

# Editorial Preface

HOWARD WILLIAMS

*University of Wales, Aberystwyth*

The main object of this special issue of the *Kantian Review* is to demonstrate the continued relevance of Kant's moral and political philosophy in the face of the dreadful events of 11 September 2001. In this context it is appropriate that three of the main articles – those of Kersting, Mertens and Banham – in the issue had either already been accepted for publication or were under review at the time of the bombing of the twin towers in New York. The majority of the review essays were also under way at the time. This shows the growing scholarly interest in Kant's political philosophy and especially in Kant's ideas on peace and war. Kant is now a major political philosopher not only for Kantians.

Wolfgang Kersting's article deals with the controversial ideas of Samuel Huntington. Huntington believes that after the end of the cold war we have entered a new phase in world history where ethnic and religious divisions take the place of ideological schisms in giving rise to conflict. For Huntington the end of the cold war has not ushered in a new world order where peace and democracy flourish. Rather we are on the verge of a new phase of religious wars. Kersting challenges this doctrine from his own Kantian perspective and indicates how we might think about world politics in a way which avoids the destructive conflicts that for Huntington inevitably await us.

Mertens's article takes a critical look at the relationship between Rawls, Habermas and Kant's ideas of politics and world order. Mertens evaluates the criticisms made by Habermas of Kant's doctrine of perpetual peace and he looks closely at the arguments of John Rawls's recent book on *The Law of Peoples*. In their different

ways these two contemporary political philosophers have been attempting to reconstruct political theory to take into account issues of both internal and external justice. In an era of globalization it is no longer proving possible to theorize cogently about politics solely in terms of internal party political and constitutional politics. This raises questions about the starting point of political philosophy hitherto not addressed by Rawls and Habermas. As Kant's thinking about politics has from its inception a global dimension, this makes his political philosophy a particularly valuable point of reference for contemporary thinking.

Gary Banham's article looks at the relationship between critique and doctrine in Kant's practical philosophy. Banham believes the distinction is particularly significant. The critical side of Kant's system, where he is engaged with the refutation of commonly held metaphysical ideas, is its destructive aspect. The doctrinal side of Kant's system, where he is concerned to map out what we can know and how we ought to act, is its positive aspect. Kant's political philosophy, presented in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace*, belongs to this positive side. This suggests that Kant's moral and political philosophy carried great weight for Kant. They represented what he hoped to see achieved as the result of his 'critical labours'. Kant's reported avid interest in the political events of his time, both at home and abroad, indicates not only the concerns of a liberal and educated man but also a systematic concern. Critique and doctrine presuppose each other.

Sarah Holtman's article was prepared especially for this volume. She considers the disappointing and sometimes disturbing responses of US citizens to the crisis at the time it occurred. I am extremely grateful to her for preparing her contribution at such short notice. It is particularly difficult for an American scholar to evaluate the disaster so shortly after the event. It is a challenge to attain the critical distance that would allow a dispassionate and balanced assessment of its implications. I am thankful that she has made that attempt and tried to use Kant's philosophy to find moral bearings in the United States in these complex times. Kelly Sorensen's article on the taxonomy of emotions may also provide a helpful context within which to evaluate responses to 11 September.

At the heart of the present conflict is the determination of young people (predominantly men) to sacrifice their lives for a cause and in so doing to bring about the maximum damage to those they regard as

their enemies. It might be possible to argue a case for the morality of such actions in an extreme emergency. But that is not my disposition. Why might we say from a Kantian perspective that it is wrong to be a suicide bomber? Kant argues in the *Doctrine of Virtue* that ‘the first, though not the principal, duty of a human being to himself as an animal being is to preserve himself in his animal nature’ (Ak. 6: 421). In Kant’s view,

killing oneself is a crime. It can also be regarded as a violation of one’s duty to other people (the duty of spouses to each other, of parents to their children, of a subject to his superior or to his fellow citizens, and finally even as a violation of duty to God, as his abandoning the post assigned to him in the world without having been called away from it). (6: 422)

To choose to kill yourself is voluntarily to abandon your personality and autonomy. We should never consider it. Kant believes it is both legally and morally wrong. Human consciousness, as distinct from animal consciousness, is the awareness of the possibility of acting on principle. We cannot therefore logically will to put ourselves in a position where we can no longer will anything that is right. This autonomy is at the root of our personality, to preserve it is therefore the first duty we have to ourselves. There can be no grounds that can justify the possibility of my no longer being able to regard myself as a cause of my own actions. Being a person implies the continuous possibility of acting on the basis of intentions we ourselves have formed.

As Kant puts it:

A human being cannot renounce his personality as long as he is a subject of duty, hence as long as he lives . . . to annihilate the subject of morality in one’s own person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world, as far as one can, even though morality is an end in itself. Consequently, disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end is debasing humanity in one’s person (*homo noumenon*) to which the human being (*homo phaenomeon*) was nevertheless entrusted for preservation. (6: 422)

But human beings none the less do bring shame on themselves and commit suicide. Kant considers carefully the argument of the Stoics that we are entitled to leave this life voluntarily when we believe in our

old age that we are no longer of use. It seems that the sage that does this would be doing no wrong to himself. What we consciously will to do to ourselves demonstrates our autonomy and cannot therefore be wrong. But for Kant the autonomous self cannot be unencumbered. Duties to ourselves are not only duties to our empirical selves; they are also duties to *humanity* in ourselves. We cannot choose to abandon this humanity in ourselves even if this is what we presently desire. Morality itself is imperilled by such action.

So although Kant considers as a 'casuistical question'(6: 423) whether or not killing oneself to save your country or sacrificing oneself for the good of all humanity might be seen as an act of heroism, he cannot sanction martyrdom. Martyrdom does not lie in the hands of those who commit suicide in this way; it lies in the hands of the observer and posterity. Kant wants to question if it is even right for us to view such martyrdom in some respects as virtuous. Perhaps the observers do wrong in thinking well of the action, and historians should think carefully before categorizing an action as one of bravery and heroism. When this martyrdom involves the deaths of thousands of others quite clearly for Kant this is not only a crime but a profound moral wrong.

Kant's reflections in the *Tugendlehre* seem to tell decisively against killing yourself (and simultaneously others) for a noble cause. Both for the perpetrator and the victim it is a heinous wrong. But we should consider carefully that the origin of the wrong is in the false choice of determined and desperate individuals. Here we are dealing with a failure of virtue which is then also a failure of right. Whatever the social, political and military contexts that spawn such individuals they ultimately have to enact their desperate choice. We can ask that our rulers guard against the consequences of their carrying out their evil choice, but ultimately we can only understand the sources of this choice through reflecting on the arguments and convictions from which it arises.