



## Research Article

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# Violence, Wars, and the Possibility of Ethical Life in an Apocalypse: A Kantian Reading of *The Walking Dead*

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**Abstract:** *The Walking Dead* is a popular TV series depicting a catastrophic and violent world. After a pandemic that turns humans into zombies, we witness the collapse of civilization with all its institutions, the depletion of the resources, and the struggle to build a new world in the middle of the wars between surviving groups. It illustrates a world of literal and metaphorical *homo homini lupus*. Some people choose sheer survival, and others try to build a moral, civil world. In this article, I propose a reading of this series from a Kantian perspective by employing his interrelated ideas on history, ethics, and politics. I claim that *The Walking Dead* represents the state of nature and the violence it contains, and illustrates the course of history toward a civil society as defined by Kant.

**Keywords:** Kant, ethics, state of nature, war, peace, *The Walking Dead*

## 1 Introduction

*The Walking Dead* is one of the longest and most popular series in TV history. It started in 2010 and by 2020 it had reached its tenth season with almost a hundred and fifty episodes. As the name indicates, *The Walking Dead* has a well-known story: flesh eating zombies chasing after the living. However, the main plot of the series starts after a zombie pandemic and it does not point to an end with a possible military or scientific solution. Therefore, the series takes the survival in an ongoing catastrophe as the subject. What happens after the catastrophe is a literal war of life and death with no sign of salvation, of turning back to the old, “peaceful” world.

The old, peaceful world not only means a world without zombies, but also a world with resources, law, rules, and a certain level of order, culture, and institutions that organize social life. After the uncontrollable and rapid spread of zombies, *The Walking Dead* illustrates the collapse of all modern institutions, and the modern world turns into a state of nature which embodies the Hobbesian statement: *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The series depicts the ferocious struggle between the surviving communities and their endeavors in building a safe and livable environment. However, this is hardly an easy task considering the ongoing threats and dangers from other surviving groups that grow more dangerous than the unconscious automaton-like zombies. With its apocalyptic storyline, the series provides efficient examples in discussing several important topics of morality, ethics, and political philosophy. It provides clues on the establishment of proto-state formations and federative structures as it shows the processes of surviving communities forge unions to not only survive but also maintain an ethical life. In this respect, *The Walking Dead* presents several concerns of political philosophy. Based on these features of the series, I will examine *The Walking*

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*Dead* as a part of a philosophical investigation concerning human nature, state of nature, history, and politics.

As the quotation implies above, Hobbes is the first thinker who comes to mind in state of nature theories. He describes the natural condition of humans as a state of war as they are endowed with same bodily and mental capacities. Accordingly, they desire the same things that make them enemies to each other. Under such a condition, humans live in a “continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of [hu]man [is], solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>1</sup> For Hobbes such a state excludes the notions of right, wrong, justice, and injustice as “nothing can be unjust,” as it lacks laws, government, and institutions to implement jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> Hobbes’s solution points to tyranny in the Greek sense of the word; an absolute ruler who dictates the organization of the society for their benefits.<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising to encounter Hobbes’s name in political readings of *The Walking Dead*. Although the series presents plots reminiscent of Hobbes’s state of nature theory, I claim that the storyline is intertwined with subtle and elaborate differences. Therefore, I will focus on a Kantian reading, as the series provides ideas approving Kantian moral and political philosophy.

Kant agrees on the violence and danger of the state of nature as Hobbes proposes. The state of nature means a relentless state of war where humans favor their own good and interests, and hence constitute danger to other humans’ rights. Yet, in his 1793 paper *On the Common Saying: That may be Correct in Theory but is of no Use in Practice* Kant clearly positions himself against Hobbes. He claims Hobbes has no morally adequate notion of ideas, ends, will, covenant, ought, freedom, and obligation.<sup>4</sup> Kant’s ideas on morality, ethics, and politics acutely differentiates him from his predecessors and contemporaries like Rousseau and Smith, as well as Hobbes and Locke. Contrary to these thinkers, Kant vigorously defends free will and moral disposition in human species. Taking these as the fundamental elements of his practical and political philosophy, Kant considers human beings and their actions that shape history and politics correspondingly. In this regard, Kant objects to the state of nature and social contract theorists’ ideas on merely selfish and competitive nature of human beings. He asserts that they condemn humans to determinism as they define human actions preconditioned by desires and predictable motivations oriented by survival and self-love. As an uncompromising defender of free will and morality, Kant disapproves the approaches of those theorists and differentiates himself from the state of nature theories of his age in the moral focus of his philosophy. Additionally, Kant refers to state of nature not as a past condition or a thought experiment in the explanation of the formation of states. He recognizes that even modern humans can experience the state of nature in wars that are not yet extinct in our world today. *The Walking Dead* depicts the transformation of the current world into a state of nature with violence and insurmountable dangers, not just due to zombie threats but also precarious encounters of surviving communities, and it shows how some groups build civil societies in order to live an ethical life.

On the grounds I mention above, I will examine *The Walking Dead* from a Kantian perspective by taking his interrelated ideas on ethics, history, and political philosophy, and question the possibility of ethical life in a catastrophic world. To do that, I will first unravel what zombies in this series symbolize for the audience and investigate the plot by examining the events from a Kantian point of view. As I focus on the collaboration of the communities in order to survive against the violence of the dead and living, I will utilize Kant’s texts, including but not limited to the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, *Perpetual Peace*, *The Metaphysics of Morals* and *The Contest of Faculties*. Due to the length of the series, I will not present a detailed storyline, but a relatively short summary and I will divide this article into two main sections: first I will focus on *The Walking Dead* and the line of events which also provides a summary for the readers who are not accustomed to the series, and then I will examine them from a Kantian perspective.

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, “Hobbes, Locke, Darwin and Zombies.”

<sup>4</sup> Riley, “Kant Against Hobbes in *Theory and Practice*.”

## 2 *The Walking Dead*

*The Walking Dead* is an audio-visual adaptation of the comic series by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard. There are several examples of zombie stories in literature and film. The early examples of zombie apocalypses focus on supernatural causes and mystical reasons that rises the dead from their graves. Like most of the recent examples of zombie movies such as *28 Days Later* (Dir: Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007), *I am Legend* (Dir: Francis Lawrence, 2007), *World War Z* (Dir: Marc Foster, 2013), *The Walking Dead* differs from the early examples by pointing to a “natural” explanation; a pandemic that affects the cerebellum and/or the brain of the human beings and turns them into walking dead with no sign of consciousness. In this respect, viral zombies highlight basic human fear of the end of life and civilization since audience witness the fast spread of the pandemic and unavoidable collapse of societies.

The zombie genre represents a literal and metaphorical *homo homini lupus* situation that refers to both dead and living, thus making social readings of the genre possible. In most of the zombie films/series, the threat creates a chaotic natural state and/or illustrates the limits of human behaviors toward others. Although references to social problems in the zombie genre is much more observable in recent movies, it is not new. Cult film director, George A. Romero provides a prominent and relatively early example of how zombie films become a means of questioning society. In Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) the main plot take place at a mall, which is a concrete symbol of a consumerist, capitalist society. In this respect the film is reminiscent of Marx’s reference to zombie capitalism.<sup>5</sup> In the film, zombies represent the horrors of capitalist society “brainwashed by the capitalistic need to consume.”<sup>6</sup>

*The Walking Dead* carries most of the features of the zombie genre. It starts with a pandemic that transforms humans into zombies after they are bitten by an infected human, yet the real threats turn out to be the living themselves. Due to the length of the series and variety of the issues it questions, it is not possible to cover and examine all the details and subjects in one paper, but if we browse through the line of events, we see that everything starts after the pandemic which brings an end to the world as we know it. For quite some time, the events are centered around the protagonist Rick Grimes, who is an American Deputy Sheriff and a symbol of the wild west, with his cowboy hat and boots. Rick wakes up from a coma and realizes that the world is not as it used to be. He encounters other survivors, finds his family, and becomes the leader of a group of survivors. After a series of dramatic events, the group manages to reach the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) where they learn that there is no cure for the pandemic, and all scientific and medical institutions that could find a solution have collapsed. This information, from the very beginning, indicates that the audience should not expect a point of medical solution to the pandemic. This revelation becomes the sign of the collapse of scientific institutions but also other administrative organizations which becomes evident as the series continue.

After the survivors find out that they cannot hope for a cure, they move on and take refuge at a farm owned by a man called Hershel who lives there with his family. In the following episodes we learn that Hershel believes killing zombies is wrong as they were once humans and keeps his loved ones and some other zombies in his barn, hoping that one day they will be treated and return to normal. Eventually Rick and his friends find out about the zombies kept in the barn and annihilate them. The dilemma Hershel presents here is indicative of the problem of respect to human beings, dead or alive. Thus, we can raise a question: is killing or torturing a zombie moral? Kant clearly positions the respect to human beings at the heart of his moral philosophy, and thus, he claims, suicide, killing, damaging, or actions that make a human a means is not tolerable.<sup>7</sup> This is the reason why we face a dilemma in Hershel’s actions as he loves and respects humans, yet zombies are not considered humans any longer. The impasse points to the uncanny element in the zombie genre: zombies are humans, people we used to know and love, but they are unfamiliar, and even severe threats to the living.

<sup>5</sup> Harper, “Zombies, Malls, and the Consumerism Debate.”

<sup>6</sup> Bishop, “The Idle Proletariat,” 237.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*.

Soon Rick and his friends, now including Herschel's family, have to leave the farm due to a zombie attack they have attracted. Indeed, this attack that occurs in the finale of season 2, becomes a turning point for the series as political concerns start to rise since Rick declares that "This isn't a democracy anymore," and whoever stays must follow his leads.<sup>8</sup> He justifies his decisions claiming that they are the best for the people. Eventually, Rick will realize his misjudgment and corrects his behaviors on moral grounds by emphasizing the importance of community. He says: "we are the greater good. We're the reason we're still here, not me,"<sup>9</sup> even though this reflection surfaces after he encounters a corrupt leader of another group, the Governor, it shows that under certain conditions the morale in human beings create a difference.

After they escape from the attack to Herschel's farm, the group take refuge in a prison. Ironically, the Prison becomes the symbol of relative freedom as its fences and walls keep zombies out. However, due to the tensions and fights between Rick and his friends, and the former prisoners, life is uneasy in the Prison as well. While they live at the Prison, they find another surviving community called Woodbury led by the Governor. They discover that this man deceives the members of his community, and attacks other surviving communities in order to take their weapons and supplies to keep his power over them and Woodbury. In this respect, the Governor represents the tyrant in a Lockean sense, as a leader who arbitrarily uses law not for the people but for self-interests.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, after a series of conflicts, the Governor kills the people of Woodbury who disagree with his revealed methods and refuse to help him on the war he declares on the Prison. He kills members of the Prison community, invades it, and forces them to flee in different directions.

Later, the Prison survivors meet at the Terminus. People of the Terminus draw survivors there by leaving signs on the roads, and railways, promising shelter for them; yet we learn that they practice cannibalism. The story uncovers that after they were invaded, prisoned, raped, and killed by another group, the remaining residents of the Terminus take over the control and they become butchers themselves with their motto: "*You are the butcher or you are the cattle.*"<sup>11</sup> The Terminus is the sheer example that in the absence of a minimum social legal or moral law, the most basic human consensuses, such as the disapproval of cannibalism, fall into abeyance. This indicates the importance of common rules or laws between communities to protect them from the arbitrary practices of each other.

In season 5, Rick and his group find a place called Alexandria, echoing the name of the ancient Egyptian city that was once one of the great cities of the Mediterranean and Hellenic world. Alexandrines are not fully aware of the dangers of the outside world since they have never seriously faced a zombie attack and managed to stay *terra incognita* from the violent living groups. They invite Rick's group to protect Alexandria. Shortly after, the Wolves attack them by using zombies. Although they defeat the Wolves, struggle and war never end. Alexandria becomes a hub of the civil communities as they start to meet other communities like the Hilltop and the Kingdom, they join forces and repel the attacks by supporting each other. Meanwhile, they encounter the Savivors, a group led by a murderer named Negan who takes extortion from the Hilltop as well as other communities. Once more the encounter is very violent and both parties lose several members of their communities and certain achievements such as their constructions preventing zombie attacks. In the following episodes, severe wars take place between the Savivors on one side and the Alexandria, the Hilltop, and the Kingdom on the other. The Savivors' downfall leads to a period of relative peace and quiet. However, in a world of catastrophe, violence never ends, and they encounter another threat from the group called the Whisperers who live among zombies, and who believe that zombies are the new owners of the world, and use zombies to threaten other communities.

I have only mentioned here the major groups and attacks; besides those, there are several relatively minor groups, attacks, and inner conflicts which depict an exhausting state of nature for the main surviving communities.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Walking Dead*, S2, E13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, S3, E15.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, "Hobbes, Locke, Darwin and Zombies."

<sup>11</sup> *The Walking Dead*, S5, E1.

*The Walking Dead* will continue, at least for one more season. Independent of the finale, it already gives us plenty of material to consider life in a catastrophic world.

### 3 End of civilization and struggle in a state of nature

*The Walking Dead* illustrates the end of civilization with all its structures. From the first season onward, one of the most basic struggles is to survive in a world where there are no modern institutions left. Electricity, water, gas, health services, military, police forces, schools, food supplies, everything comes to an end. In the absence of all modern institutions, the survival in *homo homini lupus* becomes increasingly difficult, as these structures, besides providing resources for biological survival, organize the relations between human beings in social life.

At times, the living become more dangerous than the dead as they are less predictable in their behaviors. You can “fight the dead” as the logline of *The Walking Dead* puts it. They do not think and the ways they behave are simple. But you must “fear the living” as they can be malevolent, rape, steal, murder, and make others as means to their ends. The end of the world as we know it reminds Kant’s description of wars which erase all achievements of humanity, especially the moral ones.<sup>12</sup> No law is applicable between the living communities, and we witness a fierce struggle to share the remaining limited resources. The end of civilization means the beginning of a state of nature. Kant defines the state of nature as violent since it lacks the institutions providing balance between people. He says “individual men, peoples and states can never be secure against acts of violence from one another, since each will have his own right to do *what seems right and good to him*, independently of the opinion of others.”<sup>13</sup> Kant asserts that “human beings act in a violent and malevolent manner, and that they tend to fight among themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he suggests, people should abandon the state of nature in any possible way, and “at all cost enter into a state of civil society.”<sup>15</sup> For Kant, the only way of avoiding this violent situation is establishing a public and legal state which acts as an external coercive legislation. The first step is the unification of people to create a community that could form a force among its members, and in the relations with the other peoples and communities.

We see the illustration of the course of events from the state of nature to the establishment of civil society in the plot of *The Walking Dead*. Rick’s group expands with the joining of new members, and they become larger and stronger when they collaborate with the former locals of the Alexandria, to where they later settled. But we also witness other people forming communities such as the Hilltop, the Kingdom, the Saviors, the Scavengers, the Oceanside, the Whisperers, and others. Some of these groups gather around ethical principles but others’ motivation is survival, which makes them threats to other living communities. Therefore, forming small communities fails to meet the demands of peace as they can fight each other for what “*seems right and good*” for them. Even though the Alexandria, the Hilltop, the Kingdom, and some other communities form an organization, this fails to achieve a peaceful environment as they always encounter a malevolent community that threatens their unity and peace as evinced in the violent approaches of the Saviors and the Whisperers.

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant points to the formation of a state as an answer to the problems of state of nature. The communities in *The Walking Dead* also create proto-state formations in which they separate certain powers such as judicial power by setting up prisons in different communities. Nevertheless, they adopt different rules and sometimes have conflicts about the execution of these rules. For instance, Hershel’s daughter Maggie, who used to be a member of Alexandrines, becomes the leader of the Hilltop,

<sup>12</sup> Kant, “The Contest of the Faculties.”

<sup>13</sup> Kant, “The Metaphysics of Morals,” §44, 137.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

adopts the death penalty, and executes the former leader of the community for organizing an assassination against her. On the contrary, Rick, in Alexandria, imprisons Negan who was the leader of the Savivors, a violent murderer, and torturer, and who tortured Rick in several horrible ways. This difference creates an important conflict between Maggie and Rick as Negan murdered Maggie's partner and father of her kid, Glenn, and their friend Abraham with a wired baseball bat in front of other members of the community. Although these two communities adopt different and sometimes conflicting rules as the death penalty shows, they collaborate when responding to exterior threats. It is not surprising that the series remind us of the United States where different states unite and establish a constitutional democracy. Indeed, the American Revolution (1765–1783) took place in Kant's lifetime and he shows enthusiasm for this historical event. He also has sympathy for the French Revolution as he describes it in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that he sees as a contribution to the idea of the whole:

[...] in the case of a recently undertaken fundamental transformation of a great people into a state, the word **organization** has frequently been quite appropriately used for the institution of the magistracies, etc., and even of the entire body politic. For in such a whole each member should certainly be not merely a means, but at the same time also an end, and, insofar as it contributes to the possibility of the whole, its position and function should also be determined by the idea of the whole.<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that Kant gives special importance to the struggle of different states forming a federal unity, and he seems to support the revolutions of his age. However, as evinced in his later manuscripts he supports only the ideals of revolutions as revolutions contain violence as the aftermath of the French Revolution demonstrates. Kant equates violence with savagery, an obstacle to morality. Therefore, he suggests that transformation of political conditions must be evolutionary, because revolution means a return to nature and abrogation of the positive law.<sup>17</sup>

State of nature exhausts people. Therefore, people eventually need to form a unity to avoid more conflicts and wars. *The Walking Dead* clearly shows the relentlessness of the state of nature and the need for organization of people. However, this is not an easy task in a state of ongoing war and conflict between communities, along with the inner conflicts of the groups' themselves. Therefore, the process proceeds very slowly. The course of events in *The Walking Dead* supports the Kantian idea that the progress in history occurs slowly as it is not a linear progress and is often interrupted by unexpected events, conflicts, and wars between peoples. Kant defines this process in his 1784 paper, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, where he points to the development of history. Here Kant indicates that history concerns not individual human beings but humans as a species. For him, societies inevitably include antagonism because of the unsociable character of human beings; yet humans are also inclined to sociability. Therefore, the slowness of the historical process results from the unsociable sociability of humans. Due to this conflicting nature, human beings, Kant notes, move forward gradually from crudity toward culture in which they feel more human and worthy.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this positive inclination, they eventually organize a civil society in which they can move from unconstrained, wild freedom which makes them threats to each other, to constrained civil freedom in which they can develop an ethical life. Therefore, Kant considers the antagonism a means of nature that forwards us toward culture, art, and “a beautiful social order.”<sup>19</sup>

*The Walking Dead* follows a similar series of events. First, it is about the communities' struggle and advancement even though it weaves the plots around protagonists such as Rick, Michonne, Carol, Daryl, Maggie et al. We witness the death of one, or several, of the main protagonists such as Shane, Lori, Carl, Glenn, Sasha, Tara, and Siddiq. This is reminiscent of the Kantian approach to the history as the story here is not of individuals but humans as a species. Even though the series uses the death-plots as surprise effects

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:375n, 246–247. This quotation could both refer to American and French Revolutions. Kant does not name the nation. Commentators believe he means the latter as Kant wrote the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* at the early stages of French Revolution.

<sup>17</sup> Beck, “Kant and the Right of Revolution.”

<sup>18</sup> Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 8:22, 113.



as TV series often do, I claim that in *The Walking Dead* the foundation of a civilization after the catastrophe occupies the central place. In addition to the death of several main characters, who are either murdered by a zombie or a living, the leading character Rick disappears in season 9, episode 5 with no clue left behind. People change, the story continues, surviving groups try to build a non-violent world as they severely suffer from the violence, savagery, and unpredictability of the war in addition to zombie threats.

Some of the groups strive forward to organizing a civil community where they live in a civil freedom. However, state of nature makes building a civil society difficult for several reasons. *The Walking Dead* exemplifies that people should decide first which behaviors are allowed and which are punished in a society and how to make the distinction; in other words, they must build a judicial system. Undeniably, in the series, people have the experience of a former rule-governed social world which could provide an example so as to facilitate establishing certain rules and institutions to be implemented. Yet, the process shows the opposite; even though you have examples or ideas of a civil society, controlling exterior facts such as the attacks of hostile communities or inner conflicts seems impossible. Because, as Kant describes, wars interrupt the history, and erase the civil achievements and force people to start over. Due to this fact, Kant addresses the foundation of a “beautiful social order” as the most difficult human problem that is impossible to solve perfectly.<sup>20</sup> *The Walking Dead* represents this problem as the process toward an ethical life is interrupted either by the dead or the living or both, and sometimes they have to start over until they reach a level of power over their members, unite their forces with other communities, and secure their environment against common threats. To understand the difficulty of the process I will turn to Kant and his ideas on war.

## 4 War as the greatest obstacle to morality and progress

In *The Walking Dead* the picture looks Hobbesian: *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all. However, the series also shows that there is not just one human nature which is defined by competition and survival but also another defined by solidarity and morality. Moral standpoint differentiates Kant from state of nature theorists like Hobbes as Kant unquestionably asserts that a human being is a free moral being, which is evident in the sacrifice of their selfish desires, even the basic drive of survival which manifests itself in the acts of self-sacrifice to protect others. Therefore, morality has the utmost importance in Kant’s philosophy as he remarks that “the highest end, the ultimate aim of nature ... is properly directed only to what is moral.”<sup>21</sup> Hence he is against wars as he asserts that war is undesirable to any reasonable human being as it is “the greatest obstacle to morality and invariable enemy of progress.”<sup>22</sup> With reference to Hume, he describes parties at war like “two drunken wretches bludgeoning each other in a china shop,”<sup>23</sup> they would destroy what they want. Additionally, if they survive, healing their wounds takes time. *The Walking Dead* evidently demonstrates that as the struggle between the living communities continues, they continue losing their social, moral, and material achievements.

Kant is undoubtedly against wars of any kind. As I mentioned before, he regards war as the enemy of morality and ethical life. He claims in *Perpetual Peace* that reason condemns war and posits peace as moral duty. Even though perpetual peace is only an idea, it is our duty to have it as a purpose and orient our social endeavors toward its realization. Kant asserts, “by working toward this end, we may hope to terminate the disastrous practice of war.”<sup>24</sup> He states:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A801/B829, 675.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, “The Contest of Faculties,” 189.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, “The Metaphysics of Morals,” 174.

Now, moral-practical reason within us pronounces the following irresistible veto: *There shall be no war*, either between individual human beings in the state of nature, or between separate states, which, although internally law-governed, still live in a lawless condition in their external relation with one another. For war is not the way in which anyone should pursue his rights.<sup>25</sup>

Avoiding war is a duty that every single human should obey, as all human beings are endowed with the moral law. Here, Kant's ideas on morality converge with his political ideas. Moral inclination drives humans to create a civil society in which they feel worthy and respectable. *The Walking Dead* gives us plenty of examples about the importance of being moral over survival. Carl's mother's (Lori Grimes) last words to her son presents an example: "You promise me, you'll always do what's right. It is so easy to do the wrong thing in this world."<sup>26</sup> In his last words to his father Rick, Carl points that killing all the enemies cannot be the purpose of survival and asks his father to end the fight between them and the Savivors. Carl writes: "If they (the Savivors) won't end it, you have to. You have to give them a way out. ... You have to find a way forward somehow. ... That every life is worth something. ... Show everyone they can be safe again without killing, that it can feel safe again ...." And Carl writes another letter to the leader of the Savivors, Negan, and says: "Maybe you'll beat us. If you do, there will just be someone else to fight. The way out is working together. It's forgiveness. It's believing that it doesn't have to be a fight anymore – because it doesn't...."<sup>27</sup> These letters become a turning point in the series toward ending the war between the Savivors and Alexandrines and joining forces of peoples. Fighting each other for interest is savagery for Kant. Humans should progress from savagery to the order of reason. This is the ground Kant claims that human beings should form a political order, a state that secures civil rights and provides ground for the moral duties. Entering a civil society or a state, abandoning the "savage freedom," is a necessity, since lawlessness of savage freedom is a threat to others. Unquestionably, Kant prefers "the freedom of reason" which does not interfere or hinder the freedom of others.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, a civil society or a state means organizing the freedom of its members.

Nevertheless, Kant describes wars playing a part toward peace. For Kant wars draw different classes closer and force them take action for the common good.<sup>29</sup> He indicates that people will be exhausted being at the state of war and seek tranquility and peace. "All wars are therefore only so many attempts (not, to be sure, in the aims of human beings, but yet in the aim of nature) to bring about new relationships between states, and through destruction or at least dismemberment of all of them to form new bodies ...."<sup>30</sup> There will be no peace until all people unite and join their powers, and only in doing so, they cease to become threats to each other. In *The Walking Dead* people have different rules, characteristics, and different advantages/disadvantages, which sometimes create conflict among them. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the combining force of the threats and wars on them. This does not mean to praise wars, as Kant only analyzes the course of events in the history of humanity, and believes that wars, in the end, teach us lessons.

Kant claims that even if human beings reach a certain level of civilization cultivated by arts and science, it is insufficient, as they need to be *moralized* which only the advancement of culture provides.<sup>31</sup> History shows us the slow process of these stories. *The Walking Dead* presents it in a considerably faster course. What takes hundreds of years in human history takes place in a couple of seasons in *The Walking Dead* but it can show the idea of forming a union and its driving forces. In this context, the importance of forming a state is evident. Although a state is crucial for an ethical life, it is not enough from a Kantian perspective. The states must form a federative structure so that they can secure the ongoing peace. Kant asserts:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *The Walking Dead*, S3, E4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., S8, E14.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, "Perpetual Peace."

<sup>29</sup> Armstrong, "Kant's Philosophy of Peace and War."

<sup>30</sup> Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," 8:25, 114.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



Peoples who have grouped themselves into nation states may be judged in the same way as individual men living in a state of nature, independent of external laws; for they are standing off to one another by the very fact that they are neighbors. Each nation, for the sake of its own security, can and ought to demand of the others that they should enter along with it into a constitution, similar to the civil one, within which the rights of each could be secured. This would mean establishing a *federation of peoples*.<sup>32</sup>

Kant maintains that the idea of federalism expands through time and leads us to a perpetual peace.<sup>33</sup> We cannot deduce this result from *The Walking Dead* yet, but we witness the people of the Alexandria, the Kingdom, the Hilltop, the Oceanside et al. unite, and support each other and unification expands as they encounter with new people who are willing to live a civil life. Therefore, it is easy to infer from the plotline in *The Walking Dead* that sheer survival, namely biological survival, is not the purpose of living as Kant suggests. Human beings are not just selfish individual beings striving to obtain their basic needs, but they are social, rational, and above all, moral beings.

## 5 Conclusion

Kant wrote his ideas on history, war, and peace and the role of moral disposition more than two hundred years ago. His ideas have become one of the torches of the peace defenders in their endeavors to defend international peace. Others claim that these ideas are utopian and will never be realized. I claim that *The Walking Dead* gives us some clues in considering Kantian ideas even if it takes place in a fictitious world of zombies and humans. The series successfully describes the state of nature and the struggle of humans in such a state. Obviously, this struggle is not limited to basic survival as basic survival itself is a complicated social phenomenon including the relations with others.

*The Walking Dead* presents the moral, ethical, and political problems of a catastrophic world of state of nature. It points to one of the fundamental questions of political philosophy, that is, how ethical life is possible. *The Walking Dead* shows that humans should create a unified state and then a federation between the states to ensure a non-violent environment in which humans could live morally.

Unquestionably, *The Walking Dead* is a part of popular culture, yet it is also a good example of the historical process of people forming a federal union in a dangerous world. It illustrates the unexpectedness of historical events, the temporality of human beings as well as the persistence of certain social and moral aims. Some learn from history, some do not. That is why it is a slow process when considering the lifetime of a human being, but a very short period when considering the journey of humanity. Kant is not naïve claiming that there will be peace in the future. He insistently tells us that there is no way of foretelling the future with certainty, since humans are free beings and their actions are unpredictable.<sup>34</sup> He says, “for we are dealing with freely acting beings to whom one can *dictate* in advance what they *ought* to do, but of whom one cannot *predict* what they actually will do.”<sup>35</sup> Paradoxically, this unpredictability is also the ground of morality as freedom makes morality possible. The selfishness of people and nations, the expansion and conquest desire of states, the foolishness of rulers who considers war as a game make the objective of peace nearly unattainable.<sup>36</sup> However, Kant points out that human beings should have the idea of perpetual peace as a goal, as a regulative idea and do everything necessary for implementing it. We cannot expect *The Walking Dead* to show us this process in its entirety, yet it clearly presents the violence of a world deprived of it.

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<sup>32</sup> Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 102.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Kant, “The Contest of Faculties.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>36</sup> Armstrong, “Kant’s Philosophy of Peace and War.”

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