Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal
Volume 43, Number 2, 2022

Melancholic Imprisonment in Memory

How "Never Again" Crumbled When Russia Invaded Ukraine

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> It happened, therefore it can happen again . . . . and
> it can happen everywhere.
> —Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*[1]

1. Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 brought war to Europe. Whether seen as a *Zeitenwende*, a historical turning point, or as the end of the end of history, the war poses an immense challenge to western institutions and governments promising not to repeat the atrocities of the twentieth century. Unlike the divided reaction to refugees from the wars in Syria and Afghanistan, there is broad European support for Ukraine. While western reaction has been unified within the institutional framework of the European Union and NATO, and national governments have provided unprecedented humanitarian and military aid, economic dependence on Russian energy and the future specter of nuclear war frames much of its response.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, however, appeals in his speeches to the moral obligations of western governments and post-war institutions, which are rooted in the promise that such violence would never again return to Europe.[3] His speeches and videos on social media appeal to the conscience of the international community, the political responsibility of governments, and the collective responsibility of individuals.

Uneven responses to the war demonstrate that dependence on Russia for energy, and Russian investment into universities, football clubs, and real estate after the fall of the Soviet Union, in tandem with weak sanctions after Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas in 2014, as well as the withholding of American military assistance under the Trump administration in 2019 has undermined

the responsibility of political institutions that proclaimed the sanctity of "Never Again."[4] Indeed, as historian Adam Tooze underscores:

> And though the West has responded to Putin's violence with outrage, we should admit that at first we shared Putin's framing of the war. Our backing of Ukraine was lacklustre at best. We too thought that if Putin was fool enough to launch an attack, it would be over soon. We did not take Ukraine seriously as a state. We stood back and left it to its fate. Ukraine was, and remains, beyond the protection of NATO's Article 5.[5]

The phrase Never Again, *plus jamais*, *nie wieder*, *nunca más*, or *nunca mais*, promises to end the atrocities of the twentieth century and warns of their return if individuals and governments remain indifferent to injustices in the world. Never Again is based on the moral claim that active remembrance is central to learning from the past and to preventing violence in the future. Given the plethora of commemorative ceremonies, days of remembrance, museums, monuments, films, books, art, memory laws, and educational endeavors to learn from twentieth century history, the war in Ukraine demonstrates that despite the large humanitarian support of individuals, non-profit organizations, and civil society, western political leaders and international institutions were unable to prevent Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, as President Zelensky argued in his speech on May 8, 2022 commemorating the end of World War II, "Never Again" is the "anthem of the civilized world." As he reflected on the bitter reality of war in Ukraine, Zelensky stated, "This year we say 'Never Again' differently. We hear 'Never Again' differently. It sounds painful, cruel. Without an exclamation, but with a question mark. You say: never again? Tell Ukraine about it."[6]

Is the inability of the international community to prevent atrocity after 1945 a "desecration of the words" as Zelensky argued?[7] Is the return of war an enduring example of *Realpolitik* and "the tragedy of Central Europe," as Milan Kundera suggested in 1984?[8] Has "never" been replaced with "we can repeat" and "evil has returned," as Zelensky lamented? There is, as he said, "a terrible *déjà vu*" in Europe.[9] The promise of Never Again was already undermined by, for example, the genocides in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the bombing of civilians in Syria, and the war in Afghanistan; Russia's invasion of Ukraine tests anew the ethics of Never Again on a large scale with its looming specter of nuclear war and growing list of war crimes.[10]

In an effort to understand how the very institutions that were created in the aftermath of World War II were unable to prevent war from returning to Europe, my argument proceeds in three parts: §2 examines how Never Again is based on a paradox between the universal and the

particular, as well as between the historical experience of individuals and the universal promise to avert its reoccurrence. §3 argues that Never Again indicates a break in historical time that links the living with memories of the dead and promises not to repeat the violence of the past in the future. At issue is the kind of intergenerational responsibility that is implied in the ethics of Never Again. §4 suggests that the imperative of Never Again is weakened when memory is reduced to a melancholic gaze of catastrophe that privileges a tragic understanding of history. Instead, the imperative of Never Again requires active remembrance, a sense of collective responsibility, and the ability to judge when to act collectively.

2. Never Again: Between Universal and Particular

The historical context of Never Again is a universal promise written into the charter of post-war institutions to prevent war based on memories of past violence, most prominently that of the Holocaust.[11] As a reaction to National Socialism, the phrase Never Again is engraved in five languages in Dachau, the first concentration camp in Germany that was made into a memorial. Similarly, the survivors of the Buchenwald camp took an oath of Never Again on April 19, 1945:

> We will not stop fighting until the last perpetrator is brought before the judges of the people! Our watchword is the destruction of Nazism from its roots. Building a new world of peace and freedom is our goal. This is our responsibility to our murdered comrades and their relatives. (MF 9)

As Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider contend in their book, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: The Ethics of Never Again*, Never Again stems from remembrance of the Holocaust and war. The phrase is subsequently used in different historical contexts and is invoked with respect to war, genocide, and dictatorship. As an imperative, Never Again is Janus-faced and looks simultaneously to the past and the future. Although rooted in the historical experience of the world wars and the Holocaust, the imperative of Never Again is part of the post-war institutional framework committed to democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (MF 11). By promising not to repeat the violence of the past, Never Again acts like a social contract binding the war generation with its descendants. Indeed, as Baer and Snzaider argue, "Human rights are grounded in the dystopian consciousness of a fragile world. The Holocaust is always in the background, and it becomes a powerful frame for reading near and distant atrocities" (MF 1). Since the Stockholm Convention in 2000, the Holocaust has become the common memory in Europe that links the latter's phoenix-like rebirth after World War II

to the promise of peace and human dignity.[12] As Tony Judt wrote in 2005, "Today the pertinent European reference is not baptism. It is extermination. Holocaust recognition is our contemporary European entry ticket."[13] Moreover, the Holocaust has become a global frame or template for remembering the crimes of communism, colonialism, slavery, and racism, as well as their intersections.[14]

The normative claims of Never Again, which are grounded in the protection of human rights, and the prevention of war, are caught within the paradox of the universal and particular. On the one hand, Never Again proclaims the universal value of preventing atrocity everywhere; on the other hand, the historical context of Never Again is based on the European experience of World War II, imperialism, and the Holocaust. Hence, when war and atrocities occur that are not directly related to the original event, the decision of whether and how to intervene—the application of Never Again—encounters the particularism of the interpretation of the situation. As Baer and Sznaider point out, Never Again acts like an "omnipresent moral imperative, even a universal call to concrete action" (MF 133). Never Again makes universal claims to human dignity and predicts what will happen if we do not follow universal norms. It transcends the particularity of time and space with the universal promise to prevent evil from recurring. The ethics of Never Again, as they emphasize, combines the duty to remember with an obligation to take care of generations in the future.

It was in the Ukrainian city that is now called Lviv (previously Lemberg and later Lwów) that the new ideas for the legal recognition of crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity were born. It was in this same city that Raphael Lemkin and Hersch Lauterpacht studied law at the University of Lemberg. Lemkin coined the term genocide in 1944 to describe the attempt to exterminate a national, racial, or religious group, and he was instrumental in influencing the United Nations to define genocide as a crime under international law (MF 15–6). Lauterpacht was one of the jurists who formulated the notion of 'crimes against humanity' to judge the actions of individuals within the context of the Nazi state. Lemkin's and Lauterpacht's definitions complement one another because the definition of genocide targets individuals of a specific group and the definition of crimes against humanity targets individuals regardless of group affiliation. The legacies of Lemkin and Lauterpacht are enshrined in the UN Charter from 1945, promising to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person."[15] Moreover, as Philippe Sands argues, the promise of Never Again haunts current debates about whether the Russian

bombardment of Ukrainian cities and murder of civilians constitute a war crime or genocide.[16]

The Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946) established the precedent of crimes against humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), and the 1951 Refugee Convention are the founding documents enshrining the universal sanctity of human life, individual and collective, and the promise to protect it against state-sponsored violence. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 with the controversial Cold War structure of the Security Council is, like its predecessor the League of Nations, an institutional attempt to prevent war. NATO, as a defensive military alliance founded in 1949, is dedicated to defending the peace and security of its member states. The European Union, since its creation as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, as a political and economic institution, aims for peace among member states and the protection of human rights. These post-war institutions, conventions, and declarations were founded in the shadow of the atom bomb that changed not only the nature of modern warfare but also how we think about the end of the world in the nuclear age.[17] Finally, although the International Criminal Court, founded in 2002, is gathering evidence of war crimes and genocide in Ukraine, the refusal of Russia, the United States, and China to recognize the court's jurisdiction has created a skewed international legal system.

Despite the diversity of their focuses, these post-war institutions share the recognition that the national and international framework before World War II was insufficient in preventing war and atrocity. Enshrined into the charters of post-war institutions is the commitment to human rights and peace. As Michael Ignatieff writes:

> The Holocaust laid bare what the world looked like when pure tyranny was given free rein to exploit natural human cruelty. Without the Holocaust, then, no Declaration. Because of the Holocaust, no unconditional faith in the Declaration either. The Holocaust demonstrates both the prudential necessity of human rights and their ultimate frailty.[18]

3. Collective Responsibility and a Haunted Past

While many languages have three tenses of time—past, present, and future—, the past has a very different quality than the present or future. The past, as Reinhart Koselleck outlined, is the space of experience, while the future is a horizon of expectation: "Evidently, the categories 'experience' and 'expectation' claim a higher, or perhaps

the highest, degree of generality, but they also claim an indispensable application. Here they resemble, as historical categories, those of time and space."[19] One can trace the topography of the past and confirm its veracity through testimony, witnesses, artefacts, and historical documents. The unchartered future, however, is open to dreams, hopes, aspirations, and fears. We live in the remains and artefacts of past generations, some of which will be cared for and carried over into the future, while others may decay or be destroyed.[20] Awareness of living in the present is intimately connected with how we understand ourselves as historical beings. The past thus has a lingering and haunting effect on how we act in the present and future. Reflecting on whether the past fades away, Hannah Arendt argued:

> I rather believe with Faulkner, "The past is never dead, it's not even past," and this for the simple reason that the world we live in at any moment *is* the world of the past; it consists of the monuments and the relics of what has been done by men for better or worse; its facts are always what has *become* (as the Latin origin of the word: *fieri—factum est* suggests). In other words, it is quite true that the past *haunts* us; it is the past's function to haunt us who are present and wish to live in the world as it really is, that is, has *become* what it is now.[21]

As Arendt writes, "it is the past's function to haunt us" because the world that we now live in is the world of the past. To be haunted by the past pertains not only to the visible residues around us; in its most basic sense, our spectral existence is an ethical question of how to live with the dead. Building on Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, Hans Ruin calls our attention to the unique social space and sense of historicity that the living share with the dead: "To be historical is to live with the dead."[22] Never Again occurs at the fundamental level of *Mitsein*, of "being with" others—as dead, living, or unborn. In our everyday life, we are with many different people—physically, spiritually, and mentally; however, as Ruin underscores, we share a unique space with them. As he writes, "the living *share* a world with the dead in which they are compelled not only to carry on but also to care for, elaborate, criticize, and enact their inheritance."[23] Given that we share a social space with the dead, the promise of Never Again occurs at a very deep level of *Mitsein* because our sense of self as a conscious historical being is rooted in the past. As Ruin underscores, "There is a peculiar *being with* the dead that determines human existence down to its basic condition and sense of self."[24]

The traditions into which we are born or choose to adopt influence how we live with our predecessors at individual and communal levels. One needs to learn, as Jacques Derrida argues, how to live with traces of the past. "No *being-with* the other, no *socius* without this *with* that

makes *being-with* in general more enigmatic than ever for us."[25] By promising not to remain indifferent to atrocity, the figure of the ghost is conjured. The ghost of those who are absent has its own liminal presence. Of utmost importance is the sense that we are part of a historical continuum in which we confront our heritage: "And this being-with-specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (SM xviii–xix). As Derrida emphasizes, ghosts may be conjured from the past as well as appear from the future. In its strangely liminal incarnation, the ghost exists in between different tenses of time, and signals how time itself is out of joint (SM xix–xx). Never Again thus conjures up the possibility of a return to the violence of the past: "At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back; in the future, said the powers of old Europe in the last century, it must not incarnate itself, either publicly or in secret" (SM 39).

The promise of Never Again connects the present generation with those who experienced war in order to prevent its return. As Baer and Sznaider argue, "ghosts are more than literally dead bodies. Rather, they are representative of a different potentiality, an agency of the event even after its supposed end" (MF 20). The haunting presence of the past is linked with questions of ethics and justice. Indeed, Never Again warns of regression to violence if individuals choose not to act when early signs appear. Hence, the importance of invoking the past is to remind individuals of its possible return. As they underscore:

> Ghosts are a fundamental component of the ethics of Never Again. The promise contained in the Never Again formula can only be satisfied by a constant invocation of the past, by linking it to a present that suffers not only its consequences but also the latent potential of recurrence. (MF 55)

At its core, the imperative of Never Again calls on individuals to confront the heritage into which they are born. Temporally, it functions much like Edmund Burke's "great primeval contract," Walter Benjamin's "secret agreement between . . . [past and present] generations," and Dipesh Chakrabarty's "innate connection . . . between intergenerational time."[26] Moreover, Never Again presents individuals with the inheritance of the past as a blessing and a burden, as well as with various ways in which we are implicated in history. Most concretely, the ethics of Never Again address the kind of responsibility we owe to one another for the actions of previous generations. Derrida writes, "No justice—let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws—seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present" (SM xix).

The ethics of Never Again is part of a larger question of whether individuals have obligations to remember the past, and if so, on what grounds. The phrase appeals to traditional ideas of conscience, judgment, political action, new beginnings, remembrance, responsibility, and accountability. In his book, *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit argues that individuals care about one another and the world.[27] However, unlike Heidegger, who maintains that care (*Sorge*) is primarily directed toward our own death and toward the future into which we are thrown, for Margalit, individuals may care even more about the past than the future (EM 35).[28] Indeed, as he underscores, communities are connected by the shared pasts that individuals remember:

> But whereas Heidegger stresses the essential role of the future in his idea of caring, I stress the importance of the past. When we care about another, we find it natural to expect the other to be one with whom we share a common past and common memories. (Ibid.)

Thick communities of memory, for him, are exemplified by specific individuals who care about one another. Thin communities of memory, on the other hand, refer to all human beings in the world. As he writes, morality guides our behavior toward others because they are "fellow human beings"—hence, the thin relations between us (EM 37). Ethics, on the other hand, "guides our thick relations" (ibid.). Because questions of memory, for Margalit, are predominanly about how individuals care about and remember a shared past, they are ethical rather than moral. In sharing a common past, the bonds of kinship in the thick communities of memory are stronger (EM 37–8). Following Margalit's argument, because Never Again makes universal claims based on our common humanity to prevent war and violence everywhere, we can say that it is based on thin communities of memory:

> The scope of ethics is determined by our thick relations, which determine who our metaphorical neighbor is. But then the hard question arises, What thick relations? The actual ones we happen to have, or the ones we are assumed to have or ought to have, which might, in their most extensive scope, encompass all humankind? Thus morality turns into ethics. (EM 45)

Because Never Again is a universal promise, it is precisely the "metaphorical neighbor" who becomes the most important—as the neighbor who helped others, or as the neighbor who disappeared or was deported, as the neighbor who turned others away, or as the neighbor who chose not to intervene. Again, following Margalit's distinction, Never Again is based on thin communities of memory in which we are connected to one another as fellow human beings, despite our different pasts. The promise of not repeating atrocity lies between the universal and the particular; allowing us to imagine a better world

that is bound by thin communal bonds. World wars were experienced very differently depending on one's government, nation, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, class, age, and ethnicity. As the different narratives of World War II indicate, there are clashing memories of the war and its aftermath—whether the war is remembered as liberation or occupation, or viewed through the prism of victim, perpetrator, bystander, or collaborator. There are different beginnings to, and names for, the same war—originating in 1939 as World War II—as it is narrated in the west, or beginning in 1941 as the Great Patriotic War—as it is remembered in Russia. The years of Nazi and Soviet alliance (1939–1941) are remembered differently and the dates of the end of the war are different (May 8, May 9, etc.).

As to the question of whether there are "minimal shared moral memories"—what humanity should remember—, Margalit is clear that humanity ought to remember "striking examples of radical evil and crimes against humanity, such as enslavement, deportations of civilian populations, and mass exterminations" (EM 78). While he distinguishes between thick and thin communities of memory and is unwavering in his conviction that acts of radical evil should be remembered universally, he does not address the different kinds of responsibility that are implicit in remembering and learning from the past. It is at this point that Arendt's distinction between political and collective responsibility is most germane to the obligations contained within the imperative of Never Again (RJ 147–9).[29]

In her conclusion to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), Arendt argued that we have ethical obligations to critically evaluate what we have inherited in order to judge how to act in the present (EJ 297–8). Her discussion of collective and political responsibility is helpful for thinking about what kind of obligations are implied in the promise of Never Again. As she writes, governments bear political responsibility for previous deeds, while the individuals who form nations have a vicarious responsibility for actions committed in their name—whether in the present or the past: "Every government assumes political responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past" (EJ 298). Responsibility, Arendt argues, is not contingent on thick or thin communities of memory but rather on the fact that we are born into and participate in communities: "It means hardly more, generally speaking, than that every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors" (ibid.). Unlike Heidegger's claim that we are thrown into a world that preceded us, for Arendt, in living amongst people in a community, we are born into a historical continuum of social

relations—and thus we are responsible for their sins and blessings: "Wherever men live together, there exists a web of human relationships which is, as it were, woven by the deeds and words of innumerable persons, by the living as well as by the dead."[30] The community that we are born into contains the social space of the living, the dead, and the unborn because we are born into a world that we share. As she writes,

> The common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our lifespan into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us.[31]

In contrast to Karl Jaspers, who distinguished four types of guilt after National Socialism—criminal, moral, political, and metaphysical—, Arendt argues that responsibility is collective while guilt is individual.[32] As she writes: "There is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them" (RJ 147). Guilt occurs at the individual level, while collective responsibility is connected to the community that one belongs to. Unlike Jaspers, Arendt argues against collective guilt: "Where all are guilty, nobody is" (ibid.). It is precisely the "responsibility for things one has not done" that is central to the promise of Never Again. We are obligated and liable for actions in the past because we are born into a historical continuum. Responsibility, however, is not the same as remembrance. Responsibility is a response to others and is linked to action, hence the difficult promise of Never Again, which vows not to repeat the violence of the past. Responsibility is a response to and recognition of, as Michael Rothberg argues, ways in which we are implicated as subjects "for things we have not done."[33] For Arendt, "it is only in a metaphorical sense that we can say we *feel* guilty for the sins of our fathers or our people or mankind, in short, for deeds we have not done, although the course of events may well make us pay for them" (RJ 147).

Collective responsibility is linked to what Arendt refers to as "political predicaments" as opposed to legal ones, which refer to what the individual has done, not the group. Individuals are judged according to their actions (RJ 148). Collective responsibility fulfils two conditions:

> I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve, that is, a membership which is utterly unlike a business partnership which I can dissolve at will. (RJ 149)

Responsibility is political by nature because it is linked with the group to which one belongs. Because collective responsibility concerns the

community into which we are born as individuals, we are responsible for the actions of the previous generations. It is impossible for us to live outside a community. As Arendt emphasizes, the world is the one community to which we all belong. We cannot leave it but are born into it. Where Arendt is most original is in her discussion of vicarious responsibility:

> This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community. (RJ 157–8)

How can responsibility be vicarious? Is it at the level of affect and the sentiments? Is it linked to conscience and judgment? The adjective "vicarious" is defined as "experienced or realized through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another." "Vicarious" denotes an action that has been delegated to someone else. It means serving in someone's or something's stead. Because we are born into a historical continuum and inherit political institutions with their corresponding legal frameworks, we are vicariously responsible for the actions of our predecessors.

Arendt's definition of vicarious responsibility shares much with Jeffrey K. Olick's argument for the "politics of regret" in his analysis of public apologies and official acknowledgements of controversial pasts.[34] Moreover, her definition of vicarious responsibility is the epigraph to Rothberg's book, *The Implicated Subject*, which examines how individuals are implicated both actively and vicariously in structures of injustice.[35] Although there are similarities here to Judith Butler's attention in their work to human vulnerability and precarity, Arendt does not focus on the face of the other. For Butler, precarity is the conceptual lens through which vulnerability is understood.[36] Moreover, as they outline in *Frames of War* and *Precarious Life*, vulnerability and mourning are deeply connected to how political communities are defined, and to how those who are mourned, are recognized. Following Emmanuel Levinas, Butler grounds responsibility in the face of the other, while Arendt grounds our relations to one another in the world that we share.[37] Regret, implication, precarity, and vulnerability are thus examples of vicarious responsibility for the other, as well as of the need for judging when and how to act collectively. According to Arendt, responsibility is grounded in the fact that we are born into a shared world. While we may live in different communities, the one community that we all share is the world. She writes:

> We can escape this political and strictly collective responsibility only by leaving the community, and since no man can live without

> belonging to some community, this would simply mean to exchange one community for another and hence one kind of responsibility for another. (RJ 150)

The reference for Arendt's moral considerations and reflections on responsibility is the world rather than the self: "In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world" (RJ 153). Never Again occurs at the nexus of the universal and the particular, individual and collective responsibility, and the self and the world. Moreover, Never Again is a judgment calling for individuals to act together. Action, as Arendt argued, can be actualized only in communities (RJ 105–6). As she outlined in *The Human Condition*, two of the most important faculties of action are promising and forgiving: "The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises" (HC 237). Promising and forgiving depend on plurality. They depend "on the presence and acting of others" (ibid.). Arendt traces the power of promising both to the Roman legal system with its agreements and treaties and to the covenants in the Old Testament: "At any rate, the great variety of contract theories since the Romans attests to the fact that the power of making promises has occupied the center of political thought over the centuries" (HC 244). She marvels at the power that emerges when people act together and that that disappears when they are no longer together: "The force that keeps them together, as distinguished from the space of appearances in which they gather and the power which keeps this public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract" (HC 244–5).

Never Again thus is not only a promise to prevent atrocity; it also requires the capacity for judging when to act collectively. The faculty of judgment differs from that of thinking because judging, as Arendt emphasizes, deals with particulars. Judging requires an "enlarged mentality" that considers the perspective of others.[38] Moreover, the ability to judge a particular act occurs within a *sensus communis* or shared common world.[39] Baer and Sznaider interpret Arendt's reading of Kant's "*enlarged thought* as the condition for what we could call today an ethics of Never Again . . . [and assert that] the condition of Never Again means to place ourselves at the standpoint of others without giving up our own" (MF 149). As they write, an enlarged mentality means that the universal and the particular constitute one another. It was precisely to the world as an international community with institutional obligations to prevent war and violence, based on the tenet of Never Again, that President Zelensky made his powerful speeches to the United Nations, the European Union, national governments, and the World Economic Forum at Davos, pleading for assistance and

military intervention to resist Russian aggression. When he spoke at Davos in May, Zelensky directly addressed post-war institutions and governments:

> Not to react, but to act. And act preventively. And not only to adapt what we have to the new realities, but also to create new tools. New precedents. Look at what Ukraine has already done. We have set a historical precedent for courage. Without listening to those who said that our defense would not last longer than a few days. We have stopped the Russian army, which was called the second in the world, and at the cost of heavy fighting and thousands of lives, we are gradually driving the occupiers out of our land. But would we have to do that if we had been listened to last year and if the full range of sanctions that can knock down any aggressor had been applied fairly and preventively against the Russian Federation? I'm sure the answer is "no." Preventing war would be guaranteed if the world's actions had been preventive rather than responsive.[40]

4. Melancholic Imprisonment in Memory

While time is expressed in verb tenses indicating past, present, and future, the words "never" and "again" are adverbs that modify verbs and adjectives. Never is the opposite of always and means "not at any time." "Never" indicates finality and the end of an activity. "Again," on the other hand, denotes repetition, another time, or one more time. "Again" indicates the return of a previous time or place, or the possibility of a reoccurring event. By combining the two adverbs, the phrase Never Again refers to past events that we not only wish to discontinue but also prevent from returning.

The ethics of Never Again, as Baer and Sznaider contend, is based on the twin poles of despair and hope—despair for the human capacity for cruelty and hope to avert its violent return. Unlike the melancholic gaze of Benjamin's angel of history, Never Again posits that future generations can learn from the past and act together: "The ethics of Never Again relies on the memory of events, which reveal what happens when taboos are broken" (MF 149). It is thus rooted in the fear of regression and return of violence. Never Again conjures up the past as a specter that haunts the present with its rupture of linear time. "When we think about the past, it looks like a specter is haunting our global world, and this is the specter of a fallen angel, the angel of history painted by Paul Klee from almost 100 years ago" (MF 1). Like Klee's "Angelus Novus," who is trying to move toward the future, the gaze of Never Again is fixed on the catastrophic past:

> His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward

> the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[41]

It is the fixation on the past as "one single catastrophe" and "wreckage upon wreckage" in tandem with the desire to "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" that is tragic. Unlike G.W.F. Hegel's spirit of history that moves toward the future with the consciousness of freedom, Benjamin's angel of history cannot stop looking at the past. Is the inability of national governments and post-war institutions to prevent war from returning to Europe an example of how the ethics of Never Again is caught in the melancholic gaze of past catastrophes at the expense of collectively acting to prevent new ones? Does the imperative of Never Again assume that remembrance automatically results in learning from the past? In his speech to the German Parliament, Zelensky criticized the incongruence of remembering the Nazi past in tandem with its political and economic policy toward Russia:

> You are like behind the wall again. Not the Berlin Wall. But in the middle of Europe. Between freedom and slavery. And this wall grows stronger with each bomb that falls on our land, on Ukraine. . . . When we told you that Nord Stream was a weapon and a preparation for a great war, we heard in response that it was an economy after all. Economy. Economy. Economy. But it was cement for a new wall.[42]

Like the angel of history, excessive attention to the past may unwittingly imprison individuals in ritualized remembrance while neglecting injustices that occur in the present. Melancholic imprisonment takes many forms. For Benjamin, it is the inability to look away from the pile of catastrophes so that one is propelled backward toward the future. For François Hartog, individuals are suspended on a "treadmill of an unending now."[43] Moreover, "the future is a time of disasters, and ones we have, moreover, brought upon ourselves."[44] Reflecting on historicity after the Cold War, Hartog argues that presentism is the predominant way of thinking about historical time since the end of Communism. Presentism, for him, is a new regime of historicity that is synonymous with a "stagnating present" in which "the future is perceived as a threat not a promise."[45] Unlike the modern regime of historicity that posits the future as one of progress, the presentist understanding of the future is overwhelmed under the weight of the past. Indeed, it becomes

increasingly difficult to imagine alternatives to the elongated present.

Ritualized remembrance may inadvertently turn the promise to avert future violence into a mythical moment of reflection that is suspended in time. By refusing to continue traditions of the past, Never Again exemplifies Friedrich Nietzsche's critical use of history.[46] At the most fundamental level, how we understand ourselves as historical beings is influenced by our interpretation of the past. Nietzsche's critique of the historicism of the nineteenth century for its excess of historical consciousness is deeply relevant for the crumbling of Never Again with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As he writes,

> Only so far as history serves life will we serve it: but there is a degree of doing history and an estimation of it which brings with it a withering and degenerating of life: a phenomenon which is now as necessary as it may be painful to bring to consciousness through some remarkable symptoms of our age. (ADH 7)

Disproportionate attention to the past may lessen the potential for acting by bringing about "a withering and degenerating of life." At issue for Nietzsche is how individuals suffer from a "consuming historical fever" that brings about the "decay" of individuals (ADH 8). By living in the past, one loses the ability to judge how to act in the present. Instead, as Nietzsche writes, one risks becoming "a gravedigger of the present" (ADH 10). Hence, we need to learn how to live "within a horizon" between memory and forgetting (ibid.). While not advocating amnesia, Nietzsche argues for a balance between memory and forgetting by criticizing the German culture of the nineteenth century that was obsessed with remembering and memorializing the past.

In his second "Untimely Meditation," *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*), Nietzsche outlines three kinds of history—monumental, antiquarian, and critical—and asserts: "That life requires the service of history, however, must be understood just as clearly as the proposition we intend to prove later—that an excess of history is detrimental to life" (ADH 14). It is not that one mode or kind of history is better than another. Rather, Nietzsche underscores how they affect our attitudes toward the past and future. As Ruin reminds us, Nietzsche's text is concerned with the role of historical education for life.[47] If a monumental attitude or historical sense emphasizes great events and leaders in the past while minimizing the importance of the present, the antiquarian approach focuses on preserving and archiving traces of the past for veneration (ADH 18–20). The critical attitude toward history, however, aims "to shatter and dissolve something to enable . . . [one] to live" by condemning links between past and present (ADH 21). With an excess of monumental history, parts of the past are forgotten, so that "only

single embellished facts stand out as islands" (ADH 17). By extension, as Timothy Snyder argues, when Russia became the legitimate heir to the Soviet Union at the United Nations' Security Council and European policies of remembrance identified Soviet suffering primarily with Russia, the complex history of other Soviet republics, most notably that of Ukraine, was marginalized.[48] An excess of antiquarian history mummifies the past causing the present to decay. To prevent such degeneration, critical history is needed in moderation. As Nietzsche underscores, critical history enables individuals to judge which aspects of the past should be continued, revered, venerated, and emulated; critical history drags the past "to the bar of judgment, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it" (ADH 21–2). However, an excessive use of critical history forgets that we are part of a historical continuum, and Nietzsche reminds us that "since we happen to be the results of earlier generations we are also the results of their aberrations, passions and errors, even crimes; it is not possible quite to free oneself from this chain" (ADH 22).

Implicit within Never Again is the recognition that the tendency to violence is latent within individuals and governments, hence the need to commemorate the past to prevent its return. However, when remembrance is ritualized, the past mummifies. As Nietzsche wrote, "There is a degree of *insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people or a culture*" (ADH 10). With Russia's annexation of Crimea, the intervention in the Donbas since 2014, and the dramatic build-up of its military at the borders of Ukraine during the winter of 2021–2022, western governments and international organizations became unwitting spectators to the horror unfolding on our screens. As Nietzsche had warned, an excess of historical sense hinders one's capacity to act and such a person "has become a spectator merely enjoying himself and strolling around and brought to a condition which can hardly be altered for a moment even by great wars and great revolutions" (ADH 28).

Since the specter of catastrophe comes from two directions—the past and its possible return in the future—"not yet" is the corollary to "never again." As Baer and Sznaider write, "The catastrophe is there in the future, not in the past. It is not based on 'never again' but on 'not yet'" (MF 25). Hence, it is not only the dead who have a spectral presence but the future as well:

> The logic of Never Again tells those who use it that an event is already over; that the past, the catastrophe, is already past. By embracing the Never Again paradigm, social actors construct a new temporal framework that represents the past and the present as radically different and antagonistic. However, while the catastrophe

> is placed behind us, it is situated in the future as well as a ghastly possibility. (MF 4)

Like Nietzsche's critical history, the antagonism between past and present requires more than a melancholic culture of remembrance; it requires education about violent tendencies that are latent in the present. Never Again demands the ability to think from the point of view of others, as well as the recognition of their vulnerability. A critical use of history aims to break free of the past, to tear it up from its roots to avoid its repetition. However, as Theodor W. Adorno underscored in the 1960s, it is far easier to condemn the past than to work through its aftermath in the present: "We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer alive. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain, to this very day, unbroken."[49]

5. Concluding Remarks

The promise of Never Again occurs at a very deep level of *Mitsein*, in which we share a unique social space with the living and the dead. Never Again looks simultaneously back to the past and forward to the future. In promising not to repeat the violence of the past, Never Again is grounded in our collective responsibility toward others. Such responsibility originates, as Arendt argued, in an understanding that we have a vicarious responsibility to one another, and that we are liable for things in which we as individuals may not have participated, because we live in a shared world. However, when the past is predominantly viewed with a melancholic gaze and excessive critical history, the spectral link of being with others that occurs between past and future is overshadowed by an elongated present tense. Never Again is based on the premise that remembering past violence might enable individuals and organizations to learn from the past in order to prevent its reoccurrence. And yet, as the war in Ukraine demonstrates, promises of Never Again are not a guarantee for peace. While Tony Judt acknowledged the centrality of the Holocaust for European identity, he also warned of the risks of "indulging to excess the cult of commemoration."[50] Like Nietzsche and Hartog, he maintained that "to memorialize the past in edifices and museums is also a way to contain and even neglect it—leaving the responsibility of memory to others."[51] As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine indicates, Never Again risks being silenced by the politics of memory and national interests.

While commemorations honor the dead, museums and monuments represent historical experience in profound ways. As Arendt wrote, echoing Faulkner, the past is never past.[52] Indeed, as she contends, it

is the very function of the past to haunt the present because we live in the remains of previous worlds and share a unique social space with the dead. When remembrance is frozen or reduced into a melancholic gaze of catastrophe and present violence is measured against previous violence, the ability to act is postponed in favor of looking backward. Primo Levi's words, quoted in the epigraph of this article, thus capture the *urgency* of Never Again. "It happened therefore it can happen again . . . . and it can happen everywhere."[53]

As President Zelensky emphasizes, Never Again requires far more than the duty of remembrance. As a promise not to repeat the past, we can conclude that it requires an enlarged mentality, recognition that we share the world with our metaphorical neighbors, openness to listen to the perspective of the other, and the ability to judge when to act collectively. As Zelensky's speeches starkly indicate, when Never Again is predominantly understood through the prism of a particular historical trauma—be it national, ethnic, or religious—it becomes increasingly difficult for governments and international institutions to act in a timely manner on the universal promise to prevent violence in communities that are different from one's own.

NOTES

The research for this paper was supported by the European Regional Development Fund, TK 145 and COST Action, Slow Memory CA20105, "Transformative Practices for Times of Uneven and Accelerating Change." An earlier, shortened version of the paper was presented at the 2022 Mnemonics Summer School: "Mnemopolitics: Contested Memories and (Ab)uses of the Past," organized by Södertörn University, Stockholm, August 16–19, 2022. I am very grateful to the participants of this inspiring summer school, especially Beatriz Besen de Oliveira, Stef Craps, Astrid Erll, Alexander Etkind, Florence Fröhlig, Dariusz Nikiel, Jessica Rapson, Hans Ruin, Hanna Teichler, and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa for their insightful suggestions for improvement, as well as to Andrey Gavrilin, Jeffrey Goldfarb, Aneta Kohoutová, Francisco Martinez, Francesco Orsi, Merily Salura, Pablo Veyrat, and the editors of the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* for their helpful feedback and careful editing.

1. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), p. 167.
2. See Joseph Gedeon, "The Weapons and Military Aid the World is Giving Ukraine," *Politico*, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/22/ukraine-weapons-military-aid-00019104 (accessed November 12, 2022); Mujtaba Rahman, "EU Support for Ukraine, the Next Six Months," https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-support-for-ukraine-the-next-six-months/ (accessed

November 12, 2022); and International Energy Agency, "Russian Supplies to Global Energy Markets," https://www.iea.org/reports/russian-supplies-to-global-energy-markets (accessed November 12, 2022).

3. See Volodymyr Zelensky, "Address by the President of Ukraine on the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation (May 8, 2022)," President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky Official Website, https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-z-nagodi-dnya-pamyati-ta-prim-74885 (accessed November 12, 2022); and "Ukraine is Already a Full-Fledged Part of the Free World and a United Europe: Address by President Volodymyr Zelensky (May 8, 2022)," President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky Official Website, https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-vzhe-povnopravna-chastina-vilnogo-svitu-ta-obyednan-74917 (accessed November 12, 2022).

4. See Hans von der Burchard, "EU Extends Sanctions Targeting Crimea after Russian Annexation," *Politico*, https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-extends-sanctions-targeting-crimea-after-russian-annexation/ (accessed November 12, 2022); Andrey Movchan, "How the Sanctions are Helping Putin," *Politico*, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/how-the-sanctions-are-helping-putin-214963/ (accessed November 12, 2022); and Caitlin Emma and Connor O'Brien, "Trump Holds Up Ukraine Military Aid Meant to Confront Russia," *Politico*, https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/28/trump-ukraine-military-aid-russia-1689531 (accessed November 12, 2022). In spite of western unity, there are divisions, particularly with respect to continuing economic ties with Russia and dependence on Russian energy. Early on, Estonian prime minister Kaja Kallas framed the European response early on within the obligations of "Never Again." As Kallas states, "Russia's aggression against Ukraine is an attack against humanity and its consequences will be global. It takes courage, moral clarity, and action to stand up against it and stop it. We have promised 'never again.' We must act now if we really want this to be the last time. Indifference is the mother of all crimes" (Kaja Kallas, "Kaja Kallas on the Atrocities in Ukraine," *The Economist*, https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/kaja-kallas-on-the-atrocities-in-ukraine/21808581 [accessed November 12, 2022]). As the war continued, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier acknowledged the strategic mistake of Nord Stream 2; "My sticking to [the Baltic Sea pipeline project] Nord Stream 2, that was definitely a mistake. We held on to bridges that Russia no longer believed in, and of which our partners warned us." He added, "We failed to build a common European house. I did not believe Vladimir Putin would embrace his country's complete economic, political and moral ruin for the sake of his imperial madness" (Philip Oltermann, "Ukraine Snubs German President over Past 'Close Ties to Russia,'" *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/ukraine-snubs-german-president-over-past-russia-links [accessed November 12, 2022]). The Trump administration's withholding of military support for Ukraine to defend itself against Russian intervention in the Donbas in 2019, as Jonathan Stevenson argues, only served to embolden the Russian government's resolve to fully invade Ukraine (see Jonathan Stevenson, "How Trump Sabotaged Ukraine," *The New York Review of Books*, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2022/03/11/how-trump-sabotaged-ukraine/ [accessed November 12, 2022]). Likewise, see Jim Rutenberg's

in-depth analysis of the relationship between Trump, Paul Manafort, and Viktor Yanukovych in "The Untold Story of 'Russiagate' and the Road to War in Ukraine," *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/02/magazine/russiagate-paul-manafort-ukraine-war.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare (accessed January 11, 2023). For the larger historical background, see Timothy Snyder's excellent analysis in *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia*, *Europe, America* (London: Vintage, 2018).

5. Adam Tooze, "War at the End of History: Will Putin's Invasion of Ukraine Lead to a New World Order, or an Era of Grinding Compromise?" *The New Statesman*, https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2022/04/war-at-the-end-of-history (accessed November 12, 2022).
6. Zelensky, "Address on the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation."
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8. Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," trans. Edmund White, *The New York Review of Books* 31:7 (April 26, 1984), https://www-nybooks-com.libproxy.newschool.edu/articles/1984/04/26/the-tragedy-of-central-europe/ (accessed May 19, 2023).
9. Zelensky, "Address on the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation."
10. See David M. Herszenhorn, "Russian War Crimes in Ukraine: So Much for 'Never Again,'" *Politico*, https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-war-crime-ukraine-never-again/ (accessed November 12, 2022).
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12. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, "The Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust," https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration (accessed December 13, 2022).
13. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 803.
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18. Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 81.

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21. Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), p. 270; henceforth RJ, followed by page number. See also William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919), p. 85.

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25. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*: *The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xviii; henceforth SM, followed by page number.

26. See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. H.P. Adams (London: University Tutorial Press, 1927), p. 100; Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 254; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 8.

27. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); henceforth EM, followed by page number.

28. On Heidegger's notion of *Sorge*, see Martin Heidegger, "Care as the Being of Dasein," in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); "Die Sorge als Sein des Daseins," in *Sein und Zeit*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 2 of *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977).

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30. Hannah Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action," in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James W. Bernauer, S.J. (Dordrecht, NL: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), p. 40.

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37. See Butler, "Precarious Life," chapter 5 of *Precarious Life*, pp. 128–51; and *Frames of War*, pp. 12–32.
38. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 43, 70–5.
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40. Volodymyr Zelensky, "We Should Not Be Afraid to Set New Precedents: Speech by the President of Ukraine at the World Economic Forum in Davos (May 23, 2022)," President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky Official Website, https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/mayemo-ne-boyatisya-stvoryuvati-novi-precedenti-vistup-prezi-75293, accessed November 15, 2022.
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42. Volodymyr Zelensky, "Address by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky to the Bundestag (March 17, 2022)," President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky Official Website, https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-u-bundesta-73621, accessed November 15, 2022.
43. François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. xv.
44. Ibid., p. xviii.
45. Ibid.
46. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980); henceforth ADH, followed by page number.
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48. See Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*. For a more recent analysis by Snyder, see his 2022 online Yale University course, "The Making of Modern Ukraine," especially class 23: "The Colonial, the Post-Colonial,

the Global," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLfFmYWjHtc&t=6s (accessed May 19, 2023).

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52. See also Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 10; and William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), p. 85.

53. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, p. 167.