

POLITICS AND PEACE

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To Perpetual Peace. Whether this satirical inscription on a certain Dutch shopkeeper's sign, on which a graveyard was painted, holds for *men* in general, or especially for heads of state who can never get enough of war, or perhaps only for the philosophers who dream this sweet dream, is not for us to decide. However, the author of this essay does set out one condition. . . . The practical politician must not claim, in the event of a dispute with a theorist, to detect some danger to the nation in those views that the political theorist expresses openly and without ulterior motive.... By this *clausula salvatoria*, the author of this essay will regard himself to be expressly protected in the best way possible from all malicious interpretation.

(Immanuel Kant, Preface to *Perpetual Peace*)

My goal is to work my way back to Kant's defensive preface to *Perpetual Peace*, the prophetic essay situated by many at the origin of modern conceptions of peace and international diplomacy. Suffice it to say for the moment that the following reflections are intended to reveal the epitaph in Kant's epigraph—the eternal repose residing in perpetual peace.

Imagining relation

One of the master ideas to come down to us from the eighteenth century holds that the imagination is central to all relations between self and other, however one might designate this otherness. The imagination is central to Adam Smith's idea of sympathy, and Kant uses it as a bridge to

unify his critical philosophy. Whether referring to objects or other people, we require a faculty by which to extend understanding to them, and this faculty continues even today to be described as imaginative. Postmodern theorists, for example, conceive of human relations in terms of identity politics, but at the core of identification is the power to imagine, be it the power to sympathize or to conceive of a party different from oneself. In effect, then, relation is itself a function of the imagination. Moreover, no relation, I want to claim, exists for long that cannot be well imagined, for which some symbolic object or idea cannot be found.

The four dominant modes of relation are religion, aesthetics, ethics, and politics.¹ They deserve to be called modes insofar as they name different others to which the self (or another principal) may relate imaginatively. Religion is about the relation of goodness between subject and god called the sublime. Often nature, fate, or providence as personified forces or overarching systems are also called sublime. Aesthetics is about the relation of goodness between subject and object called beauty. Ethics is about the relation of goodness between subjects called character or virtue. Finally, politics is about the relation of goodness between communities called peace.

Peace may seem at first glance to be an odd choice to name the relation of goodness in politics. A more obvious candidate might be the idea of utopia. But utopia comes into being as a concept only with Thomas More's treatise in 1516, and this late invention seems to exclude its being considered as the privileged good of politics. Moreover, the traditional opposition between ethics and politics exposes the unfitness of utopia as a candidate for the political good. Ethics and politics are often at war because ethics does not want to sacrifice even one person to improve the relations among other people. Ethics strives for a wholly inclusive community, but it defines this community as a collection of autonomous individuals having value in themselves only as ends and never as means to an end. If ethics aims at a wholly inclusive community of individuals, then "utopia" may be described by rights as an ethical concept, regardless of the fact that Utopian desire seems to stress the wrong perspective on this community, coming as it does from the collective rather than the individual point of view. The ethical dimension of the Utopian is made obvious by the realization that a

¹ I will not discuss cognition, although it is surely dominant, because its objects are various, whereas the modes of relation of interest to me here tend to represent their objects as being of a certain kind.

utopia can never be considered as a truly good place until it is the only place. For a utopia based on exclusion is no utopia at all.

Only if we begin to imagine politics as a relation occurring between communities, might we understand that peace is the political good. That is to say, in my definition, politics concerns how relations are to be established and maintained between more than one political group. This definition has the advantage of trying to name a realm in which the relation between principal (self) and other is noticeably different from those of ethics, aesthetics, and religion. It also recognizes that the primary difficulty of politics lies not in forming communities, which in fact spring forth spontaneously, but in finding ways of harmonizing the needs of different communities. This difficulty applies obviously to factions within one society as much as to different nation states, although I will be most concerned with the latter.

I recognize that my definition may seem extreme or restrictive, especially given the current scene in which one is hard put to see how anything might *not* be defined as political. Why am I adopting such a restrictive definition? For two reasons. First, I am engaging in a thought experiment about the act of definition itself. How do we represent the limits of definition? What relations and connections do we need to imagine, and how, to distinguish one object from another—which is, after all, what definition is all about? Finally, how do we define the relations used to represent definitions? Second, I want to express my gratitude to Kant, whose method of thinking I find increasingly appealing. Kant sketched fairly strict definitions of all the modes discussed here with the exception of politics. This might have been the case because he was so intent on understanding the individual nature of thought that he did not focus on its collective dimension. But it might also have been the case because politics has subjects and objects so different from those of the other modes of relation that it endangers the imagination of relation as such.

Kant's central thrust, it seems to me, is always aesthetic, that is, based on individual feeling.² He focuses on the beauty of thinking about how objects come to symbolize our thoughts and emotions, usually our moral

² This statement may seem jarring to those who consider Kant's greatest achievements to be in moral philosophy. Nevertheless, the moral self emerges in Kant via what can only be called an aesthetic process, and aesthetics remains the primary mode by which the individuality of the moral self is represented both to itself and to others. See Luc Ferry (1993) for a discussion of how subjectivity became an aesthetic function.

ones, emphasizing the process by which the relation between self and other is itself represented. But Kant is also obsessed with what I would call the problem of death-defying objectivity, being well aware of the potential rigor mortis of thought embodied in objects. Understanding requires a real or symbolic object, Kant holds, if understanding is to be put in relation, if it is to have any consequence, if it is to lead us toward the world and away from death. But anytime that understanding comes to reside in an object, it risks objectification; it risks to die on the spot, losing the imaginative and creative flexibility that we like to associate with it. To take Kant's most famous example of this paradox, freedom is incomprehensible precisely because it cannot be objectively represented. Freedom remains freedom only as long as it bears no relation to anything else.

Kant makes a crucial advance in our understanding of the limits of political representation when he discovers the inability of individuals to understand freedom. It is true that he defines this limitation as a problem of cognition rather than imagination: that is, since cognition cannot relate to metaphysical objects such as freedom in its own terms, it requires a leap of faith via the imagination to conceptualize a mode of relation beyond itself. But what if a similar limitation arises in the case of political imagination? What if individual thought fails to provide an objective representation of community? This would mean that Kant's remarks about freedom—which is after all the concept charged in his philosophy with bearing the weight of individuality relative to the requirements of social existence—are in fact a confession that human beings cannot imagine the political relation at all.

This observation, if correct, requires two additional comments, one by way of nuancing Kant's definition of politics and another by way of anticipating my eventual return to *Perpetual Peace* and the graveyard with which it begins. First, Kant defines freedom on the basis of autonomy and against heteronomy, which means that freedom is attached to individuality in itself and not to anything remotely resembling interpersonal or social relations. Freedom is, quite simply, the defining quality of the individual self. However, if human beings cannot adequately comprehend their own individual freedom, consider how difficult it is for them to imagine free relations between two or more political communities. Second, if political relation exists at the limits of the human imagination, it explains why Kant begins *Perpetual Peace* with a reference to death: in the absence of a mode of symbolizing what the political is, he has no choice but to symbolize this

absence itself. Thus, eternal rest, the death of all human relating, comes to stand for perpetual peace, the relation of the good for politics.

Incidentally, Kant's most gifted interpreters—I am thinking here especially of Hannah Arendt and the Existentialists³—have tried to repair this gap in the political imagination by defining politics on the basis of individual acts of self-reflection. The result has been a description of politics in which the individual creates his or her own political identity through an act of self-imagination, the successful community being one lucky enough to contain many of these self-imaginers. I am not convinced that this is a bad approach, especially since it has inspired some of my own work, but my goal here is obviously to experiment with another perspective, one that tries to define the political in terms of a distinct and unique relation recognizably different from those of aesthetics, ethics, and religion.

It might be objected that we reach an impasse whenever we try to imagine a relation and that it hardly makes sense to focus in particular on the aporias of the political imagination. It is now commonplace in deconstructive circles to argue that relation necessarily involves the illegal transport of thought from one term to another, since the simple fact of relation is always based on a referential error.⁴ Nevertheless, we do imagine relations all the time, so I consider it a groundless philosophical worry to fret too long about how the facticity of relation might impede more pragmatic thoughts about *kinds* of relations. Here one of Stanley Cavell's analogies might clarify what I mean: the fact that I have a body is not the same kind of fact as the fact that I have a body of such and such a size in such and such a condition. "We are not well advised," Cavell muses, "to inspect the population to discover who among us in fact have bodies and who have not" (1994, 7). In other words, the fact that we imagine relations is a different kind of fact from the one concerning the kinds of the relations

³ See especially Hannah Arendt (1982), where she translates Kant's idea of judgment into political terms. In terms of the Existentialists, I am thinking about their description of willing as a function that single-handedly creates an individual's destiny, despite the most adverse circumstances. Cornelius Castoriadis, incidentally, makes the valuable point that Arendt's followers mistakenly believe, under the force of her reading, that Kant resolved the conflict between autonomy and heteronomy. See "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy," in Castoriadis (1991, 81-123, esp. 88).

⁴ The exposure of this "error" is a constant theme in both Continental and American deconstruction. Derrida (1978: 169-74), for instance, deconstructs the logic of relation via an analysis of exemplarity, while Paul de Man (1979: 151-52) describes metaphor as a failed relation.

that we do imagine. Elsewhere I have called these other kinds of facts "artifacts," thereby emphasizing their reliance on appearance, material conditions, and artistic making (Siebers, 1994). Here I simply want to insist that we need to think about the pragmatics of imagining relations rather than allow ourselves be defeated from the outset by doubts about the facticity of relation itself.

A pragmatic emphasis requires that we characterize the particular ways that religion, aesthetics, ethics, and politics imagine what a good relation is. In what form does relation appear to us in each mode? If it is the case, as I insist, that having successful experiences of relation relies on our ability to find ways of imagining different forms of goodness, this question is hardly trivial. It is in fact the most difficult and urgent question that we might pose.

In religion, the sublime appears as the felt experience of a higher and unknowable power of understanding by whom or by which our lack of understanding is repaired. God symbolizes a superior understanding for which we have no conception other than the sacred itself. That is, we know God without really knowing him via a deficiency in our own thinking. The sacred represents collective agreement in the form of a leap of faith in the existence of a mind or state of being capable of harmonizing the diverse experiences of human beings with each other and with the object world. Agreement and commensurability are God as such.

In the case of aesthetics, beauty emerges as an aura of agreement felt by everyone confronted by an object; this object requires us to name it as beautiful, without, however, our being able to say what beauty is. Beauty *is* because people agree that it exists, without setting out to reach an agreement about it beforehand.

The imagination of ethical goodness would appear to be more arduous, but only if we underestimate how very difficult is the concept of beauty. The ethical good aims at the representation of a person in whom we imagine character. Character, like beauty, is a form of consensus, but we locate this consensus not in the people joining in the presence of the object but within the person who is said to possess virtue, which is to say that we perceive the person of character as possessing inner harmony and strength of will. Character, unlike beauty, is not without concepts. We can—and often do—write a recipe for it. And yet, possessing the recipe does not ensure that we will attain virtue, so that the end effect of experiencing ethical goodness embodied in a character is not unlike the mysterious sensation of standing before a beautiful painting. It is no accident that a

historical confusion exists between beauty and goodness, because we view character as beautiful and, consequently, are led to hope that beauty also possesses ethical goodness. So "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," as Keats put it. Kant has the best language to explain this confusion. He explains that ethics requires an aesthetics of morals to make it accessible to human understanding. The aesthetic component of ethics lies precisely in the huge chasm between our understanding of what character is and our ability to perform the prescribed actions that will build or exercise it. The crossing of this chasm seems a mysterious leap of faith, beyond prescription, the result being that the virtuous person is as beautiful as he or she is good.

If we define politics in terms of alliances between communities, its goodness is perhaps the most obvious of all. Consensus between political bodies is peace. When I say that peace is the most obvious form of the political good, however, I do not mean to undercut its difficulty. While the experience of beauty is compelled yet unfathomable and the experience of character is fathomable yet unachievable, the experience of peace is impossible to locate in any one person, object, or symbol. Peace presents a serious problem of representation. It is not God. It is not a work of art. It is not a saint or a portrait of the good will. It cannot be symbolized by a building or public space, although it is important to understand the role of monuments, court houses, and other architectural wonders in our imagination of the concept of the state or of justice. Peace appears to be the opposite of the work of art, which is an object lacking a concept. Peace is a concept without one object, which is another way of saying that it is a concept with many objects. And this is a way of saying that we rely on other modes of relation to imagine the political good, these other modes most obviously being aesthetics, ethics, and religion.

Each mode provides a particular resource used to compensate for our lack of political imagination. The aesthetic mode lends itself to the creation of political artifacts, although their ability to signify the political good remains inadequate. Symbolic objects such as flags may represent harmonious political bodies, but we experience these objects not with distinctive political emotions but as aesthetic objects, as beautiful. Different nations appreciate and protect traveling exhibits of artifacts, but the ultimate meaning of the exhibits remains lodged in the objects themselves, there being no supplementary symbolism there to represent the good political relations that made the traveling exhibit possible. (Peace is, however, a bit like a museum in that people go to museums to look at objects but often end up contemplating each other; the artifacts in museums

become an occasion for an experience of social harmony but only if they are somehow ignored.)

Ethics helps to embody our desire for political direction and relation in individual human beings. Political leaders hold out to citizens the hope of peace, the idea of a strong nation, or of a manifest political destiny, but we experience these leaders in ethical terms as courageous, honorable, and loving (or in aesthetic terms as charismatic, graceful, and handsome). Historically, of course, great houses have been wed to join political bodies, while today our leaders shake hands, embrace, kiss, and exchange smiles to much fanfare. We read these gestures as political alliance. But what we are really seeing are traditional representations of the successful joinings between individuals, which explains why political commentators and politicians alike are so quick to talk about the friendships that arise between heads of state during political negotiations. Ethics comes to the rescue to repair the gap in our imagination of politics. For friendship is, finally, an ethical representation, albeit strongly integrated into the tradition of political science.

Once upon a time, of course, we imagined nations in terms of their religious worship. The god of the clan, Robertson Smith declared, is the clan itself, and Durkheim used the idea of "collective representation" to capture the same mode of religious imagination.⁵ Religious representation was for centuries the privileged vehicle by which communities imagined themselves, but once God died, it became increasingly difficult for human beings to place their faith in such representations. The opening up of the world has also made it more difficult for communities to represent their uniqueness in terms of their objects of worship since increasingly communities share religious objects. The vestiges of the old alliance between religious and political representation remain everywhere we look, but they no longer possess for the most part the power necessary to imagine the state of being of good, collective human relating. We easily ally ourselves with the totemic symbols of groups, such as the mascots of sport teams, but no one really believes any more that the lion, for example, is an adequate symbol for the unique properties and cohesiveness of the football team playing in Detroit.

⁵ For the earliest attempts to define religion and social structure as mirror images of one another, see William Robertson Smith (1894) and Emile Durkheim (1968).

Politics appears to rely on no special form of representation. It might be objected that there is a reason for this, and a very commonsensical one at that. Political harmony must be negotiated. But it is not particularly easy to imagine the form that these negotiations would take. In the modern world, in fact, it is as if the very idea of negotiation compensates for our inability to imagine peace. Trade now provides the preferred language of international relations. The leveling effect of the market, we believe, will adjust the differences between nations, put them on an equal footing, and harmonize potential conflicts. "Peace through business" might be the slogan of modern international relations. And yet, while everyone wants to make a profit, the profit motive has never been a firm guarantee against exploitation, and it does not take a long glance at the globe to realize that the international market divides different nations into enclaves defined by their raw materials, cheap labor, and advanced technology. International business is more interested in maintaining the distinctive character of these enclaves in order to exploit their role in a larger chain of production than it is in leveling the playing field and producing long-term, beneficial relations among nations.

Politics and eternal rest

Given the failure of human beings to imagine the relation of goodness in politics, it is not surprising that they would choose to represent this failure itself as the political good. And so Kant's philosopher dreams his sweet dream of peace, alternately imagining the perpetual harmony of the starry heavens above and the eternal rest of the graveyard below. In both cases, the symbol of perpetual peace is death. Perhaps this explains why Kant opens his essay by making a double bargain with death. First, he presents the desire for perpetual peace as a joke, engaging in a bit a gallows's humor at the expense of humanity. The Dutch shopkeeper's sign makes a mockery of the common fate of philosophers, politicians, and citizens, throwing together peacemakers and warmongers, all of whom court death to make their dreams of perpetual peace come true. Second, Kant signs a peace treaty with the powers of the state, with those who cannot get enough of war and death, hoping to disclaim in advance any disloyal opinions that they might assign to him. But you do not sign a peace treaty unless you are or expect to be at war. Kant has one foot in the grave not only because he desires perpetual peace but because he dares to give advice about the political life of his community, for he lives in a country ruled by men who do not always take kindly to such advice.

Kant's essay, then, amounts to a confession that the state holds the power of death over him. "The practical politician," he knows, "tends to look down with great smugness on the political theorist, regarding him as an academic whose empty ideas cannot endanger the nation. . ." (1983, 107). Consequently, Kant reasons, "the theorist is allowed to fire his entire volley, without the *worldly-wise* statesman becoming the least bit concerned" (107). And yet Kant also knows that his life will be at risk if that same statesman "detects some danger to the nation" in his views (107). Kant signs a peace treaty with the state only to get the chance to fire his entire volley, hoping that those who hold the power of death over him will not notice his declaration of war. We should notice, however, that his peace treaty fails to meet his first article for the establishment of perpetual peace: "No treaty of peace that tacitly reserves issues for a future war shall be held valid" (107). Kant's intention is to wage a future war for peace, and so his essay begins by establishing the conditions of free speech by which he hopes to wage that war.

While Kant surely has the right to speak freely about his hopes for the future of his country without being harmed by the political powers that be, he cannot hold the same expectation with regard to his fellow citizens. Participation in politics is bought at a price, and that price, Kant understands, is the potential sacrifice of individual persons. His thoughts here are probably focused on the most immediate threat to his liberty, the monarchy of King Frederick William II, but his theory of democracy, to which I will soon turn, also reveals that political form is inherently sacrificial—that the political life of the state is somehow married to the sacrifice of citizens. The desire for perpetual peace—the relation of the good in politics—always collaborates with eternal rest, with the death wish in human relationships, and that death wish is experienced most vividly by the individual members of a community, since they are the locus of its emotions.

Kant obviously fears that Frederick William II will reprimand him. It is perhaps less obvious that he fears his fellow citizens. Nevertheless, Kant shows an increasing preoccupation with this last concern as his essay progresses toward its conclusion, demonstrating ultimately more terror of violence within nations than of violence among them. The first half of the essay has a political emphasis, presenting five preliminary articles for establishing perpetual peace among nations, while the second half focuses on ethical matters, arguing about which forms of government best eliminate conflicts between individuals. Surprisingly, only two of the five articles in

the early part of the essay involve efforts to disarm war powers.⁶ Kant is concerned first and foremost with establishing the right of separate nations to exist autonomously and only afterward with protecting these nations against conquest by other countries. For example, he maintains that countries have the obligation to preserve their own national interests before they come to the aid of other countries. The point to stress here is that these articles are purely political, for they do not flirt with the Utopian desire to banish separate nations in the favor of a single world government. If world peace is ever to exist, it will be created through the good offices of many separate and different countries working together as a league of nations.

The last half of the essay, however, focuses actively on the internal affairs of nations. Kant's first definitive article of perpetual peace, for example, requires that "the civil constitution of every nation should be republican" (112). At first glance, this article seems to conceal an attack against the monarchy of Frederick William II. In fact, Kant makes the case that the monarchy should be supported because it will gradually evolve into a republican government, while protecting its citizens in the meantime against the most dangerous form of government—democracy: "*democracy*, in the proper sense of the term," Kant laments, "is necessarily a *despotism*, because it sets up an executive power in which all citizens make decisions about and, if need be against one (who therefore does not agree); consequently, all, who are not quite all, decide, so that the general will contradicts both itself and freedom" (114). In short, Kant pledges allegiance to the king and to republicanism to contain the spread of democracy, and what he fears most about democracy is the potential violence and lack of feeling of its citizenry.

Kant wants to tame the violence of democracy—what he calls the despotism of the all turning against the one—and he believes that republicanism will accomplish the feat because it establishes a separation of powers and delegates authorities to shield individual citizens from the

⁶ Kant's five articles (1795, 107-11) are worth reviewing briefly if only to remind us of his diplomatic prowess and continuing relevance to peace studies:

1. No treaty of peace that tacitly reserves issues for future war shall be held valid.
2. No independent nation, be it large or small, may be acquired by another nation by inheritance, exchange, purchase, or gift.
3. Standing armies (*miles perpetuus*) shall be gradually abolished.
4. No national debt shall be contracted in connection with the foreign affairs of the nation.
5. No nation shall forcibly interfere with the constitution and government of another.

violence of others. In reality, however, republican government only softens but does not eliminate the sacrifices required by politics. Usually Kant represents these sacrifices in terms of a gap between ethical and political conduct. He explains, for example, that no single person has the ability to transform the particular desires of citizens into a common will, and yet he insists that the moral politician will see it as a duty to fight for laws that uphold the commonweal, stressing that "this ought to be done even at the cost of self-sacrifice" (128). Ethics and politics do not always serve the same ends, and when their ends differ, moral politicians suffer, for duty compels them to speak out on behalf of the community as a whole, but there is no way for them to know whether this same community will not turn against them with great violence.

The political relation, I have argued, is beyond the ken of any given individual. It arises whenever two or more groups begin a negotiation, whether peaceful or violent. A more sophisticated definition—one not without value for conceptualizing the gap between ethical and political representation—would define the political as the negotiation between two or more groups defined not as collections of individuals but as sets of rules. In effect, conceiving of society as a set of rules gives it the status of the mathematical sublime for each individual in that society. While I might understand, for example, that my community consists of a defining set of rules, complete with an origin and history of change and interpretation, these rules are ultimately as incomprehensible to me as an infinite number string, like Π , so I have no choice but to accept them though a leap of faith amounting to the simple conviction that my community does exist as an entity and that I am part of it, even though I cannot begin to imagine what it is or how I might fit into it. Living in common exposes individuals to a constant state of bewilderment about who they should try to be or about what they should try to do. But this is only the beginning of the dilemma of political life. For two sets of rules cannot have an encounter without the mediation of an interpreting agent. That is, one individual or more is always necessary to interpret the rules, intentions, and interests of the group, so that political encounters necessarily degenerate (and I use the word undisparagingly) into ethical encounters between individuals who must think and act with conviction, even though they are not sure what they are doing.

Here is where the sacrificial structure of politics becomes most apparent. For one interpretation is always subject to another one, and if any given interpretation is rejected or leads to disaster, the interpreter will carry

the blame for it. History abounds with the stories of individuals, great-hearted and mean-spirited alike, who have borne the burden of "bad" interpretations, who have dared to define in the unique timbre of one voice the many voices of their society. Politics is a space of tragedy, but of a tragedy of the individual, because it requires the passionate but disinterested pursuit of ends that do not profit individuals in the short term, and yet it asks these passionate individuals to put aside their enthusiasm for the common purpose at a moment's notice to preserve the common purpose. Social existence places constraints on individuals with the promise of celebrating their virtue should they accept these constraints, but it often sacrifices them in the process, tearing their life from them at the very moment when they are trying hardest to be good.

The moral incoherence of politics is, for Kant, an effect of group behavior—of the dissymmetry implicit in relations of self and other. Individuals, for example, believe that they are themselves honest but fail to believe in the honesty of other people. Nevertheless, morality does give proof of its universal claim on the human imagination in the individual's wish that everyone abide by a sense of right conduct, even as this same individual doubts that his or her right conduct will be reciprocated and turns to evil as a result. Kant's entire project is designed to cut the gordian knot of such dilemmas by separating the specific content of moral behavior from its formal conditions and then giving preference to form. Consequently, Kant adduces a principle of right behavior that no longer focuses on a specific material end: for example, the desire to arrange your behavior so that you are not cheated by others because you are more honest than they. This new moral imperative substitutes a formal end for a specific material end, requiring that this end apply categorically: "Act so that you will that your maxim ought to become a universal law (no matter what the end may be)" (132). In the final analysis, the categorical imperative is merely a conceptual tool used to measure the formal conditions of an end against its material and social ones; it frees individuals from the influence of other people and puts them in touch with the autonomy of their own moral judgment, in effect enclosing each person in a space of moral secrecy where the freedom to be good can be experienced in private.

Formally, then, the conflict between ethics and politics disappears, or we might say that individuals make it disappear by imagining that they live only with themselves and not with other people. One might conclude with only the slightest irony that only the last man alive on earth is free, finally, to express his true moral nature, since he would no longer be paralyzed by

mistrust of other people's honesty. The categorical imperative imagines every person on earth as the last survivor. But the world has not yet come to this, and human beings must live common lives, and so the conflict between ethics and politics reappears whenever we return to the sphere of practice. Here the fate of moral individuals turns tragic once more, since they must accept the sacrifices required to defend right conduct, and Kant cannot simply dispense with their sacrifices but must honor them. Moral individuals show true courage, Kant proclaims, by not yielding to evil but by pressing on more boldly than their fate allows. They sacrifice themselves for the common good and are lamented, unlike many others whose deaths are sordid and violent—and right only insofar they demonstrate the power of morality negatively. These last lawless creatures seek to violate others who are just as lawlessly disposed toward them, and thus all become caught in a storm of violence and greed, destroying themselves as if by their own hand.

Kant, it appears, cannot speak about politics without returning to ethics. It could be argued that this is a weakness in his philosophical system. I prefer to argue, however, that he runs up against the limits of the political imagination and presses on against this obstacle more boldly than the moral imagination allows. The result is reasoning to the brink of unreason, philosophical failure, but not a failure of nerve. For Kant dares to push his thought into areas where it is doomed to fail.

Perpetual Peace concludes with such a failure. This failure bears no resemblance to the note of ultimate failure with which Kant begins his essay, when he jokes that only death will provide the solution to incessant warfare. Rather, it is a philosophical failure of great richness, for Kant topples his entire moral edifice in the hope of discovering one principle that will allow him both to imagine political harmony and to bring to an end the warfare between ethics and politics. The principle is *publicity*. In ethics, we recall, individuals who are considering an action converse with themselves, seeking to apply the categorical imperative to their action. The conversation of these persons is wholly internal, secreted in the being of the person, constitutive of that being in its special relation to moral reasoning, since a "person" is for Kant only that place where reason makes its appearance. In the case of political right, however, the conversation takes place between individuals or nations in public. Kant makes the astounding claim that publicity is "found *a priori* in reason" (135), thereby insisting that it may be used in the place of the categorical imperative as the test of moral politics. He even provides a transcendental formula of political right based

on the categorical form: "All actions that affect the rights of other men are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity" (135). Thus, if the plans of a state cannot be made public, without destroying its hopes for enacting them, Kant reasons, they should be ruled immoral. If a people cannot overthrow an oppressive tyrant without the use of secrecy, the revolt is wrong (but so will be the attempt of the tyrant to regain power, if he uses secrecy to do it). In short, Kant replaces in one fell swoop the logic of moral reasoning with the principle of publicity, as if morality and consensus were one and the same. Kant's private moral self becomes mass man.

After years of describing the individual as an end in itself, Kant shifts in *Perpetual Peace* to a concept in which the autonomy of individual self-reflection is placed at risk. The individual is no longer permitted to choose a course of action without first seeking the agreement of the community at large. At the moment when Kant wants most to avoid violence to the individual, then, he embraces the solution most antagonistic to what an individual is: he saves the individual from harm by literally erasing the concept of autonomy itself—the very concept on which his claim to philosophical prominence rests.⁷ Perhaps this misguided maneuver tells us more about what an individual is than we want to know. It suggests that human beings are never more individual than when they are subject to violence, subjugation, and nonexistence, and that we cannot save individuals by sparing them this fate, though try we must, since it ends by robbing them of individuality itself. It is because the moral imagination overrides the political imagination and finds its truest expression in the individual that individual human beings suffer political violence.

The relation between self and other in the political context, whether we are considering one community or more, presents no analogy by which we might imagine it. Its harmony, rules of coherence, its existence as a conceptual fact—if there are such things as harmony, coherence, and facts among human beings who breathe—possess no symbols or objects by which we might bring them to life in our mind. Thoughts of sublime gods,

⁷ A final attempt to formulate a transcendental principle of political right shows how far Kant goes to merge ethics and politics. He seems to forget the idea, central to the categorical imperative, that individuals achieve autonomy by giving the law to themselves, choosing instead to make publicity—in effect, heteronomy—the key to ending lawlessness: "All maxims that *require* publicity (in order not to fail of their end) agree with both politics and morality" (139).

virtuous heroes, or beautiful paintings may give us repose on a day to day basis, but they offer no solutions to the misunderstandings of existence in common. Nor does the political imagination appear to have anything to do with the model of the part and the whole.⁸ Individuals compose society, but they are only social members by virtue of the existence and history of that society. And yet this society is realized in the individuals created by it. It is only in them that society exists at all. There is no analogy for this type of relationship elsewhere. It has to be thought and known as itself.

Perhaps, this is why we imagine the good political relation by way of our own death. The graveyard is the one place where there is no difference between one individual and many others—the one place where ethics and politics join in perpetual peace. It is as if there were no way to symbolize a peaceful community except by returning to the sacrificial scene located at the origin of symbolicity itself, where every word arises as a capstone and a memorial, a place of death and a plot against future deaths.⁹

The plight of free people is everywhere the same. We value the freedom of the individual person above everything else, but it is this person of great value whom we must sacrifice in particular cases, standing by as individual citizens lose their liberty and life, so that the freedom of everyone else will survive—as if the freedom and harmony of all were directly connected to the willingness of the one to die for the all. Perhaps they are. This is the most shocking truth about our existence—what allies it to death and what tempts every peace-loving person in every free nation to dream Kant's sweet dream.

The citizen of the free nation has—and always will have—one foot in the grave.

⁸ My discussion here paraphrases Castoriadis's remarks in "Power, Politics, Autonomy" (1991, 143-74, esp. 145).

⁹ Or, to put it another way, the failure of linguistic representation, so celebrated in current debates, is everywhere and always a failure of political representation, although the conjoining of these two types of representation alters the conception of the political, since it is established on what must be called a prepolitical scene. I allude, of course, to René Girard's claim that victimage is the origin of symbolicity (1978, 155-77, especially 177). The work of Eric Gans also focuses on the relation of violence to the origin of language. Among his many books the most concise is perhaps *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (1993).

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