

KANT CRISIS

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This study approaches the last days of Immanuel Kant through the lens of his contemporary biographers and other correspondents. Among the latter, Kant's brother and, subsequently, his brother's family provide a symptomatic reflection upon Kant's management of his genealogy and his legacy. Yet behind this body of work is another corpus, one which embodies maternal and paternal legacies that are not readily subsumed by Oedipus or Kant's philosophy. This work (of art) is Kant's own body or corpus, which he painstakingly maintained and which provided a case study for his reflections on preventive medicine in *The Conflict of the Faculties*.

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Cet article est une analyse des derniers jours d'Immanuel Kant à travers ses biographes contemporains, ainsi qu'à travers d'autres correspondants, parmi lesquels le frère de Kant, dont la famille fournit une réflexion symptomatique de sa gestion de son héritage du passé, ainsi que celui de l'avenir. Cependant, à l'arrière de ce corpus il y en a un autre. La philosophie d'Édipe ou même celle de Kant ne subsume pas facilement ce deuxième corpus qui incarne l'héritage de sa mère, ainsi que celui de son père. Cette œuvre (d'art) représente le corpus, son propre corps, conservé méticuleusement et utilisé pour réfléchir aux remèdes préventifs dans *Conflit de facultés*.

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Kant: or cant as intelligible character.
—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols (Götzen-Dämmerung)*

Kant biographies tend to begin with the issue of deregulated spelling of the philosopher's last name.¹ And yet the variation on his name seems to have been issued during the last years of Kant's life, a period of preparation for the end, which was, however, a long time coming. According to his first biographer, Ludwig Ernst Borowski, whose account Kant authorized and corrected himself, the family name originally began with the letter "C" (Gross et al. 12n1). His grandfather emigrated from Scotland and settled in the Prussian-Lithuanian city of Tilsit, as Kant recalls in a letter to the Jacob Axelson Lindblom dated 13 October 1797 (*Philosophical Correspondence* 237). Subsequent research into this claim, by Ernst Cassirer among others, casts doubt on this genealogy. Kant's great-grandfather was an innkeeper in Werden, near Heydekrug. His son Hans learned harness making and later settled in Memel, contrary to Kant's recollection. There Kant's great-grandfather married, and Kant's father was born. Johann Georg left his father in Memel and set out for Königsberg, where he married Anna Regina Reuter (Vorländer 1-2).

If Kant's father spoke of his ancestors as being of Scottish descent, then Kant was called upon to recall this in response to the aforementioned letter from Lindblom, a Swedish bishop. While Kant appreciates the bishop's research into his family history, he must, in the end, point out that it will prove useless for both him and anyone else. As he goes on to explain, he has known for some time now that his grandfather came from Scotland and died in Tilsit. To this statement he adds the footnote: "My father died in Königsberg, with me" (*Philosophical Correspondence* 237). Why the need for a footnote here, one might ask. For his part, he can close the issue of his genealogy in one sentence or verdict: "My family tree is completely closed off to me as I am single" (*Philosophical Correspondence* 237, translation modified). A dash introduces the final portion of Kant's genealogy. "So much for my origin, which your genealogical chart traces back to honest peasants in the land of the Ostrogoths (for which I feel honored) down to my father

(I think you must mean my grandfather)" (*Philosophical Correspondence* 237). The grounding of this discussion in the father's death, in his role as eye witness to this death, prompts more counter testimony, this time not in a note, but in the equally internalized mode of parenthesis. Where Lindblom speaks of Kant's father, it should be his grandfather instead. Kant then politely declines the entreaty implied in the bishop's letter. He recognizes the bishop's humanitarian interest in calling on him to support alleged relatives. Kant then recounts that he happened to receive another letter at the same time as Lindblom's. This correspondent provided a similar account of his descent and introduced himself as his "cousin." He wanted to borrow money—eight or ten thousand thalers—but only for a few years, until he could attain happiness. Tracing the letter back to its place and date of origin, Kant enters it into evidence. He informs bishop Lindblom that he cannot honor his or other requests because his estate shall go to his closest relatives.

Kant was the oldest surviving child in his family. An older sister was listed in the family album. His three younger sisters resided in Königsberg. They were apparently uneducated and signed their names with an "X." In the letter to Lindblom, Kant writes of his living sister, the six children of his late sister, and his younger brother, Johann Heinrich Kant, who has four children of his own, one of whom is recently married. Considering these relations, the demands of his alleged "cousin" as well as requests by bishop Lindblom on behalf of other alleged relatives, cannot be recognized. An editor's note to an English translation of this letter adds the following: "In a draft of this letter, Kant adds a eulogy to his parents who, while leaving him no fortune, nor any debts, managed to give him such an excellent moral education that he is filled with gratitude whenever he thinks of them" (*Correspondence* 527). In place of the eulogy, Kant sends, instead, the curious footnote announcing his presence at his father's death in Königsberg.

With all the talk of fathers, grandfathers, relatives on his father's side, his brother's son, and so on, mention of Kant's mother is conspicuously absent. While he credits his parents with his moral education, it was his mother who was first and foremost his educator. She would of-

ten take her “Manelchen” into the country, teaching him about the properties of nature and plant life, as well as what she knew of the makeup of the heavens. Recalling such field trips to Jachmann, Kant is reported to have said that she “planted and nourished,” in Kant, the “first seed of the Good” and “opened” his “heart to the impressions of nature;” she was the first to “awaken and expand” in him *his* ideas and “her lessons have exerted an ongoing healing influence” on his life (Vorländer 4-5).² Frau Kant was relatively educated for her time, concludes Kant scholar and biographer Vorländer from her entries into the family album, especially compared to other women in Kant’s life (5). From his mother, Kant believed he also inherited his lineament, as well as his physical constitution, including an inflected chest. According to the authorized Borowski biography, Kant’s weak chest discouraged him from pursuing a career as a pastor, one his brother would ultimately take up.

Kant seldom wrote of his family and wrote perhaps even less frequently to his family. There is a lengthy one-sided correspondence initiated repeatedly by his brother Johann Heinrich. Not until the correspondence about his family name toward the end of his life did Kant fully enter into the epistolary exchange with his brother. Kant had at least two legacies to dispose of at the end of his life. There was the maternal legacy he embodied 1) as a constitutionally weak, yet enduring physical being, and 2) as spirit disposed to melancholic hypochondria, yet capable of overcoming it through the diversion or dissociation of thought. The maternal gift of thought, bound up with the implanted seed of the Good (or the good object), was mediated by the body of its mediation, comparable to a machine, in the close quarters of finitude and psychic disturbance. Then there was the paternal legacy attached to the name and the surviving line. The younger brother, who followed this line more closely than did Kant, indeed as Kant’s substitute, entertained a one-sided or ghostly correspondence course with the great outsider, who nearly never replied. Toward the end of his life, Kant replied to his brother in the course of overseeing the payment of his dues to the family line. But then Kant sent back the patronymic as a detachable English word. One “cant” would not have delivered his name from its already existing proximity to “Kante” or



“edge.” The other “cant” speaks the jargon of the underworld or of other professional bodies. Sometimes “cant” is the displeasing, often whining tone in which words are spoken, which as projection of estrangement onto an in-group, brings us back to the cryptology of jargon. Inasmuch as the guild cited is Scottish, Kant detaches the body he signs not only from the name of his father, but also from a certain philosophical lineage. Doesn’t he summon its locale or proximity only to announce he “can’t” partake?

In a letter dated 1 March 1763, which begins “My Brother!,” Johann Heinrich Kant implores his sibling, Immanuel Kant, to write back:

If it is not at all possible to receive a response from you, I will soon have to do as Gellert did with his lazy friend. Should this letter be as fortunate as its predecessors, next time I want to draft a reply to myself on your behalf. You would then merely have to sign your name and return it. I couldn’t make it any easier. (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 40)

For the time being, however, Johann requests that Kant pay more attention, as Johann has a pressing concern that will suffer no delay. One of Johann’s pupils will be visiting Königsberg and needs a place to stay.

I cannot but highly recommend this promising young fellow, the first student I taught. He will build upon the foundation I provided by attending your lectures. In particular he especially wishes to further his knowledge in your company [. . .] might it be possible for him to stay with you and dine with you? [. . .] We await your decision about this in the coming mail [. . .] (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 40).

There is no record of Kant’s reply. Twelve years later, Johann writes that he has become deputy rector of the school in Mietau and apologizes for not having sent the news earlier (13 May 1775). This negligence is due, in part, to mitigating circumstances. “I have now made the most important change of my life: I married.” He writes of his new bride that while she has “a great deal of outer beauty and a loving character,” she lacks “*Vermögen*,” in other words: money, means, or ability. “Yet I still chose her,” he continues, “purely out of love, and hope that at her side I will get through all the obstacles

and dangers of life, satisfied and happy.” Johann then turns his attention to Kant’s body, giving him a word of advice. “My dearest brother, you must seek serenity and peace of mind in the distractions of company. You must entrust your sickly body to the hired care of strangers. [. . .] As old age approaches and brings its burdens, they are lightened by the most loving care.” Take his situation, for example: “I am more fortunate than you, my brother. Allow yourself to be converted by my example. The single life/celibacy has its comforts, as long as one is young. But with age, one must be married or otherwise acquiesce to a morose, melancholy life.” Johann sends his regards to their sisters and asks for a truly detailed account of Kant’s situation. In addition, Johann pledges to write more often, suggesting perhaps that Kant do the same.

A postscript, the first in a series, is affixed to this letter. It is written by Johann’s wife, Maria:

You will take me to be a bold woman because I dare to write a man, whom I do not yet know personally. You alone are the brother of my husband and hence my brother; this is my justification. Give me, at least in writing, the recognition that you wish to honor me with the name of a sister. The tender love I devote to my husband also makes the most ardent friendship toward you a pleasant duty. I shall never stop being your most devoted sister. (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 180)

On 16 August of the same year, Johann writes again, asking Kant to look after the young man who is delivering this letter. He then addresses marriage. “I have not come to regret my decision to marry.” He suggests that his brother come visit for a few weeks, so he can see the happy couple, whose example should not threaten the “hardened bachelor” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 184).

Although Kant never strayed far from Königsberg, it was not for lack of opportunity. He had ample funds for travel, and as early as 1759, he was offered a professorship of philosophy, his first, at Erlangen. Five years later, a professorship of poetry in Berlin was offered, but he declined as well. It wasn’t his area. Kant never made the trip to see his brother and wife, and in a letter from 21 January 1776, Johann begins by calling attention to this. “It just is not right. You would have found a loving

brother here and a sister-in-law who wishes to meet you [. . .].” Maria gave birth to a daughter, Amalia Charlotta.³ “I delegated a godfather to stand in on your behalf so you could be entered in the church register.” He requests that his brother love his niece and conveys his wife’s desire to visit relatives in Königsberg. He sends her love and gives his best to their relatives, the Richters, and his sisters. “Write soon, it would probably only cost you a quarter hour, and it would not be wasted” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 189). Again, Kant does not reply.

In early 1778, another courier arrives with a letter from Johann dated 4 January 1778. This messenger is en route to Berlin to study surgery. “It is very pleasing,” writes Johann, “that, free of postage, I can remind you that your brother is still alive and will receive news of you and his relatives after a period of three years.” In parenthesis, Johann impatiently hopes that Kant will mail him a letter soon. “Now then,” he writes, “what are you up to? What is the state of your health? Your peace of mind? Your entire situation? Miatou extended its arms to you three years ago. Was it patriotism? Or what was it that caused you not to want to visit?” Johann inquires about their sisters and his former foster parents, Aunt and Uncle Richter. If only Kant would send news of himself and their relatives, Johann would be as pleased as “a young student, who, plagued by creditors, has just received some money” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 221).

A few years later, we learn of a gift from Kant to his sister-in-law, one that circumvents his brother, who nonetheless remains grateful and for good reason, as it will continue to be a topic of conversation in the years to come. In a letter to Kant dated 10 September 1782, Johann begins with a word of thanks on behalf of Maria. She was just delighted to receive the book he sent on household management and plans to use it to “become a quite valiant farmer.” Johann explains that he has changed careers. No longer a teacher, he is now a preacher and a farmer. He continues to live happily with his wife and their children, “two cheerful, spirited girls, Charlotte and Minna, and then in place of our Eduard, whom we lost a year ago, a fresh Friedrich Wilhelm, who has almost reached his first year.” Their current situation updated, Johann inquires about his brother’s well-being



and “literary activity,” Aunt and Uncle Richter, and their sisters. Again, Johann beseeches his brother to respond to his letters. Maria appends a postscript, thanking Kant for the book. She intends to use it to transform herself into “a professor of home economics.” Maria asks him to “love a sister-in-law, who without hope of ever embracing you in person, dedicates her heart to you.” Her daughters commend their uncle and would gladly, were it possible, “rush over to kiss his hand.” Her son is also a good boy, “who should someday honor your name” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 10: 287). Kant’s nieces and nephew would attempt to correspond with their uncle in the coming years.

Johann’s letter of 21 August 1789 attempts to renew his relationship with his brother after many years and numerous unanswered letters. As they are both getting older, Johann proposes that they become closer to one another.

Now then, dearest brother! As laconic as you always are as a scholar and writer “so as not to sin against the public weal” (*ne in publica commoda pecces*), do let me know how your health has been and how it is at present, what scholarly plans of assault you have to enlighten the world of today and tomorrow. But also! do tell me how things are going with my dear surviving sisters and their families, and how the only son of my departed, esteemed paternal *Uncle Richter* is. I will gladly pay the postage for your letter, even if you only write an octavo page. (*Correspondence* 317)

In case Kant does not trust the postal system, Johann enumerates a list of acquaintances in Königsberg who might deliver Kant’s reply. He allows his children to close the letter: “Yes esteemed uncle, yes beloved aunts, we all want you to know about us, and to love us, and not to forget us. We shall love you sincerely and respect you, all of us, who sign ourselves. Amalia Charlotta Kant. Minna Kant. Friedrich Wilhelm Kant. Henriette Kant” (*Correspondence* 317).

The much anticipated and long-awaited letter from Kant finally arrives, hand-delivered by a relative of Maria, a certain Herr Reimer. In the letter of 26 January 1792, Kant explains his reason for writing: “Despite my apparent indifference, I have thought of you often enough

in a brotherly way, not only while we are both alive, but also in the case of my death.” Kant writes of the support he is providing their remaining, widowed sisters and the children of their oldest sister. Moving from his avuncular status, Kant turns to his parents, who instilled in them the “duty of gratitude.” He inquires about their family situation, as if Johann had not been describing precisely that for nearly three decades. Kant closes the letter: “Your true brother, I. Kant” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 11: 320). Less than a fortnight later, Kant receives Johann’s understandably exuberant response. When the letter finally arrived from Kant (8 February 1792), again conveyed by Herr Reimer, it was a day of celebration for Johann. The joy of brotherly love turns to talk of his wife and their children.

Although she has not met you, she very dearly loves and honors you. [. . .] She gave a quite lively account [of your letter] to our children, who sincerely love and honor you. Your generous assurance that you have thought brotherly of me in the event—may it be far removed—of your future death brought us all to tears. Thanks—thank you very much my brother for your declaration of benevolence [. . .] when I, following the most probable rule, leave my wife and children behind. (*Gesammelte Schriften* 11: 323)

Johann shares with joy in the renown his brother has achieved as a first-rate philosopher and creator of a new philosophical system; however, Johann is getting on in age. Fortunately, “old age seems, all things being equal, to be the happy lot of thinkers and scholars.” He reminds his brother of his family history. He has been married since 1775 and had five children, one of whom, Eduard, survived only a year. Their daughters, Amalia Charlotte and Minna, are sixteen and thirteen, respectively. Their son Friedrich Wilhelm is eleven, and their youngest, Henriette, is almost nine. Johann also notes with each description their birthday for Uncle Kant. Aunt and Uncle Richter must be long gone by now, he adds. “They were my fatherly and motherly benefactors and guardians.” It should be noted that Johann, while often writing of their foster parents, remains reticent on the topic of their parents. This is, however, closer than Kant comes to discussing the loss of their parents in all the years of their “correspondence.” Johann adds that

Maria sends her embrace and still appreciates the book on home economics he sent years ago. “My children absolutely want to be incorporated into their uncle’s memory,” he writes in closing (*Gesammelte Schriften* 11: 323). They will be writing him letters before he knows it. There was no reply from Kant.

On 19 August 1795, a letter arrives from Königsberg that begins with the salutation, “Best Uncle.” No longer trusting the postal system, perhaps, this letter also arrives by courier. Presuming that they will never know Kant personally, they follow in their father’s footsteps and attempt to open a line of communication with their uncle. His nieces and nephew explain that they wish to be loved by him more than anything; however, he remains “forever absent, forever distant,” something that must be “animated with the imagination.” They propose that he send them a lock of his “venerable, gray hair.” With it, they could better imagine his presence and be more content with this illusion (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12: 37). There is no record of receipt of Kant’s locks. The letter does not elicit a response from Kant.

Kant does send word of their sister’s death on 17 December 1796. Subsequently, Kant doubled his financial support of her children, which has a bearing on the future support of Johann’s family. The letter ends with a friendly greeting to his niece Amalia Charlotte. There is also an enclosure for her. It is a letter to Carl Wilhelm Rickmann, her fiancé, in which Kant conveys his best wishes and drops a line about Kantian lineage. “Just as the blood of my two honored parents in its different outflows has yet to be tainted by something unworthy, in the moral sense, I hope you will find the same with your beloved.” Kant asks Rickmann to forgive the delay in answering his letter. He was occupied with “affairs that I could not very well interrupt” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12: 140). The bypass operation of Kant’s letter in a letter brings the correspondence to a close.⁴

One generation down the line, Rickmann received as enclosure just the sort of letter of apology that Kant withheld from Johann. Just as he cosigns along the family line, he also gives the bottom line of his own ghostly reserve. Kant’s affairs have occupied him all this time, since the passing of the parents. He was at father’s bed-

side. Mother’s passing still drives him to postpone it in his own survival.

The art of body maintenance was one to which Kant devoted the last thirty or so years of his life, if not his entire life. Kant called it a *Kunststück*, a work of art (Gross et al. 207). *Kunststück* also, however, falls under the category of performance, as trick, feat, clever thing. Heine’s reference to Kant’s “mechanically ordered, almost abstract bachelor existence” circumscribes a vital supplement or consequence of the philosopher’s lifestyle choice (203). Because Kant had the mind, but not the body, for *Bildung*/building, the maintenance plan had to be preventive. In spite of his weak physical appearance, however, he was almost never ill. According to biographer Vorländer’s portrait, Kant’s rosy cheeks, healthy complexion, and strong, sharp senses (he also never needed glasses) prevailed over his stooped left shoulder and the inflected breast he inherited from his mother, also the cause of his soft voice (198).

Kant learned the lessons of preventive medicine at home from his mother. But the most lasting lesson was the one she gave unto death. While attending to a sick friend, Frau Kant died of quick and poisonous influenza (Vorländer 5). The friend refused to take the prescribed remedies. Frau Kant attempted spoon feeding, but to no avail. The patient refused the medicine, alleging it had a disgusting taste (252-53). What better way to convince her ailing friend that the medicine, on the contrary, tasted good, than by example? “She is suddenly overcome with nausea and a case of the chills” (253). She died within a few days as a sacrifice to friendship. Although she probably gagged on the dirty spoon, Kant maintained as the consequence he drew from the lesson that “everything bought, sold, and given in the apothecary are synonymous: drug, venom, and poison” (292).

Kant’s heterodox view of medicine required that he seek alternative medicine, especially for *Kopfbedrückung*, or “oppression of the head.” In a letter dated 20 December 1799, Kant writes to physician friend Johann Benjamin Erhard describing the troubled condition of his health, which is more discomfort than illness. The “spastic oppression of the head, a brain cramp [. . .] is related to “the exceptionally long duration of a widely

propagated airborne electricity,” continually on air since 1796. It is the same one the paper reported in connection with the cat deaths in major European cities. “And since this air quality must ultimately be transposed, I retain hope for my freedom” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12: 296). Wasianski takes notes on what he considers to be Kant’s last theory. The final sign of his weakness was his theory of the, by all means peculiar, phenomenon of the cat deaths in Basel, Vienna, Copenhagen, and others cites. These “electric animals,” particularly cats, proved to be the basis for Kant’s theory of electricity and the end, by most accounts, of Kant the thinker (233-34). Daily, sometimes more than once a day, he repeated his resolute assertion that nothing other than electricity was the cause of his misfortune. “Kant, the great thinker, stops thinking” at this point, Wasianski concludes (234).

Kant had published his thoughts on another, not unrelated, ailment of the head, *Grillenkrankheit* or hypochondria. Hypochondria is one of two main types of mental illness or weakness of the cognitive faculty that Kant addresses in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*).⁵ The other is mania. A person who suffers from hypochondria is aware that his thinking is not in order, but is unable to return it to its proper course (309). For the hypochondriac, mood changes, like the weather, are a way of life: untimely highs meet unseasonable lows, not outside but inside (309). By contrast, mania follows a voluntary train of thought, which abides by its own subjective rules. These are contrary to the “laws of experience” (309). Kant returns to this major division a few sections later, when he elaborates on his preferred totemic synonym for hypochondria, *Grillenkrankheit*. This designation, he advises, is derived from the forced attentiveness to the noise of the cricket (*Grille* or *Hausgrille* but also *Heime*) which, in the middle of the night, disturbs the tranquility requisite to sleep (317; *Gesammelte Schriften* 7: 212). Given its resonance with *Heim* or home, the synonym *Heime*, as constituent part of a nomination for psychiatric illness that is derived from personal experience, hypochondria itself, as *la maladie sans maladie*, is another word for a home sickness, a crisis of uncanniness, which cannot be named as such. The external chirping is analogous to the internal noise

that disturbs a restful night’s sleep. One suffering from *Grillenkrankheit* is capable of not only discovering illness within, but also producing it. This illness, however, involves the discovery of certain inner bodily sensations as emanating from the foreign body within. The hypochondriac is capable of hearing the chirping from within, which can be amplified by paying particular attention to certain locales. Yet the illness may remain at bay given habitual abstraction or distraction, which weakens symptom formation (317-18).

At this point, Kant drops a footnote referring the reader to the concluding part of *The Conflict of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*), the last book he publishes: “I have remarked in another writing that averting attention from certain painful sensations and exerting it on any other object voluntarily grasped in thought can ward off the painful sensations so completely that they are unable to break out into illness” (318). The final part of *The Conflict of the Faculties* entitled “The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Faculty of Medicine” was originally written in response to a book sent to Kant by Professor C. W. Hufeland of the University of Jena, who was also the Royal Prussian Court physician. Thanking Hufeland for the book, *Macrobotics, or the Art of Prolonging Human Life* (*Makrobotik, oder die Kunst, das menschliche Leben zu verlängern*), Kant mentions that he would like to write an essay expounding on his own art of prolonging life. According to Gregor’s introduction to *The Conflict of the Faculties*:

Hufeland replied enthusiastically promising that such an essay would quickly be made available to the medical profession. Kant’s essay, which takes the form of a letter to Hufeland, was written in January 1798 and published in the same year in Jena, in Hufeland’s *Journal of Practical Pharmacology and Surgery*. (xxi-xxii)

The title of Kant’s contribution: “On the Power of the Mind to Master Its Morbid Feelings by Sheer Resolution” (*Von der Macht des Gemüths durch den bloßen Vorsatz seiner krankhaften Gefühle Mesiter zu sein*).

The letter addressed to Hufeland entered *The Conflict of the Faculties* as an introduction to its concluding part. In it, Kant apologizes for his delayed response, writing that “old age brings with it the habit of postponing im-

portant decisions (*procrastination*)—just as we put off concluding our lives: death always arrives too soon for us, and we are inexhaustible in thinking up excuses for making it wait” (175). With respect to a question Hufeland had posed concerning the moral treatment of the physical side of man, Kant writes that “morally practical philosophy also provides a panacea which, though it is certainly not the complete answer to every problem, must still be an ingredient in every prescription” (175). The panacea, Kant continues, is a regimen that must be adopted. It is the art of preventive medicine. One condition applies to this art. It is underwritten by philosophy or its spirit, without which regimen is not possible. In the essay that follows, Kant takes himself as the experimental subject in order to draw attention to something that does not occur to everyone, either in the sense of not thinking of something or something not happening, but has occurred to him in both senses of the word. “I have outlived a good many of my friends and acquaintances who boasted of perfect health and lived by an orderly regimen adopted once and for all, while the seed of death (illness) lay in them unnoticed, ready to develop” (181). Even devotion to the regimen, to the art of preventive medicine, offers no guarantees, as Kant learned from his mother. His *Kunststück* is a tribute to her example. Kant concludes that the regimen is about prolonging life, rather than enjoying it, and that old age can only be considered as retrospective, as a testament to health one has enjoyed.

“Medical science,” Kant continues, “is philosophical when the sheer power of man’s reason to master his sensuous feelings by a self-imposed principle determines his manner of living” (181, 183). Yet, if the healing art attempts to intervene from without into the body by means of the apothecary or surgeon, it is no longer philosophical but “merely empirical and mechanical” (183). The regimen is proactive risk calculation that does not take the body for granted. What ails the body, the seed of death festering within, is just as uncertain as all that is bought, sold, or given away at the apothecary. In Kant’s personal experience or experiment, the ailment and the remedy can be one and the same. Wallace notes his take on inoculation:

He held strong views on Jenner’s great discovery: he



termed vaccination an “inoculation of bestiality.” Twice in the year 1800—once by Professor Juncker of Halle, and once by Graf Dohna (whose bride desired to be vaccinated)—he was asked whether he considered this prophylactic against small-pox a morally justifiable one. (89)

If the mechanical injection of impurity into a system is not philosophical by any means and hence not morally justifiable, then what about the time-release mechanism already deposited inside the human body as seed of death?

After having confronted and countered the possibility of hypochondria’s melancholic excess under the rubric of reason’s veto power, Kant allows a personal reflection to follow in the next paragraph (*Conflict* 189). His inflected chest, which presses upon lungs and heart, was the natural precondition for hypochondria, which in his early years, indeed, bordered on a withdrawal of his will to live. The restrictions of his physique could not be overcome. But he has since mastered their effect upon his thoughts and acts by averting attention from the oppressive feeling as though it were not his concern (189). Kant describes how he dissociates and knows it too. Upon reflecting that his oppression or anguish of the heart was probably merely mechanical, therefore, and that, as a result, nothing could be done about it, he decided to pay it no mind. Although this did not relieve the pressure entirely, peace of mind and cheerfulness prevailed (189). Because life is limited by the body, which cultivates the seed of death, the work of the mind or spirit must be that of taking account of this limitation and enjoying life just the same (189).

Wasianski reports that in December 1803 Kant could no longer sign his name. The failure of both eyesight and memory ultimately did in the signature, while delivering its verdict: I. Kant. No longer able to remember which letters comprise his name, even when they are repeated to him, he cannot represent them in his imagination (Gross et al. 292). Around the time Wasianski begins signing for Kant, a distinguished guest from Berlin visits the great thinker and is shocked to see what remains of him. He sees “not Kant but only Kant’s shell,” and asks “what was Kant then, and what now?” (297). In “The

Last Days of Immanuel Kant,” based largely on Wasianski’s biography, De Quincey describes a sense of the living end: “[W]e had the feeling of some mighty phantom from some forgotten century being seated amongst us” (159). When it’s the end among these friends, it’s noted that what stops is the “final movement of the machine,” the Kantian *Kunststück*, his body under regimen (303).

Toward the end of his life Kant maintained special sleeping arrangements, which began not with the extinguishing of the light but a quarter hour earlier. After changing into his bedclothes, “swathed like a mummy,” he prepared his body for sleep (117). Once asleep, nothing could disturb him. If he had to leave his secured space during the night, he guided himself by means of a rope connecting his bed to the adjacent room, which was needed because he kept his bedroom completely dark night and day. Wasianski explains that Kant had returned once from an excursion to find bugs in his bedroom and decided that it was the light that caused them to prosper and multiply (Gross et al. 227). The external factor of desecration was blocked out, as was already the internal max factor of decay. But you never saw him sweat. He perspired neither day nor night, according to Wasianski (Gross et al. 228). When the time came, his dead body could remain on display for a long time because of its aridity. Initially on view in his study, the mummified Kant was moved to the dining room, which accommodated more than six spectators, and was displayed on his dining room table. The regimen that outlasted all the rest in the span of a lifetime left itself behind as maternal signature.

Notes

¹ This reading of a “failed” encryptment in the wake of a “bid for incorporation” was inspired by Laurence Rickels’ reading of the G.E. Lessing corpus in *Aberrations of Mourning*.

² “Ich werde meine Mutter nie vergessen; denn sie pflanzte und nährte den ersten Keim des Guten in mir, sie öffnete mein Herz den Eindrücken der Natur; sie weckte und erweiterte meine Begriffe, und ihre Lehren haben einen immerwährenden, heilsamen Einfluß auf mein Leben gehabt.” Where an English translation is not cit-

ed, translations are my own.

³ Johann varies the spelling of his daughter's name, sometimes ending it with an "a" and sometimes with an "e".

⁴ Four years later Maria Kant sends her own letter, one that is in fact another kind of postscript (16 May 1800). She notifies her brother-in-law of her husband's death on 22 February. She had written shortly after his death, describing the poor state of her family and their finances yet heard no reply from Kant. Her husband left them with no assets and some debt. With the sale of their house, she writes, she hopes to cancel that debt. She implores him to help and support them in their time of need and hopes the request is not inappropriate. Maria concludes by appealing to Kant's "benevolent and philanthropic convictions, which will alleviate our sorrow" (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12: 306). About two months later (19 July 1800), Maria writes one last time to Kant, who came through for them, and they are grateful. He is like a second father to them (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12: 318).

⁵ Klaus Doerner writes of Kant's role in the history of German psychiatry: "Kant begins his lectures in anthropology in 1772-73, and published his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, a more knowledgeable treatment of psychopathology than most contemporary medical works, in 1789. Moreover, Kant's systematization of psychiatric concepts has remained a factor in Germany; Germany's psychiatric model of the first half of the twentieth century, inexorably linked to the names of Kahlbaum, Schüle, Krafft-Ebing, and Kraepelin, was basically neo-Kantian, and German psychiatrists tend to make Kantian anthropology their point of reference" (180).

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