form of crass thoughtlessness by casually perpetrating another, Kant seems oblivious to the degree to which he is enmeshed in a larger culture of exclusionary violence that is irreducible to militarism. Notwithstanding this blindness, Kant grasps that although the political theatre of victory is commemorative in nature, responsible for generating and publicizing the historic passage from war to peace, it is curiously devoid of the work of remembrance, as if loss and grief were almost unknown to its cultural operation. Kant's disappointment is palpable, even if the ironies that flow from that disappointment are finally impossible to pin down. As he says, the end of a war and the conclusion of peace call for quite different forms of belonging, and demand hitherto unknown social practices linking history with the public sphere, the indifferent living with the un-regarded dead. For what is "sociality" if its peaceableness is established not just through aggression and usurpation but through aggression and usurpation that forgets itself in paroxysms of joy?

The fact that the hearts of the victors are gladdened rather than brimming with regret and sorrow reminds Kant that—contrary to his infamous observations of the French Revolution—historical "events can move us emotionally but fail to fundamentally challenge the narratives with which we orient our commitments and social relations" (Simon 111). Let us therefore proclaim a day of atonement and repentance, Kant says, a day to call upon heaven, "in the name of the state," for forgiveness. Let us ask—without any assurance of an answer, since in all rigor we ask it not of any final arbiter, but of our frail and self-devising selves—for a pardon for stupidly pursuing war as an instrument of statecraft. Let us ask for forgiveness not only for perpetuating the chaotic lawlessness of war and for having destroyed the lives of so many enemy others but also for taking terrible, shameful pleasure in that dirty work. Let us take this unique opportunity to remember that the point of view of those whose military histories have prevailed is of necessity incomplete; let us recall that that loss makes us much less than what we think we are. On this day of victory, Kant counter-intuitively proclaims, let us rather contemplate how, in vanquishing our enemies we in fact defeat *ourselves*, and unseat our thoughtless and pleasurable self-sufficiency. Let us remember that the our enemy's bloody demise remains memorable and important, an unimpeachable catastrophe whose memory *summons* us—quite literally transforms us into summoning creatures, asking for forgiveness. The annihilated others, and the specter of their ruined happiness, haunts Kant, who in turn affirms their testamentary and transitive power in his call for a prayer for peace and forgiveness (itself a paradigmatically testamentary and transitive act), of which *Toward Perpetual Peace* is also an unforgettable example. And as Roger Simon notes in a richly suggestive discussion of the transformation of the social practices of everyday life in the wake of mass violence

and historically traumatic events, what is “at stake . . . is the question of one’s attentiveness to the stories and images addressed to us that arrive from another space and time—stories and images that insist that remembrance be accountable to the demand for non-indifference” (133).

A great deal is therefore happening in Kant’s curious remarks—more than I can possibly address in this context—for this is a text whose marginal status belies the degree to which it condenses themes and problems quickening Kant’s *Toward Perpetual Peace* as a whole, and that constitute a kind of neuralgic point where we might bring a symptomatic reading to bear on the philosopher’s fears for the present and hopes for the future of civic life. Kant’s countrymen behave as if the enemy dead meant nothing, or, what amounts to the same thing, especially in a text that several times speaks of war-deaths in terms of cannibalism, as if they constituted a kind of spectral food whose purpose is to nourish and pleasure the needy psyches of the victors who demand not only to win but also to triumph. With Kant, we witness a grotesque economy of conspicuous consumption that perhaps sounds a little less outlandish if one recalls its role in, for example, Ari Folman’s 2008 documentary about the afterlife of Israel’s incursions into Lebanon, *Waltz With Bashir*—a putative anti-war film in which securing the emotional well-being of Israeli soldiers who commit atrocities against Palestinian civilians is felt to play a greater testamentary role than the atrocities themselves, thereby privatizing and psychologizing what is in fact a cosmo-political disaster, a question of publicity and right, rather than happiness, as Kant would say.

Kant’s complicated interest in the matter of peacetime affect in the passage at hand is worth remarking, not least because he too is suspicious of the ways in which emotion, like commemoration, is mobilized both to enable and obscure barbarity. *On the one hand*, the shocking lack of feeling, the affect of inattentiveness that characterizes warring nations who kill others with impunity but dare to do so in the name of right, nations which, in Kant’s view, should otherwise suffer the pangs of guilt yet seem sociopathically free of such feelings. This studied or careless “indifference” proves the philosopher’s insight that the impediment to progress is not negatively ignorance but a positive and perverse will *not-to-know*. Observing the victory celebrations, Kant may well have felt the shadow of the uneducable fall heavily across the path of the teacher, and the teacher of teachers. The victory hymns demonstrate a thoughtless and negligent disregard for the catastrophically aggressive means by which “nations seek their mutual rights.” That moral idiocy—masking as statecraft—is alone “sufficiently worthy of mourning” [*traurig*], as Kant says with such precision, but there is even a greater grief to be endured, namely the sadness and loss marking the surplus of “joy” that the mass deaths of the enemy generates in the cheering and jeering victors.

Yet again, Kant finds himself acting as the spectator of spectators, and yet again that observational role is infused

with feeling. Where his countrymen feel happiness, Kant feels sorrow, as if playing witness to Europe’s war losses compels him supplementally to register grief and, more important, to insist upon grievability where, strangely, none exists . . . or *seems* to exist. Who is “worthy of mourning,” and what are the historically variable conditions under which some war deaths are keenly felt and others not felt at all? These are the prescient questions that activate Kant’s disappointment here, as it does, I think, his sorrow, his sense of the power of unacknowledged loss. This regret is, I would argue, part of a larger feeling of dashed hope that saturates *Toward Perpetual Peace* and that leads Kant finally to what he calls “desperate conclusions” or “inferences of despair” [*verzweifeltten Folgerungen*] (8:380; 346).

On the other hand, if the victorious sovereigns believe, against all evidence, that they are doing no wrong, their citizens certainly feel—or are compelled normatively to feel—that everything is right, now that the war is over and has been won, as if being the last man standing and being upright were remotely the same thing. One imagines Kant shaking his head, a man who finds himself both a part *of* and a part *from* this demonstrably cursed world. In the zealous rejoicing of the victors, Kant senses a truly threatening prospect, not only the loss of human lives and human happiness, as he says, but something more sinister, namely the loss of loss itself. Perhaps “war of extermination” is the word Kant invents to name this absolute form of want. The mass graves that Kant pictures on several occasions in *Towards Perpetual Peace*, the vast killing grounds that swallow up perpetrators, victims, and indeed the fact of right itself, strike me as the philosopher’s lurid figure for this coming extinction event. Before such a dreadful prospect, Kant urges literate Europeans to read the victory festivals against the grain, and to see that their gleeful celebrations and their elated proclamation that war has come to an end constitute what we would today call the triumphalist phase of an incomplete act of mourning. The victors have done with the dead, but it seems that they cannot have *done* with having done with them: how else to explain this public gloating over the destruction of the enemy? One can indeed kill the dead, by rendering them ungrievable, murdering their memories, and by forgetting that they too were once alive, felt joy and feared death. Yet the very over-going nature of this annihilation, coupled with the joyously desirous attachment to the disappearing of the enemy, paradoxically ensures that their loss is not lost, not lost without remainder. In their flashy but scripted exuberance, the triumphs are scenes of regulated aversion, a kind of social conjuration that seeks, as Derrida says in another context, “to reassure, but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself . . . that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead” (*Specters* 48).

As Derrida remarks, “nothing is less sure” than these sorts of death sentences and obituary practices whose reiterative enthusiasm has the strange effect of creating an alibi that also puts the murderer at the scene of the crime. Kant bears

witness to this wartime dislocation of time and place, affect and morality, and indeed exploits its uncertainties as an opening—at once delicate and profound—to imagine new forms of sociality at odds with the culturally legitimated forms happening noisily around him, rooted as those victory hymns are in the foreclosure of the history of violence and in an indifference to its testamentary significance. It was Kant's great insight as a philosopher of peace to see that, under the conditions of military modernity, war is not only a punctual event, with a beginning and an end, but also a pervasive milieu of state-sponsored and financialized destruction that penetrates the everyday, that entangles everyone and everything in unredeemable war debts, and whose disfiguring violence extends to the far reaches of the globe. (It should not be forgotten that Kant calls for forgiveness for war violence in the context of escalating war debts that are unforgivable, and whose unforgiveability leads to yet more war.) Living all of his life in a garrison town in one of the most militarized societies on the planet no doubt helped Kant come to these conclusions late in his life, from whose unique vantage point he sees the advent of total war. Kant would therefore agree with contemporary pacifist thinkers like Chris J. Cuomo, who argues that histories focussing on military crises and events neglect “the omnipresence of militarism,” and “allow the false belief that the absence of declared armed conflicts is peace, the polar opposite of war” (Cuomo 31). The absent presence of the enemy dead “puts our politics and our ethics to the test” (Simon 133) and it does so at the moment when the consensus is not only that their lives and their happiness are irrelevant but also, more strangely, more tellingly, that that irrelevance calls for both commemorative celebration and periodizing containment. For Kant, victor's justice is not justice, and, as Christina Howells remarks, after Derrida, “to be *just* our principles must respect others who are no longer or not yet present. Our responsibility cannot disregard those who are absent, be it in time or space” (151). For as the philosopher says in *Perpetual Peace*, we cannot indemnify ourselves against the abrogation of the moral law, wherever it occurs: “a violation of right on *one* place on earth is felt in *all*” (8:360; 330). Under these conditions of universally and historically mutual vulnerability—felt as much as known—the opposite of forgetting cannot simply be commemoration, which Kant sees being put to the most awful uses in the streets and in the public squares, but the much more difficult “prospect of justice.”⁵

Justice begins, if it begins at all, in affirming that one seeks it, hopes and prays and works for it, and from an irrevocably unjust place. That is why Kant says that, strictly speaking, there is no unjust enemy, or at least no imperious pronouncement that there is an unjust enemy, since to say so is to claim to speak from a position of moral sanctity that is, strictly speaking, unavailable to human beings (8:346; 320).⁶ In this way, Kant's wager recalls Adorno's insistence that, “for the sake of the *possible*, one must comprehend the impossibility of redemptive thought from the standpoint of an unredeemed world” (Simon 1). In the text at hand, redemptive

thought comes unexpectedly in the form of a *prayer* uttered by the unforgiven in an unpardonable condition of warring violence that contaminates the time of peace and indeed finds an afterlife in the form of celebrations of peace. A prayer for forgiveness is paradoxically a figure here for non-dogmatic practices of remembrance rather than dogmatic practices of commemoration that hold the war at a certain saving distance and that mistakenly call that distance “peace.”

It may well be impossible to keep these social forms and public performances from polluting each other, a fact that Kant quietly concedes by drawing from the same religious figural reservoir to describe each. And yet, against the victory hymns, Kant's prayers acknowledge, as if for the first time, that the un-regarded dead and the abrogation of the moral law that has led to their violent disappearing, exert an inexorable pressure upon what it means to dwell together and be both human and moral. Frederick the Great had himself characterized the violent aftermath of more than a century of war as having stamped the German-speaking lands with a “deadly imprint” (Clark, *Iron Kingdom* 19). Kant appears to take the sovereign at his word and reads those indelible traces of useless suffering, death, destruction, pain, and loss as testamentary and transitive in nature—that is, as demanding non-indifference and as connecting the war dead with the living, the past with the present, in earnest of a less jingoistic and more peaceful tomorrow. Kant's text models this stance of non-indifference, and is itself an example of the transformation of public life into a perpetual labour of interrogation of how sociality is enacted or performed—*performance* here meaning not a practice added into an already existing *socius*, but imagined actively to *be* that *socius*, a place where sociality means unsociably subjecting “existing practices to continual critique and the conflictual work of repair, renewal, and invention” (Simon 6). The prayer for forgiveness that flashes up in Kant's text stands as a metaphor for that labor, somehow at once earnest and ironic. Peacetime means not a respite but, quite to the contrary, marks a period of maximal rethinking about the very nature of sociality. Prayer, in other words, is philosophy's anachronistic way of giving form to the properly deformative churn of peacetime affect. And it stands as a kind of *mis-en-abyme* for the moment that philosophy becomes “a critical medium for historical cognition,” and thus a text possessing “a dialectical (rather than evasive or otherwise reactive) relation to history” (Pfau 227).

That Kant models prayer as a figure for this consciousness is perhaps surprising in the work of a thinker for whom “ceremonial rituals, petitionary prayers, words of divine praise, penance, the observance of statutory laws prescribed by church traditions . . . serve[d] as illusory substitutes for doing what a truly good God would demand of us: namely, our ordinary moral duty as human beings” (Wood, “Introduction” xiv). But in *Perpetual Peace* the reader is asked to think of prayer otherwise than either naive credulity or self-abasing flattery. Kant had in fact already done so in a con-

temporaneous text, *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* (1793), where he distills the essence of the Lord's Prayer and finds something to affirm there. As Anne-Lise François argues, Kant praises the Lord's Prayer "for 'capturing the spirit of prayer' by hardly being a prayer at all, since it does not ask for things to be otherwise but only that we may be what we already stand to be by virtue of the act of prayer itself—'human[s] well pleasing to God:' it 'contains no actual request for something that God in his wisdom might refuse, but a wish instead which, if earnest, will itself bring about its objective (to become a human being well-pleasing to God)'—in other words, it expresses a wish which to have *is* to have granted" (66).

Just so in the passage from *Perpetual Peace*, where prayer is not a petition *for* worthiness so much as an act *of* worthiness that makes estimable what others, steeped in their bloodthirsty pleasures, have come to believe is unworthy—unworthy even of mourning. Uttered and shared as a way of testifying to the absent presence of the un-regarded dead, and of bearing witness to the traces of the histories of those who have not prevailed, prayer is here an example of expanding sociality to include absent and otherwise abjected presences. It is in the most literal sense "not a propositional truth but rather the truth that one *makes* or *does*, living truly, that is, staying open and owning up to the coming of the other," as John Caputo has said of prayer in general (297). It is a condition of un-patriotic expectancy, *there* where there is so much unlooked-for and so much already-foreseen. If one must in some sense *be* at peace in order to proclaim it, and if peace is not an achievement but a transitive turning-*toward*, as the very title of Kant's text plainly says, then perhaps that minimal originary condition is prayer of the sort that the philosopher imagines: the prayer *for* peace is itself peace, peace that is not pacification but a step towards doing justice, not madly trying to kill the dead but a perilous opening to the fact that their blood remains indelibly on our too often indifferent and careless hands.

I would argue that Kant's uncharacteristic appeal to communal forms of supplication is entirely in keeping with two important principles quickening *Perpetual Peace*: first, with text's strategically unruly commitment to wartime anachronism (modelled on 18th century peace projects, Kant's text deliberately mimics key elements of a genre that was from the start identified with dreamy improbability and "ineffectual ideas" [8:342;317]), and thus to a political and ethical universe in which, as Favret argues, "befores and afters have not yet been determined" (57); and second, with the text's robust affirmation of the work of the "as if" and the virtual in all social relations: the promises, credit, testaments, covenants, mutual agreements, and other vulnerable and un-insurable acts of faith—this includes a faith in knowledge, empirically unverifiable but for that, no less real—that Kant locates at the heart of imagining and creating peace. These acts of faith include gestures as delicate, tenuous, and necessary as the "hoped-for hope" with which his text precariously

concludes . . . and in fact *dares* expectantly to conclude, perhaps the most vivid testament to the ways in which, for Kant, faith remains as irreducible to credulity as it is necessary to philosophy.⁷ For Kant's own text, staged as a fictional peace treaty but without any confirming signatures, is itself an example precarious faith—an impossible wager, as the philosopher concedes at the start (he characterizes his text as "firing off all his skittle balls" or "tossing his eleven pins" [8:317; 317]), whose outcome is anything but assured.

In a world in which dishonesty, even and especially with oneself, cannot be definitely expunged much less discerned, having faith, taking leaps of faith, asking others for faith—*prayer*, in other words—are an essential part of what Wood calls "our capacity for an indeterminate mode of life, one that is open-ended and self-devised" ("Kant" 57). It is that "suspension of certainty, not of belief," as Derrida says of prayer ("Epoché" 31), that Kant here contrasts to the ill-won confidence of the triumphant victors, those who would disembowel civic life in the name of patriotism. The Prussian philosopher in effect says: I pray you to pray *otherwise*, and in that instant, together and in earnest of those soldiers and civilians who are dead (or who are not yet born into the warring world that will claim their lives in future wars), to affirm the bonds between civic life, historical memory, and practices of remembrance. In the form of my entreaty, I implore you to pray, and thus to be what you already stand to be—in the possession of an historical consciousness—by the act of prayer itself. I ask you to pray for the war dead, whoever and wherever they are, and in that act of recollection acknowledge that the obligations of respect extend beyond the living to include the dead, "the nonpresent life of those who are not living, present living beings, living beings in the present, contemporaries" (Derrida, *Beast* 110). With Derrida, Kant seems to say, and for moral reasons above all, "One must therefore inscribe death in the concept of life" (*Beast* 110).

The prayer for forgiveness is not an attempt to ward off an injurious crime but instead a turning towards the specters that David Simpson well describes as "haunting the present from the present itself" (185), and that mark the uncanny non-coincidence of the contemporary with itself. The end of the war and the claim that peace is at hand in no way frees the citizen from the memories of war's catastrophe for victors and vanquished alike—or from the obligations that flow transitively from that remembrance and that embarrass our claims to triumphant self-sufficiency. The un-regarded dead, like the abrogation of the moral law that has led to the liquidation of their lives, their happiness, and finally, their grievability, require, Kant suggests, a substantial and ongoing re-evaluation of the relationship between social existence, unconditional ethical obligation, and historical memory. If we, the happy victors do not, amid our celebrations, regard the testamentary power of the enemy dead, we can be sure that—like the baleful images that peer out at us from Goya's *Disasters of War* series—they regard us, exposing us to their obscene exposure and imploring us to forgive the unforgiv-

able. The un-regarded war dead remind us that among us are those who are not among us.

NOTES

¹As Kant argues “Idea for a Universal History:” “Although, for example, the governors of our world now have no money left over for public educational institutions or in general for anything that has to do with what is best for the world, because everything is always miscalculated ahead of time toward the next future war. . . (117).”

²All textual citations to Kant refer to the eight volume *Akademie* edition of *Kants Gesammelt Werke* (Berlin: Prussian Academy of Sciences [now Walter de Gruyter], 1902-) followed, after a semicolon, with a reference to the English translation in the relevant volumes of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

³As Shell notes: “‘Lord of Armies’ [*Herrn der Heerschaaren* (Lord of Hosts, but also *Heere*, armies)]” (172 n40).

⁴Mary J. Gregor translates *auf gut israelitisch* as “in the style of the Israelites,” but this seems to me to be at once too literal and not literal enough. “In the style” makes it seem that Kant’s concern is more purely formal and, as it were, anthropologically descriptive, thereby emptying the philosopher’s phrasing of its colloquial dismissiveness and knowing familiarity. Does Gregor’s translation then inadvertently indemnify Kant against war, against the war that he is at this instant conducting against Jews and Judaism but in the name of peace? To fight war, Kant cites and approves an already existing war against the putative enemies of Enlightenment Christendom. In their victory festivals, Europeans attack themselves, poisoning their “truest” cosmopolitan nature, but in attacking that attack with reference to “the Israelites,” Kant cannily and uncannily reproduces that auto-immune gesture in his own writing.

⁵Simon’s citation and discussion of Yerushalmi is worth remembering here, since it is an argument that has powerfully shaped my own:

[G]iven the light shed by the proposition that the antonym of ‘forgetting’ is not ‘remembering’ but the prospect of justice [Yerushalmi 119], the irresolvable difficulties of redemptive thought do not release one from the obligations of remembrance. Indeed, these obligations require a reappraisal of the links between civic life, historical memory, and the educative force of various practices of remembrance. At stake in such a reappraisal is a response to the question of the political character of remembrance; more specifically, how and why a social, and often conflictual practice of remembrance might be central to establishing the conditions necessary for democratic life” (1-2).

My argument is that Simon’s remarks succinctly describe Kant’s tactics in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, the only modification being that for Kant “democratic life” would need to substituted with “peaceful, republican life.”

⁶But Kant’s views of the unjust enemy are notoriously unstable and contradictory. See, for example, Cavallar (103-112).

⁷The last paragraph of Kant’s text captures this fragile condition of conditionality or hoped-for hope:

If it is a duty to realize the condition of public right, even if only in approximation by unending progress, and if there is also a *well-founded hope of this*, then the perpetual peace that follows upon what have till now been falsely called peace treaties . . . is no empty idea, but a task that, gradually solved, comes steadily closer to its goal (since the times during which equal progress takes place will, *we hope*, become always shorter (8:386; 351; emphasis mine).

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Lean Earth Off Trees Unaslant, V

By Peter Larkin

Earth dips or flexes but arises to its own stark alliances of shelter: nor do the generations of trees as such but only at their siting's seedless collective of lift.

Obtaining in their uprights more than can be intensified: the tensile of trees is in direct stretch given out at a levity of earth-slump freely abraded, cageless in this running out to the unsupplied: in spite of a resourced reluctance, triggers the unaslant.

The earth takes aisled refuge in these vertical compressions, sizes toward expressive glean an unleaning. By ground (not geophilous) generously unhooked until standing immoderately below the arcless upper air, at the stilled tip of the reduction.

Closegrown is unrelinquished directory of reach, a crown faring the toss or drape without stripping the verticals out of its stream: any slip over sky is tippage a whole proneness upon the offered danger above.

Earth allows this safe standing to be equated against it. In-offensiveness can't spurn the burden manifest in trees, how they hum horizon at a co-infinite diminishment of their tapering reef.

Constant substitutes (trees) of an earth nakedly rolling by declension of abyss/peak. Won't consume these absorptions by relegating cover to surface: live out the site of spoil by keeling it toward vertical grain.

How pines surpass the earth's own leaving off by inciting what horizons it at another stricken behalf, and the blow was vertical.

Once trunks stall at the upright they no longer improvise but tell the speculation: single tapering pillars collectively aburst, filled from earth but unfuelled straight to its leanness elect.

Create a random arborescence, the root is regarded a self-avoiding sequence of high adjacencies, from plotting such edge the connector is acyclic: for non-root vehicles there is no difference of rest from the zest of holding tall.