

THE BATTLEFIELD OF METAPHYSICS: PERPETUAL PEACE REVISITED*

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Basic questions about Kant's international theory remain unresolved, in part because the ambiguous language and sketchy blueprints given in Perpetual Peace lend themselves to a wide variety of interpretations. This essay proposes a novel solution for this difficulty: a careful reconsideration of the political concepts embedded in Kant's first philosophy. In the First Critique, the "Conflict of the Faculties," and in particular his neglected essay "Perpetual Peace in Philosophy," Kant repeatedly draws on the language of sovereignty, war, and international law, in order to describe how the critical philosophy will bring peace to what he terms the "battlefield of metaphysics." The most striking feature of this program for "perpetual peace in philosophy" is that it does not end disagreement over ideas, but rather prevents it from becoming pathological by subjecting it to the "discipline" of critical reason. And I argue that Kant's proposal for global peace is precisely parallel: a sovereign world court that arbitrates decisively between states, while otherwise leaving them free to clash, compete, and disagree.

INTRODUCTION

The present moment in Kant studies is characterized by a certain schizophrenia: a growing consensus that Kant is the preeminent philosopher of international politics,¹ alongside a deepening disagreement about what his celebrated vision of world order actually entails. This is not only because so many of the formulations that appear in his mature political writings are obscure or ambiguous, but also because even his clear statements can be difficult to

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¹ See, for instance, Katrin Flikschuh, *Kant and Modern Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2000), 183–4 (attributing the rising prominence of Kantian cosmopolitanism to “changes in the practice of international relations, especially to the demise of the Cold War and the related acceleration of the process of globalisation”).

reconcile without acrobatic feats of exegesis. This blurriness extends even to very basic structural features of his utopia: whether he prefers a global leviathan or a voluntary federation of sovereign states, or how he envisions political life after the advent of “perpetual peace.” My conjecture is that we can only answer these classically political questions if we are willing to look past Kant’s political theory to the critical philosophy underpinning it. And so this essay pursues a new interpretation of Kant’s international politics, built around the architectonic of the First Critique.

Two questions dominate the contemporary discussion of Kant’s international politics. The first concerns its *architecture*—whether Kant expected the nation-state to be superseded by some form of supra-national sovereignty. “Did Kant,” asks Georg Cavallar, “have a free federation of sovereign states in mind or rather a universal state with coercive authority? Both models seem to be deducible from [his] writings.”² As we might expect, the answers given in the literature range widely. On the minimalist reading, Kant is advocating nothing more than a regime of “perfected international law” between sovereign and independent states. In the words of one of its leading proponents, “even under the rule of law, as it should be, there would be no effective international authority, no sanctions except self-discipline.” The “pacific league” that Kant sometimes refers to is, on this reading, nothing more than a series of treaties between individual states.³ A second interpretation accords the *foedus pacificum* more weight: it represents a truly new form of international organization, albeit one that is voluntary, and lacks sovereignty. The final ideal, according to these authors, is a free federation, “a league of states vested with judicial, but no coercive, power which states are free to join and leave at will.”⁴ For a third set of commentators, Kant’s theory of international order demands more than a merely voluntary league; there is no way to make sense of Kant’s international politics without this ideal of a global “state of states,” even if its final realization will come slowly, haltingly, and only after many failed experiments.⁵ On this reading, the “free federation of states” that Kant proposes becomes an intermediate stage on the path to his final goal

² Georg Cavallar, *Kant and the Theory and Practice of International Law* (Cardiff, 1999), 113.

³ F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge, 1963), 62–80, 68. Cf. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, 1999), 10, 19.

⁴ Kjartan Koch Mikalsen, “In Defense of Kant’s League of States,” *Law and Philosophy*, 30 (2011), 291–317, 291; Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge, 2009), 223–31.

⁵ Pauline Kleingeld, “Approaching Perpetual Peace: Kant’s Defence of a League of States and His Ideal of a World Federation,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 12 (2004), 304–25; Georg Cavallar, *Kant and the Theory and Practice of International Law* (Cardiff, 1999), 113–31. Cf. J. G. Fichte, “Review of Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*” (1795), trans. Daniel Breazeale, *Philosophical Forum*, 32 (2001), 319 (the institution of “a state of nations . . . is

of a comprehensive world state. While Pauline Kleingeld has persuasively revived this last model in recent years, the debate over the architecture of *ewige Frieden* remains unsettled.

A second set of arguments revolves around the *character* of perpetual peace. It is often imagined that Kant expected the advent of international peace to bring with it the dissipation, if not the disappearance, of social antagonisms. Here Allen Wood is exemplary:

Antagonism and inequality belong to all human culture as long as it develops “without a plan”. The vocation of humanity in the epoch of freedom is to supply a conscious and collective plan through which the natural antagonism or discord between human beings will gradually be overcome, vanquished by reason’s free concord.⁶

But the assumption that Kant hoped to dissipate the forces of “unsocial sociability” in the final state of international politics has been challenged by a number of recent studies, which emphasize the important signals in Kant’s work that agonistic conflict must necessarily *remain* a part of any future global civil order. As Michael Ferguson observes in a recent essay on the *Idea for a Universal History*, ceaseless competition between individuals and collectivities is what spurs mankind to self-improvement, sharpens its creative faculties, and preserves the meaning and attraction of the cosmopolitan ideal. And, paradoxically, it is only by occasionally relapsing into periods of war and barbarism that we can summon the resolution to continue our impossible drive towards perpetual peace.⁷ Sankar Muthu agrees with Ferguson that “antagonistic resistance is essential for continually approximating perpetual peace,” but argues that Kant’s vision is primarily *nonviolent*: a balance of forces between nations competing in global markets and jealously resisting incursions onto one another’s sovereignty.⁸ Thus the expectation that the Kantian peace will be essentially *pacific*—dedicated to the expansion of amity and friendship—appears increasingly uncertain.

This essay proposes a novel solution to these interlocking debates, one that begins with a telling turn of phrase from the First Critique: the object of the critical philosophy is to bring juridical order to the anarchic “battlefield of metaphysics”

the decision of pure reason, and the federation of nations [*Völkerbund*] proposed by Kant for the preservation of peace is no more than an intermediary condition”).

⁶ Allen W. Wood, “Unsocial Sociability: the Anthropological Basis of Kantian Ethics,” *Philosophical Topics*, 19 (1991), 326–51, 343.

⁷ Michael Ferguson, “Unsocial Sociability: Perpetual Antagonism in Kant’s Political Thought,” in Elisabeth Ellis, ed., *Kant’s Political Theory* (University Park, 2012), 149–69.

⁸ Sankar Muthu, “Productive Resistance in Kant’s Political Thought: Domination, Counterdomination, and Global Unsocial Sociability,” in Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi, eds., *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives* (Oxford, 2014), 68–98, 91. I am grateful to Professor Muthu for sharing with me an advance copy of this essay.

(*Kampfplatz der Metaphysik*). Although the treatment of Kant's views on history and global governance has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years, it is still the case that scholars of his political thought rarely comment on his first philosophy, and vice versa.⁹ This is unfortunate, since Kant leaves important hints that his international politics and his metaphysics share a common point of origin and a parallel trajectory.¹⁰ One clue to his belief that Europe's international crisis and its intellectual crisis were profoundly intertwined is the sardonic title he gave to a late and often overlooked essay: the "Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy."¹¹

Kant's persistent analogy between warring philosophical schools and violent conflict between nations may be worth taking more seriously than it has been so far. The gambit of the present essay is that this equivalence is more than a mere illustration or stylistic device; it speaks to a deep structural and conceptual unity underlying the metaphorical language. In both the politics and the metaphysics, "perpetual peace" implies a *juridical* resolution to the state of war, one that does not dissolve but rather *institutionalizes* the antagonism of the warring parties. The picture that emerges is highly paradoxical: a world state that is ultimately sovereign, but that tolerates and even fosters legal and commercial rivalries between nations and peoples. The ideal is what one modern theorist has called a *conflictual consensus*, and what Kant himself describes as "an equilibrium in liveliest competition."

The first half of this essay addresses the question of *form*—it asks what Kant's first philosophy can tell us about the architecture of his preferred international order. Crucially, the Critique is presented as a *juridical entity*, a tribunal whose distinctive mandate is to allow metaphysical debates to continue within certain limits, while intervening forcefully against unwarranted or dogmatic claims.

⁹ The first modern effort to interpret Kant's philosophy by the light of his political metaphors was Hans Saner, *Kant's Political Thought*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Chicago, 1973). Saner's study is excellent, though I break with it here by emphasizing the necessity of conflict and agonism, even in a fully developed state of perpetual peace. Many subsequent authors have imitated Saner's methodology, but curiously they have mostly neglected the importance of these metaphors for Kant's *international* political theory, focusing instead on their relation to his domestic constitutional ideas. See Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge, 1989), 3–28; Otfried Höffe, *Kant's Cosmopolitan Theory of Law and Peace* (Cambridge, 2006), 204–27; Sofie Möller, "Human Rights Jurisprudence Seen through the Framework of Kant's Legal Metaphors," in Andreas Follesdall and Reidar Maliks, eds., *Kantian Theory and Human Rights* (New York, 2014), 52–69.

¹⁰ On this approach to reading Kant see Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford, 2003), 3 ("it becomes possible to find significant support for interpretations of difficult aspects of one text by appealing to patterns of argument found elsewhere in Kant's work").

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, "Treaty" (1797), trans. Peter Heath, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Peter Heath and Henry Allison (Cambridge, 2002), 413–22.

Its position, in other words, is that of a *minimal world state* reigning over a diverse plurality of nations under conditions of perpetual peace. The second part of the essay turns to the question of *character*—it joins a wave of recent scholarship in reading the Kantian peace as essentially *agonistic*, premised on the sublimation of unsocial sociability and “productive resistance.”¹² Once again, it takes its orientation from the metaphysics, where Kant states explicitly that the Critique does not *dissolve* the polemical conflict that constitutes philosophy’s state of nature, but rather renders it controlled, predictable, and lawful. And this suggests, in turn, that only a federal world republic that preserves a space for interstate competition and adversarial litigation is capable of realizing the “perpetual peace” that the Kantian project demands.

A PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT

Kant opens his 1781 Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* with an operatic narrative of decline and fall. Metaphysics, the Queen of the Sciences, has been deposed, and in her exile wails like Hecuba at the siege of Troy. In her absence a blood-dimmed tide of anarchy has been loosed upon the world, as dogmatists, skeptics, and empiricists collide in violent internecine conflict (*innere Kriege*) for control of the kingdom. “The battlefield of these endless controversies” (*Der Kampfplatz dieser endlosen Streigkeiten*), he writes succinctly, “is called metaphysics.”¹³ This section sketches an atlas of that battlefield—that is, both a comprehensive survey of the military and diplomatic tropes that pervade his first philosophy, and the persuasive evidence that the *ius cosmopolitanum* he defended in the late 1790s adheres to the same template as his earlier program for perpetual peace in philosophy. As we will see below, this has ramifications not only for how we understand the historical context from which *Zum ewigen Frieden* emerged, but also for how we interpret certain critically ambiguous phrases in his signature political text.

When Kant gave his 1797 rejoinder to the amateur scholar J. G. Schlosser the title and form of a treaty for perpetual peace in philosophy it wasn’t just a witty joke at his own expense; from 1781 forward he had consistently depicted the condition of metaphysics without critical philosophy as a state of war. Many of the most memorable passages in the First Critique draw freely from this idiom. If the 1781 Preface was the first to dub metaphysics a “battlefield” and liken Humean skeptics to nomadic raiders “shattering . . . the civil unity” (*zertrennen . . .*

¹² Muthu, “Productive Resistance in Kant’s Political Thought,” 72.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781–7), trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 1998), Aviii–ix.

die bürgerliche Vereinigung) of dogmatism, the 1787 Preface underscores the Sisyphian futility of these skirmishes:

In metaphysics we have to retrace our path countless times, because we find that it does not lead where we want to go, and it is so far from reaching unanimity in the assertions of its adherents that it is rather a battlefield, and indeed one that appears to be especially determined for testing one's powers in mock combat; on this battlefield no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any lasting possession on his victory.¹⁴

"Philosophy" is the name we give to this screaming, whirling tableau, where dogmatists whistle arbitrary doctrines past one another like rounds of artillery, and skeptics periodically materialize to batter the foundations of every established tenet and creed.¹⁵ This martial imagery multiplies as the book approaches its climax. And as it does, the resemblance to Kant's theory of war becomes inescapable. The clash of dogmatisms and skepticisms, he writes, is a "dialectical battlefield" where each side finds itself exposed to attack.¹⁶ "They must always be exposed to the enemy, and each can take advantage of the exposure of his enemy."¹⁷ Even in moments of apparent tranquility, new dogmatisms are rising to challenge regnant orthodoxies and thus to ignite the war anew. And this means that the contest can never be definitively resolved: "Fight as they may, the shadows that they cleave apart grow back together in an instant, like the heroes of Valhalla, to amuse themselves anew in bloodless battles."¹⁸ Though it is "bloodless," this endless quarreling and "vacuous hair-splitting" is not at all harmless; it leaves philosophy mired in a primitive state of nature, unable to distinguish sound ideas from dogmatic nonsense.¹⁹

And yet, crucially, Kant insists that reason, "entangled in a crowd of arguments and counterarguments," cannot "command peace" between them.²⁰ In 1786 (as he was preparing the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) he would chastise Moses Mendelssohn for precisely this error; that is, attempting to dissolve the "conflict of pure reason with itself" into a mere disagreement over words, and thus to "settle the dispute amicably" (*den Streit . . . gütlich beizulegen*). Mendelssohn's expectation of frictionless reconciliation is far too facile—the strife of philosophers "has never been at the basis a quarrel of words but always a

¹⁴ Kant, *Pure Reason*, Bxv.

¹⁵ On Kant's varied concepts of "dogmatism" see Michael N. Forster, *Kant and Skepticism* (Princeton, 2008), 3–54.

¹⁶ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A422–3/B450–1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, A751/B779.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, A756/B784. Cf. *ibid.*, A776/B804 ("feuds that can never be resolved").

¹⁹ Kant, "Treaty," 416.

²⁰ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A464/B492.

true quarrel over things.”²¹ Thus it cannot be resolved by the good will and pious hopes of those Kant dismissed as “indifferentists.”²²

Neither will peace be established by the universal monarchy or narrow oligarchy of any philosophical sect. A selection from his very interesting essay on Leibniz helps explain why. Here, Kant is describing the desperate efforts of his opponents to resist the principles of his First Critique by holding out Leibniz as the true master of metaphysics, to whom all others must genuflect:

Given the anarchy which inevitably prevails among philosophizing folk, since it is only an invisible thing, namely reason, that they recognize as their sole sovereign, it has always been a saving remedy to gather this turbulent crew around some great man as a rallying point. But for those with no understanding of their own . . . to *understand* such a man was a difficulty, which has hitherto prevented the formation of a durable constitution . . .²³

Even as he mocks dogmatists like Eberhard for misreading Leibniz, Kant is denying that the rule of a single philosopher-king can ever form the basis of what he calls a “durable constitution” (*eine daurende Verfassung*) for metaphysics. This point is sharpened in Kant’s 1796 article “On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy,” which ridicules those who repudiate modern philosophy as mere footnotes to Plato and Aristotle. He dubs them “monarchists out of necessity; elevating now Plato, and now Aristotle to the throne, so that, being conscious of their own incapacity for personal thought, they do not have to endure the hateful comparison with others still living.”²⁴ Philosophy, in its free and authentic form, forbids this kind of cringing servility to past ages, just as it forcefully rejects any attempt by “would-be philosophers [to] *behave in a superior fashion*,” claiming oracular insights into the nature of being that are inaccessible to ordinary scholars and thinkers. The superior tone of these obscurantists is reminiscent of “the old nobility,” and treads egregiously on the “inalienable right” of all thinking persons “to freedom and equality in matters of mere reason.” And so when Kant concludes this essay by calling for a treaty (*Vertrag*) that will bring definitive concord (*Eintracht*) to the contentious world of metaphysics, it is understood that this compact must be republican in character,

²¹ Immanuel Kant, “Some Remarks on Ludwig Heinrich Jakob’s *Examination of Mendelssohn’s Morning hours*” (1786), trans. Günter Zöller, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge, 2007), 8: 152, Kant’s emphasis.

²² Kant, *Pure Reason*, Ax–ii.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One* (1790), trans. Henry Allison, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, 8: 247, emphasis in the original.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, “On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy” (1796), trans. Henry Allison, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, 8: 395.

abjuring any automatic deference to “*men of genius*,” genuine or self-proclaimed, past or present, and staking everything on “the agreement of free citizens” engaged in open debate and discussion.²⁵

Scholastic amity, then, will not be attained through the naive *fiat pax* of Mendelssohn, the obsequious ancestor worship of Eberhard, or the arrogant mysticism of Schlosser. Rather, the construction of perpetual peace in philosophy follows the same blueprint as the original institution of civil society. Hobbes is the dwarf inside the mechanical Turk of critique:

One can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice [*Gerichtshof*] for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but is rather set the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution. Without this, reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through *war*. The critique, on the contrary, which derives all decision from the ground-rules of its own constitution, whose authority no one can doubt, grants us the peace of a state of law [*eines gesetzlichen Zustandes*], in which we should not conduct our controversy except by *due process* [*durch Proceß*]. What brings the quarrel in the state of nature to an end is a *victory*, of which both sides boast, although for the most part there follows only an uncertain peace, arranged by an authority in the middle; but in the state of law it is the *verdict*, which, since it goes to the origin of the controversies themselves, must secure a perpetual peace [*ewigen Frieden gewähren muß*]. And the endless controversies of a merely dogmatic reason finally make it necessary to seek peace in some sort of critique of this reason itself, and in a legislation grounded upon it; just as Hobbes asserted, the state of nature is a state of injustice and violence, and one must necessarily leave it in order to submit himself to the lawful coercion which alone limits our freedom in such a way that it can be consistent with the freedom of everyone else and thereby with the common good.²⁶

The function of the critique—grandly designated “the supreme court of justice for all disputes”—is to *discipline* the exercise of reason, and thus to bring the fruitless contest of dogmatism and skepticism to an end.²⁷ By proscribing “groundless assertions” while nevertheless insisting on the possibility of synthetic

²⁵ Kant, “Tone”, 8:405; *ibid.*, 8:390; Kant, *Pure Reason*, A738/B766. Emphases in the original.

²⁶ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A751–2/B779–80. Cf. *ibid.*, Bxxv (“To deny that this service of criticism is of any **positive** utility would be as much as to say that the police are of no positive utility because their chief business is to put a stop to the violence that citizens have to fear from other citizens, so that each can carry on his own affairs in peace and safety”). Emphasis in the original.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, A740/B768. Cf. *ibid.*, A709/B737. The term *Disciplin*, frequently used by Kant to describe the constraining of pure speculative reason in the First Critique, is also how he characterizes the formation of civil institutions out of the state of nature. See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), trans. Robert B. Loudon, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, Education*, 7: 268.

a priori judgments about the ineffable (the soul, divinity, cause and effect), he imposes a kind of order on the irresponsible speculations of both camps.²⁸ Indeed, he enforces an armistice under whose terms both the skeptic and the dogmatist jettison their most extravagant claims and accept the necessity of the other to the metaphysical dialectic. Just as the Leviathan humbles those whose “vain-glory” renders them unfit for collective life, so under the supervision of the critique these “proud and conceited” philosophies are quelled, domesticated, and forced to coexist.²⁹ And just as Hobbes founded sovereignty under the banner *homo homini lupus*, so Kant analogizes philosophers who would “thrust aside the critique of pure reason” to the Aesopian wolf who “proposed to the sheep that, if only the latter would get rid of the dogs, they might all live like brothers in perpetual peace.” Without the guardianship of the “ever-vigilant critique,” he cautions, we become the mere “plaything” (*Spielzeug*) of mountebanks and sophists, easy prey for every new dogma that arrives on the scene.³⁰ We see, then, why Kant declares in a late essay that “Critical philosophy is that which sets out to conquer,” and why he visualizes his philosophy seated on the gilded throne of the Hobbesian sovereign.³¹

This much is obvious, at least to those who have cared to look. What commentators have been much slower to recognize is that the “rule of lasting tranquility”³² that Kant heralds under the sign of the *Kritik* also bears a striking resemblance to his idealized portrait of the *civitas gentium*. First, a number of technical terms originally introduced in the First Critique resurface in the international writings; Kant, a highly precise writer, is unlikely to have done this carelessly. For instance, the famous phrase *ewige Frieden* appears for the first time not in the political essays but in the First Critique, where it describes the ongoing emergency of metaphysics and its projected resolution. Moreover, when Kant expressly demands a “peace-treaty” to repress the vehement rivalries of the philosophers he calls it a *Friedensbund*, exactly the term he employs in *Zum ewigen Frieden*, rendered into Latin as *foedus pacificum*, and translated as a “*pacific league . . . [that] seeks to end all war forever.*”³³ And Kant stresses that what differentiates the state of law in metaphysics from the anarchy and injustice

²⁸ Kant, *Pure Reason*, B23; *ibid.*, A486/B514.

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1640), ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (London, 1889), 36–8. Compare with Kant, *Pure Reason*, A781/B809; *ibid.*, A464/B492 (“proud claims”).

³⁰ Kant, “Treaty,” 8: 420; Kant, “Tone,” 8: 404.

³¹ Kant, “Treaty,” 8: 416, emphasis in the original.

³² Kant, *Pure Reason*, A465/B493, emphasis in the original.

³³ Kant, “Treaty,” 8: 421, emphasis in the original; Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), trans. Mary J. Gregor, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, 1996), 8: 356. These are the only two instances of *Friedensbund* in the collected works.

of the state of nature is not the absence of conflict but rather the settlement of every controversy by resort to “due process.” Kant’s lexicon—*durch Proceß, gesetzlichen Zustandes, Gerichtshof*—carries a distinctly judicial charge, and the opposition of *Streitigkeit* and *Proceß* that structures the First Critique is preserved intact in the political theory. “In the state of nature,” he opines in the “Metaphysics of Morals,” “a state is permitted to prosecute its right” by violence, since it has no recourse to “a lawsuit [*einen Proceß*] (the only means by which disputes are settled in a rightful condition).” A few pages later, he contrasts the resolution of disputes “in a civil way, as if by a lawsuit (“*zu errichtenden . . . ihre Streitigkeiten auf civile Art, gleichsam durch einen Proceß*”), with the “barbaric” method of “savages . . . namely by war.”³⁴ Similarly, in *Perpetual Peace* he contrasts the state of nature with a “lawful condition” (*gesetzlichen Zustandes*) in which hostilities are not merely suspended indefinitely, but cancelled completely. War, he adds, is “only the regrettable expedient for asserting one’s right by force in a state of nature (where there is no court [*kein Gerichtshof*] that could judge with rightful force).”³⁵ The consistent repetition of these keywords is a reminder that Kant’s political theory and his meta-philosophy grow from the same volcanic soil.

A second point of intersection is Kant’s aversion to *lying*, which plays an outsized role in both the philosophical and international versions of perpetual peace. This is the crux of the Second Appendix to *Perpetual Peace*, where Kant asserts that war—at least, unjust war—becomes impossible if states are forced to publicly justify their actions. No nation could broadcast in advance its intention to carve up its neighbors, repudiate its contracts, and preemptively attack its rivals without eliciting massive resistance; duplicity is the oxygen of *raison d’état*.³⁶ As we might expect, this provision found an echo two years later in Kant’s treaty for peace in philosophy. Like its counterpart, the *Tractats* closes with a peroration on the majesty of truth:

But a lie, whether internal or external, is of two kinds: 1. when someone gives out as *true* what he nevertheless knows to be untrue; and 2. when he gives out as *certain*, what he nevertheless knows himself to be subjectively uncertain of . . . The commandment: *Thou shalt not lie* (were it even with the most pious intentions), if most sincerely adopted into philosophy, as a doctrine of wisdom, would alone be able, not only to procure eternal peace therein, but also to assure it for all time to come.³⁷

By publicizing its corrupt aims the predatory state frustrates its own ability to achieve them, and so brings the goal of “federative union” a step closer to its

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) (*Rechtslehre*) (§56), trans. Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, 6: 346. Cf. *ibid.* (§61), 6: 351.

³⁵ Kant, “Tone,” 8:405; *ibid.*, 8:390; Kant, *Pure Reason*, A738/B766. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 381–6.

³⁷ Kant, “Treaty,” 8: 422, emphasis in the original.

realization. By confessing the radical uncertainty that surrounds its capricious speculations, dogmatism surrenders its most ambitious metaphysical claims and submits to the reasoned jurisdiction of the critique. In both cases, an illegitimate power is brought under the yoke of reason and drawn within the ambit of a comprehensive legal order. This link is even more apparent in the lectures on ethics. In a 1784 talk on *mendacium*, he oscillates freely between censuring unreliable scholars who thwart “the human craving for knowledge” with false or unwarranted claims, and condemning states that wage aggressive or unnecessary war. Both, he intones, are fundamental betrayals of “the right of humanity.” This unusual juxtaposition is more than free association; it is an approximate map of the Kantian mind, in which urgent political questions restage the classical dilemmas of philosophy and ethics on a global scale.³⁸

Finally, the imbrication of Kant’s international and epistemological ideas—and the suspicion that much of the former is already implicit in his exposition of the latter—become obvious if we trace his promiscuous use of the term “boundaries” (*Grenzen*). The flaw of dogmatic speculation, he repeats ad nauseam, is not its propensity to draw transcendental conclusions about the universe, but rather its total failure to separate genuine insights from supercilious fictions. And interestingly, he illustrates this point with a succession of images taken from geography. Thus he observes in the First Critique that the understanding

cannot accomplish one thing, namely, determining for itself the boundaries [*Grenzen*] of its use and knowing what may lie within and what without its whole sphere; for to this end the deep inquiries that we have undertaken are requisite. But if the understanding cannot distinguish whether certain questions lie within its horizon or not, then it is never sure of its claims and its possession, but must always reckon on many embarrassing corrections when it continually oversteps the boundaries of its territory [*die Grenzen seines Gebiets . . . unaufhörlich überschreitet*] (as is unavoidable) and loses itself in delusion and deceptions.³⁹

When pure reason tries to extend its insights about the physical world past the limits of empirical observation it merely seems clumsy. But when it spins out elaborate fantasies about the invisible world, from the nature of the soul to the composition of the universe, it takes on an air of fanaticism.⁴⁰ Tellingly,

³⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Moral philosophy: Collins’s Lecture Notes” (1784), in *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Peter Heath, ed. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge, 1997), 27: 447.

³⁹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A238/B297. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), trans. Mary J. Gregor, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 5: 15.

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, “The End of All Things” (1794), trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George DiGiovanni (Cambridge, 1996), 8: 335 (“where reason . . . prefers to indulge in enthusiasm rather than—as seems fitting for an intellectual inhabitant of the sensible world—to limit itself within the bounds

he associates these metaphysical doctrines with imperialism and offensive war: they “incite us to tear down all those boundary posts” constructed by skepticism and to “lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations anywhere.”⁴¹ Thus pure reason, in its extreme phase, mimics the irredentism of states aspiring to universal monarchy. Just as the hegemonic state dreams of dissolving “the *separation* of many neighboring states” into a single territorial empire, transcendental reason seeks to overturn the limits set by skepticism and to reign despotically over the field of philosophy.⁴² And just as universal monarchy, having “swallowed up all its neighbors . . . ultimately disintegrates all by itself,”⁴³ so every existing transcendental doctrine, no matter how formidable, is destined to “collapse like houses of cards” in the face of the skeptical challenge.⁴⁴ Pure reason can only survive under the magisterial supervision of the Critique, which first expels it from the territory it has occupied unjustly, and then encloses it in a new sphere of legality that makes future hostilities impossible. “The critique,” he predicts, “will easily reveal the dogmatic illusion, and compel pure reason to surrender its exaggerated pretensions in its speculative use, and draw back within the boundaries of its proper territory [*innerhalb die Grenzen ihres eigenthümlichen Bodens*], namely practical principles.” And once stable frontiers have been reestablished between the sciences, the Critique acts as the defender of the peace, patrolling zones of conflict and intervening decisively against incipient acts of aggression,⁴⁵

for the boundaries that it is required to set for its speculative use at the same time limit the sophisticated pretensions of every opponent, and thus it can secure against all attacks everything that may still be left to it from its previously exaggerated demands. The greatest and perhaps only utility of all philosophy of pure reason is thus only negative, namely that it does not serve for expansion, as an organon, but rather, as a discipline, serves for the

of the latter” (*Vernunft . . . lieber schwärmt, als sich . . . innerhalb den Gränzen dieser eingeschränkt zu halten*). Cf. Immanuel Kant, “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786), trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 8: 145.

⁴¹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A296/B352.

⁴² Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but It Is of No Use in Practice” (1793), trans. Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, 8: 311, emphasis in the original; Kant, *Pure Reason*, Aix (“In the beginning, under the administration of the **dogmatists**, her rule was **despotic** [*Herrschaft . . . despotisch*]”).

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), trans. George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, 6: 35. Cf. Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 8: 367.

⁴⁴ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (Preface), 6: 209. Cf. Kant, *Pure Reason*, Aix (“Yet . . . this rule gradually degenerated through internal wars into complete **anarchy**”).

⁴⁵ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A794/B822.

determination of boundaries, and instead of discovering truth it has only the silent merit of guarding against errors.⁴⁶

Several years before his first published remarks on political theory, Kant could already conceive of a normative framework that would govern the scattered archipelago of dogmatisms and skepticisms while preserving the existence and independence of each. It was, in every particular, a prototype for the “state of states” that a decade later would crown his vision of the *ius gentium*. And so it is not surprising that when Kant began to flesh out this ideal in the “Metaphysics of Morals,” he borrowed the skeleton from his meta-philosophy. Affirming that “two neighboring peoples” are permitted to “resist one another” (*einander widerstehen*) so long as they do so peacefully, he writes, “as long as they keep within their boundaries [*wenn sie sich innerhalb ihrer Grenzen halten*] the way they want to live is up to them.”⁴⁷ The picture is one of *controlled* conflict, kept within lawful boundaries. The “true politics” of the *Völkerrecht* and the metaphysics of the First Critique are two branches growing from a common trunk.

TOWARD AGONISTIC PEACE

Unsocial sociability in politics and philosophy

So far we have underlined two points of symmetry between the theoretical philosophy and the program of perpetual peace. On the one hand, the incessant, riotous discord between the schools reappears as “the barbaric freedom of already established states” under conditions of international anarchy. And on the other, the supranational *Völkerstaat* that Kant propounds as the solution to that violence is plainly modeled on the “ever-vigilant critique,” which reigns benevolently over the “mob of sophists” even as it permits them to continue their erroneous speculation.⁴⁸ The recurrence in *Zum ewigen Frieden* of a technical vocabulary originally designed for the *Kritik* discloses the inner logic of Kant’s world utopia. And it does the same, *mutatis mutandis*, for the teleology presented in the *Idea for a Universal History*.

Readers of the *Universal History* will recall the uncertainties and detours that mark the path from *bellum omnium* to *pax perennis*. Its engine is *unsocial*

⁴⁶ Ibid., A795/B823. Cf. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), trans. Gary Hatfield, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, 4: 351; Kant, A710/B738; Kant, *Pure Reason*, A710/B738; Kant, *On a Discovery*, 8: 228 (“the Critique, which can alone determine the boundary line”).

⁴⁷ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§ 15), 6: 266, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” (1784), trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, Education*, 8: 26; Kant, “On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy” (1796), trans. Peter Heath, in *Theoretical Philosophy*, 8: 404; Kant, *Pure Reason*, A669/B 697.

sociability, the contradictory impulse to live in solitude and to seek out the company of others that inheres in every individual, and by extension in every nation. People and states are thrown together by their raw needs, repelled from one another by their antisocial competitive drives, and ultimately reconciled under the terms of a “*just civil constitution*.”⁴⁹ The *Universal History* is notable not only for the dialectical somersaults through which lawless antagonism eventually produces its opposite, an interlocking network of international institutions, but also for Kant’s repeated affirmation that there is something *salutary* about the spiral of violence that ushers in the global order. Competition—including war—is the indispensable catalyst of civilization and progress, and in its absence human life is drained of its dignity, sinking into trivial enjoyment and merely animal pleasure:

Without these qualities of unsociability from which the resistance arises . . . all talents would, in an arcadian pastoral life of perfect concord, contentment and mutual love, remain eternally hidden in their germs; human beings, as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would give their existence hardly any greater worth than that of their domesticated beasts . . . Thanks be to nature, therefore, for the incompatibility, for the spiteful competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess or even to dominate! For without them all the excellent natural predispositions in humanity would eternally slumber undeveloped. The human being wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species: it wills discord.⁵⁰

Kant refined this argument over the subsequent decade, but never retracted it. It can be summarized as follows.⁵¹ First, the competitive drive undergirding unsocial sociability is what rescues men from a decadent life “dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play.” A life without exigency and ambition, passed in the empty pursuit of “tranquil indolence,” is unworthy of the majesty of man; a political union devoted to “mere commerce” quickly degenerates into “selfishness, cowardice, and weakness.”⁵² Second, armed conflict stimulates human creativity, since interstate competition demands a sophisticated and continuously advancing repertoire of arts and technology. This is Kant’s meaning when he writes in the *Critique of Judgment* that the “splendid misery” of mankind is “bound up with” its progress, and that the “horrible tribulations” of war are

⁴⁹ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 8: 20–22, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8: 21.

⁵¹ A similar reading can be found at Ferguson, “Unsocial Sociability,” 153–6.

⁵² Immanuel Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786), trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, Education*, 8: 122; Kant, “Review of J. G. Herder’s *Ideas for the philosophy of the history of humanity* Parts 1 and 2” (1785), trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, Education*, 8: 65; Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, 2000), 5: 263.

“one more incentive (while the hope for a peaceful state of happiness among nations [*Volksglückseligkeit*] recedes ever further) for developing to their highest degree all the talents that serve for culture.”⁵³ Finally, the perpetual threat of combat conserves a space for human liberty that would otherwise be foreclosed by hierarchy and empire. In the international arena, unsocial sociability is what disperses populations across the globe, engendering the differences of language and culture that make universal monarchy impossible.⁵⁴ And within each state, it is only the fear of war and the need for a conscripted army that restrains despotic leaders from freezing the progress of arts and sciences and stripping away the minimal rights and privileges its citizens are afforded. “One needs only to look at *China*, which on account of its situation has to fear perhaps only an unforeseen attack, but not a mighty enemy, and in which therefore all trace of freedom has been eradicated.”⁵⁵ The double edge of the *ius gladii* explains Kant’s reluctance to abolish it prematurely. Instead, the dialectical dance must continue until its exhausted contestants seek out an alternative arrangement. The signal passage is from the Concluding Remarks to his 1786 essay on the “Conjectural Beginning of Human History”:

only after a (God knows when) completed culture, would an everlasting peace be salutary, and thereby alone be possible for us . . . and the holy document is quite right to represent the melting together of the nations into one society and its complete liberation from external danger, when its culture has hardly begun, as a restraint on all further culture and as a sinking into incurable corruption.⁵⁶

The fires of war must be allowed to rage until, gradually, they burn themselves out.

What is more rarely noticed is that Kant saw the same dialectic at work in the first philosophy. However murderous the war between the dogmatics and skeptics becomes, we cannot simply “command peace” between them. Instead, Kant’s paradoxical prescription “for arriving at enduring philosophical tranquility” is to heighten the contradictions and accelerate the conflict.⁵⁷ Thus he makes the centerpiece of the First Critique “The Antinomy of Pure Reason,” a jousting match staged between the dogmatic and skeptical world views for the delectation of the critical philosophers. He introduces this section with an eye-catching extended metaphor:

⁵³ Kant, *Judgment* (§82), 5: 433.

⁵⁴ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 364. Cf. *ibid.*, 8: 368 (“Just as nature wisely separates states that the will of each state, and even on grounds of the right of nations, would like to unite under itself by cunning or force”).

⁵⁵ Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8: 121, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8: 121. Cf. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 367.

⁵⁷ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A464/B492; *ibid.*, A757/B785.

These sophisticated assertions thus open up a dialectical battlefield [*dialektischen Kampfplatz*], where each party will keep the upper hand as long as it is allowed to attack, and will certainly defeat that which is compelled to conduct itself merely defensively. Hence hardy knights, whether they support the good or the bad cause, are certain of carrying away the laurels of victory if only they take care to have the prerogative of making the last attack, and are not bound to resist a new assault from the opponent. One can easily imagine that from time immemorial this arena has often been entered, both sides gaining many victories, but that each time the final victory was decisive merely because care was taken that the champion of the good cause held the field alone, his opponent having been forbidden to take up his weapons again. As impartial referees [*unparteiische Kampfrichter*] we have to leave aside entirely whether it is a good or a bad cause for which the combatants are fighting, and just let them settle the matter themselves.⁵⁸

The purpose of the Antinomy, as Kant concedes, is perverse: to sharpen a gladiatorial contest that has occupied the forum “from time immemorial.” Kant hopes to finally render it decisive, not by awarding final victory to one side, but by revealing its true nature as a savage and unwinnable war of attrition. He compares his “unseemly” procedure to that of an arms merchant selling munitions to both sides:

To incite reason against itself, to hand it weapons on both sides, and then to watch its heated struggle quietly and scornfully is not seemly from a dogmatic point of view, but rather has the look of a spiteful and malicious cast of mind. If, however, one takes regard of the inexorable deception and bragging of the sophists, who will not be moderated by any critique, then there is really no other course but to set the boasting of one side against another, which stands on the same rights, in order at least to shock reason, by means of the resistance of an enemy, into raising some doubts about its pretensions and giving a hearing to the critique.⁵⁹

Just as the horrors of the First World War shocked Europe into organizing the League of Nations, Kant’s hope is that a full-speed collision of dogmatism and skepticism will convince each side to retreat from the field and shelter itself under the protective wing of the Critique. To generate enthusiasm for peace, each camp must be badly bloodied. And to this end, Kant is perfectly willing to license as “weapons of war” the polemics and ungrounded hypotheses that the critical philosophy categorically forbids for use in public debate. His justification for authorizing this “complete armament” verges on reason of state: “He is, namely, free to use, as it were in an emergency [*Notwehr*], the very same means for

⁵⁸ Kant, A422–3/B451–2. Cf. *ibid.*, A425/B453. *Vereinigung* is one of the terms most frequently associated with cosmopolitan right in the political writings; see Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§43), 6: 311; Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 8: 29; Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 356.

⁵⁹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A756–7/B785–6.

his good cause as his opponent would use against it.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the sophist is *encouraged* to employ the full arsenal of faulty proofs and rhetorical techniques, since the sharper the antinomies become, the more harrowing the combat, the more pliantly will the schools finally acquiesce to the jurisdiction of the *Kritik*. The structure of this argument unmistakably prefigures the pivotal Eighth Proposition of the *Universal History*.

Finally war itself will become not only an enterprise so artificial, and its outcome on both sides so uncertain, but also the aftereffects which the state suffers through . . . will be so noticeable, that these states will be urged merely through danger to themselves, even without legal standing, as arbiters, and thus remotely prepare the way for a future state body.⁶¹

In the philosophy, as in the political theory, the specter of a jubilant future is called forth to redeem the crimes and failures of a wretched present, and “chaos and night” are only the tempestuous prelude to order and enlightenment.⁶²

Kant not only advances the same teleology in his philosophy that he does in his politics; he does so for identical reasons. The reason we do not simply “command peace” in philosophy, as though by royal edict, is that fierce contestation over metaphysics is itself intrinsically valuable, and deactivating it prematurely will short-circuit philosophy’s future progress. As Kant puts it in his lectures on logic, “nothing is more harmful to the learned world than universal tranquility and agreement and peace . . . this always hinders [the] improvement and augmentation of learning.”⁶³ Thus debate must be encouraged whenever a wave of consensus and orthodoxy sweeps through the faculty. Although it is regrettable that philosophers must pursue their rivalry in a blizzard of misunderstanding, although they seem to go “round and round in an eternal circle of ambiguities and contradictions,”⁶⁴ nevertheless their violent gyrations are what propel metaphysics forward. Here the seminal text is the *Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy*, which begins by retracing the *grandes lignes* of the *Universal History*.

In *addition* to the property of *self-consciousness*, by which man is to be distinguished above all other animals, and in virtue of which he is a *rational* animal . . . there is also the *itch* to use this power for *trifling*, and thereafter to trifle methodically and even by concepts alone, i.e. to *philosophize*; and then also to grate polemically upon others with

⁶⁰ Ibid., A777–8/B805–6.

⁶¹ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 8: 28. Cf. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§56), 6: 346 (until the establishment of a right of nations, states retain every right of *ius ad bellum*, including the right to preventive war).

⁶² Kant, *Pure Reason*, Ax.

⁶³ Immanuel Kant, “The Blomberg Logic,” in Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, trans. and ed. J. Michael Young (Cambridge, 1992), 210 (translation modified).

⁶⁴ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A395.

one's philosophy, i.e. to *dispute*, and since this does not readily happen without emotion, to *squabble* on behalf of one's philosophy, and finally, united in masses against one another (school against school, as contending armies) to *wage* open *warfare*; this itch, I say, or rather *drive*, will have to be viewed as one of the beneficent and wise arrangements of Nature, whereby she seeks to protect man from the great misfortune of decaying in the flesh.⁶⁵

The light irony masks a series of essential points. First, we get another clear indication that the history of philosophy follows the same twisting, parabolic course as political society, descending from an original unsocial sociability into lawless pandemonium and the war of all against all. Here the diction is more direct than usual: *Schule gegen Schule als Heer gegen Heer . . . vereinigt offenen Krieg zu führen*. And second, as attentive readers of the *Critique of Pure Reason* would have understood intuitively, this enmity is not philosophy's death but its salvation. This is not only because the mutually assured destruction of the different clubs prepares the way for their final assimilation by the Critique, but also because discord and polemic are what keep the critical faculties sharp and the human spirit vital. The expression "decaying in the flesh" (*lebendigen Leibes zu verfaulen*) references the first line of the essay, a paraphrase of Chrysippus: "Nature has given the pig a *soul*, instead of *salt*, so that he should not become rotten [*damit es nicht verfaule*]." ⁶⁶ Our drives, including our drive to compete with, subordinate, and annihilate our fellow human beings, are what elevate us above the baseness of the animal kingdom. And a life of easy contentment—free of danger in politics and controversy in metaphysics—is mere *existence*, the shadow of a life.

Perhaps better to say: a life dreamed away. Because Kant habitually associates the tranquility and unity sought by dogmatic philosophers with languor, dormancy, and the sleep of reason. Hence the well-known declaration in the *Prolegomena* that it was Hume's piercing skepticism that first roused him from his "dogmatic slumber": however barren skepticism may be as a comprehensive epistemology, it is infinitely valuable in unsettling the "sweet dogmatic dreams" of the philosophers, and so making "a peaceful retirement for reason" impossible.⁶⁷ Similarly, in the unpublished Prize Essay, he cited his discovery while composing the First Critique that "*a priori* propositions . . . come into conflict and mutual attrition [*in Widerstreit kommen und sich unter einander aufzureiben*]" as the *force*

⁶⁵ Kant, "Treaty," 8: 414, emphasis in the original. Even in the political writings, "unsocial sociability" is bound up with epistemic conflict; it takes hold because each man "wants to direct everything according to his own sense of things." Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 8: 21 (translation modified).

⁶⁶ Kant, "Treaty," 8: 413, emphasis in the original.

⁶⁷ Kant, *Prolegomena*, 4: 260; Kant, *Pure Reason*, A757/B786.

majeure that shook his reason from “the pillow of its supposed knowledge.”⁶⁸ The point is the same in either case: to flourish, reason requires contest, competition, and dissension. It must be, in Kant’s terms, awake. The end of conflict in philosophy is slumber, and the onset of slumber is death—what Kant ominously calls “the euthanasia of pure reason.”⁶⁹ The delicate task of the Critique is to sustain the tension that keeps philosophy vital, while preventing it from collapsing into a war of extermination.

Recall Kant’s admonition in the *Universal History* that, without the spur of unsocial sociability, the infinite capacities of man “would eternally slumber undeveloped” (*ewig unentwickelt schlummern*), and his warning in the *Conjectural Beginnings* that a life of “everlasting peace” (*immerwährender Friede*) would be “dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play.”⁷⁰ To a startling degree in both the politics and the philosophy, war and dissensus are associated with progress and human liberty, while “everlasting peace” is linked to complacency, orthodoxy, and absolutism. In the remainder of the essay I want to confront two puzzles that now loom gigantically on the horizon. First, what can the “perpetual peace” that Kant advocates possibly mean in this context? And second, is it plausible that, having moved in such perfect synchronicity, the paths of perpetual peace in politics and perpetual peace in philosophy will now abruptly diverge?

The usual way of reconciling Kant’s denunciation of concord with his appeal for perpetual peace is to posit a kind of teleological threshold. In our current primitive state the imposition of a general peace would be disastrous, but under the conditions of a “completed culture” mankind will at last be prepared for its messianic arrival.⁷¹ Yet this fails to explain why a harmonious cosmopolitan order wouldn’t quickly become a “Chinese peace” that arrests further mental and material progress. Enlightenment, after all, is not a process that can ever be brought to completion,⁷² and nothing about the social and psychological mechanisms Kant identifies suggests that they will become inoperative at some unspecified point of inflection. Rather, he predicts in the *Universal History* that “a condition of public state security [that] is . . . wholly without *dangers*” would foster torpor and inactivity.⁷³ The question, then, is what sort of international political structure might stem the bloodletting of global war while preserving

⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany* (1793/1804), trans. Peter Heath, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, 20: 319–20.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A407/B434.

⁷⁰ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 8: 21; Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8: 122. Cf. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 343.

⁷¹ Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 8: 121.

⁷² Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784), trans. Mary J. Gregor, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 8: 39.

⁷³ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 8: 26, emphasis in the original.

the competitive tension that drives civilization forward. How do we escape the double bind in which the more hospitable international civil society becomes, the greater also is our risk of intellectual and political stagnation?

We have seen that all great problems in the Kantian philosophy recur, as it were, twice, since the political theory duplicates and extends the basic framework of the first philosophy. And so one way of discerning the shape of the cosmopolitan future is to ask how Kant thinks to safeguard a future of perpetual peace in philosophy:

This philosophy, which is an outlook ever-armed (against those who perversely confound appearances with things-in-themselves), and precisely because of this unceasingly accompanies the activity of reason, offers the prospect of an eternal peace among philosophers, through the impotence, on the one hand, of *theoretical* proofs to the contrary, and through the strength of the *practical* grounds for accepting its principles on the other; a peace having the further advantage of constantly activating the powers of the subject, who is seemingly in danger of attack, and thus of also promoting, by philosophy, nature's intention of continuously revitalizing him, and preventing the sleep of death. From this point of view, the utterance of a man eminent not only in his own (mathematical) field, but also in many others . . . must be interpreted, not as words of ill-omen, but as a *felicitation*, when he utterly denies to the philosophers a peace resting comfortably on suppositious laurels; in that a peace of that sort would indeed merely enfeeble the powers and defeat nature's purpose with regard to philosophy, as a continuing restorative to the ultimate purpose of mankind; whereas the disposition to contend is still no war, but rather can and should restrain the latter, and so assure peace, by a decisive preponderance of the practical grounds over those of the other side.⁷⁴

This severs the Gordian knot of competition and stagnation in a single clean stroke. Eternal peace in philosophy (*ewigen Frieden unter den Philosophen*) doesn't trail "the sleep of death" because here "peace" means supervision by the Critique, not the cessation of all conflict. The pacification of philosophy by means of enforced unanimity is the hallmark of dogmatism, scorned by Kant as a "pillow to fall asleep on, and an end to all vitality, which latter is precisely the benefit conferred by philosophy."⁷⁵ The continuing vibrancy of metaphysics depends on these debates and arguments continuing ad infinitum. With this difference: that all parties formally submit to its jurisdiction, and recognize it as the "true court of justice [*Gerichtshof*]" and the final arbiter of their disputes.⁷⁶

Conflict in philosophy is ineradicable for two interlinked reasons. First, the form of a tribunal presupposes an ideal of adversarial due process. Kant draws

⁷⁴ Kant, "Treaty," 8: 416–17, emphasis in the original.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8: 415.

⁷⁶ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A751–2/B779–80. Cf. *ibid.*, Axii ("this court is none other than the **critique of pure reason**").

this out in a passage from the *Logik Blomberg*, differentiating “true” skepticism from its useless variants:

Thus the *scepticus* constantly inquires, he examines and investigates, he distrusts everything, but never without a ground. In this he resembles a judge, who weighs the grounds for something as well as against it, and who listens to the plaintiff as well as the defendant, prior to and before deciding the matter and passing judgment. He postpones his final judgment quite long before he dares to settle something fully.⁷⁷

Knowledge, in other words, is produced dialectically through conflict. And the role of the Critique is to structure this conflict by providing a method through which competing philosophical claims can be evaluated. In the words of Susan Neiman, “just as an impartial legal system concerns itself with achieving the conditions of a just process without seeking to determine any outcome antecedent to that process itself,” so the critical philosophy seeks to identify and outlaw spurious philosophical arguments without imposing a fixed program of eternal truth.⁷⁸ The conflict and competition that marked “the battlefield of metaphysics” are translated into the idiom of legal order and *durch Proceß*. This result is not, as is sometimes supposed, the liquidation of dogmatic and skeptical philosophies, but their mutual transformation and balance. Dogmatic pronouncements on moral autonomy reappear as the cautious investigations of practical reason; arid skepticism is reconfigured as the skeptical method, a guardrail against “groundless beliefs.”⁷⁹

The critical philosophy, moreover, is *itself* a fragile, shifting consensus, born of reasoned deliberation and “the agreement of free citizens.” Implicit in the very concept of critical reason is its constant rearticulation and re-formation in response to criticism, and its renunciation of any “dictatorial authority.”⁸⁰ Its character of sublimated warfare is suggested by a quote from the Doctrine of Method: “Thus let your opponent speak only reason, and fight him solely with weapons of reason.”⁸¹ Kant, then, seems to have squared the circle: contention without anarchy, order without sleep. As long as the philosophers obey the final arbitrations of the Critique, they can argue as much as they like.

⁷⁷ Kant, “The Blomberg Logic,” 24: 209–10.

⁷⁸ Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (Oxford, 1994), 195.

⁷⁹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A486/B514. Cf. Philip Rossi, SJ, *The Social Authority of Reason* (Albany, NY, 2005), 142–3; John Christian Laursen, *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant* (Leiden, 1992), 199–206.

⁸⁰ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A738/B766. Cf. O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 15–17.

⁸¹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A744/B772.

A new world order

Kant's blueprint for *ewige Frieden unter den Philosophen* is distinctively political: a cool war of perpetual antagonism, overseen by a central intelligence that prohibits open violence but tolerates competition and disunity when restricted to lawful bounds. The question is whether this constellation of motifs and metaphors helps to illuminate Kant's politics, which Arthur Ripstein has called "opaque, even by the standards of his other writings."⁸² It is tempting to think that it doesn't, that the politics and the philosophy run on different tracks, and that Kant's striking metaphors are not a guide to anything but themselves. This is the line taken by Henry Allison:

the kind of peace (or health) attainable by philosophy differs in at least one significant respect from the peace that Kant envisioned for the political realm in the original essay on *Perpetual Peace*. For there Kant emphasized that it is the very fact that states find themselves in an armed condition that inclines and invariably leads them to war . . . By contrast, in the realm of philosophy, no such abolition [of arms, or readiness] is recommended.⁸³

And admittedly Kant states that the "disposition to contend is no war," which seems inconsistent with the demand in *Perpetual Peace* that standing armies and public credit be abolished.⁸⁴ Kant, after all, is at pains to remind the reader of the First Critique that (unlike the slaughter-bench of history) philosophy's battle of the books is necessarily "bloodless."⁸⁵ It is not impossible to imagine that Kant is willing to tolerate a level of antipathy among scholastics that he would find unacceptable in world politics. Isn't this the gist of the satirical verse by the mathematician Kästner that Kant welcomes as a "*felicitation*"?

Eternally all wars will cease
If we but heed the wise man's thought;
Then all men will live in peace
Except philosophers, in squabbles caught.⁸⁶

⁸² Arthur Ripstein, "Kant and the Circumstances of Justice," in Ellis, *Kant's Political Theory*, 42–73, 42.

⁸³ Henry Allison, "General Introduction," in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, 1–27, 27.

⁸⁴ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 345 ("This facility of making war . . . is therefore a great hindrance to perpetual peace"). Cf. *ibid.* 8: 349 ("which is much rather a condition of war, that is, it involves the constant threat of an outbreak of hostilities even if this does not always occur").

⁸⁵ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A747/B775; A756/B784.

⁸⁶ A. G. Kästner, *Poetische Blumenlese für das Jahr 1797*, trans. David Wellbery, in Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, trans. and ed. Eckhart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge, 1993), 267 n. 51.

But a separate peace for philosophy is implausible. In every sphere of human relations Kant's ideal is a *kinetic* and *conflictual* peace, not the celestial tedium of Milton's Heaven. Hence the injunction in ethics that "such conflict will remain . . . as the whetstone of virtue," and in religion that "to assert [our] freedom, which is constantly under attack, [we] must henceforth remain forever armed for battle."⁸⁷ And of course the mission of the *Conflict of the Faculties* is not at all to heal the schism between the philosophical and professional departments. Rather, "This conflict can never end, and it is the philosophy faculty that must always be prepared to keep it going." In what sense, then, can Kant speak of a "Conclusion of peace and settlement of the conflict of the faculties"? He tells us in the laconic paragraph that caps the Fourth Section:

So this antagonism, that is, this *conflict* of two parties united in [their striving toward] one and the same final end (*concordia discors, discordia concors*), is not a *war*, that is, not a dispute arising from conflicting final aims regarding the *Mine* and *Thine* of learning.⁸⁸

Peace demands a sovereign entity that can articulate a shared set of "final aims" and adjudicate questions of *meum* and *tuum*; it does not require eliminating jealousy, rivalry, or social antagonism. Indeed, in a world without aggressive war it is precisely the amplification of these tendencies in our intellectual and political life that preserves the critical faculties from stultification and decay. The *Conflict of the Faculties* is remarkable only in underlining what readers will have already suspected: the Kantian peace typically carries a ballistic signature. And this is true, above all, of the "cosmopolitan condition of public state security" that he champions in the *Universal History*, "which is not wholly without *dangers* [*Gefahr*] so that the powers of humanity may not fall asleep," but are kept in equipoise, "so that they may not destroy each other."⁸⁹ Or as he puts it in *Perpetual Peace*, slightly more mysteriously: "a peace that is produced and secured, not as in such a despotism (in the graveyard of freedom), by means of a weakening of all forces, but by means of their equilibrium in liveliest competition

⁸⁷ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 379; Kant, *Religion*, 6: 93 [*muß er forthin immer zum Kampfe gerüstet bleiben*].

⁸⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor, in Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 7: 34; 7: 61; 7: 35–6, emphasis in the original. The slogan *concordia discors* . . . is quite close to "The human being wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species: it wills discord." See Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 8: 21. Although Kant continuously revised his ideas, including his political ideas, this recycling of language fourteen years later implies that his concept of disorder as the predicate of order remained constant.

⁸⁹ Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 8: 26. Notably, in the next sentence Kant refers to *dem an sich heilsamen Widerstande*—that is, "the essentially healthy antagonism between states."

[*ihr Gleichgewicht im lebhaftesten Wetteifer*].” Once we appreciate that risk and competition are the building blocks of a rightful condition between states, we can start to make sense of Kant’s aphorism that “the disposition to contend is still no war.” As with cantilevered architecture, it is the underlying stress and tension that makes the soaring achievement possible.

A close reading of the pivotal clause in the *Treaty for Perpetual Peace in Philosophy* calls into question the sharp distinction between eternal peace in philosophy and eternal peace among nations. For instance, only the *critical philosophy* is called “ever-armed,” while individual philosophies and philosophers are carefully described as “seemingly in danger [*in scheinbare Gefahr*] of attack.”⁹⁰ But it is certainly true that Kant’s international writings demand not just the curtailment but also the total abrogation of offensive war and its appendages.⁹¹ And so we are left with the question of how the tension and animosity that fuels perpetual peace can be safely contained without being evaporated. We can imagine different scenarios. One is *perpetual incompleteness*, stated in exemplary form by Michael Ferguson. On this reading, we are meant to approach the ideal asymptotically without ever fully attaining it, and it is our failure to complete the process that keeps it in motion. Thus we should expect our progress to be undercut by periods of relapse into war and cruelty, which will in turn renew our motivation to realize a cosmopolitan legal order.⁹² A second possibility is the *displacement* of our agonistic energies into other activities—dynamic, planetary forms of public deliberation, or the harmless competition of Olympic games. In the *Anthropology* Kant talks about games of chance and skill in terms that recall the *Universal History*: “they are unknowingly the spurs of a wiser nature to daring deeds, to test human beings’ powers in competition with others; actually so that their vital force in general is preserved from weakening and kept active.”⁹³ It could be that, in the future empyrean of a *Weltrepublik*, our indestructible competitive drives will be satisfied by the mere play of bodies and ideas.

But the collected works point to an additional answer: the creation and expansion of adversarial judicial institutions. Although in the 1790s Kant would propose a voluntary league of nations as a way station on the *via ad pacem*, a “future large state body” with a full panoply of judicial powers remained the

⁹⁰ Kant, “Treaty,” 8: 416. Emphasis mine.

⁹¹ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§62), 6: 354 (“Now morally practical reason pronounces in us its irresistible *veto*: *there is to be no war*, neither war between you and me in the state of nature nor war between us as states”—emphasis in the original).

⁹² Ferguson, “Unsocial Sociability,” 164–6.

⁹³ Kant, *Anthropology*, 7: 276.

event horizon of his international theory.⁹⁴ A growing body of scholarship calls attention to the centrality of juridical institutions to Kant's picture of global peace.⁹⁵ Byrd and Hruschka go furthest in their commentary on the *Doctrine of Right*:

Far from accepting a loose league of states, such as the United Nations, or a commercial negotiation forum, such as the World Trade Organization, Kant envisions a state of nation states and a cosmopolitan legal order, both with courts backed by coercive enforcement powers, as the ideal solution to ensuring peace on the international and cosmopolitan levels.⁹⁶

Kant, after all, never retreated from his insistence that "conflict among princes will be resolved through judicial sentences [*Gerichtsaussprüche*]" rather than through immature violence.⁹⁷ And since the First Critique is hardly under way before Kant is proclaiming his metaphysics "a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims," this is just as we would expect from the double-helix pattern of the philosophy.⁹⁸ Importantly, Kant depicts these tribunals not only as spaces of cooperation and dispute resolution, but also as sites of quarrel and commotion. Just as conflicts in philosophy will continue as before, albeit now under the control and supervision of the *Kritik*, we may suspect that the diplomatic, commercial, and geopolitical rivalries of the present will not be entirely superseded by the advent of a world public sphere.

⁹⁴ Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 8: 24–6. Cf. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8: 368; Kant, "Theory/Practice," 8: 313. Kant's statement in *Perpetual Peace* that "[t]he way in which states pursue their right can never be legal proceedings before an external court but can only be war" (8: 355) is highly misleading if taken on its own; in context it is clear that he is making a descriptive claim about the present and not a normative claim about the future. On the next page he opines that a state of states ("the civil social union") is the surest means of securing "the right of nations," which would seem to falsify the earlier remark. On the other hand, his belief that states "already have a rightful constitution internally and hence have outgrown the constraint of others to bring them under a more extended law-governed constitution" is more complex. Certainly it does *not* mean that states can never be the targets of coercion by a global political body; it means only that they cannot be dragooned into this new world order against their will. Kleingeld, "Approaching Perpetual Peace," 320, construes this as a warning about "the proper emergence of these structures and their democratic legitimacy." Byrd and Hruschka argue that Kant abandoned even this qualified position in the *Rechtslehre*; see B. Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka, *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary* (Cambridge, 2010), 195.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Reidar Maliks, "Kantian Courts: On the Legitimacy of International Human Rights Courts," in Follesdall and Maliks, *Kantian Theory and Human Rights*, 153–74.

⁹⁶ Byrd and Hruschka, *Commentary*, 188.

⁹⁷ Immanuel Kant, "Anthropology Mrongovius (1784–5)," in Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, trans. Robert R. Clewis, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 2012), 25: 1429.

⁹⁸ Kant, *Pure Reason*, Axi–ii.

Indeed, if we survey the collected works we find that legal contest is not at all a synonym for “amicable” dispute resolution and universal friendship, but something closer to its opposite. Thus in his withering review of *Morning Hours*, published at the height of the pantheism controversy, Kant reproaches Moses Mendelssohn for his weak and unconvincing efforts at neutrality. “*Mendelssohn*,” he writes, “in order to dispense with the laborious business of *deciding* the conflict of pure reason,” adopts the comportment of an “indolent judge” who hopes either to “*settle* the dispute amicably, or to *dismiss* it as not pertaining to any court of law [*Gerichtshof*].” The province of a true jurist is not to duck controversies but to decide them, and this is entirely different from Mendelssohn’s shallow attempts to broker consensus.⁹⁹ This stark distinction between a comprehensive juridical peace and the superficial amity preferred by the indifferentists is on full display in the *Conflict of the Faculties*. “This conflict” between philosophers and their opponents in the professional faculties “cannot and should not be settled by an amicable accommodation (*amicabilis compositio*), but (as a lawsuit) calls for a verdict, that is, the decision of a judge (reason) which has the force of law.” Although he is adamant that “[t]his conflict can never end,” he hastens to add that it is “quite compatible” with agreement on a basic set of ground-norms that, “if observed, must bring about a constant progress of both ranks of the faculties toward greater perfection.”¹⁰⁰ That is to say, the peace treaty Kant drafts for the university is not meant to usher in a chiliar of comity and friendship. Rather than moral consensus Kant offers an uneasy *modus vivendi*, a minimalist legal framework that binds the Furies without entirely banishing them.

The template for this imperfectly suppressed hostility is the adversarial legal system, which is why Kant can write of the prosecutor and defense attorney that “their dispute cannot be settled amicably (*per amicabilem compositionem*) but must rather be decided with all the rigor of right.”¹⁰¹ Two sides competing aggressively before a judge, sharing nothing in common save an overarching commitment to the rule of law—there is an unmistakable resemblance here to the “congress of states” that Kant elucidates in §61 of the *Rechtslehre*. This “convention” (*Zusammentretung*), modeled on the ad hoc assemblies in the Hague that mediated conflict in the first half of the eighteenth century, has all the trappings of a world court. Great emphasis is placed on judicial process.

The ministers of most of the courts of Europe and even of the smallest republics lodged with it their complaints about attacks being made on one of them by another. In this way

⁹⁹ Kant, “Some Remarks” 8: 152; 8: 154, emphasis in the original. Cf. Kant, “Lectures on Ethics (Collins),” in *Lectures on Ethics*, 27: 431.

¹⁰⁰ Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, 7: 33; 7: 35. Here “lawsuit” is *Proceß*, and “verdict” is *Sentenz*.

¹⁰¹ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Tugendlehre)* (§13), 6: 440.

they thought of the whole of Europe as a single confederated state which they accepted as arbiter, so to speak, in their public disputes.¹⁰²

Even more telling is what Kant adds on the following page: “The rational idea of a *peaceful*, even if not friendly, thoroughgoing community of all nations on the earth . . . is not a philanthropic (ethical) principle but a principle *having to do with rights*.”¹⁰³ The special focus on juridical rights, the brisk dismissal of mere “philanthropy,” and the vision of a world community that is *peaceful* but not *friendly* (*friedlichen, wenn gleich noch nicht freundschaftlichen*) are all perfectly contiguous with the program of *pax philosophenis* enunciated in the First Critique.

CONCLUSION

In the late 1990s, as liberal philosophers looked ahead expectantly to the twilight of great-power politics and the dawn of global human rights, the political theorist Chantal Mouffe sounded a dissonant note. Dissatisfied with the emerging consensus that “antagonisms are a thing of the past and that, in times of globalization, the cosmopolitan ideal elaborated by Kant can finally be realized,” Mouffe instead called for a politics of agonistic struggle and (in her coinage) *conflictual consensus*.¹⁰⁴ On a global scale, this would mean discarding “the illusion of a unified world” in favor of a vibrant multipolar order that would preserve space for debate, dissent, and irresolvable disagreement. Territorial nation-states and regional associations would continue to compete over ideology, ethics, and the configuration of power, but through polemic and legal argument, and not by the resort to arms. On this point, Mouffe is lucid: “By creating the conditions for possible conflicts to take the form of confrontations among adversaries (agonism), it attempts to avoid a frontal struggle between enemies (antagonism).”¹⁰⁵ By acknowledging the inevitability of disagreement and producing structures to accommodate and constrain it, we might be able to circumvent its deadliest consequences. Of course these doctrines should sound more than slightly familiar. Mouffe’s embrace of Kantian politics in the guise of

¹⁰² Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§61), 6: 350. In the “Anthropology Mrongovius,” 25: 1412, Kant also commends the “many examples of peacefully settled disputes at the Diet at Regensburg,” the imperial congress of the Holy Roman Empire.

¹⁰³ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals (Rechtslehre)* (§62), 6: 352, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London, 2005), 90; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, 2000), 103.

¹⁰⁵ Chantal Mouffe, “Introduction,” in Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London, 1999), 1–6, 4.

anti-Kantianism testifies to the cloud of misprision that still surrounds *Perpetual Peace* and the allied writings.

The modern reception of Kant is defined by a double movement: on the one hand, a growing consensus that he is the preeminent figure in international political thought, and on the other, an increasingly fractious disagreement about the content of his “perpetual peace.” The astonishing number of programs and initiatives that look to Kant for their patents of nobility only add to the confusion. At the same time, Kant’s metaphysics are suffused with juridico-political metaphors and phantom invocations of sovereignty. The endless sparring of opposing philosophical schools is frequently termed a “battle” or a “war,” while the critical philosophy is presented as a mode of global governance uniquely capable of bringing this tumult to an end.

The grand proposition of this essay has been, first, that these seeming digressions constitute a guide to reading and interpreting the later political texts, and, second, that the Kantian utopia takes on a very different aspect when projected through the camera obscura of *Kritik*. For the first time it acquires a definite shape: a *Völkerstaat* that absolutely forbids war, but permits and even thrives on the unrest and free competition of its constituent parts. And equally, its agonistic character, what Kant calls its *concordia discors*, comes clearly into focus. The recession of war will be accompanied—and perhaps underwritten—by an eternal recurrence of ideological struggle and political combat.

One perceives immediately the distance between this version of Kant’s politics and the conventional interpretations. On the one hand, it requires a much more extensive world government than is typically acknowledged, since it is only under the watchful eye of a transcendent authority that our deepest disagreements can be safely expressed. And on the other hand, it renounces what Mouffe calls “the dream of a reconciled world that [has] overcome power, sovereignty, and hegemony,” a fantasy of ethics and politics fused indissolubly together.¹⁰⁶ Whatever we make of a pacified future inhabited by gentle cosmopolitan citizens, this is assuredly not the Kantian ideal.

In the spring of 1797, as Kant finalized the manuscript for his long-awaited “Metaphysics of Morals,” he found himself drawn into a polemical exchange of letters with the Physiocrat J. A. Schlettwein. Several weeks earlier, Schlettwein had published an intemperate open letter to Kant, heaping scorn on the critical system. He thought it a particular scandal that Kantian metaphysics could be interpreted in so many diverse ways by Kant’s disciples, who were now mired in “the most shameful disputes” (*entehrendsten Streitigkeiten*) with

¹⁰⁶ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 130.

one another.¹⁰⁷ In his measured response, Kant acknowledged the interpretive controversy, and confidently welcomed what he perceived to be Schlettwein's attempt "to overthrow completely my whole philosophical system." He named the interpreters who were authorized to speak and argue on his behalf. And he closed with a benediction that might also serve as an epigraph for the critical philosophy: "So now the feud may continue forever, with never a shortage of opponents for every disputant."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Johann August Schlettwein to Immanuel Kant, 11 May 1797, in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge, 1999), 12: 366 (my translation).

¹⁰⁸ Immanuel Kant to Johann August Schlettwein, 29 May 1797, in Kant, *Correspondence*, 12: 367–8.