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Perpetual Peace Academy, Phase III

In Immanuel Kant's short text, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he asserts that peace stands opposed to the state of nature. Peace cannot be presupposed and cannot therefore be posited a priori; instead, it only arrives politically, through the establishment of the "civil condition" that regulates and protects external freedoms. As outlined in the Preface to the essay, as well as in the first preliminary article, the temporary halting of hostility and violence between states is insufficient for securing peace. Peace is perpetual, explains Kant, when it is brought about through international law (or the law of nations) and cosmopolitan law, and it is what "signifies the end to all hostilities" (Kant 8:344). Kant recognized peace not only depends upon states interacting with one another, but it rests on non-state actors as well, ranging from citizens, refugees, businesses, terrorist groups, organizations and so on. As such, Kant complements international law with cosmopolitan law, which protects the right to present oneself (as a state, individual, or organization) to another without violence or hostility, and this is based on the observation that "originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else" (Kant 8:358).

Peace must also be understood as a kind of remedy to the presumed state of nature—which is war. If war and peace are opposed terms, such that *real* peace cannot exist if it is locally inscribed and used to stave off a future threat, then war is the "originary" term in this dyad, and peace acts as a saving power, a juridico-political solution to conflicts that would otherwise be decided by force—that is to say: by war (see de Ville 2019). But to insist that peace is in some sense artificial, or in any case, a state that requires inventing in order to solve a problem in the "natural state" of humans, is also to say that political systems are *designed* to bring about peace, even if that peace has yet to arrive.

Designing Perpetual Peace is how the latest version of Perpetual Peace Project has been framed. And if "design" seems alien to the Kantian discourse on international and cosmopolitan rights, then the claim we're making is that it shouldn't be. Design, without being named as such, is in the background of the Kantian problematic to establish juridico-political orders that secure perpetual peace. Of course, *design*, historically, discursively, and practically, has been characterized as the technical art of problem-solving. And while this *technē* also involves planning, strategy, reasoning, iteration, all these notions are derivative to what amounts to a design axiomatic—namely, to *solve problems*. And within a Kantian

paradigm, the establishment of an everlasting or perpetual peace via the formation of just public institutions, state authorities, and an international league of nations all mobilized to secure external freedoms, can be reframed, without too much difficulty, as the political design problematic *par excellence.*

Today, however, the scale and complexity of this design project was is almost unimaginable: not only are we on the brink of the wars in the Ukraine and Gaza spiraling out of control and igniting a third world war, the likes of which we have never seen; but these wars, and not coincidentally, are also taking place within a shifting geopolitical landscape. The BRICS nations no longer find themselves on the global periphery: with dozens of new member states on the horizon, these nations are asserting themselves as viable financial and military forces that are shifting the global architectures of power. And with the rapid emergence of populist authoritarianisms, backed by the stockpiling of nuclear weapons and a stranglehold on natural resources, we may have never experienced a world more out of sync with what Kant envisioned and in dire need of geopolitical designs capable of installing an everlasting peace.

Still, one must be wary of geopolitical architectures that claim to design away war for good, as if political design solutions—at institutional, state, or international levels—did not already harbor within them something else. For this reason, one might argue, as Jacques Derrida did, that Kant did not go far enough vis-à-vis the difference between moral duty and political practice when Kant insists that what's ethical must also be politically possible (see La Caze 2007); or in short: that there is always space for the ethical (eternal peace) within the realm of the political (Kant 8:370),[1] even when: "No peace settlement which secretly reserves issues for a future war shall be considered valid." (And this is precisely how peace has been used in the war in Ukraine, with very little that remains secret about Russia's intentions.)

What's at issue here does not concern political solutions *ipso facto* requiring the friend and enemy distinction (à la Carl Schmitt), and hence, always harboring plans for war at future date; rather, what's at stake concerns the fundamental impossibility of finite political institutions, weighed down by their empirical and practical limitations, giving birth to solutions that transcend all empirical instantiations. It is in this way that perpetual peace may indeed function as a transcendental horizon, a Kantian Idea even: while eternal peace may be impossible to actualize empirically (as Derrida would have it), it

nonetheless functions as the condition for the emergence of just states, laws, and institutions. Far from being a copy of an ideal, a Platonic form, perpetual peace is only ever known through its instantiations, through the institutions and laws it conditions. In itself, then, perpetual peace is meaningless. Which means that if perpetual peace is a transcendental condition, then it is also, and simultaneously, conditioned by what it conditions.

Such reciprocal determination, in Gilles Deleuze's sense, also yields a deeper understanding of the design axiomatic—to solve problems. Design never finishes its work, because design problems never completely disappear. Still, and as the design scholar Kees Dorst insists, these problems do not pre-exit their solutions in as much as design gives shape to the problem as it works through possible solutions (iteratively)(Dorst 2006). While the problem is in this sense determined and refined by solving it, design never rids itself of what animates it. Folding this insight back onto the Kantian framework, it seems that designing institutions capable of ending war (*in toto*) is a *problematic* in just this sense. Derrida knew this of course, and he makes this plain in his reading of Levinas and Kant in *Adiu to Emmanuel Levinas*. There, Derrida uses Levinas' ethics of hospitality to open up a reading of Kantian peace that brings the impossibility of its political establishment into sharp relief. Siding with Levinas, Derrida asserts: "in sum, without being at peace with itself, such a concept of peace retains a political part, it participates in the political, even if another part of it goes beyond a certain concept of the political (Derrida 1999, 80)

Hence, perpetual peace is at once internal to the political-legal system and external to its conditioned welcome of the stranger. If peace can only be realized through finite designs, then these legal and institutional designs also harbor the promise of something more, indeed, something that undoes its very conditions for existence in conditioned institutions—namely, the welcome of the stranger or the foreigner without condition or question. It is precisely this unconditional hospitality, this welcome beyond the realm of the political, that functions as an imperative and places a demand on all political states. Thus, within politically instituted peace, which always contains the "trace of war," that peace always "exceeds itself, goes beyond its own boarders, which amounts to saying that it interrupts itself or deconstructs itself so as to form a sort of enclave inside and outside of itself…" (Derrida 1999, 80).

Now, it's with this in mind that the Perpetual Peace Project has sets its sights on the university. The founding of the university, from the Latin *universitas* ("the whole"), is widely debated. Depending on

the criteria used, Plato's Academy might serve as the first real institution of higher education. Others challenge the exclusively Western genealogy of the university, finding organized higher education across many ancient civilizations. As Harold Perkins notes, "[t]he Confucian schools for the mandarin bureaucracy of imperial China, the Hindu gurukulas and Buddhist vihares for the priests and monks of medieval India, the madrasas for the mullahs and Quranic judges of Islam, the Aztec and Inca temple schools for the priestly astronomers of pre-Columbian America, the Tokugawa han schools for Japanese samurai" (Perkin 2007, 159). Still others continue to mark the founding of the University of Bologna in 1088 as the origin of the modern university, a designation which explicitly links the university as a formal institution to Medieval Christianity. Whatever the case, for our purposes, the University of Bologna's 1158 charter, known as the *Constitutio Habita,* on academic freedom is decisive in articulating the university's mission. The charter "guarantee[s] the right of a traveling scholar to unhindered passage in the interests of education."[2] And to honor what is widely agreed to be the founding document on academic freedom, 900 years after the university's founding in 1988, 388 university rectors and heads from across Europe signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum.* The signatories repledged commitment to upholding key "principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy," and to date, 960 universities from 94 countries have signed the document.[3]

Like Kant's short text on perpetual peace, the charter provides a blueprint for institutional cooperation across national borders. More than this, it places a demand on universities to not let their ties to national policies and their financing of research and innovation stand in the way of the institution's fundamental mission: to permit the "traveling scholar unhindered passage in the service of education." On this template, the university is *designed* to welcome the foreigner, indeed, to be a refuge to those who question established norms, and whose education and research ought not depend on the advancement of state-power. The architectures of this institution are such that they oblige those in power to create conditions to be unconditionally hospital to the exchange of ideas without retribution.

And yet, as I'm sure all of us in this room know too well, today, this welcome is fundamentally *conditioned* by state policies, and economic and military interests. Research universities, especially in North America, look more and more like real estate companies, interested in land grabs and offering tax incentives to the highest bidder, alongside their explicit interest in increasing research budgets through acquiring military contracts. Far from being an instrument of peace— a *universitas*— over the last century this institution has been redesigned to prop up the sovereignty of the economic-state, and

is thus, in some fundamental sense, an instrument of *war*. Many universities in the West have done well to conceal this fact by aligning themselves with the UN's Grand Challenges, and making it their mission to solve so-called "world problems". This green washing masks a larger strategy on behalf of the university to secure financing from government agencies, which only places the institution further in the debt of state and military interests.

Like any institution, the university is weighed down by empirical and practical constraints, which leaves the "unhindered passage" of scholars and ideas in the service of education conditioned (rather than unconditioned), and more like a dream than a reality. Still, for most of the university's history, the failure to achieve this "freedom" *in reality* never eclipsed the promise of it, even if it could never be fulfilled. And so, if the university is in excess of itself, and harbors within its corridors its own impossibility, then this is impossibility is also what gave the institution an ethics, and not just a politics.

In the twenty-first century, it's just this renewed promise that is systematically being foreclosed in the university in the name of securing political and economic security. When those who protest and stand against state-sponsored genocide are deemed enemies of the state, and "freedom of speech" on campuses becomes a technology of oppression wielded by wealthy university donors to ensure the university toes the state line, then the university has well and truly passed a tipping point. This is why the Perpetual Peace Academy was formed—to renew an unconditional promise within a conditional institution. This cannot be done from the top-down and it cannot be done through grants and official policy, or at least not exclusively. It needs to be done from within the institution. We welcome you to the Perpetual Peace Academy.

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[1] Here's Kant: "Morality belongs to the practical sphere, in the objective sense, as the totality of unconditionally commanding laws according to which we *ought* to act. It is therefore obviously inconsistent, after having acknowledged the authority of this concept of duty, to want to say that one *cannot* carry out one's moral duties. For if this were so, the concept of duty would altogether disappear from the realm of morality (*ultra posse nemo obligatuur* [no one is obliged beyond what is possible]). Therefore there can be no dispute between politics as the applied doctrine of right and morality as a theoretical doctrine of right (and hence no dispute between theory and practice)…" (8:370).

[2] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University

[3] https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum