Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*: The New World Order of Critical Philosophy

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Abstract

Kant’s 200-year-old essay is considered in light of its enduring impact on peace studies, the creation of the United Nations, and the implementation of a new world order based on lasting peace. Through a detailed analysis of its content and the cross-examination of various sources, it is suggested that the reputation of Perpetual Peace is not undeserved: while stressing the importance of fundamental principles applied to world affairs, it also provides realistic steps towards conflict resolution. Most importantly, the present study attempts to show how Kant’s view of religion’s role in human life, based on his critical philosophy, serves as the underlying catalyst of his apparently secular considerations.

One can legitimately wonder what a philosopher with an inclination for abstract theoretical thought could possibly contribute to the cause of world peace. Kant, in fact, uses that very point to ironically suggest that the ideas he proposes in *Perpetual Peace* are no threat to the powers that be—hence that they should be able to fly below the radar, so to speak, with no danger to the author. The rest of the document makes it however abundantly clear that Kant hoped for something else. Not unlike Confucius, he expected that the rulers of this world would have the wisdom to listen and much like his Chinese predecessor, he would certainly have had ample grounds for disappointment if he had lived in the decades that followed.

But it remains a fact that, more than 200 years after its first publication, Kant’s essay is routinely referred to as a work of prophetic insight, as a direct antecedent and inspiration to the founding of the League of Nations and later the United Nations. When one remembers that Kant hardly ever left his provincial hometown of Königsberg during his long life, “prophetic” takes on a new meaning: whatever valuable content is to be found in the essay is not based on worldly knowledge of international affairs or practical experience in that field. It is entirely based on Kant’s own reflections and directly related to the conclusions of his theoretical philosophy. In the Second Supplement of *Perpetual Peace* (“Secret Ar-

*Biography*

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ticle for Perpetual Peace” Kant actually suggests that rulers and princes should seek the advice of philosophers, who can thus be understood to be prophets of reason.4

1. Investigating Kant’s Perpetual Peace

If Perpetual Peace has been submitted to exegesis by students of Kant’s philosophy, as well as by political philosophers intent on assessing its real impact on the emergence of peace organization in the 20th century, the reverse is also true: there are those, like Jerry Pubantz, who have evaluated the United Nations by its ability or failure to live up to Kant’s vision. Similarly, Yale’s Bruce Russett repeatedly and in all seriousness speaks of Kantian vs. non-Kantian states in the context of UN peace building. It is, in fact, both mind-boggling and moving to see how contemporary political scientists submit present-day international organizations to precise scrutiny using Kant’s short essay almost as if it were an absolute paragon.

Not surprisingly, that has not always been the case. It is well known that, upon its publication, Kant’s essay was greeted with polite praise and considerable skepticism. Geismann sums it up somewhat emphatically, saying that “standing on the high shoulder of Hobbes and Rousseau, Kant, the professor of law, was able to look into a limitless land of liberty and peace. But as soon as that land’s features clearly appeared, they vanished again in the fog of 19th century worldviews.”8 “Today’s renewed interest in Perpetual Peace thus represents a particular form of the famous “return to Kant” in the field of political philosophy.

The next question is about the meaningfulness of the present article. What, if anything, can a scholar of philosophy like myself who specializes in Kant’s most theoretical works possibly achieve by writing a journal article on a theme that requires knowledge in the political sciences – a knowledge I lack almost entirely? If I have nevertheless accepted the offer to do so, it is with the clear awareness that I will have to largely avoid the more political discussion of Kant’s contribution and concentrate on the directly philosophical content of his essay – to the extent that such an artificial partition is possible.9 After all, as I have noted above, it is that philosophical thinking that forms the entire basis for Kant’s contribution. Showing how and why it can have a valuable impact on the real world of contemporary world affairs is a meaningful undertaking.

2. The nature of Kant’s essay: afterthought, new beginning, or parallel development?

Perpetual Peace is known as one of Kant’s “semi-popular” writings, short pieces that are somewhat removed from the abstract, intricate rational deductions of his theoretical works, his critical philosophy. In writing these short essays, Kant uses a tone that is often reminiscent of Voltairean wit (minus the venom), but the intent is very serious.10

For all its significance as a precursor of contemporary political theory, Perpetual Peace is frequently considered an afterthought to Kant’s real contribution in
philosophy. In essence, that assessment may be correct, but it misses an important detail: though it was written in 1795 (less than ten years before Kant’s death in 1804), it is part of a series of similar writings, the first of which, Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent was written in 1784, a mere three years after the first publication of the Critique of Pure Reason and years before that of most of Kant’s other major works. Key ideas of Perpetual Peace, including that of a League of Nations, already appear in the 1784 essay. The latter is thus part of an ongoing effort by Kant to relate his philosophical investigations to the practical concerns of society.

Perpetual Peace has antecedents not only in Kant’s own writings. It is well known that, in the 18th century and before, others had felt compelled to deal with this topic of both immediate and ultimate significance. There was the Abbé de Saint Pierre’s Project for Settling Perpetual Peace in Europe (Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe), (1713), Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Judgment on a Plan for Perpetual Peace (1761), a significant document given Kant’s considerable admiration for Rousseau, and Jeremy Bentham’s A Plan for a Universal and Perpetual Peace (written between 1786 and 1789). None of these works, however, are much remembered today, even though the last two were penned by illustrious authors. Kant’s essay has two decisive advantages that give it lasting value. It is very specific rather than vaguely utopian and, as noted by A.C.F. Beales, it “lift[s] the discussion of war and peace far above the level of politics” and makes it a timeless question of ethics and conscience.

3. Significance of the title

The English title, Perpetual Peace, which is reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham’s work on the same topic, is a secularised translation of Kant’s Zum ewigen Frieden, or Towards Eternal Peace. Perpetual and eternal practically mean the same thing, but the religious undertone of “eternal” is lost in translation. So is, of course, the ambiguity of the expression “eternal peace.” But Kant used that very ambiguity to initiate the discussion: the first sentence of the essay is an ironical reference to the fact that the only lasting peace available to humans might very well be that of death. As for the religious undertone, it need not be read into the text. Though discrete and thoroughly rational (as opposed to institutional), religion is present throughout the essay.

When Kant wrote his Perpetual Peace in 1795, the events of the French Revolution had been unfolding for several years. Two years earlier, in 1793, Kant had also written his most directly theological work, the often-maligned Religion within the limits of reason alone. This latter work has been attacked by Christians as godlessness dis-
guised in the form of rational religion, a monstrosity in their eyes. It has also been attacked by the “enlightened” like Goethe who saw in it proof that Kant had at last succumbed to the temptation of speaking in the traditional terms of “sin” and “redemption” to appease the Christian establishment. The fact is that in his Religion Kant uses religious (biblical) language in ways he does in none of his other major works, but he does so, expectably, without discarding the rationalist’s philosophical approach.

Recent scholarship has convincingly shown that this work was neither a departure from critical philosophy nor the final proof of its profane and agnostic nature. Common wisdom has it that, in his First Critique, Kant had demolished the very notion of a theoretical knowledge about ultimate things (including God). In his Second Critique, he insisted on the primacy of duty (the categorical imperative) regardless of consequences and rewards. However, the Third Critique already hints at something different with its suggestion of a teleological explanation to this world’s existence and nature. In spite of his reputation as a pure deontologist Kant was, in fact, keenly interested in the outcome of our earthly actions.

The Religion represents a continuation of the Critique of Judgment and is intended to show the inevitable need for religion in addition to ethics. Kant repeats that moral action is self-sufficient and has no need for a purpose to exert itself. However, he adds, the notion of purpose cannot be dispensed with either, because “reason cannot possibly remain indifferent to the question of the outcome of our right action (Rechthandeln).” In spite of the otherworldly emphasis one would again expect to find in a work expressly dedicated to the theme of religion, Kant discusses that “outcome of our right action” in decidedly this-worldly terms. The third part of the Religion is entitled “The victory of the good principle over the evil principle and the establishment of God’s Kingdom on Earth.” In that section, Kant comes to the following conclusion: “Unnoticed by human eyes, the good principle is constantly at work … to establish a government and a kingdom representing a victory over the evil principle. Under its sovereignty, the world should be guaranteed eternal [perpetual] peace.”

It is perhaps time to quit (or at least interrupt) this digression on religion in an article about perpetual peace. And we can now afford to. The link between the Religion’s Kingdom of God and the secular equivalent of perpetual peace that served as the title of Kant’s essay barely one year later is now explicit. Though it may be of limited interest to the political scientist, the religious roots of Kant’s idea of a league of nations leading to perpetual peace is a fact and it could not be ignored, especially since Kant himself elaborates extensively on that linkage in the first Supplement (see below).

4. Structure of Perpetual Peace

The essay has three separate sections:
First, six preliminary articles indicating practices that should be avoided as soon as possible as a precondition for perpetual peace to be even thinkable; second, three definitive articles containing what Kant considered the key requirements for perpetual peace to be realized; and third, two supplements and an annex (or appendix) in two parts that contain some of Kant’s deepest thinking. If Kant’s structure here is predictably clear, it is also predictably complex as soon as one looks at it carefully, with arguments overlapping and the most important insight not always appearing where one would expect them to be.

As announced, I will leave it to others to dissect Kant’s document in every detail and from every possible perspective, something which in fact has already been abundantly done. This will hopefully give me the time and space to deal with some of what Rabelais would call the “substance-full marrow” of Kant’s underlying thought. Perpetual Peace is nevertheless short enough to allow for a brief point by point description of its main sections. The mere listing of some of the issues Kant brings up in the definitive and even the preliminary articles is evidence of the immense influence his vision has had on the quest for world peace up to date.

**a) The preliminary articles**

The preliminary articles perhaps show best that Kant did not ignore the empirical aspect of things and that he could be quite practical, even pragmatic when needed.

Kant stresses the importance of an immediate implementation of the first, fifth, and sixth preliminary articles over the other three. The first of these articles, Article 1, states that “No Treaty of Peace Shall Be Held Valid in Which There Is Tacitly Reserved Matter for a Future War.” This immediately indicates the obvious, fundamental difference between peace treaties as they had been known and as they would be known in the future, treaties that are little more than armistices with a fancy name, and real lasting peace.

Kant introduces the Jesuit notion of “mental reservation.” Peace is then made as a matter of expediency when the continuation of war seems less desirable to both sides, each side secretly preparing for a new attack as soon as the occasion arises. There may be a difference compared to more recent times here, as nations and their democratic governments today often do have a genuine desire for peace after a protracted war, but are simply unable to maintain it, which would be the ultimate goal of peace-making. The autocratic rulers of Kant’s time can be assumed not even to have had that sincere desire in most cases but, after all, neither have many of the governments throughout the
20th century.

Articles 2 and especially 5 intend to prohibit any kind of intervention by one nation into the affairs of another under any pretext, including when such intervention may seem desirable. This requirement of non-interference, which many contemporary governments undoubtedly would welcome and others despise for a variety of reasons, stands in stark contrast to the just war doctrine. Practically, according to Kant, interference always leads to increased chaos. More fundamentally, it is against right. It means to “infringe on the rights of an independent people struggling with its internal disease; hence it would itself be an offense and would render the autonomy of all states insecure.” These two articles also vaguely allude to the problem of colonialism which, however, is further discussed in the third definitive article.

Most fundamental perhaps, and most influential is Article 6, “No State Shall, during War, Permit Such Acts of Hostility Which Would Make Mutual Confidence in the Subsequent Peace Impossible.” This article can be seen as a direct call for what would become the Geneva Conventions preceded by the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863. It directly exposes the contradiction inherent in war: war is an undertaking that requires those who participate in it to refrain from using the means most suitable for immediate success. Soldiers must be trained to kill the enemy, but they must be trained to do so in a humane way — something every decent government has been struggling with ever since. The reason is obvious. War is by definition not acceptable on ethical grounds and, as long as its possible end is not in sight, nations should at least include elements favorable to peace in the very conduct of belligerence. By and large, the generations following Kant, especially since the end of the 19th century, have agreed with that form of reasoning, even when they have not always applied it.

The remaining two articles (3 and 4) have a prophetic sound not so much because they announce the solution of a particular problem, but because they point out issues that have remained vexing and controversial to this day: the question of disarmament (“Standing Armies [miles perpetuus] Shall in Time Be Totally Abolished” – note the “in time”!) and that of national debt incurred for the funding of war (“National Debts Shall Not Be Contracted with a View to the External Friction of States”)

b) The definitive articles
The second section of Kant’s brief treatise, Containing The Definitive Articles For Perpetual Peace Among States, is where Kant exposes many of his key ideas on peace, though some of the most precious insights are actually to be found in the Supplements and Appendixes. Section II begins with the following statement:

The state of peace among men living side by side is not the natural state (status naturalis); the natural state is one of war. This does not always mean open hostilities, but at least an unceasing threat of war. A state of peace, therefore, must be established, for in order to be secured against hostility it is not sufficient that hostilities simply be not committed …

The Hobbesian notion of a natural state of war will be further analyzed in the discussion of the First Supplement. Following that brief but revealing introduction, Kant details the three main pillars of his suggested solution.

1) Republican vs. Democratic

By pitting the notions of republican and democratic against each other, the first definitive article appears to be an unexpected excursion into the realm of constitutional policy. For the American reader in particular, it also has a feeling of déjà vu, but in a definitely unfamiliar context.

Kant states that, for the sake of achieving perpetual peace, “the civil constitution of every nation should be republican.” He then makes it clear that republican does not mean democratic: democracy is a form of sovereignty in which the people, as opposed to a monarch or an aristocracy, possess power; republicanism is a form of government that is the opposite of despotism, one in which the executive is separate from the legislative. Each form of government can be either republican or despotic – except, surprise, the democratic one, which “is, properly speaking, necessarily a despotism, because it establishes an executive power in which ‘all’ decide for or even against one who does not agree; that is, ‘all,’ who are not quite all, decide, and this is a contradiction of the general will with itself and with freedom.”

The reasons for such a sharp distinction between the two notions are complex, not entirely clear to anyone, and somewhat removed from our interest. It has been said that Kant was referring to the democracy of Ancient Greece. But he was writing in 1795, just after the end of the reign of terror that followed the French Revolution and at the time when Napoleon was on his way to absolute power. It is easy to see how Kant could have come to the conclusions he reached about the despotic nature of democracy based on what he witnessed in France: a popular mob lynching former rulers, priests, everybody else, and each other. The description quite fits what Kant otherwise says about the inevitably chaotic nature of democracy. But Kant was an ardent supporter, not a critic, of the French Revolution (he had also supported the American Revolution, which is consistent with his emphasis on the value of human freedom). More surprisingly, even after the French Revolution had turned into a generalized massacre, he
never withdrew his support and admiration, which earned him the epithet of *Jacobin*. We thus have to leave it as what it is: an open question.

**Even if one discards Kant’s absolute pessimism about democracy, the observation remains valid: the democratic form of sovereignty, as opposed to monarchy, is not necessarily more “democratic” in the modern sense (or more republican, to speak with Kant).**

More interesting here is the distinction made between the form of government and the form of sovereignty, a difference that suggests that democracy is not inevitably, *per se* – democratic (the way we understand the term). Even if one discards Kant’s absolute pessimism about democracy, the observation remains valid: the democratic form of sovereignty, as opposed to monarchy, is not necessarily more “democratic” in the modern sense (or more republican, to speak with Kant). The blooming of democratic republics in the second half of the 20th century would probably have comforted Kant in his view that democratic and republican, placed together, are a contradiction in terms.

Often it is however assumed that what Kant had in mind when referring to the republican form of government practically overlaps with what we call liberal democracy today. Quoting Fernando Tesón, Patrick Capps makes the following comment:

Tesón considers that this [Kant’s view] corresponds to the modern conception of a constitutional democracy. He says: “By republican Kant means what we would call today a liberal democracy, that is, a form of political organization that provides for full respect for human rights” (p. 3). But minimally, what Kant means by republicanism is a government whose political power is restricted by a constitutional document which prevents despotism by either a monarch or the masses.

As for Pubantz, he all but ignores the distinction and routinely refers to democracy as the form of government Kant had in mind. He also quotes former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who essentially has the same position as Tesón: “… Kant … argued that ‘republics’ – which meant essentially what today we call liberal or pluralistic democracies – were less likely than other forms of state to go to war with one another. Broadly speaking, the last 200 years have proven him right.” Yet, ironically, this is the sole point on which Pubantz suggest an amendment should be made not to the UN system’s implementation of Kantian doctrine, but to Kant’s thesis itself. The suggested adaptation to reality is that international organizations might initially have to include members that are not
“free states” but have the potential of becoming so through a dialectical process involving Kant’s other two definitive articles.\(^3^7\)

2) A federation of free states: dealing with the Münchhausen syndrome

Here, with the notion of a federation of free states,\(^3^8\) Kant appears most unambiguously as the forerunner of a new world order. His logic is rather simple. Since sovereign nations, by definition, have no judge above them to prevent them from acting aggressively towards one another, as is the case among individuals in civil society within each nation, such a superior authority has to be brought into existence. Given what Kant calls the obvious depravity of human nature, this seems more than unlikely to happen, as it would presuppose the very entity in need to be created in order to become feasible.

Kant has to deal (as we all do) with what I would like to call the Münchhausen syndrome.\(^3^9\) He has to show how man, so to speak, can get himself out of the water by pulling on his own hair, as the famous Baron is said to have done. The first step is to acknowledge that a superior entity with the function of a referee already exists, though invisibly and deprived of the means to enforce its rule:

The homage that every nation pays (at least in words) to the concept of right proves, nonetheless, that there is in man a still greater, though presently dormant, moral aptitude to master the evil principle in himself (a principle he cannot deny) and to hope that others will also overcome it. For otherwise the word right would never be uttered by those nations that want to make war…\(^4^0\)

Kant then draws the logical conclusion:

... Reason, from its throne of supreme moral legislating authority, absolutely condemns war as a legal recourse and makes a state of peace a direct duty, even though peace cannot be established or secured except by a compact among nations. For these reasons there must be a league of a particular kind, which can be called a league of peace (foedus pacificum), and which would be distinguished from a treaty of peace (pactum pacis) by the fact that the latter terminates only one war, while the former seeks to make an end of all wars forever.\(^4^1\)

League of peace (Friedensbund) immediately brings to mind the League of Nations. Such a league would not seek supranational power but only to maintain peace among its members through the idea of federalism. Ideally, once a “powerful and enlightened people” decides to form a republic, it should, by its power of attraction, gradually come to include every nation and thus lead to perpetual world peace\(^4^2\). But Kant is a realist. Such a loose federation of nations will not be able to enforce the ideal of peace. That would only be possible through a “nation of peoples...that (continually growing) will finally include all the people of the earth.” Since this is not to be expected and “if everything is not to be lost,” the “positive idea of a world republic” will, for now, have
to be replaced by the “negative surrogate of an enduring, ever expanding federation” that will, however, always be at the mercy of a change of mind. There is, thus, a back and forth between the idea of a well-intentioned, but limited League of Nations and the ultimate idea of a United Nations, or more precisely, of one Unified Nation. On Kant’s own premises so far, that second option has to remain a dream. But, unlike some of his predecessors, Kant was not a dreamer.

These implications are not a matter of philanthropy, but one of right.

3) Cosmopolitan right and universal hospitality: Kant and the “other UN”

The third and final definitive article deals with the necessary or desirable implications of the views expressed in the second. As Kant himself puts it, these implications are not a matter of philanthropy, but one of right.43 In accordance with the idea of a world federation of states comprising all of humankind, based on the common human dignity of every individual, Kant stresses the need for hospitality. At first, hospitality, if understood as the mere propensity to be kind and generous to strangers (a tendency some have more than others), this may appear to be a secondary point. But Kant sees the question in terms of people’s “right to visit, to associate [that] belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth’s surface.”44 While Kant also acknowledges that the status of a permanent visitor (today’s permanent resident status) is not to be granted automatically, the emphasis in this section is clearly on the Western (European) world’s duty to behave properly towards the rest of the world – the great civilizations of the Far East, notably China (which Kant much admired) and the natives of less developed areas of the world.

This passage represents an unusually sharp indictment of European colonialism and particularly its justification by the need to expand markets. Kant names slavery by name and the words coming out of his mouth when discussing the Western military domination that inevitably accompanies commercial expansion include “most cruel” as well as “famine, rebellion, perfidy, and the whole litany of evils which afflicts humankind.”45

The third article refers quite exactly to the role of what Pubantz has called the “other UN” that is embodied in organizations such as the UNHCR (High Commissioner for Refugees): “A ‘new’ United Nations, in some ways more reflective of Eleanor Roosevelt’s aspirations embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or Kant’s democratic alliance, than the role as world ‘policeman’ touted by Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 and 1945, has emerged in the new era.”46

What is missing in Kant’s perspective is an acknowledgment of the constructive role of anything like our contemporary Non-Governmental Organizations.
NGOs), the role of women in peace-making and the role of religious leaders in interreligious dialogue to resolve religion-based conflicts. The latter is easily explained by the poor opinion Kant had of the religious leaders and institutions of his time, the former by the fact that civil society, notably international civil society, did not have at its disposal the kind of intermediaries between sovereigns and the people that we now have in the form of NGOs and similar groups.

5. Quantum leap: the First Supplement

The structure of Kant’s vision for world peace has now been presented, but the temporary conclusion is about what should be, rather than about what will be and how it will come about. This additional step is tentatively, though not conclusively, made in the First Supplement. Kant had ended the main part of his document on a low note after removing the perspective of a world republic able to guarantee peace in all its constitutive parts, i.e., the whole world.

The Second Supplements is the only part of the essay that was added to the second edition published in 1796. Still, when reading the First Supplement, one already has the impression of a quantum leap, as if Kant had spent time reflecting on the unsatisfactory implications of his provisional conclusions, as well as on the internal logic of his entire system (the systematic quality of which would be threatened by inconsistencies in any of its elements). Here, Kant no longer speaks of conditions and preconditions for the achievement of peace but he tackles issues relating to the underlying rationale and justification of the whole enterprise. Quite naturally, it is for launching the idea of a league of nations and for introducing necessary factors in a compelling way that Perpetual Peace is mostly remembered – as well as dismembered by the analytical sharpness of commentators. Ultimately, however, it is perhaps the supplements and annexes (particularly the First Supplement) that offer the best material for an in-depth reflection on the subject. I believe that it is only by carefully examining the ideas found there that we can come to a full understanding of Kant’s vision.

I thus propose to have a closer look at the following questions: the notion, pervasive throughout Perpetual Peace and Kant’s other writings, that human nature is evil (the state of nature = a state of war); the notion that Nature, standing in for a divine Providence, uses the very inclinations that push people to make war to lead them to eventual peace; the nature of Kantian peace and its challenge by Hegel; and the possibility and desirability of going beyond a loose league of nations and achieve and integrated “world republic.”

a) The State of Nature

Throughout his essay and his other writings, Kant builds on the assumption that human nature is evil or “depraved,” an important departure from Rousseau. Commentators have largely assumed that Kant simply took over this pessimistic view from Hobbes and it is undeniable that Kant’s position immediately brings to
mind his British predecessor’s state of nature as a "war of all against all" (*bellum omnium contra omnes*, *Leviathan*, 1651). It is also true that Kant mentions Hobbes occasionally, but not necessarily in an approving way. In his 1793 *Theory and Practice*, Kant already takes up the touchy topic of the “coercive right” of rulers over their troublesome subjects (as he would in *Perpetual Peace*), but he describes Hobbes’ position as “terrifying.”47 If Kant rejects Hobbes’ suggested solution as unduly brutal, it is first of all because his understanding of the state of things is fundamentally different. What Kant says of fallen human nature in his *Religion* is essential to know if one is to understand how he believes that a decisive step can be taken toward a state of peace.

Kant clearly expresses his belief in human beings’ inherent propensity to do evil, while at the same time being aware of the categorical imperative to do what is right. In *Religion* and, to a lesser extent, even in the short writings like *Perpetual Peace*, Kant’s statements to that effect are very close to biblical verses (notably by Saint Paul); in fact, Kant often and surprisingly intersperses his text with biblical quotations—again, a rather unique occurrence in his body of work. Thus, Kant was very far from sharing the often superficial forms of 18th century optimism. In spite of his admiration for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Kant did not share with him the belief that humans are born naturally good but perverted by so-called civilized society. Neither did he believe, with the majority of the *philosophes*, that progress was possible, even certain, at the hands of enlightened cultural pioneers. And he did share Voltaire’s rather pessimistic assessment of civilization as something remarkable that, nevertheless, gave little reason to believe in a radical improvement of the human condition.

In short, Kant believed that humans naturally tend to do evil (original sin), but that their conscience clearly tells them that the only rationally acceptable course of action is to do what is right—something they cannot do on their own because of the first premise. Hence, he writes in his *Religion*, it is rational to believe that there must be a Supreme Being that gives us the necessary support once we set out to do good and mean it seriously. Surprising as it may seem to those who know Kant from his critical philosophy (usually second-hand), his is thus a fundamentally Christian perspective expressed in the rationalistic language of the Enlightenment. The beliefs of Christianity are perceived in a purely formal and rational way that has become quite unfamiliar to the 21st century reader. The duty to do good is rational. It is the only behavior that makes sense. Doing evil is not just wrong, it is unreasonable, because I cannot rea-
man reason in questions of the
relation of effects to their causes
must remain within the limits of
possible experience.49

Kant’s reference to divine providence as a
guarantor for eternal peace is barely no-
ticed by commentators, which is not alto-
gether surprising, since the literature on
this essay essentially stems from the cir-
cles of political philosophers and political
scientists who have little interest in theo-
litical speculation. Kant’s understandable
choice to forego the use of religious lan-
guage in the given context and speak of
“nature” instead has not gone unnoticed,
but it has been greeted by rather dismis-
sive comments on the outdated nature of
the metaphor. Parallels have been drawn
to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” (Wealth
of Nations, 1776), with the occasional re-
mark that such a view of things distorts
reality in an “almost grotesque way.”50

Pojman offers a more matter of fact as-
sessment: “This Aristotelian teleological
thesis is problematic in a post-Darwinian
world, unless one holds that a Providen-
tial hand guides the affairs of men and
nations. Kant seems to have held this the-
ist thesis, which may be the underlying
basis for his optimism.”51

In fact, Kant was literally fascinated by
the notion of a purpose in nature corre-
sponding to the purpose of human ac-
tions, a question that occupies him
throughout his Critique of Judgment. The
beauty and purposefulness of nature’s ar-
rangements leads Kant to reiterate the
idea of a divine creator already present in
the first two Critiques. It is thus not sur-
prising at all that he would, in Perpetual

b) Nature and the Providence in the
First Supplement

It is now easier to understand why Kant
abruptly starts his First Supplement with
an explanation about the cunning of Na-
ture that paradoxically sets out to com-
pensate for the inferiority of our own na-
ture. The “First Supplement” of Perpetual
Peace begins with the following statement:

The guarantee of perpetual peace is
nothing less than that great artist, na-
ture (natura daedala rerum). In her me-
chanical course we see that her aim is
to produce a harmony among men,
against their will and indeed through
their discord. As a necessity working
according to laws we do not know, we
call it destiny. But, considering its de-
sign in world history, we call it
“providence,” inasmuch as we discern
in it the profound wisdom of a higher
cause which predetermines the course
of nature and directs it to the objec-
tive final end of the human race48.

Kant then goes on to say:

The use of the word “nature” is more
fitting to the limits of human reason
and more modest than an expression
indicating a providence unknown to
us. This is especially true when we are
dealing with questions of theory and
not of religion, as at present, for hu-
For Kant, lasting peace does not depend on philanthropy but on reason. Kant’s general moral vision, both in terms of personal ethics and in terms of international relations, is that what we are given as a moral duty must, by definition, be attainable. As always, his rationale is not based on the assumption that an always questionable goodwill will do the trick, but it does not exclude the presence of that goodwill, on the contrary. We thus have a three-tiered guarantee that lasting peace will be achieved. First, it does not depend on philanthropy but on reason. Second, since reason dictates moral behavior (I should not exempt myself from putting the whole community first, just because it is me), such behavior must be attainable. Third, since an obvious though mysterious deficiency prevents even the best among us from fully achieving that goal, we can and should expect help from God’s providence, to which Kant here more prosaically refers as the workings of nature. But it is not difficult to see that this three-tiered guarantee is nonetheless just a limited warranty.

In a morally practical point of view, however, which is directed exclusively to the supersensuous, the concept of the divine concursus is quite suitable and even necessary. We find this, for instance, in the belief that God will compensate for our own lack of justice, provided our intention was genuine; that He will do so by means that are inconceivable to us, and that therefore we should not relent in our endeavor after the good. Kant’s real view of things is in fact somewhat different, but one must look carefully for it. It is most clearly expressed in a footnote:

In a morally practical point of view, however, which is directed exclusively to the supersensuous, the concept of the divine concursus is quite suitable and even necessary. We find this, for instance, in the belief that God will compensate for our own lack of justice, provided our intention was genuine; that He will do so by means that are inconceivable to us, and that therefore we should not relent in our endeavor after the good. Kant’s main practical argument is that the spirit of trade, “sooner or later gains the upper hand in every state,” is “incompatible with war,” and thus guarantees the goal of peace “adequately from a practical point of view” even thought a theoretical certainty remains elusive. Here, as we see, Kant replicates his classic distinction Peace, extend this notion to a seemingly mysterious arrangement by which nature (understood here as the reality of things) would lead human affairs towards a pre-established purpose, using a complex web of opposing individual choices. Awkward as it may seem in this context, Kant’s argument (at least its first element) has been considerably elaborated upon in the contemporary Anthropic Principle. But it is yet another matter for him to see nature in a more general sense lead humans’ actions into the right direction against their own will. Even there, the idea that destructive behavior would, by its consequences, force a course correction and thus lead to an unwanted positive result in the end does make some sense, though it is hard to see how a “race of devils,” even armed with reason, could lead to an ideally peaceful world where one would want to live. In fact, what Kant seems to suggest here is a quite exact equivalent of the modern-day MAD doctrine (Mutually Assured Destruction).
between theoretical certainty and practical assurance. The assumption that war is detrimental to trade is obviously not without merit, but the argument as stated by Kant is just as obviously open to criticism. I will defer to others, much more qualified than me, who have abundantly discussed this point.

**c) Hegel’s challenge and the nature of peace**

Among the many challenges to Kant’s position on war and peace, Hegel’s comments in his *Philosophy of Right* are perhaps best known. Hegel was not a warmonger and he too recognized the necessity of maintaining some degree of decency in the conduct of war though, as Mertens points out, one needs to refer to Kant’s moral theory to find a proper justification for that position. But Hegel objected to Kant’s absolute rejection of war, and he did so on several grounds. Among his objections, the most interesting one is somewhat unexpected, at least to the reader who is used to Kant’s vision of things. War, for Hegel, has an ethical value, even though not without restrictions. It shows that nations have an identity and integrity that goes beyond the selfish interests of individuals. Thus, lasting (perpetual) peace would not be desirable, as it would leave people stuck in their small habits and self-centered ways, as opposed to the patriotism required by a war situation.

In the First Supplement, Kant also recognizes that an organic national unity is needed and that such national entity is willed by the people who will always reject the soulless abstraction of a world state. And Kant also recognizes that this automatically leads to wars and conflicts. But to him, this is an inevitable, though regrettable side effect – one that morality condemns and that nature helps overcome for the sake of the common good. National sovereignty is not ultimate. It is a building block.

As for the selflessness and heroism brought about by war alone, Kant mentions it too in *Perpetual Peace* (again in the First Supplement), but his evaluation is totally negative: War, he says, is often considered noble, it is something “to which the love of glory impels men quite apart from any selfish urges.” Kant even adds that “some philosophers have praised it as an ennoblement of humanity” – but he concludes that this is forgetting that war produces more evil people than it eliminates.

Amazingly, however, in the *Critique of Judgment*, one find a passage that sounds a lot more like Hegel than like Kant, something Hegel fails to notice:

Even war, when it is conducted with orderliness and holy respect for the rights of citizens, has something sublime about it. The way of thinking of the nation that conducts it in this way becomes more sublime as it gets exposed to greater dangers and faces them with courage. On the other hand, a long peace usually leads to the dominance of the spirit of trade that comes with petty selfishness, cowardice and self-indulgence and tends to lower the way of thinking of a people.
Mertens generously leaves open the question whether this passage is compatible with Kant’s writings on perpetual peace or not, but the contrast is in any case astounding. But Kant clarifies that for the warrior to receive the respect that fits the above description of war, he “also needs to display all the virtues of peace: gentleness, compassion, appropriate care for his own person. Only then will courage in front of danger prove that his soul is truly impossible to conquer.”

All this is said from the perspective of aesthetic judgment, i.e., the subjective perception of the observer. In that context, Kant argues, the head of state, no matter how superior his position, will always have to give precedence to the commander of an army in terms of prestige.

This passage is important, because it shows an aspect of Kant’s view on peace that barely appears in Perpetual Peace, though it is present between the lines. It is present in Appendix I, where Kant expresses his considerable contempt for politicians. Kant contrasts the rare but respectable “moral politician” with the common “political moralist,” i.e., the one who acts according to political convenience and gives a post mortem moral justification to his despicable behavior. In other words, Kant does not deny that it is possible to show greatness in the conduct of war. What is utterly reprehensible is the conduct of war for political advantage. And Kant hints at the fact that the qualities most worthy of praise in human beings are more easily shown in the danger of war than in the convenience of peaceful trade. This contrast between Kant’s all-out advocacy of universal peace and his comments on warlike qualities opens a small window into the question of what and ideal, permanently peaceful human-kind would and should be like. It also confirms that the trick of nature in forcing peace upon men through the needs of trade can only be a temporary help until the sense of moral righteousness he so often stresses takes over in society. It also suggests that creating the conditions of perpetual peace might require a considerable amount of courage and selfless dedication.

d) World republic or loose federation?

By now, one is used to see Perpetual Peace as an early announcement of things to come – things that came to be in the form of the League of Nations and the United Nations. But was that really what Kant had in mind? If so, was he not disappointingly timid and, at the same time, unduly optimistic in the end? This question deserves close consideration, because it is really essential for an evaluation of Kant’s legacy. On the one hand, the United Nations as it exists today (not to mention the earlier League of Nations) has provided ample proof of its insufficiency, at times amounting to a near paralysis due to the absence of any coercive power. On the other hand, particularly in this nation, many have objected to any hint that even minimal powers be given to international institutions that could thus bypass US sovereignty and amount to a “dictatorship” by an antagonistic majority.

1) Principle and reality
In the second definitive article, as we have seen, Kant indicates that a world republic is literally required by reason as the sole possible solution. But Kant tacitly drops the idea because he recognizes that people will reject it and he seems to never take it up again. For this, he has been both praised and criticized by some of his most notable supporters. Whether right or wrong, however, Kant seems to have overruled the law of reason. Heinrich Klemme cleverly notes that, if true, this would constitute an absolute anomaly.

To Klemme’s knowledge (and to mine), once Kant decides that something is willed by reason, he never gives up on it. The ironclad law of reason must be followed sooner or later – perhaps in some unknown, distant future – but it cannot be dismissed. Indeed, for Kant, the idea of an unfulfilled duty willed by reason will remain forever, even if the world ceased to exist. Reason will not rest until that goal is fulfilled. The particular instance of the world republic forms the one exception in the Kant corpus where the philosopher actually seems to accept as a fact that the ideal of reason will be frustrated, because people simply won’t accept it. This is in particular the exact opposite from what he says in “That May be True in Theory, But Is of No Practical Use (1793).” In the first Supplement, it is true, Kant explains that, after all, the existence of separate states is presupposed by the idea of international law, hence inevitable in spite of the limitation of a mere federation linking them, because the alternative would be the soulless despotism of one central world government – a despotism that would eventually turn into anarchy.

Klemme interprets this to mean that, after close consideration, Kant concluded that the idea of a world republic is thus not reasonable after all, which would explain why he abandons it.

It seems to me that this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Kant never explicitly rejects his initial reasoning in favor of a world republic in Article 2, nor does he explain why he was mistaken in coming to such conclusion. He simply moves on after stating that the peoples of the world would never follow such a path and later gives a rationale for the preservation of independent national entities, as well as reasons to hope for eternal peace on other grounds.

2) Kant’s apparent inconsistency: a suggested answer

An excellent contribution by Pauline Kleingeld offers what I believe to be a decisive answer to the interrogations caused by Kant’s apparent inconsistency. Kleinfeld first notes that authors like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, for all the differences in their evaluation, simply assume that Kant came to reject the idea of a world government. She then proceeds to show that this is an erroneous premise. Kant does advocate a non-coercive league, but...
this makes sense in the overall framework of his thought and, most importantly, it is compatible with his advocacy of a stronger “state of states.” As I had indicated above, Kant never repudiates his initial idea of a world republic or state of states, but he concludes that it will not be possible to make the jump from the state of nature to that universal entity. By advocating the intermediate step of a loose league, “Kant presents us with a view as to how to start leaving the international state of nature; he does not say that we should reject the idea of a world republic as such.”

Indeed, what Kant rejects in the First Supplement is a despotic, non-federal world government dominated by a superior power, not the idea of a supranational entity in itself. The really decisive observation here is about the workings of nature to separate nations through the divisions of language and religion. Kant clearly seems to suggest that, in this, nature works against a possible unity of the human race. But we need to look at the kind of unity that is thus to be averted: immediately after speaking of the dangers of a soulless despotism, Kant states that “nevertheless, every state, or its ruler, desires to establish lasting peace in this way [emphasis added], aspiring if possible to rule the whole world.” It is then that he adds “but nature wills otherwise” and goes on to speak of the differences in language and religion, a difference that does carry the potential for hatred and war, but also that for the development of culture through lively competition, source of greater harmony. It is thus the shortcut to a totalitarian world state that Kant rejects as dangerous and simply contrary to nature – not the idea of a unified human-kind. A league of nations, freely joined by republican states, even if it lacks coercive powers, leads into the right direction. At the very least, it serves as a platform for peaceful debate. Ultimately, through “endless approximation,” the goal of a peaceful world should be attained.

3) A hint from the Religion within the limits of reason alone

At this point, I believe it is essential to return to Kant’s Religion, a work in which I had initially shown Kant’s vision of perpetual peace is rooted to a large extent. In the preface to the second edition, one finds a statement that seems to be at odds with the title, Religion within the limits of reason alone. Kant compares revealed religion and pure rational religion to two concentric circles, revealed (and institutional) religion being the outer circle encompassing and protecting the inner circle of pure, rational and ethical religion. Religious traditions, with their revealed truths and their practices, no matter imperfect in Kant’s eyes, are the necessary ground in which pure, rational faith can grow. Human beings are not capable of making the shortcut to pure religion that “proceeds from mere a priori principles, as if experience did not exist.” They need to gradually discover the real significance of religious revelation and teachings and then to eliminate the “crust” that has become unnecessary. Religious life stems from existing traditions, not from an abstract rational faith. Throughout the Religion, Kant makes this point and he also states that the tradition serving as a starting point.
can be any religion, even though he naturally considers the case of his own Christian tradition. Kant spends much time showing how the core essence of Christianity is compatible with the pure rational and ethical faith of his philosophy.

**Religious life stems from existing traditions, not from an abstract rational faith.**

Kant doesn’t hide his distaste for the church leadership he knew and its collusions with the powers of the state\(^75\) – he was at odds with both at the time – and some of the typical 18\(^{th}\) century anticlericalism can be found in *Perpetual Peace* and other similar essays. But that criticism comes second to the fundamental acknowledgment that pure rational religion needs a home base in a particular tradition to realize itself.

The same is true for languages\(^76\), hence cultures and national traditions, which is our main concern. Just as there can be only one religion in Kant’s eyes, there is only one humankind, all differences in national sovereignty being mere “accidental vehicles … changing with times and places.” But these accidental vehicles are the only possible building blocks of genuine human unity. National sovereignty is in no way a holy cow for Kant as it is for some other thinkers. But it is a starting point to be acknowledged, and only a gradual, willing movement towards greater unity will make world peace possible. Therefore, Kant’s entire account of the workings of nature can be read as an indication of how a worldwide federation (details unspecified) can be aimed at without forceful centralization and at the same time without remaining on the level of a well intentioned by powerless association.

4) **Contemporary views: towards a federation**

As both Kelingeld and Klemme indicate, Jürgen Habermas (whose sympathy for Kant is well known) has recently moved towards advocating such a midway solu-
tion. To describe his vision, Habermas uses a terminological monstrosity of the type German scholars take delight in – but this one makes sense. He speaks of a “world domestic policy without a world government” (Weltinnenpolitik ohne Weltregierung). As Kleingeld puts it:

Habermas suggests that a dynamic array of deliberative democratic processes and organizations, at the national, international, and transnational levels, can greatly increase the level and legitimacy of binding regulation concerning matters of global concern. Thus, it is possible to continue the transformation of international law into a cosmopolitan order (a process that Habermas recognizes is already underway) without leading to a centralized world government.

Pollock notes that, in its present state, the United Nations, with its minimal sovereignty and capacity to enforce its edicts, already represents a step beyond the mere “negative surrogate” of which Kant speaks. Pollock admits that it is questionable whether the UN lives up to Kant’s expectations and its own criteria, but it at least begins to fulfill the double requirement stressed by Kant. Member states maintain their identity and full sovereignty in internal matters, but they do sacrifice some amount of autonomy in settling international disputes. This takes into account the principle of subsidiarity that is the basis for the political system of the Swiss Confederacy and the United States of America, whose founding Kant enthusiastically welcomed, precisely because it was a freely willed coming together of a commonwealth of equal states deciding how much of their sovereignty they were willing to give up for the sake of the common enterprise.

6. Kant’s timeless ideal and the road to its implementation

In a recent public lecture on the Middle-East crisis, Richard Rubenstein repeated his conviction that the perspectives for peace in that region of the world are slim to none at this time, whatever the changes in the political leadership. The gist of his argument was a reference to Hegel’s reading of Antigone as representing the tragic collision between incompatible ethical paradigms. The problem, then, would not be that one side is right and the other wrong, but that both sides have exclusive claims to being right that annihilate each other. In this case, conflict or war seems inevitable because of the very ethical values of the protagonists.

How would Kant respond? Undoubtedly, he would point to his own distinction between religion and specific historical faiths. As he acknowledges in Perpetual Peace, the existence of different historical faiths is both necessary (as no pure rational religion will ever appear out of the blue) and more than likely to lead to severe clashes. The way out of the conundrum is for both sides to eventually recognize that the real value of their faith does not lie in the specifics of their tradition, but in their own ability to practice a genuine ethical religion based on these traditions. Kant even agrees with believers of the faiths involved that supernatural help is (or may be) needed to reach
that result, but he would deny that this help can be obtained by any other means than the sincere and total commitment to achieve the highest good. In particular, he would consider any claim to a divinely ordained right over a holy place or holy land absurd. Kant’s position on this would in turn have very little chance to be listened to by more than a small minority on either side. But Kant has time: he does not claim that the developments leading to perpetual peace will be completed soon or even in the foreseeable future, but that it has to be sooner or later, because it is the absolute requirement of reason.

The practical question is then whether there is a faster and more efficient way to reach a solution than the somewhat timeless perspective that Kant espouses. Paradoxically, if we stand today on the foundation of the United Nations system – no matter how insufficient and imperfect – it is, I believe, because we reap the benefits of 200 years of dialectical conflicts, just (or supposedly) just wars, and a whole array of elements for which Kant had very little sense. The very un-Kantian 19th and 20th centuries perhaps give us the best chance ever to approach Kant’s timeless ideal.

Kant does not claim that the developments leading to perpetual peace will be completed soon or even in the foreseeable future, but that it has to be sooner or later, because it is the absolute requirement of reason.

Kant’s vision of a new world order is thus both idealistic and realistic, neither utopian nor unduly down to earth. That is the genius of his vision and the obvious reason why it not only survived to be remembered, but served as an inspiration for real life realizations in the world of 20th century politics. Beyond what has already been said, I will not even attempt to show where it falls short, as my purpose here was to present its rich content.
with as much clarity as possible, not to take sides in a debate that is going on in academia and on the world stage at this very moment. I believe that, among other contributions, Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* and related writings raise the question of the proper balance between central authority and autonomy, indifference and interference, integration and pluralism, all from the perspective that harmony and peaceful cooperation are always the final aim.
References:


2. Kant was writing under the reign of Prussia’s Friedrich Wilhelm III. Unlike his predecessor, Friedrich (Frederick) the Great, this monarch was not practicing enlightened despotism. Kant was forced to commit himself to refrain from publishing works of a religious nature. Writing on political matters was thus risky, which should never be forgotten when reading the contents. For a very detailed analysis of the subtle way in which Kant uses language to sidestep censorship and at the same time sending clear, even provocative messages in *Perpetual Peace*, see: John Namjun Kim, “Kant’s Secret Article: Irony, Performativity, and History in Zum Ewigen Frieden.” Germanic Review, Summer 2007, Vol. 82 Issue 3, pp. 203-226.

3. It should nevertheless be added that Kant was in direct contact with the great minds of his time, that he was in constant dialogue with them, and received news of international events. In a way, he can thus be compared to a contemporary student of world affairs who has no direct access to sources other than the Internet.

4. It is to be noted that Kant absolutely rejects Plato’s idea of the philosopher-king. See *Perpetual Peace*, p. 34.

5. A recent example is a collection of essays by German and English-speaking social scientists published on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the first publication of *Perpetual Peace*, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II: James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (eds.), *Perpetual Peace. Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideal* (The MIT Press, 1997).


the ideas of Perpetual Peace cannot be explained away as a mere reaction to the political turmoil of the times.

13. Published posthumously as part of The Principles of International Law. Though Bentham’s life and work as a whole chronologically follow rather than precede Kant’s, this particular work was thus written a few years prior to Kant’s Perpetual Peace.


referred to as *Religion*.


23. It is to be remembered that, at the time when Kant drafted his *Perpetual Peace*, his own country, Prussia, and Austria had unsuccessfully attempted just such an intervention against revolutionary France (Kant was an ardent supporter of the French and American revolutions). As Kim explains, Prussia was also involved in the second partition (i.e., dismemberment) of Poland at that time. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.


31. See Andrew J. Yu, “Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace and contemporary peacekeeping*” *Peacekeeping & International Relations*, 11873485, Mar/Apr98, Vol. 27, Issue 2. This view is supported by the fact that in preliminary notes for *Perpetual Peace*, Kant indicates that the Ancient Greek did not know a “representative system.” *Akademie-Ausgabe* XXIII, “Vorarbeiten Zum Ewigen Frieden,” p. 167.

32. *Perpetual Peace*, p. vii, Lewis White Beck’s Introduction. Kant himself strongly rejects that accusation of
“support for mob action” … in a country more than hundred miles removed.” Kant also acknowledges that the French Revolution may succeed or fail and that it “may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point where a sensible man … would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost [a second time]. Nevertheless, he also sees the potential for spectators (which would include himself) to feel “a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm.” This sympathy, which he deems potentially dangerous, “has no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race” to seek for rights and a morally good constitution. The overall vision, for Kant, remained thus more important than the flaws in its execution. See Immanuel Kant, “An Old Question raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?” (1798) In: On History (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp. 144-145.


35. See Note 3 above.


37. Pubantz, p. 17.

38. Kant literally speaks of a “federalism (Föderalism) of free states”. Perpetual Peace, p. 16.

39. No relationship to the psychiatric condition known under the same name, in reference to the same semi-historical figure, but with the typical Anglo-Saxon economy of one “h”.


42. Perhaps an indirect reference to the newborn French Republic, this statement can also be applied to the contemporary notion of American exceptionalism and the role the United States would play in the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations. Kant’s words here at the very
least put into perspective the opposite opinion expressed, for instance, by Herfri Münkler in “Kant's 'perpetual peace': utopia or political guide?” Open Democracy (May 26, 2004), available at: http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-iraqwarphilosophy/article_1921.jsp (retrieved on November 23, 2008). Münkler contrasts Dante's “imperial” peace plan (based on the strengthening of a dominant power) with Kant's “republican” plan, adding that “Kant's federation of states does not account for a superpower like the United States; unquestionably a political realist, Kant would have realized that such an overwhelmingly superior power could not be fitted into his projected structure.” By equating imperial with despotic, Münkler's analysis does not take into account Kant's distinction between the form of sovereignty and the form of government discussed above.

43. Perpetual Peace, p. 20.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., pp. 22-23 (slightly revised translation).

46. Pubantz, p. 17.


50. Klemme, ibid., p. 15.


52. Even in Perpetual Peace, in the midst of his argumentation for nature's arrangement guaranteeing peace among humans, Kant digresses into considerations on the miraculous arrangements of nature permitting humans to exist in the first place. For instance: “But the care of nature excites the greatest wonder when we see how she brings wood (though the inhabitants do not know whence it comes) to these barren climates, without which they would have neither canoes, weapons, nor huts …” Ibid, p. 27.

seau’s reversal: Rousseau believed that civilization, far from improving man, destroyed his natural goodness. Kant again reverses this assertion by showing that the passions and vices of culture may be real, but that, in the long run, they open the road to peace.

54. After acknowledging that it may appear that only a “nation of angels” could constitute a peaceful republic, Kant famously states: “The problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved even for a race of devils, if only they are intelligent. The problem is: ‘Given a multitude of rational beings requiring universal laws for their preservation, but each of whom is secretly inclined to exempt himself from them, to establish a constitution in such a way that, although their private intentions conflict, they check each other, with the result that their public conduct is the same as if they had no such intentions.’”  


56. Ibid., p. 32.

57. Thomas Mertens, “Hegel's Homage to Kant's Perpetual Peace: An Analy-


58. G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, § 324, Note. The German original is available at: http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Hegel,+Georg+Wilhelm+Friedrich/Grundlinien+der+Philosophie+des+Rechts; the English translation can be found at: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/ (December 8, 2008).

59. Perpetual Peace, p. 29.

60. Ibid. Kant was not referring to Hegel, whose Philosophy of Right was published in 1821.


62. Ibid., p. 262.

63. Ibid., p. 37 ff.


66. A detailed analysis of Kant’s works over time (culminating with the *Metaphysics of Morals*, published in 1797, two years after *Perpetual Peace*) is said to reveal a steady shift away from the idea of a world republic. See Fisch, *ibid.*., p. 144.


70. Kleingeld, p. 305.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 307. Kleingeld goes on to indicate several instances in *Perpetual Peace* and even in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (the later work where Kant is supposed to have moved further away from the idea of a world state) where it becomes clear that, for Kant, the league of nations was merely a provisional goal on the way to a real “state of peoples” (*Völkerstaat*). For references, see Kleingeld, p. 307.


75. Kant suggests that, at the end of a war, the state organize a day of atonement or fasting in addition to the thanksgiving for victory. *Ibid.*, p 20, Note 8. What begins as a simple suggestion to add a call for forgiveness to the expression of gratitude ends in a biting comment expressing Kant’s real feelings: “The thanksgiving for victory won during the war, the hymns which are sung to the God of Hosts … stand in equally sharp contrast to the moral idea of the Father of Men. For they not only show a sad enough indifference to the way in which nations seek their rights, but in addition express a joy in having annihilated a multitude of men or their happiness.”

76. It would be interesting to have Kant’s opinion on an artificial universal language like Esperanto. It is safe to guess that he would have seen its lack of real success as a confirmation of his theory.


80. Perpetual Peace, p. 46.
