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# Kant on Peace, Honor and the “Point of View” of Princes, 1755–1795

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*By recovering the pre-critical foundations of Immanuel Kant’s political idealism, this article elucidates his fundamental concern with reorienting the “point of view” of real princes and sovereigns to the cause of peace. I trace this priority to Kant’s reading of Pierre Bayle, whose skepticism illustrated that the true nature of princes rendered Saint-Pierre’s ideal of peace “not possible.” Beginning in 1756, Kant reframed perpetual peace as the ultimate political honor for those unmoved by strict moral necessity, promising them a legacy that was entwined with the providential course of human history. This appeal to honor identified the first necessary phase of political change, accounting for ruling motives that might otherwise lead to wars of conquest and expansion. This view of Kant’s shrewd attempt to steer the “point of view” of real power, which persisted into his final political writings in the 1790s, challenges dominant readings of a Kantian politics concerned solely with the distant realization of ideal institutions.*

In August of 1795, four months after Prussia made peace with France in Basel, Immanuel Kant was completing *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf*, an essay that struck early readers as the culmination of his political philosophy. Kant’s final word on politics would in fact come with the 1797 *Rechtslehre (Doctrine of Right)*, but this 1795 essay debuted his thoughts on republican peace, prompting close readings across Europe and an unauthorized French translation rushed out before the end of the year.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with Kant’s earlier writings on politics and history, *Ewigen Frieden*, henceforth *Perpetual Peace*, offered philosophical grounds for the hope of human progress.<sup>2</sup> Kant drew from an eighteenth-century tradition, stretching back to Saint Pierre’s *Projet pour rendre la paix*

<sup>1</sup>François Azouvi and Dominique Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris: La réception de Kant en France* (Paris, 1991), 21.

<sup>2</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* [1795], AA VIII, 341–86. Throughout the article, I note the Kant source but cite from the volumes and page numbers of Kant’s *gesammelte Schriften* (the Academy *Ausgabe*). See Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1902–). Most Kant sources are available in English through *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 1992–). I use my own translations for a consistent rendering of Kant’s terms relating to honor. Translations of other primary sources are also my own, unless indicated.

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*perpétuelle en Europe* (1713), of examining the prospect of peace as a “perpetual” condition irreducible to temporary ceasefires and conditional armistices.<sup>3</sup> Now the best-remembered work in this tradition, Kant’s thought on peace is still claimed as a touchstone for democratic peace theory, liberal internationalism, and even humanitarian intervention.<sup>4</sup> Yet none of these perspectives, nor indeed the flurry of Kant scholarship over the past twenty years, has taken into account Kant’s earliest comments on princes and politics, which began to envision perpetual peace some forty years before the appearance of his 1795 tract.

This article brings these comments to light, setting them in the context of the German reception of Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), translated by Johann Christoph Gottsched in the 1740s.<sup>5</sup> Kant’s political idealism was shaped in this earliest hour by two intellectual challenges contained in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*. The first, on *raison d’état*, excluded Christian virtues in the exercise of power, aligning the honorable princely reputation with Machiavellian power politics. The second, which became even more vexing after the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, was the age-old problem of evil that apparently ruled out a God both beneficent and omnipotent. I begin with a remark conventionally dated to 1755, wherein Kant cites Pierre Bayle’s defense of Machiavellian *raison d’état* to critique Saint-Pierre: “Bayle says that the application of the rules of Christianity is possible in the abstract but not possible among princes. It was not possible when it came to the Abbot Pierre’s proposal.”<sup>6</sup> In 1756, Kant introduced his own vision of peace while reimagining theodicy after the Lisbon disaster. A peaceful prince, Kant claimed in his second essay on the 1755 earthquake, was nothing less than a “beneficent instrument in the gracious hand of God, and a gift He makes to the peoples of the earth.”<sup>7</sup>

More than resituating the origins of Kant’s thought on peace, these comments help illuminate an enduring and under-studied priority in his political thinking. Following Bayle’s wisdom, the young Kant would not predicate progress toward peace solely upon the virtue of living rulers, avoiding the naivety that was widely (if inaccurately) associated with Saint-Pierre. Instead, Kant claimed the reputational motives Bayle had associated with the doctrine of *raison d’état*, redirecting these toward humanity’s aspiration to peace. Beginning with this 1756 passage on the “leadership of the human race,” I argue that Kant held up a providential future to the shrewd natures of princes, redirecting the pursuit of honor to the cessation of expansive war and conquest. Kant’s politics doubtless evolved over decades, culminating in a system of right that issued strict moral duties to perpetual peace. Yet,

<sup>3</sup>Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe*, vol. 1 (Utrecht, 1713).

<sup>4</sup>For more on these legacies see Antonio Franceschet, *Kant and Liberal Internationalism: Sovereignty, Justice, and Global Reform* (New York, 2002); and Michael W. Doyle, *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (New York, 2012).

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Bayle, *Herrn Peter Baylens Historisches und kritisches Wörterbuch, nach der neuesten Auflage von 1740 ins Deutsche übersetzt*, vols. 1–4, ed. Johann Christoph Gottscheden (Leipzig, 1741–4).

<sup>6</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß Logik*, 2116, AA XVI, 241.

<sup>7</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Geschichte und Naturbeschreibung der merkwürdigsten Vorfälle des Erdbebens, welches an dem Ende des 1755sten Jahres einen großen Theil der Erde erschüttert hat* [1756], AA I, 429–61, at 460–61.

as I argue, his mature political writings retained the possibility of progress toward peace through this lesser honor motive, an important and overlooked piece of the relationship between theory and practice.

This reading of Kant's politics engages three literatures, beginning with commentary on reason of state and the reputation of princes in the eighteenth century. Saint-Pierre, Voltaire, and Frederick II, among others, proposed visions of international order by reimagining the doctrine of *raison d'état* in a century marked not by the power politics of Machiavellian principalities but by the harmonizing commercial interests of large European states.<sup>8</sup> In updating the definition of state interest, these writings sought to align the glorious reputation of princes with the happiness and prosperity of peace, rather than the politics of conquest and expansion. Scholarship on perpetual peace has illuminated Saint-Pierre's attempts to pacify princely glory as a central part of his *Projet*, which was later disputed by Rousseau.<sup>9</sup> Yet, viewing the *Projet* as a precursor decades removed from Kant's 1795 essay, this literature has not uncovered how Kant himself related to this earlier context, nor how he conceptualized princely glory as an unruly desire for honor (*Ehrbegierde*). I show that while Kant similarly attempted to pacify the good princely reputation, his earliest appeal to princes was uniquely embedded in a response to the earthquake of 1755, which set peace within the providential course of human perfection. Mooring political honor to an immutable progress willed by providence, Kant's argument thus subjected princes to the judgment of an ever more moral posterity. As we will see, Kant developed further versions of this argument in his major writings on politics and history.

This article also contributes to recent literature on the non-moralizing nature of Kant's politics. Scholarship of the last twenty years has established Kant's treatments of politics and law as a distinct and essential part of his practical philosophy, irreducible to his earlier writings on the sphere of virtue.<sup>10</sup> Some have identified the "civilizing" role Kant assigned to honor, a surrogate of virtue that could benefit the civil condition.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, Kant distinguished between a love of honor (*Ehrliche*) on the one hand and, on the other, an unruly *desire* for honor (*Ehrbegierde*), sometimes translated as "ambition" or "vainglory." Whereas the

<sup>8</sup>I am especially indebted to Nakhimovsky's treatment of the discussion between Frederick II, Voltaire, and Saint-Pierre. Isaac Nakhimovsky, "The Enlightened Prince and the Future of Europe: Voltaire and Frederick the Great's Anti-Machiavel of 1740," in Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky, and Richard Whatmore, eds., *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2017), 44–77.

<sup>9</sup>See especially Céline Spector, "Le projet de paix perpétuelle: De Saint-Pierre à Rousseau," in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Principes du droit de la guerre: Écrits sur la paix perpétuelle*, ed. Blaise Bachofen, Céline Spector, Bruno Bernardi, and Gabriella Silvestrini (Paris, 2008), 229–94. For more on the place of glory in Saint-Pierre's political philosophy see Carole Dornier, "La politique culturelle dans les projets de l'abbé de Saint-Pierre," in Carole Dornier and Claudine Poulouin, eds., *Les projets de l'abbé Castel de Saint-Pierre (1658–1743)* (Caen, 2011), 105–16.

<sup>10</sup>See, for instance, Wolfgang Kersting, *Wohlgeordnete Freiheit: Immanuel Kants Rechts- und Staatsphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); and Arthur Ripstein, *Force and Freedom: Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>See Robert Louden, *Kant's Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings* (Oxford, 2000), 149–50; and Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Relating Aesthetic and Sociable Feelings to Moral and Participatory Feelings: Reassessing Kant on Sympathy and Honor," in Susan Meld Shell, ed., *Kant's "Observations and Remarks": A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2012), 101–15.

former helped moral agents resolve themselves to inner virtue by considering what was truly *worthy* of honor, the latter, a passion Kant associated with princes and statesmen, contented itself simply with the external trappings of reputation. Most recently, Susan Shell has illuminated what Kant's 1798 vision of republican government owed to the "love of honor" (*Ehrliche*), combined with "well-understood self-interest."<sup>12</sup> In showing how Kant sought to redirect real princes and politicians to the common good, my focus is more on his second form of honor, *Ehrbegierde*, which remains under-discussed in Kant literature. I am most sympathetic with Antong Liu's account of a distinctly political reconciliation between the "ethical" love of honor and the "natural" desire for honor, but this argument does not focus on political power per se.<sup>13</sup> Precursors to the present argument have sometimes highlighted Kant's forays into the genre of the "mirror for princes." Elisabeth Ellis has noted Kant's attempts to steer the "would-be enlightened" ruler to moral ends by considering their "present power and glorious reputation."<sup>14</sup> Paul Guyer has similarly remarked that Kant's 1784 essay on history might be read as "Kant's anti-Machiavelli."<sup>15</sup> Yet, treating Kant's uses of honor as the product of single texts, these nonetheless helpful remarks have not elucidated the foundational link in Kant's thought between the political desire for honor and the providential dimensions of peace.

A third literature concerns Kant's ideal of peace and the vision of its realization. Commentators have long sought to elucidate the legal order entailed by Kant's ideal of peace, especially the nature of his commitment to a world state or a federation of free states as the guarantor of right.<sup>16</sup> Recent literature has also emphasized the "agonistic" character of Kant's idealized peace, which would forbid war but leave open the possibility of productive rivalry and political contest.<sup>17</sup> Without obviating the need for these discussions, the present argument focuses not on the ultimate form and character of a Kantian peace but on the most proximate obstacles to it, what Kant called the "evil that stands in its way."<sup>18</sup> Beginning in the 1750s, Kant foresaw how the seduction of a political reputation based in conquest threatened even a viable plan of international order, let alone its eventual realization. Thus, alongside the ideal of peace itself, Kant remained intent on generating a resolve

<sup>12</sup>Susan Meld Shell, "Kant as Soothsayer: The Problem of Progress and the 'Sign' of History," in Paul T. Wilford and Samuel A. Stoner, eds., *Kant and the Possibility of Progress: From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties* (Philadelphia, 2021), 115–34. Cf. Shell, "Archimedes Revisited: Honor and History in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Part Two," in Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 277–305.

<sup>13</sup>Antong Liu, "'The Constant Companion of Virtue': On the Dilemma and Political Implications of Kantian Honor," *Review of Politics* 82/4 (2020), 548–70.

<sup>14</sup>Elisabeth Ellis, *Kant's Politics: Provisional Theory for an Uncertain World* (New Haven, 2005), 22, 104–11.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Guyer, "The Crooked Timber of Mankind," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt, eds., *Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim": A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2009), 129–49, at 149.

<sup>16</sup>See notably Pauline Kleingeld, "Approaching Perpetual Peace: Kant's Defence of a League of States and His Ideal of a World Federation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 12/3 (2004), 304–25.

<sup>17</sup>See especially Adam Lebovitz, "The Battlefield of Metaphysics: Perpetual Peace Revisited," *Modern Intellectual History* 13/2 (2016), 327–55.

<sup>18</sup>Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 376.

to peace among rulers of his own century, whatever their true motives, without which faraway institutions would amount to the naivety he had earlier associated with Saint-Pierre. This interpretation also offers a new perspective on the practical implications of Kant's philosophy of history, which has been variously appreciated for its attempt to buttress moral resolve for the pursuit of peace.<sup>19</sup> In addition to a purely moral orientation to peace, Kant aligned, as we will see, the favorable fate of humanity with a ruling disposition more prone to honor and reputation. I ground this reading of Kant's politics in its neglected precritical foundations, turning first to Bayle's influence on his perception of Saint-Pierre's *Projet*, then to his own appeal to a "noble" ruler after the Lisbon earthquake, and to his evolving concept of honor throughout the 1760s and 1770s. I then trace how these foundations endured into Kant's later writings on politics and history, contributing to his philosophy of history in the 1780s, his matured views of sovereignty alongside the French Revolution, and finally his appeal to the "moral politician" in *Perpetual Peace*.

### Saint-Pierre, Bayle, and Kant

The Abbé de Saint-Pierre envisioned how peace could become "perpetual" with the formation of a European federation, an ideal he occasionally clothed in the medievalist language of Christian republics. Though widely admired for its visions of a pacified Europe, the *Projet* was often shunned for its naivety about the motives and natures of European princes. Leibniz was first to challenge the Abbé's apparent faith in dutiful sovereigns, writing to the Abbé in 1715 that his plan seemed to require a great prince with "a soul exceptionally cleansed of worldly things."<sup>20</sup> Voltaire was sharper, later describing the proposed federation as "a chimera no more likely of being realized between princes than between elephants and rhinoceroses."<sup>21</sup> Frederick similarly stated in 1770 that visionaries of peace should "transport themselves to an ideal world ... where princes, their ministers and their subjects are all without passions."<sup>22</sup> By the 1750s, the idealism of *paix perpétuelle* had found favorable German readers but it also carried an echo of its powerful critics, not least the Prussian king. The *Projet's* popularity among German readers was perhaps also ill-fated by Saint-Pierre's reliance on Germanic history, which he mistook, as Leibniz also remarked, as a precedent for the desired federation.<sup>23</sup> The present section examines how, beginning to envision an alternative to Saint-Pierre's ideal, Kant viewed the matter through Pierre Bayle's skeptical lens.

<sup>19</sup>See, for instance, Lea Ypi, "Natura Daedala Rerum? On the Justification of Historical Progress in Kant's *Guarantee of Perpetual Peace*," *Kantian Review* 14/2 (2010), 118–48; and Loren Goldman, "In Defense of Blinders: On Kant, Political Hope, and the Need for Practical Belief," *Political Theory* 40/4 (2012), 497–523.

<sup>20</sup>G. W. Leibniz to C. I. C. de Saint-Pierre [4 April 1715], in André Robinet, ed., *Correspondence Leibniz-Castel de Saint Pierre* (Paris, 1995), 55.

<sup>21</sup>Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet], "De la paix perpétuelle, par le docteur Goodheart. Traduction de M. Chambon" [1769], in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1872), 355–66, at 355.

<sup>22</sup>Frederick II, *Examen de l'essai sur les préjugés* (London, 1770), 42.

<sup>23</sup>G. W. Leibniz, "Observations on the Abbé de St Pierre's 'Project for Perpetual Peace'" [1715], trans. Patrick Riley, in *Leibniz: Political Writings*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge, 1988), 178–82, at 183. On the German reception of Saint-Pierre see Anita Dietze and Walter Dietze, "Abriss einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Friedensidee vom Mittelalter bis zur Französischen Revolution," in Dietze and Dietze, eds., *Ewiger Friede? Dokumente einer deutschen Diskussion um 1800* (Leipzig, 1989), 7–58.

Kant's earliest remarks on politics must be understood alongside his largely overlooked debts to Bayle, whose German popularity peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century with Gottsched's translations of the *Dictionnaire*.<sup>24</sup> Bayle's influence is comparable in Kant's precritical writings to Kant's explicitly acknowledged debt to Hume, whose skepticism famously roused him from a "dogmatic slumber."<sup>25</sup> Yet per his later logic lectures from the 1770s, Kant viewed Bayle, rather than Hume, as the prototypical sceptic, wherein the skeptical method consisted in "investigating truth through postponement, meaning that nothing is immediately accepted or rejected, but first subjected to dispute." Beyond Bayle, a "modern sceptic," Kant listed those who, like Voltaire, "do not deserve the name of philosopher at all," and those who, like Hume, "are not real *academici* but rather only take on a skeptical method."<sup>26</sup> This suggests Bayle's central role in the development of Kant's pathbreaking method of *Kritik*, a new rationalism illuminated by the most salient objections to the "dogmatic" uses of reason. Though present purposes exclude a full investigation of Bayle's influence on Kant, it must be noted that it has also been detected throughout the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*), in passages no less significant than the "Antinomy of Pure Reason."<sup>27</sup> The lingering indeterminacy of this influence is at least partially explained by the nature of Bayle's writing: as Jean Ferrari has noted, one hardly thinks to cite a dictionary.<sup>28</sup>

Kant's 1755 remark contains his most explicit reference to Bayle: "Bayle says that the application of the rules of Christianity is possible in the abstract but not possible among princes [*nicht beim Fürsten möglich*]. It was not possible when it came to the Abbot Pierre's proposal."<sup>29</sup> These lines were likely written in preparation of Kant's first lectures on logic, delivered in the winter semester of 1755–6, and based on Georg Friedrich Meier's *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (1752). Kant is known to have read French sources but, as Ferrari has argued, there is reason to question his familiarity with the original *Projet* in the 1750s. Most importantly, his remark implies that Saint-Pierre had blithely assumed that the "rules of Christianity" *could* be applied to princes, when in fact the Abbé's original proposal had leaned heavily upon the worldly advantages of peace, including even to a ruler's "reputation."<sup>30</sup> Though Kant may indeed have become more familiar with the *Projet* over time, his early comments seem to reflect not a close reading but the impression, more quickly disseminated than the *Projet* itself, that Saint-Pierre was ignorant in the ways of princes.<sup>31</sup> These notes later referred to "The Platonic

<sup>24</sup>Gerhard Sauder, "Bayle-Rezeption in der deutschen Aufklärung," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 49 (1975), 83–104.

<sup>25</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* [1783], AA IV, 253–383, at 260.

<sup>26</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Logik Blomberg* [1770s], AA XXIV, 7–301, at 210–11.

<sup>27</sup>See D. A. Rees, "Kant, Bayle, and Indifferentism," *Philosophical Review* 63/4 (1954), 592–5.

<sup>28</sup>Jean Ferrari, *Les sources françaises de la philosophie de Kant* (Paris, 1979), 270.

<sup>29</sup>Kant, *Nachlaß Logik*, 241.

<sup>30</sup>Saint-Pierre, *Projet*, 230–35.

<sup>31</sup>Jean Ferrari, "L'Abbé de Saint-Pierre et l'idée de paix perpétuelle dans l'oeuvre de Kant," in Jean Ferrari and Simone Goyard-Fabre, eds., *L'année 1796: Sur la paix perpétuelle de Leibniz aux héritiers de Kant* (Paris, 1998), 63–79.

Republic of the Abbot St. Pierre's Proposals" as an example of what Meier called a "false" problem, whose "resolution is not possible with a certain intent [*in gewisser Absicht unmöglich*]." <sup>32</sup> Saint-Pierre's proposal was not "absolutely impossible" on its face, nor inherently illogical. Rather, it failed in a sphere of implementation when a "certain intent" was required, a matter of human limitations or unfavorable "circumstances." <sup>33</sup> Kant's notes thus highlighted Saint-Pierre's apparent inattentiveness to practical constraints upon those with the power to pursue peace. <sup>34</sup>

Kant was drawing from Bayle's Machiavellian *Dictionnaire* articles, which emphasized how the demands of politics inevitably opposed the commands of religion. <sup>35</sup> Bayle predicated the good reputation of princes upon the uncompromising pursuit of state interest, impugning private scruples and common virtues as sources for political legacies. It must be noted that Bayle himself was not attempting to update the definition of *raison d'état* to reflect the softening of international competition since Machiavelli's century. Instead, the *Dictionnaire* echoed Machiavelli directly, defining reason of state to include even the most bellicose mandates. "Let a prince conquer and maintain the state," Machiavelli had written, and "his methods will always be judged honourable and praised by all." <sup>36</sup> Bayle's Louis VII article is perhaps Kant's likeliest source for this wisdom on princes and what was "not possible" in Saint-Pierre's proposal. According to Bayle, Louis VII exemplified a politically incommensurable "conscience," which "prefers always the honest to the useful" (here Bayle recast the Roman dyad of *utile* and *honestum*). The pious prince who "determined himself never to stray from the strict rules of the Gospel's morality [*des règles sévères de la Morale de l'Évangile*]," would, along with his subjects, "undoubtedly be the prey of other nations." <sup>37</sup> Kant's reference to the "rules of Christianity" (*Regeln des Christenthums*) echoes Bayle's "règles sévères de la Morale de l'Évangile," translated by Gottsched as "Regeln der evangelischen Sittenlehre." <sup>38</sup>

It is unclear from Kant's formulation whether this "impossibility" was down to the moral failures of princes or the nature of politics itself, or indeed both. Notwithstanding the ambiguity, Bayle had laid bare a political reality that seemed inhospitable to Saint-Pierre's *Projet*, at least as Kant then understood it: princes, who could not be held to common Christian virtues, shored up their reputations through a shrewd mandate of state interest that often led to war. Kant's remark

<sup>32</sup>Kant, *Nachlaß Logik*, 3157, AA XVI, 686.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. Kant's definitions of "false" problems are taken from Georg Friedrich Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (Halle, 1752), 93–4.

<sup>34</sup>For a brief discussion see Kurt von Raumer, *Ewiger Friede: Friedensrufe und Friedenspläne seit der Renaissance* (Munich, 1953), 151–4.

<sup>35</sup>Ferrari and Franco Tomasoni concur with Erich Adickes's suggestion (Kant, AA XVI, 241) that Kant is plausibly drawing from Remark H and Remark E, respectively, of Bayle's "Louis VII and 'Machiavel'." See Ferrari, *Sources françaises*, 94–5; and Francesco Tomasoni, "Bayle en Allemagne: de Kant à Feuerbach," in Antony McKenna and Gianni Paganini, eds., *Pierre Bayle dans la république des lettres* (Paris, 2004), 485–502, at 485.

<sup>36</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, "Chapter XVIII," in Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella, ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford, 2005), 60–62, at 62.

<sup>37</sup>Pierre Bayle, "Louis VII," in Des Maizeaux, eds., *Dictionnaire historique et critique, tome troisième (K–P), cinquième édition* (Amsterdam, 1730), 167–70, at 170.

<sup>38</sup>Bayle, "Louis der VII," in *Wörterbuch (Theil III)*, 167–71, at 170. See Ferrari, *Sources*, 93–4.

should not be taken as proof that he accepted Bayle's version of *raison d'état*, traceable to Machiavelli or Amelot de Houssaye (whom Bayle also cited). Rather, the *Dictionnaire's* skepticism toward the possibility of princely virtue highlighted for Kant a problem of motivation that he would confront in envisioning peace anew: how, given this inapplicability of the "rules of Christianity," could those in power be moved toward peace, or at least toward abandoning the glory of conquest? Kant's response, emerging within roughly one year of the probable date of his Bayle remark, would not simply reaffirm the necessary virtues of peacemakers, but rather uncouple honor from a mandate of war and conquest, a move that brought him closer to the letter of Saint-Pierre's original proposal. Yet, to understand Kant's distinctness from Saint-Pierre on this score, one must first look to the Lisbon disaster, which led Kant to contemplate the "leadership of the human race."<sup>39</sup>

### Peace after the Lisbon Earthquake

The 1755 earthquake overwhelmed optimistic solutions to the *problème du mal*: how could a God both benevolent *and* omnipotent have allowed suffering on this scale? The disaster gave new resonance to Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, which had earlier concluded that the persistence of evil could only be resolved by adding Scripture to the claims of reason. Pursuing a philosophical explanation, Leibniz's 1711 counterargument affirmed the "best of all possible worlds," an a priori maneuver, later immortalized by Voltaire's ridicule, that wove evil into the larger designs of a just and almighty creator.<sup>40</sup> In three essays on the Lisbon disaster, the young Kant discussed the earthquake strictly as a geological phenomenon rather than an instance of "evil." Swiftly rejecting such theological interpretations, Kant's second earthquake essay envisioned how a peaceful prince might become a champion for all humanity, alleviating the suffering that was squarely in human hands. It is highly possible that this remark, appearing in a weekly paper that reached beyond academic readers, was aimed at Frederick II, courting the possibility of peace one month before the outbreak of the Seven Years War. Kant, who had earlier dedicated his *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (*Universal Natural History and theory of the Heavens*) to Frederick, also wrote to the Prussian king about an academic post just as his earthquake essays were appearing.<sup>41</sup> I now examine how, while meeting the motivational conditions set by Bayle's writings on *raison d'état*, Kant envisioned peace through a vision of providence after 1755.

This 1756 comment on peace must be set within the cosmology that Kant had developed just before his essays on the Lisbon disaster. In his *Universal Natural History*, Kant described a teleological aim by which nature, animated by God's laws, sought its own perfection. As Martin Schönfeld has shown, this pushed back against a common "anthropocentric" teleological model that gave priority to human beings and their experiences of revelation. Kant's alternative leaned upon his admiration of Pope's Great Chain of Being: humanity occupied a middle rung in the tiered perfection of the universe, each lower tier gaining in ignorance of

<sup>39</sup>Kant, *Erdbebens*, 461.

<sup>40</sup>Steven Nadler, "Theodicy," in Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds* (Princeton, 2008), 78–107.

<sup>41</sup>Immanuel Kant, *An König Friedrich II* [8 April 1756], AA X, 3.



everything above it. This teleology drew close in some passages to Leibniz's argument for the best of all possible worlds, but it was ultimately more accommodating to the inexplicability of human suffering, as the second earthquake essay would show: for Kant, the Lisbon disaster was not an instance of evil but a natural phenomenon, woven into a divine plan that was unknowable to humanity and irreducible to its experience.<sup>42</sup> It is within this ignorance of a larger divine plan that Kant turned to peace. Thus "man is in the dark when he tries to guess at the intentions that God has in mind in governing over the world," but there could be "no uncertainty as to how we are to apply these ways of providence in accordance with its purpose." Whatever else remained unknown about a divine plan, humanity could resolve itself *directly* to its part in the *telos* of the world, avoiding the wars that caused its suffering and stymied its perfection.

Kant thus appealed to a peaceful prince capable of applying the "ways of providence," at least in this narrower human sense:

A prince who, driven by a noble heart, lets these tribulations of the human race move him to spare from the miseries of war those who are threatened on all sides with grave misfortune is a beneficent instrument in the gracious hand of God, and a gift He makes to the peoples of the earth, whose worth is of a magnitude they can never truly estimate.<sup>43</sup>

The essay invoked the greater honors awaiting princes who, shunning the narrow glory of conquest and state expansion, pursued peace for a larger humanity that was "threatened on *all sides* [*von allen Seiten*]."<sup>44</sup> I suggest that this call to princes contains critical foundations for Kant's political idealism, shaping a dimension of his political thinking that endured into the 1790s. Yet this is not to minimize the significant changes in his approach to politics and history over the decades: Kant later rejected ontological speculations on God and the structure of the universe, eventually declaring the "miscarriage" of theodicies based on theoretical demonstration.<sup>45</sup> As we will see, however, a version of this peace proposal survived the formation of his critical philosophy: Kant continued to align peace and its major protagonists on a path of human perfection willed by providence, posited irrespective of what remained indemonstrable about God's "intentions." As he later remarked in *Perpetual Peace*, rulers could be given epithets like the "divinely anointed" to be reminded that, entrusted with improving the civil condition, they presided over "the most holy thing God has on earth," namely the "rights of human beings."<sup>46</sup>

Though Kant's early remarks cannot be mistaken for a fully formed political philosophy, they situate him within an eighteenth-century discourse, often traced to Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699), on the reputations of princes and the true good of their peoples. Historicizing Machiavelli, these writings reimagined princely glory to conform with new definitions of *raison d'état*, updated for a

<sup>42</sup>Martin Schönfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project* (Oxford, 2000), 74–121.

<sup>43</sup>Kant, *Erdbebens*, 460–61.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee* [1791], AA VIII, 253–71.

<sup>46</sup>Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 353.

century marked not by Machiavellian conquest but by the commerce of large European states. Saint-Pierre himself had appealed less to the hope of princely virtue than to the recognition of true state interest: his proposed federation promised states a stable commerce and prosperity unknown in war. It followed from this pacified *raison d'état* that the peaceful prince would receive praise and glory, hence the “ninth advantage” of Saint-Pierre’s federation for sovereigns, the “interest of reputation.”<sup>47</sup> As recent commentary has shown, the *Antimachiavel* of Voltaire and Frederick was not solely a moralizing rejection of Machiavelli (a reading that has long fueled claims of Frederick’s hypocrisy), but an astute alternative to Saint-Pierre’s revision of *raison d'état*. Rejecting the possibility of a federation that could bind the wills of sovereigns, the *Antimachiavel* defined state interest within a balance of power stabilized by commerce.<sup>48</sup> It also commented upon “the error of Machiavelli on the glory of conquerors,” since true glory could not be guaranteed by the size of one’s land.<sup>49</sup> The *Projet* and the *Antimachiavel* thus both envisioned how an updated doctrine of state interest, rather than strict virtue in the person of the prince, might orient politics toward international order. Yet their disagreement on the nature of this order, ensured either by a federated structure or by a modern balance of power, fueled disputes that lasted until Saint-Pierre’s death in 1743. As their antagonism intensified, the Abbé emphasized the promise of glory to Frederick himself: if the Prussian king would only initiate the legal steps to make peace “perpetual,” he might be remembered as “a principal pacifier of the universe.”<sup>50</sup> Weighing in with his 1761 *Abstract* of Saint-Pierre’s *Projet*, Rousseau endorsed the idea of international federation, aligning the idea of “European arbitration” with the true interests of modern states. But while Rousseau also included the “glory and authority of the Sovereign” among these advantages, the *Abstract* expressed profound skepticism toward Saint-Pierre’s formulation of the “eternal glory” of peace, which was no doubt ridiculed in the “cabinets of Ministers.”<sup>51</sup>

Saying nothing about the nature of international order or its structures, Kant’s early comments on peace were concerned chiefly with the stubborn association between conquest and honor. This is not to suggest that he rejected the imperative of enlightened *raison d'état* developed in Saint-Pierre’s more formalized vision of a federated peace. Indeed, a rejection of the older Machiavellian reason of state is implicit in Kant’s assurance that praise would await the peaceful prince, rather than the conquering one. Yet Kant approached the matter at the explicit level of princely motivation, addressing the skeptical view of princes expressed in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*. Most importantly, Kant’s vision of the peaceful prince allowed for a moral motivation to peace (hence the invocation of a “noble heart”), but it also applied to those more likely moved by the desire to be remembered as a divine gift to humanity. As we will see, the simultaneous appeal to moral and reputational incentives was characteristic of Kant’s evolving conception of honor, which could

<sup>47</sup>Saint-Pierre, *Projet*, 230–35.

<sup>48</sup>Nakhimovsky, “Enlightened Prince,” 44–77.

<sup>49</sup>Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet], *Anti-Machiavel ou essai critique sur le Prince de Machiavel, publié par Mr. de Voltaire* (Brussels, 1740), 9.

<sup>50</sup>Charles Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre, *Reflexions sur l'Antimachiavel de 1740* (Rotterdam, 1741), 64.

<sup>51</sup>J. J. Rousseau, *Extrait du projet de paix perpétuelle de Monsieur l'abbé de Saint-Pierre* (Amsterdam, 1761), 43–5, 56. See Spector, “Le Projet,” 3–5.

motivate either from true morality or from the mere semblance of it. Later described as the “desire for honor of the heads of state” (*Ehrbegierde der Staatsoberhäupter*), this purely reputational motive would fall beyond the strictures of Kant’s sphere of virtue, which equated moral action with perfectly moral maxims.<sup>52</sup> Kant had thus begun to identify how, without counting on the “rules of Christianity,” one might motivate real princes to pursue a peace willed by providence.

Irrespective of his exact familiarity with the writings of Saint-Pierre and Frederick, Kant ultimately strengthened the potential honor motive for peace by addressing rulers from within his cosmology after 1755. Kant’s precursors had doubtless appealed to the providential dimensions of peace: as Fénelon had earlier remarked, “does a man who seeks glory [*gloire*] not find enough of it in governing wisely [*avec sagesse*] over what God has placed in his hands?”<sup>53</sup> Yet Kant’s version, uniquely embedded in a response to the Lisbon earthquake, rooted his peaceful future resolutely within humanity’s gradual perfection (*Perfectio, Vollkommenheit*), a part of the larger—and largely unknowable—providential plan. His essay thus appealed not simply to a possible glory in public services to peace, *pace* Saint-Pierre, but to a peaceful future, bound up in the human perfection willed by providence, that would *inevitably* judge present-day mandates.<sup>54</sup> The hope was not that readers would resign themselves to the distant peace of a God-granted *telos*, but that they would be roused by the honor of bringing it about sooner, indeed becoming “a beneficent instrument” in a divine plan. This future orientation of Kant’s argument ultimately made it less vulnerable to objections, like the one Rousseau levelled against Saint-Pierre, that reputations were in fact *still* made by war and expansion in the present age. Per Kant’s cosmology, princes would be subject to the judgment of an ever higher understanding, as humanity came into its perfection per the “ways of providence.” From the standpoint of this human *telos*, princes could either be celebrated in posterity for accelerating peace, or suffer the disgrace of having delayed it, foolishly setting the spoils of war above the God-granted ends of humanity. As we will see, Kant refined versions of this argument throughout later writings (1784, 1795), envisioning for shrewd politicians and princes a peace that would determine their legacies for all future time.

### Progress Without Virtue

Kant’s next comments on peace and princes arrived with the 1764 *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*), the best-known of his precritical writings and the first text to court a general audience since his earthquake essays. In an early footnote, Kant referred to the motives of princes to disentangle the feelings of sympathy from true virtue. Thus a prince (*Prinz*) could express sympathy for a “single misfortunate person” while at the same time unleashing untold miseries through the order for war, often from a “vain motive” (*eitlen Bewegungsgrunde*). As this case

<sup>52</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* [1784], AA VIII, 15–31, at 31.

<sup>53</sup>François Fénelon, *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils D’Ulysse, livre premier* [1699] (Paris, 1841), 146.

<sup>54</sup>Kant, *Erdbebens*, 461.

helped illustrate, a mere capacity to feel sympathy, which lacked the “dignity of virtue,” was an insufficient guide for moral action.<sup>55</sup> Kant was still two decades away from describing his famous categorical imperative, but his insistence in 1764 that “virtue can only be grafted onto principles” signaled the dawning of a recognizably Kantian approach to morality, which would seek to ground virtue more reliably than had the philosophies of moral feeling.<sup>56</sup> As this section shows, Kant’s early efforts in moral philosophy and anthropology from the 1760s and 1770s developed the great motivational potential of honor that had earlier emerged in his 1756 vision of the peaceful prince. Even in the absence of virtue, the inclination to honor could benefit the “public good.”

The *Observations* introduced a distinction between what was truly “worthy of honor” (*ehrwürdig*), namely the pursuit of virtue for its own sake, and the “feeling for honor” (*das Gefühl für Ehre*) that attended being virtuous, a motive that would help resolve imperfect human wills to moral causes. The thought of being virtuous thus admitted a motive that could corrupt the purity of virtue itself. Hence “everyone who wants to be thought of as [virtuous] carefully conceals the motive of the desire for honor [*Ehrbegierde*].” It should be noted that while *Ehrbegierde* is also accurately rendered as “ambition,” the more literal “desire for honor” is better suited, as we will see, to the conceptual connection with honor (*Ehre*) and the love of honor (*Ehrliebe*). The *Observations* foresaw how, given the imperfection of the human will, the feelings of honor (along with a corresponding sense of shame) were necessary and implanted by providence to steer human beings to “actions for the public benefit” (*gemeinnützigen Handlungen*). What could emerge neither from “good-heartedness nor from principles” would materialize “simply for the sake of outward appearance, from a delusion that is very useful but in itself very shallow, as if the judgment of others determined our worth and the worth of our actions.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the useful delusion of comparative moral worth, channeled through a desire for honor (*Ehrbegierde*), could activate an otherwise “idle human nature.” Since the feeling for honor could still be “fine,” it would at best occasion something resembling virtue, indeed a “shimmer of virtue” (*Tugendschimmer*).<sup>58</sup>

Pitfalls in the desire for honor emerged most vividly in the *Versuch über die Krankheit des Kopfes* (*Essay on the Maladies of the Head*), also published in 1764. Kant there described how “a high degree of the desire for honor” (*ein großer Grad der Ehrbegierde*), much like “amorous passion,” could make “fools [*Thoren*] of many reasonable people.”<sup>59</sup> Kant’s examples of honor seekers drew from ancient military history and the campaigns of ambitious rulers, echoing the 1756 appeal to the peaceful prince. The resulting impression is of a passion that, while distributed among all people, was especially intense and manipulable among powerful rulers like Alexander, whom the citizens of Athens sent “to the end of the world through their ridiculous praise.”<sup>60</sup> Kant found a further example in the

<sup>55</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* [1764], AA II, 205–56, at 215–16.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 216–17.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Versuch über die Krankheit des Kopfes* [1764], AA II, 257–71, at 261.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 261–2.

campaigns of Pyrrhus of Epirus who, even throughout his many military failures, understood “that bravery and power gain universal admiration.” Thus, following the “drive of the craving for honor” (*Trieb der Ehrsucht*), Pyrrhus acted like the fool Kineas thought him to be.<sup>61</sup> The natural contrast to this foolishness was wisdom, but a perfectly wise person, devoid of “all passion,” was “perhaps best sought on the moon.”<sup>62</sup> As we will see, Kant’s later remarks on peace and political honor would maintain this fundamental outlook on the folly of a desire for honor bent on conquest and expansion. Without relying on the strict moral conversion of princes and politicians, Kant would often reveal instead the basic foolishness of Pyrrhus and Alexander, illustrating how a shrewd pursuit of honor could only align with peace.

Though he had yet to formally distinguish between this unruly desire for honor and the ethical “love of honor,” Kant began to identify how the feelings of honor might provide an accompanying motive to pure virtue. Whereas, in this accompanying capacity, the thought of honor could help moral agents determine the relative worth of actions (and thus behavior that could be deemed *honorable*), the honor-seeking passion of Alexander and Pyrrhus committed them to a purely external pursuit of reputation, desiring honor solely for its own sake. Thus, as the *Observations* put it, “the desire for honor [*Ehrbegierde*] is a foolish delusion [*thörichter Wahn*], insofar as it becomes the rule to which the other inclinations are subordinated.”<sup>63</sup> In the *Bemerkung*, a series of remarks on the *Observations*, Kant associated this ethical use of honor with “the man of honor [*Ehre*]” and the quality of *honestas*.<sup>64</sup> The person who instead mistook honor as a “basic drive” was lacking in a proper “end,” and subject to the whims of public opinion, often in contradiction with morality. Thus the honor seeker could justify partaking in “drinking” and “dueling” when these behaviors happened to be in fashion.<sup>65</sup> The duality of the honor motive was most striking in Herder’s notes to Kant’s lectures on ethics (1762–4), which associated the ethical honor with Rousseau, since “Rousseauian honor is strictly inner honor.”<sup>66</sup> By contrast, the external “drive for honor” (*trieb der Ehre*) was “more detrimental to morality than any other passion,” since it was a mere “fantasy” that aimed at morality “with something external.” Yet if this lesser honor motive was to disappear among beings “higher than ourselves,” Kant remarked, “with us it is still useful as an antidote to great immorality ... and thus still necessary due to the paltry morality of human beings.”<sup>67</sup>

It is worth noting how Kant’s early anthropology associated this honor motive both with Germanness and the ruling temperament. In a discussion on national variants of the feeling for honor, the *Observations* concluded that Germans were “especially infected” by a weakness for seeking approval, which materialized in “tokens of honor” (*Ehrenbezeugungen*). This drive to “shimmer with titles,

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Kant, *Beobachtungen*, 227.

<sup>64</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* [1764–5], AA XX, 1–192, at 130.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>66</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Praktische Philosophie Herder* [1762–4], AA XXVII, 1–89, at 53.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 44.

pedigree, and pageantry” was in fact embedded in the German language, which favored terms like “gracious [*Gnädig*], highly minded [*Hochgeneigt*], high and well born [*hoch-und Wohlgeb.*].”<sup>68</sup> As indicated by the Friedländer notes from 1775–6, Kant’s anthropology lectures similarly referred to Germany as the “land of titles” (*Titelland*), attributing to Germans a “choleric” temperament prone to honor and meddling in the “matters of state.”<sup>69</sup> In the larger anthropological sense, these lectures also suggested that the content of honor could evolve with the refinement of morality in the civil condition. Thus, if honor was initially bestowed upon those who merely rode in carriages, a symbol of luxury, it would eventually be reserved to the person who was universally regarded as “righteous.” Kant foresaw how this refinement in the content of honor might benefit the civil condition, creating an “external compulsion” for human behavior, grounded in “the opinion of others.”<sup>70</sup>

Kant developed in this period a firm sense of how honor could either aid in the inner orientation to virtue, or alternatively fix the mind upon a hollow pursuit of external recognition. But while only the former was morally worthy, even the hollowest pursuit of honor could contribute to the common good. According to the Friedländer notes, delusions like honor accomplished a providential purpose “that human beings would not have envisaged.” Thus one who merely desired honor (*der Ehrbegierige*) still sought to “promote the happiness of others” even if it was “just to have the honor.” Kant compared this favorable result to miserliness, which in seeking personal riches ultimately amassed enough wealth to benefit generations thereafter.<sup>71</sup> The possible benefit of an unvirtuous desire for honor ultimately led back to the nature of honor and the appeal to the “judgment of others.” Used virtuously as a *means*, the thought of honor illuminated actions that were *worthy* of honor, hence moral, which would then be undertaken for the sake of virtue itself. Considered instead as an end, honor itself became the sole ground for action, obscuring any inner moral orientation it may have benefited. Yet since this inner resolve to virtue was not discernible in the judgment of others, honor would still attend actions that merely *conformed* with inner virtue. As it related to the honor-seeking natures of princes, this allowed an answer to Bayle’s skepticism, leaving open the possibility of a virtuous ruler without *depending* on it: peace might be the strict resolve of virtue, but it would also appeal to those more likely to act “just to have the honor.”

### Moral Law and the Civil Condition

Kant’s political thought is typically located in the ‘critical’ period inaugurated by his 1781 *Critique*, a professional renaissance Mirabeau once likened to the sudden flight of an eagle.<sup>72</sup> By 1785, the search for the fixed foundation of virtue yielded the categorical imperative, the highest principle of morality, which guided actions

<sup>68</sup>Kant, *Beobachtungen*, 249.

<sup>69</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Die Vorlesung des Wintersemesters 1775/76 aufgrund der Nachschriften*. Friedländer 3.3 [1775–6], AA XXV, 465–728, at 638, 657–8.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 588.

<sup>72</sup>Mirabeau [1787], quoted in Azouvi and Bourel, *Königsberg à Paris*, 65.

performed from the strict command of duty.<sup>73</sup> Following from these moral foundations, Kant's mature political thought ultimately rejected states that encroached upon individual autonomy to command virtue or happiness to its citizens. The state, Kant insisted against Wolff and Leibniz, could only secure the freedoms necessary for the pursuit of morality, entrusting human perfection to autonomous citizens making use of their civil freedoms.<sup>74</sup> The flourishing of morality thus demanded the freedoms of a civil condition, established both within and between states. Kant called upon states to protect civil freedoms and renounce burdensome wars, redirecting vast military budgets to institutions of moral education.<sup>75</sup> I now examine how, alongside major innovations in his moral philosophy and philosophy of history in the 1780s, Kant made his most explicit attempts to direct the desire for honor to the peaceful ends of humanity.

Kant's mature concept of honor appeared in the 'Collins' notes on moral philosophy, transcribed from lectures given in the winter semester of 1784–5. Even while emphasizing that honor could not be grounds for morality, these lectures introduced a critical distinction between a praiseworthy "love of honor" (*Ehrliebe*) and an unruly "desire for honor" (*Ehrbegierde*), effectively formalizing Kant's earlier ambivalence toward actions performed for the judgment of others. The love of honor, which Kant likened to *honestatem*, concerned itself in a "negative" sense with not being "an object of contempt" among equals. By contrast, the desire for honor, a form of raw ambition, was a yearning to be an "object of the esteem of others," effectively placing oneself above them. It was possible to "love honor without the company of others," since this related back to an inner state of being *worthy* of honor, a test of morality that considered honor to strengthen the resolve to rational principle.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, one could not "*desire* honor in solitude, because one wishes to be highly regarded by others."<sup>77</sup> Kant implied that these honor concepts, despite their differences, existed along a continuum: the love of honor remained praiseworthy so long as it did not *become* a desire for honor (*zu keiner Ehrbegierde wird.*) If one who loved honor ultimately sought virtue, one who desired honor, by contrast, "demands that others should respect him and thus makes himself ridiculous."<sup>78</sup>

Kant carried these concepts into his major works of practical philosophy, including the 1785 *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*), which considered in its first section the difference between actions performed from duty and those that merely conformed with it. Here Kant referenced "the inclination towards honor [*der Neigung nach Ehre*], which, when it happily aligns with the common interest and duty, and thus the honorable, merits praise and encouragement, but not high esteem; because the maxim lacks moral content, namely, to perform such actions not from inclination but from duty."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* [1785], AA IV, 385–463, at 393–405.

<sup>74</sup>See especially Douglas Moggach, "Freedom and Perfection: German Debates on the State in the Eighteenth Century," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42/4 (2009), 1003–23.

<sup>75</sup>Kant, *Idee*, 22–31; Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 349–53.

<sup>76</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Moralphilosophie Collins* [1784–5], AA XXVII, 237–473, at 408–9.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, my emphasis.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>Kant, *Grundlegung*, 398.

This referred not to the solitary honor of a praiseworthy inner life, but to the reputational inclination to be honored by others, which could nonetheless happen upon the right causes. Thus, even as he developed a theory of morals around motivational purity, Kant still found significant potential in external appeals to honor: actions could benefit the common good without being virtuous. Commentary on this theme has often overlooked this potential, finding instead in Kant's writings a strict moralizing aim to purify this honor seeking into a *love* of honor reconcilable with virtue. I suggest that a readiness to direct even nonmoral motives to moral causes, traceable to Kant's early comments on peace and princes, persisted at the intersection of his political thought and his philosophy of history.<sup>80</sup>

Kant began to envision this philosophy of history in anthropology lectures likely delivered in 1781–2. Though the lectures largely extolled the *love* of honor, they did find one use for its unruly, desirous form: “to stir up the princes’ desire for honor [*Ehrbegehrde der Fürsten*] to aspire to and work towards sublime purposes, and work for the good of the whole human race, a history written strictly with a cosmopolitan intent [*cosmopolitischer Absicht*] would be of significant benefit.”<sup>81</sup> This reference to *Ehrbegehrde*, which Kant had long since assigned to the trappings of praise and princely reputations, suggests a focus not upon the merits—or improvement—of princely character, but rather the moral uses of motives they already possessed. This concluded a discussion of human progress toward the perfect civil condition, which had earlier insisted that a shift toward a “cosmopolitan point of view” was necessary among princes: “The point of view [*Gesichtspunkt*] from which especially princes should consider states must not be simply patriotic but also cosmopolitan; meaning it should move toward the universal good.” The desired history would attempt to stimulate this point of view by “making worthy of posterity’s remembrance [*des Andenken der Nachkommen*] only those acts concerning the welfare of the whole human race.”<sup>82</sup>

This intent materialized in the 1784 *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*). I do not mean to imply that the essay was written solely for powerful readers, but rather that Europe’s princes figured prominently in Kant’s intended readership, not least since the titular “cosmopolitan aim” stood directly opposed to a ruling tendency to “violent aims of expansion” (*gewaltsamen Erweiterungsabsichten*).<sup>83</sup> Absent any proof that human beings had a rational aim to progress, Kant’s essay sketched how nature helped along a hapless humanity as reason faltered. This ultimately presented a global civil condition as the human fate: even if it failed to seek peace of its own moral reason, humanity was still destined for it through a mechanism of “unsocial sociability.” Human beings would be forced, by the cumulative resolutions of a natural tendency to war and antagonism, into a social harmony culminating in a “federation of peoples” (*Foedus Amphictyonium*).<sup>84</sup> This

<sup>80</sup>For a sympathetic account of honor and “nonmoral motivations with moral effects,” see Liu, “The Constant Companion of Virtue,” 567.

<sup>81</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Die Vorlesung des Wintersemesters 1781/82 [?] aufgrund der Nachschriften. Menschenkunde*. Petersburg, AA XXV, 849–1203, at 1174, 1202–3.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 1203–3.

<sup>83</sup>Kant, *Idee*, 26.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 21–5.



“mechanism” fulfilled the “concealed plan” providence had embedded in nature, generating peace and the political conditions of humanity’s perfection. But lest princes *resign* themselves to war, content with nature’s authorship of progress, the *Idea* emphasized that a rational resolve to peace would bring forth the civil condition much earlier and without so much “sad experience.” Thus, “by our own rational arrangement [*vernünftige Veranstaltung*],” Kant wrote, human beings could “bring about more quickly this point in time, which is so pleasant for our posterity.”<sup>85</sup>

Remarking how Saint-Pierre and Rousseau had possibly been mocked for thinking perpetual peace too near, the 1784 essay presented peace instead as inevitable.<sup>86</sup> This, in addition to shoring up a moral orientation to peace in the present age, could also, like Kant’s second earthquake essay, galvanize the more common motives of politics. Living rulers could either ignore the human fate laid out in Kant’s history or become its protagonists, shunning offensive wars for an ideal of peace that would, one way or another, materialize and judge their mandates. Thus, if Kant had earlier called upon princes to become an “instrument” in the peace mandated by providence, the speculative history of the *Idea* elaborated upon what the ends of humanity required: a civil condition, spanning all nations, which would also ensure the conditions of human morality. Kant was sufficiently concerned with this audience of princes (and their more common motives) that he devoted to it the final lines of the essay. Questioning how “our distant posterity [*Nachkommenschaft*]” would view the “burden of history that we might leave them with,” Kant remarked that they would without doubt read history “only from the point of view of what interests them, namely what peoples and governments added to or detracted from the cosmopolitan aim.” To account for this, and for the “desire for honor of the heads of state and of their servants,” one could “direct it to the only means that can bring their glorious memory [*rühmliches Andenken*] through to the latest age: that too can be a small reason for attempting such a philosophical history.”<sup>87</sup>

This purpose also extended to the 1784 *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (*What Is Enlightenment?*), where Kant insisted that any ruler (*Fürst*) ensuring “full freedoms” in religious matters would “be praised by a grateful world and by posterity [*dankbaren Welt und Nachwelt*], as the first one who liberated the human race from immaturity, at least on the side of government.”<sup>88</sup> Consolidating Kant’s vision of individual moral perfection, the *Aufklärung* essay appealed dually to princes, who might improve civil freedoms, and citizens, who might make good use of them, “daring” to use their own understanding. Yet Kant had a specific ruler in mind while praising the improved conditions for enlightenment. This had been the “century of Frederick,” whose over four decades in power had by that point buttressed freedoms of expression with a noted esteem for the arts and sciences.<sup>89</sup> These domestic policies cohered with part of Kant’s

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 24, 27.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 24

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 30–31.

<sup>88</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* [1784], AA VIII, 33–42, at 40.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 40–41.

vision for civil freedom, even if Frederick had often undermined the peace that would complete it. Lauding Frederick's better judgments and perhaps anticipating his successor (Frederick died two years later), Kant insisted, much like in the *Idea*, upon the larger human posterity of those who fortified the conditions of moral perfection. Articulating this ideal mandate for a general audience, the essay insisted that Prussians already had "a splendid example," since "no monarch has yet outdone the one we honor [*verehren*]." <sup>90</sup>

Kant's shrewdness about princes did not imply a permanent limit on the morality of politics. As indicated by the Collins notes, a virtuous disposition could one day "rise up even to the throne." <sup>91</sup> Yet this seemed impossible without a prior change in governing priorities: the appeal to peace had to be made first to a generation of rulers and politicians who, by definition, could not have benefited from the moral education that peace could secure. Asking how far humanity had come "on the path of this perfection," these lectures concluded that the "Abbot de St Pierre's proposal for a universal senate of nations would, if it ever came to pass, be the point at which the human race would take a great step toward this perfection." Yet such proposals inevitably encountered the fact that "law has little purchase among princes compared to independence, power and the desire to rule by one's will." <sup>92</sup> Alongside a vision for humanity's perfection, Kant thus also foresaw how, even by ulterior motives, real politics might be steered toward peace, the ultimate condition of this perfection.

### Revolution, Right, and Honor

In March of 1793, Kant received a letter from Carl Spener, a Berlin publisher who was poised to reprint the 1784 *Idea*. Decrying how "this excellent essay has not gotten through to princes [*Fürsten*] and their counsellors [*Räthen*]," Spener suggested that Kant might add to it to strengthen the case for peace (France had declared war on Great Britain and the Dutch Republic just over a month earlier). The new edition could "fall into the hands of a youth, on whom providence might one day bestow a powerful country." <sup>93</sup> Declining to add to the essay, Kant's reasons were brief and cryptic: "when the powerful of the world are in a state of intoxication ... a pigmy who holds dearly to his own skin is advised to stay out of their quarrel." <sup>94</sup> It is possible that this hesitation expressed a fraying relationship with the new Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, whose edicts had already stalled the publication of Kant's writings on religion. But while it might be tempting to accept Kant's response to Spener on its face, or to attribute to his final political writings the sole intention of elaborating strict moral duties to peace, this would omit his many references to honor after 1784. I now examine how, developing his major works of political philosophy alongside the French Revolution, Kant revised, rather than abandoned, the appeal to honor in the 1790s. Though these appeals were doubtless more tacit than in the 1780s, they amount to an important and largely overlooked dimension of Kant's mature political philosophy.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>91</sup>Kant, *Collins*, 471.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 470–71.

<sup>93</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Von Carl Spener* [9 March 1793], AA XI, 415–17.

<sup>94</sup>Immanuel Kant, *An Carl Spener* [22 March 1793], AA XI, 417.

This discussion must be situated alongside two notable developments for Kant's politics and philosophy of history: the 1790 *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (*Critique of Judgment*) and the French Revolution. According to some, the account of natural teleology in the final *Critique* revised Kant's earlier view of nature's purposiveness, exposing what the earlier *Idea* still owed to a 'precritical' metaphysics that made ontological claims about providence. I agree with the opposing view that the third *Critique* clarified the non-dogmatic status of Kant's 1784 claims.<sup>95</sup> For present purposes, it suffices to emphasize that Kant's political writings (especially *Perpetual Peace*) closely echoed the 1784 unsocial sociability argument on the unintended consequences of human action, defending the possibility of peace implied in the moral necessity of working toward its realization. Within this broad continuity, I am most concerned with how the politics of the French Revolution refined Kant's philosophy of history, which increasingly anchored the moral fate of humanity in events of Kant's own day, including the fervor of German spectators of the revolution.<sup>96</sup> As we will see, Kant's appeal to the honor of rulers became less dependent upon the judgment of a remote posterity, and more upon a providential cause of right that was *already* willed—and honored—by their subjects.

Though Kant may have quieted his appeals to princes, continuities in his views of honor are corroborated throughout major writings of the period. The first *Introduction* (1789) of the third *Critique* remarked in a discussion on psychology that "moral philosophers" (*Sittenlehrer*) could learn from the psychologists about the "desire for honor [*Ehrbegierde*], which believes that this [honor] consists in mere reputation." This would serve not the deduction of the "moral laws themselves," which were derived solely from reason, but the "manner of ridding obstacles [*Hindernisse*] opposed to their influence."<sup>97</sup> This suggests that *Ehrbegierde* still held a distinct status as a passion that might improve the conditions of morality, as Kant had earlier defined it. Echoing earlier remarks on princes, Kant's 1793 *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*) similarly described the disposition of "every great lord in the world" (*jeder großer Herr der Welt*), who had a distinct "need of being honored [*geehrt*] by his subjects [*Unterthanen*] and praised through displays of obedience." The *Religion* had thus identified the temperament of rulers not with the virtuous love of honor, but a yearning for external "praise" and "testimonies of honor" (*Ehrenbezeugungen*).<sup>98</sup> As noted in the later *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*), this tendency among rulers was especially vulnerable to flatterers (*Schmeichler*) who "nourish this passion" and "act as corrupters of the great and mighty."<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup>For a clarification of Kant's nondogmatic claims about history after 1781, see Henry E. Allison, "Teleology and History in Kant: The Critical Foundations of Kant's Philosophy of History," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt, eds., *Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim": A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2009), 24–45.

<sup>96</sup>For a recent and thorough elucidation of Kant's thoughts on the French Revolution see Reidar Maliks, *Kant and the French Revolution: Elements in the Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge, 2022).

<sup>97</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilkraft* [1789], AA XX, 193–251, at 237–8.

<sup>98</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* [1793], AA VI, 1–202, at 103.

<sup>99</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [1798], AA VII, 117–333, at 272.

That Kant would continue in the 1790s to court political honor might seem peculiar given his own republican principles, developed alongside the French Revolution. Kant's language around power no doubt evolved in these years, referring increasingly to "heads of state" and "politicians" rather than strictly to "princes" (*Fürsten*). Yet, as we will see, he maintained this earlier interest in a ruling disposition to honor *precisely* because he did not think that republicanism should be achieved through revolutions. Kant began to present his alternative, a gradual reform process, in "Against Hobbes," the second part of his 1793 *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis* (*Theory and Practice*). Kant followed Hobbes in recognizing the necessity of absolute sovereignty, but he bestowed on his own sovereign an a priori principle of right (*Recht*), derived from "freedom in the external relationships of human beings." The ideal of "patriotic" government that emerged from this principle echoed Rousseau in recognizing the legislative powers of citizens entrusted with the general will.<sup>100</sup> It was within this vision of republicanism that Kant also prohibited revolutions, which wrestled power from existing authorities with the best claim of *representing* the general will. Strengthening Kant's 1784 vision of enlightenment, the 1793 essay described how freethinking citizens might push for reforms through an open public sphere and the "freedom of the pen."<sup>101</sup> Yet Kant had not lost sight of the problem identified in the 1780s: who but reigning rulers would look favorably upon the public sphere and enshrine the freedoms behind *further* reform? Kant's nuanced endorsement of absolute sovereignty *pace* Hobbes ultimately sharpened the hope of elevating the ruling "point of view." Whereas Leibniz had joked that Hobbesian sovereignty would be desirable only when "those who have supreme power are gifted with angelic virtues," Kant, finding no way around absolute sovereignty in politics, envisioned how a "supreme power" could be stirred to virtuous causes over time.<sup>102</sup>

Alongside the moral duties incumbent upon any "supreme power," the final passages of "Against Hobbes" considered other reasons they might have to rule in a republican manner, including anxieties around revolution. Thus any supreme power that denied right could find that "the people could also try [its own force] and thus make all constitutions insecure." Though the insecurity of thrones was perhaps a powerful motive for reform, Kant would only go so far along this path given his own condemnation of revolution. A more positive version of this argument was possible through the honor of pursuing pure right: "if right speaks forth loudly," Kant insisted, "human nature does not show itself too deviant to listen to it with veneration [*mit Ehrerbietung*]" ("veneration" is the closest equivalent but the root of the word, *Ehre*, is significant here).<sup>103</sup> Kant supplemented this remark with a passage from the *Aeneid*, which recounted how a seditious mob could be soothed by the right statesman: "if perchance they set eyes on a man honored for noble character and service, they are silent and stand by with attentive

<sup>100</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis* [1793], AA VIII, 273–313, at 289, 294–5.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>102</sup>G. W. Leibniz, *Caesarinus Fürstenerius (De Suprematu Principum Germaniae)* [1677], in *Leibniz: Political Writings*, 111–20, at 120.

<sup>103</sup>Kant, *Theorie und Praxis*, 306–7.

ears.”<sup>104</sup> Though far from the only motive to improve the civil condition, true political honor could belong only with the cause of right. As we have seen, an external pursuit of honor could only *coincide* with morality, substituting inner principle for external judgment and the trappings of praise. Yet this also meant that, with humanity’s moral refinement, even the hollowest aspiration to seem honorable could benefit the common weal. In his earlier writings, Kant had appealed to honor through a posterity that would, from an advanced stage of morality, scorn for all future time those who had obstructed the ends of humanity. Yet, spurred by the French Revolution, Kant was later prepared to find proof of this providential future in his own age, holding up to power what ordinary citizens deemed honorable.

In an essay published in *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (*The Conflict of the Faculties*), Kant offered, as Susan Shell has shown, a vivid account of this sudden maturation in the common definition of honor.<sup>105</sup> The essay, likely written in 1795, returned to an “old question,” namely “whether the human race is constantly progressing toward the better.” Kant would not again speculate about nature’s designs but point to a historical “sign” that humanity was in fact advancing of its own reason along the path laid out by providence.<sup>106</sup> While maintaining a staunch opposition to revolution, the essay identified this providential sign in “disinterested” German enthusiasm for the French Revolution, which evinced a natural propensity for the pure concept of right. Kant recounted how, in the very moment of France’s revolutionary struggle, even “the concept of honor [*Ehrbegriff*] (an analogue to enthusiasm) of the old martial nobility disappeared before the arms of those who held to the right of the nation.”<sup>107</sup> As Kant emphasized, German sympathies for the French Revolution culminated precisely in this moment, when the moral cause of right supplanted what had previously seemed honorable.<sup>108</sup> The essay wove the “historical sign” of spectator enthusiasm into his case for “top-down” reform, which imposed a “duty” upon monarchs to match a popular yearning for republican right. Together with a purely moral injunction to republican government, however, Kant also presented monarchs with an epochal change in the content of honor itself, echoing his 1793 remarks on a readiness to honor right. If, per the letter to Spener, Kant had in fact become more modest about courting princely passions directly, he was prepared after the French Revolution to confront monarchs with what their own subjects *already* honored, the principle of justice (*Recht*) at the heart of his own political philosophy.

### Toward perpetual peace

In 1788, two years after Frederick II’s death, Christian Garve published the *Abhandlung über die Verbindung der Moral mit der Politik* (*Treatise on the*

<sup>104</sup>Ibid. Kant quotes the original Latin (Book 1, 151–2). I have used Fairclough’s translation, revised by Goold, in Virgil, *Eclagues, Georgics, Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough and G. P. Goold, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 261–597, at 273.

<sup>105</sup>Though my interpretation focuses more closely on princes and the unruly *desire* for honor, I am indebted to Shell’s reading of Kant’s 1798 text. See Shell, “Kant as Soothsayer,” 115–34; and Shell, “Archimedes Revisited,” 277–305.

<sup>106</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten* [1798], AA VII, 1–116, at 79–94.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 86–7.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.; Shell, “Kant as Soothsayer,” 115–134 and Shell, “Archimedes Revisited,” 277–305.

*Relationship of Morality and Politics*), which offered a powerful defense of Frederick's foreign policy through a separation of private morals and political mandates.<sup>109</sup> Garve drew a direct response from Kant, inspiring a first Appendix to *Perpetual Peace* that imagined how a "moral politician" might in fact steer real politics toward a pure principle of right. To be sure, much of Kant's mature political writing, especially the 1797 *Doctrine of Right*, presented peace as a strict moral duty irrespective of reigning temperaments.<sup>110</sup> Yet this could not resolve the problem he had first encountered in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*: what if a virtuous orientation to peace was simply beyond living rulers more intent on the perceived honors of war? This final section examines how Kant's references to honor throughout *Perpetual Peace* left open the possibility of a political resolve toward peace generated by the pursuit of honor rather than the strict command of virtue. By 1795, Kant had in fact also begun to consider how this drive to honor was shaped by subordinate political figures, including the very "politicians" he criticized in the first Appendix.

Adopting the conventions of peace treaties, Kant's 1795 essay presented a vision of peace in a series of "articles." In his very first "preliminary article," on the tendency of rulers and ministers to make peace with secret reservations for future wars, Kant admitted that his proposal would "appear academic and pedantic" if "the true honor of the state" (*wahre Ehre des Staats*) was placed "in the constant accrual of power by whatever means."<sup>111</sup> Kant thus established an important contrast between his proposal and those who held to an older view of honor, stirred by the spoils of war. It is this contrast that explains his adjoining insistence upon the honor of right and the corresponding shamefulness of unending war. Thus a secret reservation for future war was not simply immoral, but also "beneath the dignity [*Würde*] of a ruler, just as compliance with such deductions is beneath the dignity of a minister."<sup>112</sup> In his sixth preliminary article, Kant similarly condemned war tactics like "poisoners" and "assassins" as "dishonorable stratagems" (*ehrlose Stratagemen*).<sup>113</sup> The persuasion in these remarks, as well as in Kant's insistence upon the true honor of right, must be understood alongside Kant's conception of honor itself. Upon deducing what was truly honorable, hence moral, the virtuous person committed to it for its own sake. Yet in characterizing the republican principle of right as "honorable," one could also stir to action those who, stopping short of the inner determination of virtue, aligned their mandates with right simply for a chance at honor. Though susceptible to delusion (since only pure virtue itself was strictly *worthy* of honor), this latter motive was nonetheless *useful* because it could, as Kant had reiterated in 1785 and again in 1789, generate actions that *conformed* with virtue and benefited the common good.

The second "definitive article" of *Perpetual Peace* famously described republicanism as the form of government most conducive to peace: declarations of war

<sup>109</sup>For more on Kant and Garve see Georg Cavallar, "The Contemporary Context," in Cavallar, *Kant and the Theory and Practice of International Right* (Cardiff, 2020), 13–45.

<sup>110</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Rechtslehre (Metaphysik der Sitten)* [1797], AA VI, 203–372, at 354–5.

<sup>111</sup>Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 344. For a discussion of these passages and Kant's conception of dignity see Rachel Bayefsky, "Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective," *Political Theory* 41/6 (2013), 809–37, at 817–19.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 346.

would abate under a self-legislating people, since people, not kings, fought wars and assumed their costs.<sup>114</sup> Though this might have warranted a direct transfer of power to the people, Kant distinguished sharply between the form of a state (*Staatsform*), which could be either monarchic, aristocratic, or democratic, and a manner of governance (*Regierungsart*) that was either “despotic” or “republican.” Just as a despotic king could replace the “public will” with his own, a figure like Frederick or Marcus Aurelius might also choose to govern in a manner that held true to the general will. Though Kant ultimately envisioned a republic governed solely by reason, republicanizing monarchs would thus establish the conditions for it to flourish to this point.<sup>115</sup>

Defending this republican future, *Perpetual Peace* recast the mechanism of unsocial sociability, describing how republican order could emerge in a “race of devils.” The will of nature, set upon the eventual “supremacy” of right, ultimately achieved its purposes through shared commercial self-interest, compelling states to avoid war.<sup>116</sup> This speculation about a distant human future was doubtless more explicit in attempting to generate a moral resolve to peace than an honor-seeking one, but the 1795 view, like its 1784 precursor, could also motivate through the thought of posterity. As Kant later remarked, it was often argued that parties at war did no wrong since they merely offset one another’s animosity. Yet reason grew steadily with the progress of culture, which meant that the violation of right would only become more obvious in time. Thus a “later posterity” might, from its morally advanced age, think of these warring parties solely as a “cautionary example” (*warnendes Beispiel*).<sup>117</sup> Kant similarly called upon a providential future in a footnote on Frederick II, insisting that “exalting names” (*hohe Benennungen*) like “the divinely anointed” would “make [a ruler] consider that he has assumed an office too great for a human being,” presiding over “the most holy thing God has on earth,” namely “the rights of human beings.” Rulers, accordingly, “must always be on guard about offending in any way against what is most important to God.”<sup>118</sup>

*Perpetual Peace* returned to honor in its first Appendix, which distinguished the truly moral politician from the political moralist, who merely dressed sovereign mandates of “shrewd force” (*verschmitzten Gewalt*) in the moralizing language of justice. The Appendix explained that an older “political honor,” grounded in conquest and expansion, persisted because great powers cared only about the judgment of other powers, never expressing shame before the “judgment of the common masses.” Thus, among themselves, princes and statesmen still pursued the “honor of increasing their power, by whatever means it may have been acquired.” Opening up political reputations to more than the gaze of political rivals, Kant reaffirmed the popular consciousness of right: “people can just as little distance themselves from the concept of right in their private relations than in their public ones.” Indeed, despite defending mandates of force, even the political moralists themselves appealed (albeit emptily) to right: “they pay all due honor [*alle gebührende Ehre*] to

<sup>114</sup>Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 350–53.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 353–4; cf. Kant, *Rechtslehre*, 340.

<sup>116</sup>Kant, *Ewigen Frieden*, 368.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 380.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 353.

it, despite devising a hundred excuses and evasions to avoid it in practice.”<sup>119</sup> Echoing his early comments on the foolishness of Pyrrhus and Alexander, Kant described the “sophistry” and “illusion” by which these moralists “deceive themselves and others” by claiming the honor of right.<sup>120</sup> By revealing moralists as representatives of force rather than right, Kant exalted the virtue of the moral politician. Yet, for those unmoved by strict moral duty, this also blocked any appeal to honor through mere moralizing language, effectively restoring the principle of right, and the peace it commanded, to the honorable reputation.

The language of honor is also detectable, albeit indirectly, in the final line of the Appendix, which insisted that, however great the sacrifice was for the existing power, “all politics must bend its knee before right.” Though seldom quoted beyond this point, the sentence went on to conclude that politics could “thereby hope to attain, even if slowly, a stage of persistent splendor [*wo sie beharrlich glänzen wird*].”<sup>121</sup> The meaning of this splendor is perhaps best clarified by an earlier passage from *Perpetual Peace*, which criticized the mistake of identifying the “splendor” (*Glanz*) of bellicose “leaders” (*Oberhaupt*) solely in being “able to order many thousands to sacrifice themselves.”<sup>122</sup> This also echoed Kant’s 1784 remark that Prussians had “a splendid example” (*glänzendes Beispiel*) in Frederick, the monarch “whom we honor.”<sup>123</sup> Kant had similarly remarked upon this “splendor” in his lectures on moral philosophy, explaining that the “desirer of honor” (*Ehrbegieriger*) was animated not by pure moral principle but instead by “making the actions he engages in splendid in the eyes of others [*in Augen anderer zu glänzen*].”<sup>124</sup> Reformulating Kant’s earlier aim of raising the “point of view” of princes, the contrast between the political moralist and the moral politician in 1795 was one of lower and higher perspectives on humanity’s potential, the former mired in political calculation and the latter fixed upon a purely moral aspiration to right. It is often thought that Kant’s Appendix left the gulf between these perspectives unbridged, amounting to a mere hope that the latter would eventually prevail.<sup>125</sup> Yet Kant’s insistence upon the false honor of conquest, the true honor of right, and indeed the promise of a future “splendor” for the politics that approximated it suggests that he had not left the cause of peace solely to those prepared to pursue it by the strict command of moral duty. On the contrary, Kant’s later writings retained a foundational insight of his political thinking, namely that the pursuit of peace, while a matter of moral necessity, could also appeal to those more inclined to secure an honorable reputation.

Though Kant’s attempt to pacify the glory of princes was no doubt more direct in his earlier writings, these references to honor and the true nature of princes still resonated at the time of *Perpetual Peace*. Writing to Goethe in 1795, Prince August of Sachsen-Gotha commended Kant’s guarantee of perpetual peace, but he also

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 375–6.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 376.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 380.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 354–5.

<sup>123</sup>Kant, *Aufklärung*, 41.

<sup>124</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten Vigilantius* [1793–4], AA XXVII, 475–732, at 666.

<sup>125</sup>For a good discussion see Seán Molloy, *Kant’s International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace* (Ann Arbor, 2017), 96–100.



lamented that the essay would not likely please those who “read nothing but the rankings of their armies!”<sup>126</sup> In his review of Kant’s essay, the Danish diplomat Karl Heinrich von Gleichen identified a similar problem: “crown-bearing heads” (*gekrönte Häupter*) would instinctively “oppose the emergence of a project that might limit their craving for honor [*Ehrsucht*].”<sup>127</sup> Noting in 1797 how much “the heads of armies and the honor of crowns [*der Ehre der Kronen*] are now discussed in the newspapers,” Georg Christoph Lichtenberg wondered where *true* honor (*Ehre*) resided: was it “in having happy subjects with a decent income and unharmed limbs, or in having hundreds of thousands slaughtered or maimed ... and with the waste of this abundance to buy jewels for the crown?”<sup>128</sup> The theologian Sixt Gottlieb Kapf similarly remarked, in a poem on the end of the eighteenth century, that “Glory [*Ruhm*] beckons flatteringly, and the hero’s laurels are beautiful, but even more beautiful is the wreath that peace plucks for us.”<sup>129</sup>

## Conclusion

I have traced the beginnings of Kant’s politics to his engagement with Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*, which illustrated what was “not possible” in Saint-Pierre’s vision of perpetual peace. Just as his critical philosophy would later cite skepticism as an entry point to a more robust rationalism, Kant turned to Bayle’s skeptical objections, especially toward princely virtue, to refine Saint-Pierre’s proposal for peace. Despite its undoubted evolution over four decades, Kant’s political philosophy remained marked by its foundational context, showing how the honorable reputation belonged with the peace willed by providence. To be sure, Kant’s ideal of peace was not diluted to conform with what political minds thought possible: as he had argued in the first *Critique*, the ideal politics could not be abandoned on the “very miserable and harmful pretext of its unfeasibility [*Unthunlichkeit*].”<sup>130</sup> What Kant envisioned, rather, was how the ideal politics could be aligned with motives that animated living authorities, resulting in a peace proposal that confronted the first steps of political change and the necessary resolve to improve the civil condition.

Despite its place in the history of international thought, *Perpetual Peace* has often struck its readers as imprecise about the nature and legal structure of a Kantian peace.<sup>131</sup> Yet a foundational aim of Kant’s thought on peace, dating back to his remark on Bayle and present throughout his later writings, was not to provide institutional blueprints for international order but to refute the apparent honors of conquest and expansion, which would stall even the most gradual

<sup>126</sup>“Prinz August von Sachsen-Gotha in einem Briefe von 22. November 1795 an Johann Wolfgang Goethe,” in Dietze and Dietze, *Ewiger Friede?*, 129.

<sup>127</sup>Karl Heinrich von Gleichen, *Versuch eines Entwurfs zu einem ewigen Frieden* [1796], in Dietze and Dietze, *Ewiger Friede?*, 203–7, at 206.

<sup>128</sup>Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Notizen über Revolutionen, Krieg und Patriotismus* [1797], in Dietze and Dietze, *Ewiger Friede?*, 246–7.

<sup>129</sup>Sixt Gottlieb Kapf, *Am Schlusse des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, in Dietze and Dietze, *Ewiger Friede?*, 333–4.

<sup>130</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1781], AA III, 247.

<sup>131</sup>For a discussion of this impression and a novel solution to it see Lebovitz, “The Battlefield of Metaphysics,” 327–31.

approximation of peace. This is not to suggest that Kant's political ideal and its accompanying philosophy of history amounted to rhetoric for powerful readers, but rather that his writings on peace cannot be viewed separately from the intent of making peace seem possible, indeed desirable, to living princes and politicians.

Since its publication, *Perpetual Peace* has faced two dominant and contrasting lines of criticism over its approach to political power. The first of these interprets Kant's hope for peace as a naive extension of the moral purism that characterized his sphere of virtue, apparently committing him to unusually virtuous sovereigns and princes.<sup>132</sup> The second takes Kant not as a moral purist but as a determinist, who envisioned peace solely through the unforeseen consequences of war itself, leaving progress to what Friedrich Schlegel called the "external occasions of fate."<sup>133</sup> The present reading pushes back on both impressions. Kant was not naive about the virtues of sovereigns and princes, but nor was he resigned to progress solely by the "sad experiences" of war. Kant's political project, traceable to 1755, also consisted in envisioning a providential future with immediate political effect, redirecting the true natures of those with the power to pursue peace.

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<sup>132</sup>See, for instance, Friedrich Gentz, "Ueber den ewigen Frieden," in Gentz, ed., *Historisches Journal* 4 (1800), 711–90, at 780–81.

<sup>133</sup>Friedrich Schlegel, "Essay on the Concept of Republicanism occasioned by the Kantian Tract 'Perpetual Peace'" [1797], trans. Frederick Beiser, in Frederick Beiser, ed., *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge, 1996), 93–112, at 109.

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