

The Perpetual War of Biopolitics

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In a war devastated Europe, Hobbes, the philosopher of pacification, framed a strategy for the transition of the human from *homo hominus lupus* to *homo hominus dues*. This was imagined through the Leviathan, figured as the repository of collective violence, who in turn offered individual security. It's a dual process. Detheologization of politics also meant the state starts developing a reason for its existence - which is announced as preservation of social peace and looking after mundane needs of subject-citizens (both to become vital elements of liberal governance subsequently) - while the tropic transition of the human from 'lupus' to 'dues' would by the same token allow the state transcendence above violence. It's a Leviathan that looks after (/constructs) society by being outside society and above it.

By the time of Kant the ambers of religious devastations had properly died down, an enlightened monarchy prevailed in Germany though shadows of the Revolution were creeping dangerous close and finally engulfed the political and intellectual landscape of the 'free' world. This was also the time of the second wave of colonial expansion. Peace needs to be fostered and sequestered away from disruptions, which skewedly but effectively means extension of war. Kant, interested in the peace of common humanity, prosperity and progress through the use of universal reason, wanted to avoid the prospect of war by appealing to federation of nations. It hasn't worked historically, or only in a fragile manner. But the essay has secured a long life in IR.

I would like to make some cryptic observations on why in Kant's enterprise one can see foreshadows of the upcoming modern modes of power - namely, discipline and biopolitics. Given the vastness of the area and the fleeting nature of 15 / 20 minutes, don't expect anything beyond a few provocations.

Perpetual peace has been praised for its robust commitment to sovereignty and non-interventionism. Definitive articles include republicanism, free states, and world citizenship of universal hospitality. Republicanism for Kant meant the separation of the legislative and the executive so that the mere private will of the King cannot become public will. But the agreement is not substantive, only formal - Kant was no advocate of universal suffrage. Kant's advocacy of constitution as a will uniting people so that everybody enjoys what is agreed as right, is soon made to look quite different, for no enquiry into the origin of supreme authority is permitted. Like Rousseau, for Kant too sovereign is sovereign by the fact of being sovereign. Kant understood that common as the optimistic equation of law and reason may be, the two become incompatible with the adoption of the rule of law. If the dictates of reason, or the people inventing them, ruled, then the necessarily unique and untrammelled authority of the rule of law would be pre-empted. Between the dictates of reason and the rule of law, Kant would undoubtedly go for the latter. Kant's democratic construction of the people - refusing all status hierarchies and obeying only those laws they could prescribe for themselves - is a metaphysical image of a spiritual community grafted on

to the political plane –and as such applies only to the transcendental subject of reason. For ordinary, heteronomous beings like you and me, any law or state is preferable to no law or no state, since it is only in the capacity of the state (and law) that collective moral will and freedom can be cultivated, allowing the space for a prescribed vigilant position against the state. By the insistence on republicanism and well-ordered states, the countries outside the free world were logically excluded, while there was no injunction that Kant could raise against colonial exploitation, save a mild rebuke: the savage Europeans are no less savage than the savage Americans in their greed and plunder. Here the distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitus* that is crucial, for it is only the latter that can qualify for just law and equality. The metaphysics of law and order thus opens the space for ‘principles of exclusion’. (Fanon)

Kant loved the idea of one human race globally (earthlings) but was also convinced of the natural differences of races. As a matter of fact, with time he tilted towards the latter, observing how even though they might have started from the same source, the differences increased with time – making the question of racial equality an ever widening spiral. On the other hand, Kant’s notion that the nation has roots, state has laws and people have rights is the foundation on which social solidarity offered by the nation-states is based. Following Foucault of *Birth of Biopolitics*, one can argue that Kant’s essay is in the spirit of the shift from merchantalism to physiocracy. The combined result of European balance and European progress is: don’t fight inside Europe, grab colonies. A permanent army posted at the border, a vigilant police inside the country and a self-monitoring subject-citizen is Kant’s recipe for balance and progress.

Kant performed a crucial departure in epistemology by demonstrating that while we can think of concepts that would go beyond any empirical instance, we can never intuit or be given knowledge of these concepts in their completion. We know the world as lawfully ordered, but we never experience the law-giving power itself. We know ourselves as subjects, because our world is subjectively formed, but we never experience subjectivity as such. From our standpoint important is how this rhetoric of the ‘unattainable’ is deployed in Kant as an important ingredient of moral formation of the subject through a kind of spiritual paedia. In presenting the pure intellection of the substances as unavailable to a sensitively affected rational being (Kant’s emblem of *homo duplex*), this exercise is designed to induce and intensify the longing to behold such substances – an angst that instigates the human on an endless journey of ‘self-purifying exercises’ presented as ‘an intellectual ethos’ (Ian Hunter, 2002). An exercise in speculation, an infinite elaboration of the self, of contemplative self-purification. This exercise of an endless elaboration of speculative self (a self that is also righteous, duty-ordained, rigorously disciplined and law-abiding) is also the groundwork of the coming liberal self-discipline – the self of discursive elaboration, but also of auto-surveillance, repetition and obedience – while Kantian anthropology goes well with the rise of the classificatory state, based on the improved, the improvable and the doomed, and consequently the changing cartography of inclusion and exclusion. The modern liberal state is a caring, terminating state. The duty of the state is to protect and nurture normalcy (deciphered for ‘the rhythms and patterns of different spheres of life’: Foucault) and take action against evident or imagined pathologies.

Calling liberalism a project, liberal philosopher Canovan imagines it in terms of a garden in a jungle that is continually encroaching. In other words, it is a garden that looks to the jungle for threats, it lives at the threshold. This threat of the illiberal is constitutive of liberalism. Hobbes' conceptualization of the City as *tanquam dissoluta* – “as if it were dissolved” – is not a chronological marker but gestures to this ever-present immutable core. Precisely for the same reason, Julian Reid considers war on terror congenital to modernity itself.

Phrasing it ‘becoming-dangerous of Being’, Michael Dillon has argued that it is fortified by Kantian philosophy that “underwrites the very political reasoning of liberalism’s terrorizing internationalism and terrorized peace.” The seductive unreachable of knowledge pushes it for knowledge that it can never reach because it is beyond experience. The dutiful subject of liberalism is in constant vigil against evil whose nature it doesn’t know. So governmentality as conduct of conduct becomes a ceaseless vigil against evil it doesn’t have a clue of and in the process against one’s own self and the threats in the environs. This, Dillon observes, leads to the “double terror: the terror of the emergent and terror of the reason through we operate” (but whose constitutive part we cannot fathom). Continuing with his argument, this politics of paranoia of the contingent and emergent provides the impetus and the justification for “vanguard action against the ethically unacceptable nations”. At its birth, parliamentary democracy was kept in place by discipline and needed for biopolitical penetration. Today, countries are invaded in the name of democracy. To be read along with this is the scenario ‘back home’, where the ‘dispositif of security’ places the social body as a juncture of all kinds of risk – from ‘illegal immigrants’ to drug peddlers to terrorists to viruses known or unknown.

But does that mean that liberalism is necessarily authoritarian? The answer is no. It guards the normal against the incursion of the pathological, but it avoids total administration of life. We should not forget that liberalism as a political position made its effective presence only by championing the State’s withdrawal from the moral realm, as an expression of the moral community’s transcendental resistance to the state. This critique wasn’t framed in theological terms but as post-theological/secular, borrowing from the theological notion of Last Judgment its apocalyptic tone while focusing on a diagnostic notion of society as in medical crisis (a la Reinhert Koselleck’s notion of *crisis*). In course of the passage from critique to a governing technology, liberalism has tried to translate this eschatological, moral load into a language of freedom based on a notion of ‘society’ where such freedom is apparently performed, and transform that content into a set of norms enforceable, if necessary, by sovereign means. (Michel Dean, 2002) This is the new art of governance. In other words, liberal rule is structured around the illiberal, its anxieties erupt from the illiberal and it marks the terrain of the normal only by mapping the pathological. But it loses its art when this balance is lost to an authoritarian, totalistic administration of life. This is the moment of the ‘demonic’, which Foucault characterized as irrational and inspirational, indicating to its confessional turn.

Perhaps as a sign of the failing equation of liberal governance – a phenomenon whose roots must lie in decolonization - ever since the drumroll of the tumbling Berlin Wall settled down, the balance has been tilting towards a totalistic administration of life. The traditional equation between everyday and the private is now usurped by a new understanding of the

intangibility of threats and placed at the interface of the criminalizing discourse, the medicalizing discourse and the discourse of public safety. (Jodi Dean: 2004) If Rousseau's 'the People' ('fastastic retroactivity', as Derrida called it) found its climactic expression in the General Will of the Nazis, for Kant the exemplary secular hermeneut of the spiritual is hopelessly caught at the turn of the millennium in its own backyards in 'homeland security' of contemporary neoliberal biopolitics.

Democracies of the South present a much more complex scenario. In such formations, where more than half the population is a biopolitical threat for the rest, a full-scale operationalization of the biopolitical logic would be undoing for the sheer demographic logic of democracy. Hence some receive care, some termination in a shifting vector of alliance. I draw my picture of neoliberal future from Mike Davis, particularly his recent book, *Planet of Slums* where there is an implicit argument that even if the entire resources of the planet are subjected to neoliberal appropriation with its ever accelerating levels of technology, it wouldn't require even half the population of the world either as market or labor. The remaining population is surplus, a huge tapestry of surplus humanity that need to be contained, looked after, terminated – all happening together with these functions emanating from the selfsame governmental technologies. Let me conclude drawing on a classic evocation of war-torn Afghanistan from Derek Gregory's *Colonial Present*: a lonely peasant gazing at the airplane up at the sky, wondering whether the yellow packets that might soon drop are food packets or lethal bombs, for they look the very same.