

Eternal Peace, Perpetual War?

A Critical Investigation into Kant's Conceptualisation of War

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Introduction

There is something paradoxical about the relationship between Immanuel Kant and International Relations. While he casts a significant shadow on Liberalism in general, and the Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) in particular, much of this influence is based on a very limited and rarified reading of his work. Given the virtually exclusive focus on his treatise *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, which ignores much of his other political theoretical and anthropological writings, a critical review of his reception within IR should easily reveal the facile and truncated use and abuse of his work.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to destabilise traditional IR readings of Kant by elaborating his unstable and contradictory conceptualisation of War. Contrary to the facile reading by IR Liberal theorists, War cannot be reduced to the other of (Eternal) Peace in Kant. When we expand our critical reading of his political theory, it becomes quickly evident that Kant offers a very different, contradictory, or rather aporetic, discussion and valorisation of War.¹ This essay argues that we can detect at least three different conceptualisations in his work, which produce an ever-shifting and ultimately irreconcilable argument about the relationship between War and Peace, and between War and Subjectivity. As such, the normative commitment to Eternal Peace and the concomitant condemnation of War that we find in the treatise of the same name needs to be qualified by contrasting it with Kant's definition of War as a) a historically progressive force and b) an expression of the Sublime.

Given the intellectual and theoretical 'spill-over' such a conceptual and normative revalorisation has for the DPT, the second(ary) purpose of this paper is to pull the floor from underneath its simplistic reading of Kant and to undermine its theoretical as well as political and practical tenets. What I aim to demonstrate here is that a wider and more critical reading of Kant on War and Peace does not provide the philosophical support for DPT that its proponents claim. In a sense, then, the aim is to re-enforce the argument that DPT relies on a systematically erroneous reading of Kant (e.g., MacMillan, 2006; Franceschet, 2006; Jahn, 2006). This latter argument relies on a critical re-reading and re-assessment of *Eternal Peace*,² focusing on the omissions

¹ I thank Rob Walker for the latter observation.

² Contrary to common usage, I insist on the translation of 'Ewiger Frieden' as 'Eternal Peace'. See Behnke (2008: 513-14) for the relevant argument.

and mis-interpretations by DPT protagonists in reading the text. The analysis in this essay expands this critique by including a wider reading of Kant's texts, and by focusing on the concept of War rather than Peace.

Arguably, it is Kant himself who pushes us to re-focus the analysis away from Peace towards War. Even in *Eternal Peace*, the 'noble cause' of Peace as the expression of moral perfection (and economic interests) cannot distract Kant from his own fascination with War as a historical force in the shaping of human subjectivity. And when we further expand our reading of Kant, we find that War much more than Peace at the centre of his political theorising.

This fascination with War should not really come as a surprise. Interested as he is in the (moral) progress of mankind through history, the stasis of Peace cannot account for the changing subjectivity of Man. For this, the dynamics of War have to be recognised as ontological prior to, and analytical more significant than, Peace. For as Christopher Coker has argued, it is the experience of War that induced existential experiences; it is the encounter with the *extra-ordinary* of life-and-death combat that transforms our subjectivity. So it should come as no surprise that the moral progression of mankind that is at the core of Kant's political theory cannot be conceptualised without reference to the transformative capacity of War.

The analytical template of this paper draws on Coker's scheme in his analysis of culturally embedded understandings of War (Coker, 2002: 32-8). The relevant, here somewhat modified, categories are:

- Subjectivity: What subject are engaged in, and constituted by, War and Peace? What is their identity, and how are they related to normative valorisations of War and Peace?
- Inter-subjectivity: Who or what is 'the other' of the central subject? What is the relationship between these 'adversaries'? What structures this relationship?
- Agency: Who or what is the agent in Kant's narratives on War? What is the purpose of this agent? What is his role in relationship to History and moral progress?

As I shall demonstrate in the following, there are three different sets of answers Kant provides to these questions. Ultimately, the concept of War remains altogether unstable and contradictory, and consequently, so does the concept of Peace. The

conclusion of the paper will spell out the consequences of this deconstructive reading for Liberal Theory and DPT.

War as the Other of Reason

In its first and most commonly appreciated version, Kant's concept of War serves as the backdrop to the moral and political superiority of Peace (Jabri2007: 67). While the latter is associated with moral maturity, republican identity, and historical progress, the former becomes an indicator of moral inferiority, dynastic identities and ambitions, and historical backwardness. In Kant's words,

But under a constitution where the subject is not a citizen, and which is therefore not republican, it is the simplest thing in the world to go to war. For the head of state is not a fellow citizen, but the owner of the state, and a war will not force him to make the slightest sacrifice so far as his banquets, hunts, pleasure palaces and court festivals are concerned. He can thus decide on war, without any significant reason, as a kind of amusement, and unconcernedly leave it to the diplomatic corps (who are always ready for such purposes) to justify the war for the sake of propriety (Kant, 2007a: 100).

War here stands in opposition to Law and Freedom, as only the alternative form of government, i.e., Republicanism is based on 'the pure concept of right' (Kant, 2007a: 100). War turns free men into pawns of kings and princes, calling down upon them 'all the miseries of war'. War, in other words, turns men into means rather than ends, with the ends defined by the frivolity of a morally depraved aristocracy.

Given Kant's concern with the moral progress of mankind, War is temporalised as an indicator of an earlier stage of civilisation, characterised by the blatant absence of Reason. War takes place among humans who are still within, or close to, the state of nature. 'Savage and lawless freedom' has not yet been transcended by the morally informed freedom that subjects itself to the Law. And those blessed by the latter can only loathe those creatures which remain in such barbaric conditions:

We look with profound contempt upon the way in which savages cling to their lawless freedom. They would rather engage in incessant strife than submit to a

legal constraint which they might impose upon themselves, for they prefer the freedom of folly to the freedom of reason. We regard this as barbarism, coarseness, and brutish debasement of humanity (Kant, 2007a: 103).

It is interesting to read this section closely, as Kant here deploys aesthetic categories (coarse, brutish) to express a moral condemnation. Morals and Aesthetics, it seems, are somehow involved with each other in Kant. I shall return to this point further down below.

The temporalisation of War into a metaphysical past of mankind is accompanied by a particular spatialisation of War outside of the republican space. A confederation of republics define the core of the Eternal Peace project, in which man is able to realise his otherwise dormant moral capacity to overcome the ‘evil principle within him ... and to hope that others will do likewise’ (Kant, 2007a: 103). Outside this republican space the independence and sovereign freedom of states still leads to conflict and war. The Eternal Peace project then consists in expanding the pacific, republican sphere into this ‘anarchical’ remainder. The mechanism that accomplishes this is ‘the spirit of commerce’ and economic and financial interest that cannot, Kant argues, be realised in a war system.

Thus states find themselves compelled to promote the noble cause of peace, though not exactly from motives of morality. ... In this way, nature guarantees [eternal] peace by the actually mechanism of human inclination (Kant, 2007a: 114).

Subjectivity

At first glance, Eternal Peace defines the realm of the autonomous subject that stands as the *telos* of Kant’s moral progression of mankind. As Vivienne Jabri writes,

The modern subject of reason is at the same time the peaceful subject, author of the transition from the state of nature to a social framework based on rights, a framework that in the Kantian view extends from the civic constitution that guarantees the rights of the individual citizen to the federation that guarantees the rights of all in a community of humankind (Jabri, 2007: 81).

Within this in the Liberal IR reading of Kant dominant narrative of War and Peace the ideal subject is a free, rational man, a citizen, pursuing his economic interests in a pacified republican space. Reason has replaced ambition, as the subject's identity is no longer constituted in the vain and frivolous pursuit of 'amusement' or glory. Freedom is no longer the freedom of the savage to do as he pleases, but of reasonable Man, who willingly subjects himself to the Law. Eternal Peace is thus the accomplishment of the morally perfected subject that can freely submit himself to law and thus overcomes the heteronomy of historical man.

Yet on closer inspection, Kant introduces an interesting aporia into the logic of Eternal Peace when he states that even a 'nation of devils' and 'actually existing (although as yet very imperfectly organised) states' can become parties to the pacific confederation at the heart of his project (Kant, 2007a:114). Moral perfection no longer seems to be the only necessary condition, as the (heteronomous) interests in the economic benefits of such a confederation by less than perfect subjects and states suffices for the institution of Eternal Peace. It therefore becomes impossible to decide how Eternal Peace is to be instituted. While the first of these story lines suggest that moral perfection leads to the realisation of economic interest and thus to Eternal Peace, the second narrative lets (at this point heteronomous) economic interests and rationality lead over time to moral perfection, as the benefits of the economic benefits of pacific confederation induce the latter. Hence it becomes undecidable whether morality leads to peace via economic rationality, or economic rationality to morality via peace. Hence, it remains unclear whether Moral Man is the producer, or the product of Eternal Peace.

Inter-Subjectivity

Given that Kant temporalises War into a historically and morally antecedent reality to Peace, Moral Man encounters his (earlier) self as the Other. War and Peace here define a relationship not between phenomenal and contemporaneous agents, but between different stages of Man in his progress to moral perfection. War defines the space of the Other of Man, the continued violent mingling of brutes and savages. As such, it has no productive role to play in the moral constitution of Man. Written from the idealised perspective of moral perfection within a republican space, and thus at the 'end of history' for Man, its prior, imperfect incarnations are ontologically shed, and

relegated to the past. Moral Man forgets his own historical trajectory and encounters his prior self in an alienated fashion as a savage, brute, or degenerate Other.

Agency

Within this dominant narrative of *Eternal Peace*, Man himself is the agent of History and its transcendence. Moral man is the author of the Eternal Peace, it is up to him to create the federation of states that shall be at the centre of an ever expanding pacific sphere. Man at this stage is autonomous, his subjection to Law self-imposed. Peace is either the outcome of the constant moral improvement of Man, or the by-product of the pursuit of with economic or financial benefits, luring those still short of moral perfection). War in turn is the outcome of moral imperfection within agents, not the result of structural conditions or conflicting political identities and interests.

To the extent that Eternal Peace ‘must be formally instituted’ (Kant, 2007a: 98), the moral agency of Man is mirrored in the political agency of the continuously sovereign state. Peace is translated from the moral to the political by investing the state with the ‘agency for peace’ (Jabri, 2007: 72). More precisely, this agency depends on the proper internal structure of the state, for only a republican state can induce the creation of a pacific sphere within the state system. The autonomy of the moral individual within a republican state is then reflected and amplified in the autonomy of the sovereign state within a pacific confederation.

As for War, ontologically and politically it fades from sight in *Eternal Peace*, its incarnations rendered meaningless and unproductive.

Yet the stasis of Eternal Peace can only account for the presence, but not for the ‘historical’ constitution of rational subjects, nor account for their moral progress through time. The dominant interpretation of *Eternal Peace* therefore leaves two significant lacunae in its ontological structure. Interestingly enough, Kant himself provides the narratives to fill these gaps. The most fascinating aspects of these narratives are the radical revalorisations he offers in terms of the relationships between War, History, and Subjectivity.

War as Nature’s Agent

Already in *Eternal Peace* we find a narrative, usually subdued in the Liberal reading of the treatise, that gives us an answer to the historical development of morals and rational man. Eternal Peace, we are informed, is guaranteed by Nature herself and produced by ‘discord’.

The mechanical process of nature visibly exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men, even against their will, and indeed by means of their very discord (Kant, 2007a: 108)

Peace, in other words is the unintended, yet necessary outcome of humans’ conflict and strife. Peace, moreover, is inherently dependent on War. The first human communities are made possible by Nature’s provision of wildlife and prey. At this stage men ‘have enough to do making *war* on the animals to be able to live in peace among themselves’ (Kant, 2007a: 110; emphasis added).

After Man’s fall from grace and the expulsion from Paradise, Nature forces him to spread out and inhabit all of the earth (Kant, 2007a: 111). War and strife are the means to accomplish that. Here then, the first condition of moral progress, and the ultimate return to Paradise (of Reason, not Ignorance) is the mutual alienation of Man from Man and the introduction of contest and competition. The latter provide the antagonistic structure through which such progress is produced.

Second, and at an already civilisationally higher stage, Nature uses War to force people to organise themselves into states ‘in order to encounter the other as an armed *power*’ (Kant, 2007a: 112). For Kant, at this stage freedom within states in fact depends on the constant risk of War, as the latter keeps despotism in check ‘because a state must now have wealth before it can be powerful, and there can be no wealth-producing activity without *freedom*’ (Kant, 2007b: 231). This argument in effect reverts the logic in *Eternal Peace*, where economic incentives lead even ‘a nation of devils’ to abandon War and to join the pacific confederation. Here, while maintaining its internal relationship with freedom, economic power is linked to the conduct of warfare, rather than the implementation of Peace. War now becomes the incentive to have wealth, and as such the precondition for first instances of political freedom. Should War cease, should two formerly hostile populations ‘amalgamate’, despotism raises its head again, the end of freedom is nigh (Kant, 2007b: 231).

The externalisation of War to the ‘outside’ of the state and into the ‘international system’ therefore defines both the condition of possibility for, and the limit of, the emergent realm of moral freedom. Freedom is made possible within the state, but cannot, indeed *must not*, transcend its boundaries.

Given the productive and constitutive nature of War, Peace is revalorised dramatically. The absence of War and external danger, of ontological or existential challenges, would in fact have deleterious effects and induce a descent into moral corruption (Kant, 2007b: 232). Without the antagonistic structure of War, Man has no incentive to expand his wealth, his freedom, and thus progress towards moral perfection.

Subjectivity

An undistinguished Mankind is the subject of this narrative. Reason has done its initial, disruptive work and alienated Man from his Elysian origins, but has not yet taken hold of him fully and returned him to the Paradise of Reason. So Man stumbles forward, alienated from his origin and from himself, encountering himself as a competitor for power and wealth. To the extent that freedom is incomplete and despotism still a reality, he is a heteronomous agent. Desires and ambition have not yet given way to Reason. So nature has to use and utilise his as yet imperfect disposition, his ‘unsocial sociability’ and direct his desires in a progressive way. Man here is the subject (or rather object) of War as the agent of History (or Nature), his moral perfection is taken out of his own hand and vested in the cunning of Nature that exploits his moral imperfection for the purpose of moral perfection.

Inter-Subjectivity

On the practical level, Man is set against contemporaneous (and not barbarian) Man in an emergent War system. The contest for scarce resources, for power and wealth leads to political organisation, the creation of states, and the incremental expansion of freedom within these states. Alienated and differentiated by linguistic and religious differences, any attempt at transcending this division by any one single state runs afoul of these nature-ordained impediments to ‘intermingling’ (Kant, 2007a: 113-14).

On the ontological level, this struggle sees Man posited against Nature, his ignorance and lack of moral reflection set against Nature's cunning. For War to be effective as a means to drive Man to his ends, a rupture between Man and Nature has to occur. Without yet providing the solution to the conundrum into which it casts Man, Reason severs him from his ordinary state of self-sufficiency, peace, and sociability. Nature now stands against Man, his only innate connection to it tentatively asserted by Kant as a propensity towards War in his human nature.

Agency

Agency in this narrative is vested in Nature rather than Man. While Man progresses morally towards freedom and moral perfection, he does so inadvertently. It is Nature that disperses Man to the ends of the world, and it is Nature that gives War its ultimate meaning.

In seeing to it that men *could* live everywhere on earth, nature has at the same time despotically willed that they *should* live everywhere, even against their own inclinations. And this obligation does not rest upon any concept of duty which might bind them to fulfil it in accordance with a moral law; on the contrary, nature has chosen war as a means of attaining this end (Kant, 2007a: 111).

War is already here an existential experience for Man, yet without him having a full grasp of this. His agency is limited to the mastery of tasks set for him by Nature. Simply put, War is his Master.

War itself, however, does not require any particular kind of motivation, for it seems to be ingrained in human nature, and even to be regarded as something noble to which man is inspired by his love of honour, without selfish motives (Kant, 2007a: 111).

Politics, i.e., the operation of statecraft, becomes the continuation of War by other means as the basic relation through which History advances. In Kant's political theory, War is not the instrument of statecraft, but the basic condition of possibility

for the latter. States form in response to Nature's scheme, and the final result of Eternal Peace is the outcome of Nature's will imposing itself on Man. Arguably, Man is duped into Eternal Peace.

One might try to reconcile this narrative on War and Peace with the dominant one by historicising and sequencing them. As long as Man has not achieved a level of moral maturity, as long as his freedom is heteronomous, Nature must drive him on, and does so by exposing him to the challenges of War. It is when moral perfection is within reach (through a last push provided by economic incentives) that War somehow loses its productive role, that Man takes responsibility for his own actions and Peace is now the outcome of his own free will, rather than Nature's cunning. Until such time, War is to be valorised as a necessary evil that pushes Man forward towards his perfection, and Peace as a condition in which Man regresses, in which culture, industry, and above all freedom fade away. In Kant's own words,

So long as human culture remains at its present stage, war is therefore an indispensable means of advancing it further; and only when culture has reached its full development – and *God only knows when that will be* – will [eternal] peace become possible and of benefit to us (Kant, 2007b: 232; emphasis added).

There are a number of problems with such an argument, however. When exactly is that 'tipping point' reached, when Reason exerts enough power over Man to return him to Paradise Lost, to Eternal Peace, to a sociality characterised by concord and cooperation? This is less an empirical question than a methodological and philosophical one. How is a 'phenomenal' man, situated within a particular historical and cultural context, to decide that 'noumenal' Man has finally attained that enlightened status? After all, as Kant himself states, almost in exasperation, only God has an answer to this question.

Moreover, a critique of Kant needs to focus on the question of precisely *how* is the transition accomplished? How, in other words, does Man turn from a 'structural dope' at the mercy of Nature to rational Man? What social mechanisms are involved in the constitution of his subjectivity?

Kant's answers in *Eternal Peace* are limited and ultimately unsatisfactory. Subjectivity here is pre-social, War and Peace the outcome of particular subjectivities. War is the product of morally inferior, savage, coarse, and brute barbarians; Eternal Peace the result of morally advanced rational Man. The conditions of social and political conduct are thereby lodged within the agents themselves. Yet this contradicts Kant's own description of War as productive of human progress. The 'savages' and 'barbarians' that 'engage in incessant strife' are after all executing Nature's will at their respective stage of moral progress. To denounce them as savages is therefore a conceptual anachronism, a conflation of the noumenal and the phenomenal, that assumes that moral perfection is already accomplished and this state can now be read back into mankind's imperfect past. Yet Kant himself acknowledges the continued imperfect state of Mankind.

Kant's ambivalent attitude towards War is perhaps nowhere more clearly revealed in his answer to this conundrum. He hints at it in *Eternal Peace*, where 'war itself is invested with an inherent dignity; for even philosophers have eulogised it as a kind of ennobling influence on man' (Kant, 2007a; 112), but immediately retracts it, reminding the reader of a Greek saying that 'war is bad in that it produces more evil people than it destroys' (Kant, 2007: 112). This is all the more astonishing, as a few years before the publication of *Eternal Peace*, he had been one of the philosophers he here dismisses to quickly.

War as the Experience of the Sublime

In a fascinating section of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of the Power of Judgment [CPJ]), his third and final Critique which deals with the conditions of aesthetic judgments, Kant writes,

For what is it that is an object of the greatest admiration even to the savage? Someone who is not frightened, who has no fear, thus does not shrink before danger but energetically sets to work with full deliberation. And even in the most civilized (*allergesittetsten*, literally 'morally most advanced') circumstances this exceptionally high esteem for the warrior remains, only now it is demanded that he at the same time display all the virtues of peace, gentleness, compassion and even proper care for his own person, precisely

because in this way the incoercibility (*Unbezwinglichkeit*) of his mind by danger can be recognized. Hence however much debate there may be about whether it is the statesman or the general who deserves the greater respect in comparison to the other, aesthetic judgment decides in favour of the latter. Even war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and at the same time makes the mentality of the people who conduct it in this way all the more sublime, the more dangers it has been exposed to and before which it has been able to assert its courage; whereas a long peace causes the spirit of mere commerce to predominate, along with base selfishness, cowardice and weakness, and usually debases the mentality of the populace (Kant, 2000: 146).

This section obviously deserves to be quoted at length and a very careful unpacking, as it in effect articulates a radical revalorisation of Peace, War, and Subjectivity.

Interestingly enough, Kant once again invokes ‘the savage’ as a relevant subject of war, yet in this section, the savage is not the ‘war-monger’, the one that continues with an anachronistic, coarse, and barbarian practice. On the contrary, here the savage is to admire the fearless Warrior as an aesthetic example of superior Man. Within the latter, then, savage man can already anticipate his own moral advancement. And rather than seeing the Warrior fade into history and irrelevance for the most advanced societies, he remains an aesthetic model for all, if and when his conduct expresses supreme morality. Overcoming fear, expressing and demonstrating courage in the face of danger, produces human beings morally superior to those that live under conditions of concord and comfort. The ‘spirit of mere commerce’ becomes a token of moral debasement, rather than the expression of Reason taking hold of Man and leading towards the moral perfection of Eternal Peace.

Where the dominant narrative in *Eternal Peace* considers War to be an obstacle to the final realisation of liberal Man’s subjectivity, i.e., the realisation of economic interests and the free subjection to the Law, in CPJ War becomes the condition of moral perfection. War, in this sense, defines a condition of possibility for Man to transcend the immediate, phenomenal world and to gain knowledge and experience of the super-sensible and the transcendental. The moral laws to which Man is supposed to subject himself in order to realise his freedom in eternal peace are justifiable and deducible only in that realm of pure practical reason in which ‘sensible impulses’ hold no sway

over the subject (Kochi, 2009: 97). By ‘sublimating’ War, its experience is now formative of subjectivity as it provides access to the realm beyond the merely phenomenal, thus perfecting the moral education that Man has acquired so far. Experiencing the sublime, Man sacrifices himself, surrendering ‘the empirical power of imagination for the power of the imagination taken over by the supersensible’ (Battersby, 2007: 30). Hence, while his conduct in war is guided by certain moral guidelines, ultimate moral perfection is accomplished through this encounter with the sublime experience. What makes this relationship between War and Subjectivity possible is a potentially radical, yet in Kant ultimately limited or ‘contained’ re-conceptualisation of the subject itself, which nonetheless stands in opposition to the subject of *Eternal Peace*.

For many philosophers, the Sublime has denoted the sphere in which the subject loses itself, where it encounters the unspeakable, the unknowable, where it experiences the limit of its cognition and imagination. The Sublime de-centres the subject, depriving it of its capacities, imposing a sense of terror, awe, and impotence.

For Kant, the Sublime rests within the faculties of the mind itself, rather than with the object of desire or adoration. As Christine Battersby explains,

Where ‘terror’ and fear are involved, the terror is not so much bound up with external events, as with the initial incapacity of the mind to bring sensory experience, imagination, understanding and reason together and deal with what we see or otherwise sense. In Kant we have not yet entered a discourse in which art objects are sublime; what is sublime is the natural world or, more accurately, the mind of man as he responds to that world and to the feelings that it engenders (Battersby, 2007: 30).

In order to appreciate the Sublime, the mind itself needs a moral competence; as Kant states, ‘without the development of moral ideas, that which we ... call sublime will appear merely repellent to the unrefined person’ (Kant, 2000: 148). The sublime therefore occupies the borderline between the moral and the aesthetic.

To simplify matters somewhat, for Kant the experience of the Sublime consists of a ‘controlled’ exposure to the ‘terror’ of the incomprehensible in order to expand the Subject’s mind into a hitherto inaccessible sphere. The abyss is crossed, the Subject decentred and ‘sacrificed’ (Kant, 2000: 152), only to step back into order and thus

become 're-centred'. Reason brings the Subject back from the brink 'via the idea of the supersensible, as the response to disharmony and conflict between faculties' (Battersby, 2007: 32).

The object of a pure and unconditional intellectual satisfaction is the moral law in all its power; ... and since this power actually makes itself aesthetically knowable only through sacrifice, ... the satisfaction on the aesthetic side ... is negative, i.e., contrary to this interest, but considered from the intellectual side it is positive, and combined with an interest. From this it follows that the intellectual, intrinsically purposive (moral) good, judged aesthetically, must ... be represented ... as sublime, so that it arouses more the feeling of respect ... than that of love and intimate affection ... Conversely, even that which we call sublime in nature outside us or even within ourselves (e.g., certain affects) is represented only as a power of the mind to soar above certain obstacles of sensibility by means of moral principles, and thereby to become interesting (Kant, 2000:153-4).

The Sublime, in other words, propels the subject from the moral into the aesthetic realm, only to recover him for the purpose of moral perfection. The de-stabilisation of the Subject is therefore only temporary and ultimately serves an even stronger moral centreing. The exposure to a realm beyond the immanent and mundane, a realm of transcendent and absolute freedom, creates the condition of possibility for Man to realise his moral potential.

There is a second noteworthy limitation built into Kant's definition of the Sublime that prevents a more radical de-centring of the subject. The Sublime can only be found in Nature, not in Art, or within social intercourse. As a force of nature, it can stir our senses and imagination, yet it remains mute, anonymous, and passive. War as a sublime experience is therefore an individualised experience with an Other that reflects back on the subject. War as an encounter with a radical social/human other, which presents the contradiction or dialectics of encountering the other in the same, the enemy in the fellow human being, is made impossible by this conceptualisation. Ultimately then, Kant salvages the Liberal individual from too radical a de-centring. Having acquired a moral code prior to the exposure to the Sublime, and recovering

himself after the 'terrific' experience, the Sublime defines but an episode, if a crucial one, in the moral perfection of Liberal Man.

Subjectivity:

A temporarily de-centred subject emerges in CPJ that encounters War as a sublime experience in which it finds moral perfection. The valorisation of War found in the dominant reading of Eternal Peace here is reversed; War now becomes the condition of possibility, rather than the anachronistic obstacle to, moral perfection.

Kant produces a significant opening here that points to arguments forwarded later by Hegel, and most significantly by Nietzsche about the a(nta)gonistic constitution of subjectivity.³ Above all the latter reverses the order between subject and aesthetic experience, leaving the former at the mercy of the latter. Liberated from any moral Law, the Nietzschean turns his life into a constant project, a constant de-centring, subjugation, conquest, and creative destruction. War here becomes the condition of possibility for the affirmation of life and the will to power. What Kant only gestures to finds his most radical expression in the latter life-as-project.

Inter-Subjectivity:

The self-other relationship here appears as the one of Subject – Sublime Nature. The latter is deprived of any agency. It affects, but does not act. The sublime experience is therefore one of a self-reflection of the subject against an immutable Sublime. The dynamic and constant de-centring, the unhinging of the subject in the encounter with the violent other in War as a social intercourse, an other that refuses the passive gaze that Nature invites, is therefore avoided. The de-centring never throws us at the mercy of another subject, the encounter is therefore never social or for that matter political. Given the non-social nature of Nature, the subject is necessarily thrown back onto himself.

Agency:

³ Cf also Lyotard's (1994) post-modern reading of Kant that draws on the same elements in Kant discussed here.

Agency in this narrative is made contingent on the exposure to War, and invested into the Warrior as the ideal moral figure. War defines the condition for moral perfection by posing those challenges and dangers, which the subject has to face and overcome. At the same time, War sets the moral limits for the subject's conduct, as moral conduct respects the imperatives of civility and just war constraints.

Peace, in turn, is a condition conducive to the moral decay of agency, leading to selfishness, cowardice and weakness, debasing the mentality of the populace (Kant, 2000: 146).

Conclusion

Contrary to the dominant reading of Kant's writing on War and Peace that underlies Liberal International Theory and DPT in particular, this paper argues that he cannot supply a stable concept of War, and hence of Peace. The ontological and ethical commitments underpinning the dominant interpretations of *Eternal Peace* are undermined and contradicted by other sections within the text, and by Kant's other writings. The need to account for War within the context of Kant's Enlightenment project of the moral perfection of Man through the free will's subjection to Law necessitates a temporalisation of War and Peace, in which the conditions of moral progress are re-inscribed into the former. The need to account for the subjectification of Moral Man within this process, to account for the transition of phenomenal man into moral Man leads Kant to a re-valorisation of War that anticipates post-modern celebrations of Aesthetics and the Sublime as a permanent de-centring of subjectivity. Yet this move is not easily reconciled with the other conceptualisations of War in Kant.

While the revalorisation of War as a historical force of progress can be temporalised as antecedent to the final stage of human moral perfection in which Reason replaces and transcends War as the warrant of the *telos*, the sublimation of War escapes this move. For the constitution of the morally perfected subject is a constant process, one that takes place even in the most advanced societies. It is a constant challenge that does not leave War behind, but rather works through it. The desire for Eternal Peace becomes a desire for moral debasement – a concern most radically expressed in Nietzsche's condemnation of Last Man (Behnke, 2008).

Traditional liberal readings of Kant overlook the fundamentally aporetic thinking in his writing. Kant's project of *Eternal Peace* suspends Peace, War, and Subjectivity within irreconcilable differences. The project constantly shifts the definition of agency between the macro-level of Nature and History to the micro-level of the subject, and it constantly revalorises the relationship between War and Peace. It locates the condition of possibility of moral conduct within rational man himself, only to subject him to, and de-centre him within, the Sublime in War in order to tease out the transcendental ego. As such, *Eternal Peace* should be read less as a handbook for the pacification of global politics, and more as a dialectic *Auseinandersetzung* of a project with its immanent critique.

Such a reading would open up an intellectual space in which the dialectics of War and Peace is more fruitfully explored than within the confines of Democratic Peace Theory. Two issues offer themselves in this regard.

First, one might study in more depth the debt international institutions – the focus of so much Liberal scholarship – owe to War. Many of the favourite institution through which war is to be curtailed, limited, or overcome, owe their existence to the existential experiences of war. One might even broaden the scope of such investigation into the question of order and violence and the way in which the latter is always vested within the former (Prozorov, 2005).

Liberalism would arguably also benefit from a dialectical reading of Kant in order to recognise the limits of its own mode of war. Understood as a continuation of liberal ends such as peace, democracy, and market economy by other means, a proper understanding of the constitutive or sublime nature of war is absent. Yet as the last eight years of the War on Terror have demonstrated, it is in that war that our enemies constitute themselves as such. War has given them the opportunity to become the recognised enemy of the West, to establish themselves as political, indeed quasi-sovereign entities (Behnke, forthcoming). Writes Jean-Luc Nancy,

In war, there is something that immediately goes beyond all the possible goals of war, whether they be defensive or offensive: the accomplishment of the Sovereign as such in a relation of absolute opposition with another Sovereign. War is indissociably the *physis* and *technē* of sovereignty (Nancy, 2000: 121).

Rather than eradicating enmity from the global order by waging endless wars to end all wars, the West perpetuates it by providing the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Warriors that define their purpose in radical opposition to it. Kant's trust in the Warrior as the harbinger of Eternal Peace can only be sustained via a by now problematic assumption of a universal and thus purely formal rationality. Yet as a critical review reveals, Liberalism always comes with a 'small print' of substantive commitments and injunctions, which put severe ontological demands upon the Other before he can join the Liberal zone of Peace (Hopgood, 2000), and which serve as the incitement to resistance. The desire for eternal peace, in other words, creates nothing but perpetual war.

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