# FINESSING THE DEMONOLOGY OF WAR:

## TOWARD A PRACTICAL AESTHETIC OF HUMANISING DISSENT

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## Abstract

This essay examines peace-building communication in an adversarial world by pursuing an unlikely comparison between the crisis-managing discourse of President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev in 1962 and the prophetic Christian voice of Jim Wallis' antiwar dissent since 9/11. It draws from these cases the rudimentary form of a humanising aesthetic, in which political actors – whether resisting the demonology of war as decision makers or dissenters – devise the discursive equivalent of a stereoscopic gaze out of the language of position and vision. This rhetorical exercise in reflexive perspective taking facilitates the perception of a strategic interdependency between antagonists, confounds the projection of evil, and circumvents rituals of redemptive violence.


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*It became clear to him that all the dreadful evil he had been witnessing . . . resulted from men attempting what was impossible: to correct evil while themselves evil.*
Tolstoy 1899/2004, 391

The news of early June – conveyed in the *Guardian's* jarring headline, "The New Cold War: Russia's Missiles to Target Europe" (Harding 2007) – may have stirred repressed memories of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis when the world teetered on the brink of nuclear disaster. This time, nearly 45 years later, the Russians were protesting the planned installation of US missiles in Eastern Europe instead of the Americans confronting the Soviets over placing missiles in Cuba. This disquieting echo of a troubled past was a timely reminder of the continuing relevance of a long Cold War rivalry and its residual influence on international relations. The Cuban missile crisis in particular "remains the defining event of the nuclear age and the most dangerous moment in recorded history," in the estimation of Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999, ix), who affirm that its lessons "continue to shape the thinking of American leaders, and others, about risks of nuclear war, crisis confrontation, and foreign policy" (p. x). Certainly, Cold War culture did not simply disappear after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. With the residue of a half century of bipolar hostility deposited in our collective conscience, its mythic conjuring by today's news media and other cultural agents continues to influence our perception of adversaries as incorrigible and to reinforce our management of conflicts by coercive measures.

The Cold War narrative is not simply about irreconcilable differences and a Manichean struggle between the forces of freedom and tyranny, although this is the moral lesson of good versus evil that was rhetorically reconstituted in the Bush administration's global war on terrorism. Cold War demonology was a virulent influence in the Kennedy presidency, no less than in the previous Truman and Eisenhower administrations (Windt 1990, 59). NSC-68, which was approved by Truman on September 30, 1950 soon after the outbreak of the Korean War, conceived of the Soviet Union as a deadly adversary "animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own." According to this formative articulation of US security doctrine, America confronted an "implacable ... slave state" adamantly opposed to freedom and ruled by "evil men." This evil enemy was a communist "monolith held together by the iron curtain around it and the iron bars within it." It was a "totalitarian dictatorship" in a "shrinking world of polarized power." As a lethal threat to freedom, communism had to be contained and frustrated by superior US power in order to "block further expansion" and to "roll back" and ultimately "change" the Soviet system. The US, by this reckoning, was "mortally challenged" in a way that required it to maintain a "superior aggregate of military strength" in order to restrain and transform a malevolent adversary (Etzold and Gaddis 1978, 385, 387, 389, 391-393, 396, 401-402, 413-414, 434, 441-442). Hence, when Soviet missiles were discovered in Cuba twelve years later, JFK asked his advisors (perhaps somewhat sardonically) how the "demonologists" – which was the operative term at that time for US Kremlinologists – might explain Russian tactics and aims (May and Zelikow 1997, 107).

Rather than succumbing to the prevailing demonology in a moment of extreme crisis, President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev together opted to finesse the rhetorical divide between their two countries. They struggled against the influence

of a totalising discourse of superpower rivalry to devise a more humanising aesthetic of peaceful competition, which momentarily loosened the tightening knot of nuclear confrontation. From a communication standpoint, we might say that they engaged one another in a dynamic process of rhetorical invention in order to accommodate conflicting perspectives. In this anxiously calculated exchange, they managed to step away from the abyss, not by resolving their differences and achieving consensus or by one party prevailing unambiguously over the other but instead by coordinating their still-divergent accounts of the disputed events. The deescalating trajectory of their muscular manoeuvring and fitful collaboration on a shaky political plane of ideological schisms and military asymmetries exhibited a notably humanising configuration. In their adaptations to one another as empathising rivals, without forcing an implausible transcendence of their otherwise deeply divided positions, Kennedy and Khrushchev managed to synchronise a set of crisis-defusing actions under decidedly unstable conditions.

What we can learn about peace-building communication, and what was remarkable about this particular transaction between inveterate foes, is that the seemingly inevitable projection of evil onto one's enemy can be deflected from its usual path to belligerency. Given the cultural clout of demonising language and the corresponding force of moralistic motives for war, we might usefully reflect upon how these two adversaries turned aside such a malignant trope. Their uncommon feat confirmed Leo Tolstoy's discernment of the human condition in *Resurrection*:

> *One of the most widespread superstitions is that every man has his own special definite qualities: that he is kind, cruel, wise, stupid, energetic, apathetic, and so on. Men are not like that. We may say of a man that he is more often kind than cruel, more often wise than stupid, more often energetic than apathetic, or the reverse; but it would not be true to say of one man that he is kind and wise, of another that he is bad and stupid. And yet we always classify mankind in this way* (Tolstoy 1899/2004, 169-170).

Overcoming so strong a superstition by strategically humanising the image of an enemy, who has been reduced metonymically to the hideous sign of evil, is neither a simple nor impossible task. Tolstoy (1899/2004, 170) understood that "Every man bears in himself the germs of every human quality; but sometimes one quality manifests itself, sometimes another, and the man often becomes unlike himself, while still remaining the same man." Human adversaries on both sides of the divide are neither pure demons nor perfect angels but usually a mixture of both, sometimes more one than the other. Recognising this reality, Kennedy and Khrushchev worked themselves out of their potentially lethal face-off by interacting strategically. Short of actually retrieving the projection of a demon, they acknowledged its presence and thus managed to avert its full impact. The American side, at least, was anxious to avoid "carrying the mark of Cain" on their brow for the rest of their lives (May and Zelikow 1999, 149).

Douglas Fry (2007) has mustered anthropological evidence to argue forcefully that humans have demonstrated over time a strong potential for peace. Even while acknowledging our aptitude for "creating great mayhem," he maintains that "warfare is not inevitable and that humans have a substantial capacity for dealing with conflicts nonviolently" (p. 2) This capacity extends to "preventing physical aggression, limiting the scope and spread of violence, and restoring peace following

aggression" (p. 2). Nonviolent conflict resolution comes in various, often underappreciated forms compared to our obsession with the methods of warfare. Warfare is a relatively recent development linked to increased social complexity and to the birth of nation-states. Over the long course of evolutionary history, *Homo sapiens* have proven to be a flexible species with impressive conflict management skills. We are "the language-using primate" that regularly "'talks it out,' airs grievances verbally in the court of public opinion, negotiates compensation, focuses on restoring relationships bruised by a dispute, convenes conflict resolution assembles, and listens to the wisdom of elders or other third parties . . . acting as peacemakers" (p. 205). In Fry's estimation, then, the ways of encouraging peacemaking by promoting "crosscutting ties" between adversaries "are as bountiful as human ingenuity itself" (p. 216).

If we aim to promote peace-building communication in an adversarial world, we are well advised to consider the rhetorical ingenuity of those who have dissented successfully from a war in the making, as in the case of the Cuban missile crisis. Their communication strategies are telling indications of the human flexibility that Fry attributes to language use. Devising plausible correctives to demonising caricatures in the midst of a crisis is difficult work that must be artfully performed. Although typically taken for granted, the practical aesthetic operating in discourses that humanise our enemies enables us to imagine nonviolence as a viable option. Whether it involves resistance by privileged decision-makers on the inside or criticism by marginalised protesters on the outside, the discourse of dissent manoeuvres away from the mentality of war by reformulating repulsive, narrow-minded depictions of adversaries. This was exactly Kennedy's and Khrushchev's collaborative achievement.

## A Fitful Collaboration

The initial trajectory of missile-crisis rhetoric promised anything but a negotiated settlement. Kennedy's public posture in his televised address on October 22, a week after the bothersome missile sites in Cuba had been detected by US surveillance aircraft, seemed decidedly confrontational. The President's speech began, Windt (1990, 54-56) observes, as a "moral melodrama" of mortal combat between angels and devils, "with sinister motives attributed to the Soviets and pure motives to the United States," and then developed into a historic test of American character. "A series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island," Kennedy declared, which was a threatening act of "deliberate deception" perpetrated under a "cloak of secrecy" by the Soviets. Their "aggressive conduct," like Hitler's in the 1930s, could not be appeased by America's "surrender or submission" – certainly not at the expense of "freedom." Thus, Kennedy called on Khrushchev "to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat to world peace" so that the world might move back from "the abyss of destruction" (Kennedy 1962, 272, 274, 276, 278). The President's uncompromising rhetoric ostensibly set the world on a perilous path toward nuclear annihilation.

Moreover, Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos (1995, 112) point out that by branding the Soviet Union an international outlaw, Kennedy assumed no US responsibility for, or complicity in, such a menacing provocation. The President's "rhetorical strategy was to define the Soviet Union as a legal and moral pariah," they observe.

His moralistic stance thereby obfuscated a number of key issues, such as how Soviet missiles in Cuba amounted to a provocation, what made these missiles offensive instead of defensive, and whether Kennedy's ordering of a naval blockade to quarantine Cuba was not itself an act of war. This was rhetorical brinkmanship that backed the President into a corner where the stakes were incalculable and he "could cling only to the hope that the responsible person on the other side of the globe would blink first" (Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos 1995, 116).

This was an exceptionally dangerous and somewhat perplexing gamble on Kennedy's part, given his perception of Khrushchev at the outbreak of the crisis. There is evidence to suggest that Kennedy previously had come to view his mystifying counterpart as rough and ruthless – an impression based on their long meetings in Vienna, in June 1961, where the young president had wanted to establish that he was himself tough but not intransigent (May and Zelikow 1999, 29-30, 38). Yet, upon learning of the missile sites in Cuba on October 16, Kennedy asked his National Security Council Executive Committee (ExCom) why Khrushchev had put them there, that is, what motivated the Chairman: "What is the advantage?" he inquired. There "must be some major reason for the Russians to set this up." Secretary of State Dean Rusk suggested that Khrushchev may have been motivated by an "obsession" over Berlin. National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy wondered if it might be some kind of a "bluff." Kennedy himself perceived that Khrushchev was "playing at God" when he "initiated the danger." Rusk portrayed the Soviet leader as "completely hypocritical." Yet Kennedy remained perplexed, observing that "after all, Khrushchev demonstrated a sense of caution over Berlin," thus leaving open the question of "why" these missiles were being placed in Cuba. Undersecretary of State George Ball answered that it was "a trading ploy." Perhaps, Ball added, the Chairman was attempting "to add to his strategic capabilities." Nevertheless, Kennedy averred, "I can't understand their [the Soviet] viewpoint":

> *... it's a goddamn mystery to me. I don't know enough about the Soviet Union, but if anybody can tell me any other time since the Berlin blockade where the Russians have given so clear a provocation, I don't know when it's been, because they've been awfully cautious, really ...* . Now, maybe our mistake was in not saying, sometime before this summer, that if they do this we're going to act (emphasis added).

Regardless of the mystery, Rusk counselled Kennedy two days later that "the effect on the Soviets if we were to do nothing" would be that "they would consider this a major backdown" which would, in turn, "free their hands for almost any kind of intervention that they might want to try in other parts of the world." Thus, the US had no choice but to "face up to the situation in Cuba against this kind of threat," despite the fact that there was no more than a slight "possibility" that Khrushchev would recognise that he had to "back down" in order to prevent "a great conflict" (May and Zelikow 1997, 59, 61-62, 88, 99-100, 105, 107, 127, 129).

By hammering away at the question of motive, instead of presuming Khrushchev's conduct was simply demonic, Kennedy opened a small speculative space in behind-the-scenes deliberations with his ExCom advisors, giving the group some room to consider how the Soviet leader might react to various possible US countermeasures. The question of perspective, often expressed as "point of view," came up frequently in the ExCom deliberations (between Tuesday, October 16,

and Monday, October 22) leading up to Kennedy's televised address to the nation. Thinking in terms of point of view served as a check on the most belligerent options under consideration. It made Kennedy's confrontational public posture less rigid and absolute than it might otherwise have become if it had not been guided by the assumption that Khrushchev operated purposefully and therefore should be given, in the President's words, "some out" (May and Zelikow 1997, 142).

Taking the perspective of Western European allies, Kennedy observed that they regarded as a "fixation" the "slightly demented" US concern over missiles in Cuba and would consider an ensuing military clash to be a "mad act," especially when "the presence of these missiles really doesn't change the balance [of power]." Their concern was maintaining a Western presence in divided Berlin. Taking the perspective of the Soviet leadership, Kennedy maintained that "from their point of view" the situation of a Berlin was "bizarre" and the risks entailed by placing missiles in Cuba compared to the leverage gained were "rather satisfactory." As Kennedy saw his predicament through Soviet eyes, a military attack on Cuba (whether a full-blown invasion or a limited strike aimed at taking out the missile sites), or even a blockade of the island, would likely bring about a Soviet reprisal, such as blockading or taking Berlin by force, thus leaving the US with only one "hell of an alternative," which was to "begin a nuclear exchange" (May and Zelikow 1997, 134, 144, 176, 256).

By widening the framework of the discussion to include the concerns of European allies and to consider Khrushchev's strategic aims, Kennedy elevated the working image of the enemy somewhat above the level of sheer evil, thereby averting the full appeal of a military strike. General Curtis LeMay, the Air Force Chief of Staff, did not share the view that "if we knock off Cuba, they're going to knock off Berlin," and thus he believed that the only choice was "direct military action." Moreover, he argued, "If we don't do anything to Cuba, then they're going to push on Berlin and push *real hard* because they've got us *on the run*." The only recourse was to make them "back off" by taking a strong stand. A decision to settle for a blockade accompanied by political manoeuvring instead of acting militarily would be "almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich" (May and Zelikow 1997, 177-179, emphasis in original; see Carpenter 2004, 63-109 for a discussion of the missile crisis deliberations from the perspective of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). In LeMay's empathically challenged assessment, beating back a repulsive enemy required using a blunt instrument.

Kennedy's slightly elevated aesthetic, which eventually prevailed over the General's boorish bearing, envisioned a kind of action that would allow the Soviets "a chance to pull back" in order to avoid being attacked. Consistent with the President's previous suggestion that the US had to show firmness to contain the Soviets (i.e., that his mistake had been not to warn the Soviets early enough that "if they do this we're going to act"), Kennedy argued that a blockade now would serve the purpose of "avoid[ing], if we can, nuclear war by escalation or imbalance." It was a small first step, Rusk concurred, that the administration thought might provide "a brief pause for the people on the other side to have another thought before we get into an utterly crashing crisis" (May and Zelikow 1997, 189-190, 186, 258). Although the burden of shifting direction and deescalating the crisis was placed directly on Khrushchev's shoulders, by this reckoning he was credited with

at least the possibility of reflecting thoughtfully on his predicament. The enemy, in a word, had been depicted, even if only tentatively and minimally, as rational, or at least purposeful. In a private letter to Khrushchev, accompanied by a copy of the President's address to the nation, Kennedy expressed a desire for "peaceful negotiation," referred to the Chairman as a "sane man" who would not "deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which would only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world," warned him against misjudging the American commitment to protecting its hemispheric interests and to maintaining "the existing overall balance of power," and cautioned him against taking "any action which would widen or deepen this already grave crisis" (May and Zelikow 1997, 281-282).

But what way of backing off from the confrontation had Kennedy given Khrushchev should he decide to reflect further on the wisdom of installing Soviet missiles in Cuba? Would a reflective Khrushchev choose to respect the American naval blockade or, as Kennedy euphemistically called it, the quarantine? What, if any, turn toward a deescalating discourse might a sane Khrushchev take in response to Kennedy's confrontational speech? Would he blink and, if so, how might he save face? Was it possible for Khrushchev's reply to advance a more humanising aesthetic?

The Soviet leader, we now know, was more relieved than threatened by Kennedy's announcement of a blockade. Khrushchev had anticipated worse from the Americans, including the possibility of a US military attack on Cuba. The blockade, instead of requiring a military escalation by the Soviets, left the Chairman room to manoeuvre politically. At this point, he had no desire to "add fuel to the conflict" (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 123). Instead, his crisis-management rhetoric became alternately challenging and conciliatory as he probed the American blockade to calculate his remaining options, ultimately to give ground. He devised a tactical discourse, under the double sign of assuring Cuba's security while advancing the cause of world peace, which facilitated a strategic withdrawal without either disallowing or adopting Kennedy's construction of the crisis. Khrushchev's face-saving manoeuvre coordinated his narrative of the events with Kennedy's competing account so that the two versions might plausibly coexist as a hedge against an unambiguous chronicle of American victory and Soviet defeat.

Speaking in the secrecy of the Presidium on October 27, Chairman Khrushchev declared that "we must retreat" in the service of Soviet interests, to save Soviet power, and to prevent a nuclear catastrophe that might destroy the human race (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 284). This key moment of decision to end the crisis had developed out of a sequence of private and public exchanges between Khrushchev and Kennedy following the President's October 22 announcement of the US naval blockade.

Having been given an opportunity by the American response to pause and reassess the viability of positioning Soviet missiles in Cuba and determining that the blockade provided him with a chance to manoeuvre politically out of his perilous military predicament, Khrushchev responded initially by crafting a muscular message to Kennedy on October 24 in which he asked the American president to empathise with the Soviet position:

> *Imagine, Mr. President, that we had posed to you those ultimative conditions which you have posed to us by your action. How would you have reacted to this? I think that you would have been indignant at such a step on our part. And that would have been comprehensible to us* (May and Zelikow 1997, 389).

This naval blockade was no "quarantine," Khrushchev continued, but instead a threatening ultimatum "to subordinate ourselves to your demands." It was not an attempt to "reason" or "to convince me to agree," but rather a "wish to intimidate us" by "trampling" on international law, an "arbitrary" demand and "piratical" action of "outright banditry," "the folly of degenerate imperialism," and "an act of aggression" that pushed the world toward the "abyss" of nuclear war. "Try to put yourself in our situation and think how the USA would react to these conditions," Khrushchev persisted, and thereby understand why the Soviet Union must reject any attempt "to dictate conditions of this sort" (May and Zelikow 1997, 390-391).

Following this stern request for empathy by perspective taking, and after receiving a reply from Kennedy stressing that the American hand had been forced by the Soviets placing "offensive weapons" in Cuba, Khrushchev wrote Kennedy again, on Friday, October 26, calling for a normalisation of Soviet-American relations based on the principle of "peaceful competition" and offering terms for settling the present crisis. The humanising aesthetic permeating this long cable carefully balanced competing interpretations of the crisis on a fulcrum of shared rationality and common desire to remove the threat of war.

"From your letter" of October 25, Khrushchev began, "I got the feeling that you have some understanding of the situation which has developed and [some] sense of responsibility. I value this." Thus, Khrushchev manoeuvred himself into a position of moral equivalency with his aggrieved American counterpart, stating that "each of us has set forth his explanation and his understanding of these events." He could see that Kennedy was "not devoid of a sense of anxiety for the fate of the world" or of an "understanding . . . of what war entails." Likewise, Kennedy must know that "we [Soviets] are normal people [who] correctly understand and evaluate the situation." Only "lunatics or suicides" would "want to destroy the whole world before they die." Assuming the American president had not lost his "self-control" by "succumbing to intoxication and petty passions, regardless of whether elections are impending," he would now join Khrushchev in a display of "statesmanlike wisdom," for "everyone needs peace: both capitalists, if they have not lost their reason, and, still more, communists, people who know to value not only their own lives but, more than anything, the lives of the peoples." Indeed, "all progressive people . . . want peace, happiness, and friendship." The Soviets wished only to compete with the Americans on a "peaceful basis. We quarrel with you; we have differences on ideological questions . . . that must be solved on the basis of peaceful competition . . . . That is the sort of principle we hold" (May and Zelikow 1997, 485, 486, 487, 490).

While Khrushchev gave himself the better part of rationality in this cable, his move provided a rhetorical counterbalance to the high ground Kennedy already had staked out for himself at Khrushchev's expense in his televised speech the preceding Monday. More than just a reciprocal exercise in demonising an enemy, Khrushchev's rhetorical manoeuvre equalised both parties on an elevated plane

of reasonable disagreements and prudent diplomacy, which ostensibly would "normalize relations" and hopefully "assure a stable peace" (May and Zelikow 1997, 487-488). In this same vein, he insisted that the present disagreement over the Soviet weapons in Cuba was a matter of differing interpretations based on divergent conceptions and over which there was no longer any need to "quarrel," for "I assure you that your conclusions regarding offensive weapons in Cuba are groundless." Kennedy was "mistaken" to think Soviet missiles in Cuba were offensive because, as weapons of extermination, they could only be used defensively as a deterrent. Both parties were sane enough to understand the logic of mutual assured destruction. Even though it was apparent, Khrushchev allowed, that he would not be able to convince Kennedy these were merely defensive weapons, he felt it was important to explain that their delivery was "evoked" by a desire to protect Cuba from "the threat of armed attack, aggression, [that] has constantly hung, and continues to hang over Cuba." Thus, if the US would provide assurances not to invade Cuba, "this would immediately change everything" and the question of armaments, "which you call offensive" would "disappear" (May and Zelikow 1997, 486, 487-489).

At this point, the crucial rhetorical pieces had been put in place to temper the demonology of war with a peace-building discourse that encouraged negotiations between wary but responsible adversaries. Non-rhetorical factors were in play as well, and Kennedy might still consider Khrushchev to be "a son of a bitch" (May and Zelikow 1997, 480), but the humanising aesthetic of their communication contributed to a useful reconfiguration of standard enemy images. Neither party was reduced to the level of sheer, unmitigated, or unmotivated evil. Instead, they operated rhetorically from asymmetrical but intersecting and roughly equivalent moral positions on a common, somewhat elevated human plane. Kennedy could call the Cuban missiles *offensive* weapons while Khrushchev would insist they served *defensive* purposes. In the image of sane men engaged in wise statesmanship, they might agree to disagree on this particular matter for the sake of achieving the higher common goal of avoiding a war of annihilation and working toward a stable peace. As peaceful competitors, each operating from a different perspective but capable of imagining one another's point of view well enough to understand that their interpretations of disputed events varied substantially and to recognise that they themselves could be viewed suspiciously by allies or adversaries, they managed to empathise with one another short of transcending all discord. This was the basic form of their dissent from the counsels of war and the general trajectory of their descent from the precipice of nuclear confrontation. It was a rhetorical handshake that helped to mitigate a face off which in one sense obliged Khrushchev to back off but in another sense, as Allison and Zelikow (1999, 363) conclude, allowed Kennedy to offer more (on the issue of offensive American missiles in Turkey) and Khrushchev to accept less than either might have required.

Operating within this tenuous rhetorical framework, Khrushchev prodded Kennedy on October 27 to eliminate the American missiles in Turkey simultaneously with the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Kennedy chose to refer to this new demand only obliquely in his public reply to Khrushchev but privately offered the Chairman assurances that the missiles in Turkey would be dismantled soon after the missiles in Cuba were withdrawn. Not everyone was happy with

the deal Kennedy struck with his Soviet adversary. The Joint Chiefs, in fact, were livid, believing the President had succumbed to "diplomatic blackmail" and insisting that an air strike followed by an invasion of Cuba was the proper course of action (May and Zelikow 1997, 635). But Kennedy, "yoked" to Khrushchev in a cooperative rhetorical exchange, had succeeded in pressing his ExCom advisors to probe each option for deeper implications; "to explore ways of circumventing seemingly insurmountable obstacles; to face squarely unpalatable tradeoffs; and to stretch their imagination" (Allison and Zellikow 1999, 355, 357). It was a Cold War watershed that motivated the two parties subsequently to edge their rivalry toward détente by exploring a nuclear test ban treaty; a working bond between adversaries had been forged in this "brush with calamity" (Seaborg 1981, 300; see also Allison and Zelikow 1999, 77).

The humanising aesthetic in evidence here begins with a double articulation of perspective taking. This move involves not only speculating on the motives of one's adversaries from their point of view and imagining from that vantage point how a rival might interpret the matters in dispute, but also speaking of oneself critically from the perspective of others – allies, enemies, and bystanders – as a hedge against arrogance and self-righteous posturing. Kennedy, for example, acknowledged that the Berlin situation looked "bizarre" from Khrushchev's standpoint and that the American "fixation" on missiles in Cuba appeared "slightly demented" to European allies. This stereoscopic gaze helps to elevate one's estimation of an opponent's humanity and to increase one's own humility, both of which are necessary to establish a practical level of empathy.

The humanising tendencies of this elevating gaze are strengthened by the rhetorical equivalent of a handshake when rivals engaged in perspective-taking manage to interconnect their divergent positions – that is, when they agree (tacitly or explicitly) to disagree on certain points of interpretation for the sake of avoiding a mutual calamity and/or reaching intersecting objectives. Kennedy and Khrushchev could hold to their competing claims about whether Soviet missiles in Cuba were offensive or defensive, for example, so long as they might avoid a devastating nuclear war by agreeing to a course of action that arguably enhanced security for the US and Cuba. In this sense, the second aspect of the peace-building aesthetic involves the articulation of a strategic interdependency.

## Dispelling Demons in Dissent

How might this humanising aesthetic – of identifying, with the added acuity of the stereoscopic gaze, the strategic interdependency of rivals – apply in other venues of peace-building advocacy, and in particular to public settings of democratic dissent from wars of empire? Is it conceivable that the discourse of Cold War adversaries would contain within it a form compatible with, and even conducive to, protesting war itself? Might a rhetorical adaptation of the linguistic ingenuity these earlier crisis managers displayed in devising crosscutting ties help to break the cycle of recrimination by elevating democratic dissent above the demonising level of war propaganda? At a minimum, it would seem, something useful can be gained by at least recognising the projection of demons in antiwar rhetoric, and more yet is achieved by finessing the demonology of war, even if actually retrieving our demons is more than we presently can hope to bear. Is dispelling demons

feasible in antiwar dissent? Is this a venue for humanising adversaries by gazing at them stereoscopically to locate strategic points of interdependency? Might the discourse of protest promote this peace-building aesthetic one way or another?

Certainly, dissent is more inclined toward a demonising rhetoric of reciprocal recrimination than toward an elevating language of crosscutting ties. One need not search long or hard to find multiple examples of protesters charging that George W. Bush is the tool of the devil or, along with Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, insisting that Bush is the devil himself. "The devil came here yesterday," Chavez told the members of the UN General Assembly, "and it smells of sulphur still today" (CNN 2006). In the words of one similarly disposed, apocalyptic blogger, "George Walker Bush is the ANTI-CHRIST" (Hanchett undated; see also Hanchett 2005). Indeed, one can even purchase a George Bush devil coffee mug from Amazon.com.

Likewise, the rhetorical essence of Bush's war on terror reduces to the projection of evil (Ivie 2007b; Ivie and Giner 2007). Just as Bush is determined to call the enemy "evildoers," evoking an image of the war on terrorism as a messianic test of Christian faith (Ivie 2004), war dissenters are prone to accuse the President and other members of his administration of lying, stealing, and murdering (Sheehan 2005, 15-16), of being slimy, dishonest, greedy, hypocritical, immoral, "murderous thugs" (Sheehan 2005/2006a, 775-776; Sheehan 2005/2006b, 777-778) – of nothing short of committing the seven deadly sins of lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride (for more on Bush hating, see, for instance, Huberman 2003; Alterman and Green 2004; Rampton and Stauber 2003).

Given that much of the rhetorical battle has been fought in religious terms and addressed to a self-proclaimed Christian nation (Boyd 2005; Ivie 2007a), it makes sense to examine the dissenting discourse of Jim Wallis – himself an evangelical Christian leader and progressive peace activist – for signs of a humanising aesthetic, that is, to determine if and how he uses language creatively to articulate crosscutting ties and thus to break from the cycle of reciprocal demonising. As a faith-based activist, Wallis speaks and writes in a Christian prophetic voice, calling to account both the religious right and the secular left in the struggle for peace and justice (Wallis 1994; Wallis 2005). He is a prolific author, high-profile preacher, popular public speaker, founder of the Sojourners national network of progressive Christians working for peace and justice, media commentator and public theologian, and – to close the circle – he has even taught at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Wallis was already prominent in the US peace movement when he edited a handbook in 1982 dedicated to Dorothy Day on the subject of *Waging Peace* (Wallis 1982).[1] Does his peace advocacy, we might ask, invoke something like a stereoscopic gaze to envision a strategic interdependency among adversaries?

The relevance of Wallis' rhetorical efforts to this question of crafting a humanising aesthetic is clearly indicated by a short essay – now anthologised in a volume on the US antiwar movement – which he wrote for *Sojourners* magazine after 9/11

but before the beginning of the US war in Afghanistan (Wallis 2001/2004). The war demon is fully present and acknowledged by Wallis, who recognises that "there are dark places within us and in our nation." He asks if we have the "courage to confront the darkness in the face of evil we saw on Sept. 11" and the "courage to heal the darkness in ourselves." He warns that "we must not become the evil we loathe in our response to it." Terrorism is an evil, Wallis insists, "the ambition of a perverted religious fundamentalism for regional and global power," which radically rejects "the values of liberty, equality, democracy, and human rights." While global injustice and American global dominance are not the cause of terrorism – for this terrorism is driven by an "ideological and fanatical" force – "grinding and dehumanising poverty, hopelessness, and desperation clearly fuel the armies of terror." Just as terrorists should not be confused with freedom fighters who are "out to redress the injustices of the world," a constructive response to global injustice "should be seen not as an accommodation, surrender, or even negotiation with the perpetrators of horrific evil." Facing thoughtfully and honestly "the grievances and injustices that breed rage and vengeance" is rather the courageous and correct way to "attack" the ability of terrorists "to recruit and subvert the wounded and angry for their hideous purposes, as well as being the right thing to do." Rather than play the "blame game," Americans "must take on the prophetic role of answering why this happened or, as many have put the question, 'Why are so many people angry at us?'" America cannot hope to grasp the source of its plight except by "genuine soul searching" and should not expect to develop a practical response to the atrocities of terrorism until the nation looks "at its own sins" and, in a spirit of self-examination that distinguishes Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, faces up to the difficult question of "whether we are on God's side, rather than the other way around." The courage to resist fear and to make this a "teachable moment" hinges on our decision to "speak of the need to drain the swamps of injustice that breed the mosquitoes of terror" (Wallis 2001/2004, 134-135, 138-139).

Immediately, similarities between Wallis's humanising dissent and the earlier Kennedy-Khrushchev exchange can be observed. Like Kennedy, Wallis resists the easy turn to demonology in a moment of crisis by posing a question of motivation, which introduces an element of perspective taking. In posing the question of why so many people are angry at the US, he shifts attention to the desperate victims of grinding poverty and global injustice. Their agency intersects America's action. Even as Wallis reduces terrorism itself to an evil force, his emphasis on the injustices that breed rage among those who support terrorism promotes the prophetic act of soul searching over the thoughtless resort to playing the blame game. Peering down into the darkness of America's collective soul becomes the complement of gazing up at the plight of others. This double optic reveals the interdependency that necessarily exists between draining the swamps of injustice and reducing the threat of terrorism.

The prophetic vision, including the language and logic, of Wallis' pre-Afghanistan-invasion essay extends to his book, *God's Politics*, published during the bloody occupation of Iraq. His relatively standard arguments against the Bush administration's global war on terrorism are developed in some detail in this longer treatise on spiritual values, international relations, and economic and social justice. He argues for a prophetic politics and against both Christian and secular fundamentalism.

Neither the religious right nor the secular left gets it right, in Wallis' opinion. Just as Christian values are not irrelevant to political life, Jesus is neither pro-war nor pro-rich. Wallis' progressive prescription for the contribution of faith to politics in America is to begin listening for the prophetic voice of healing and reconciliation. This kind of biblical prophecy is moral truth-telling rather than future-telling. It diagnoses present problems and points toward solutions, always advancing the common good consistent with spiritual values. In this sense:

> *God's politics reminds us of the people our politics always neglects – the poor, the vulnerable, the left behind. God's politics challenges narrow national, ethnic, economic, or cultural self-interest, reminding us of the much wider world and the creative human diversity of all those made in the image of the creator. God's politics reminds us of the creation itself, a rich environment in which we are to be good stewards, not mere users, consumers, and exploiters. And God's politics pleads with us to resolve the inevitable conflicts among us, as much as is possible, without the terrible cost and consequences of war* (Wallis 2005, xv).

Humility, reflection, compassion, and accountability in an "era aflame with war" – rather than closed-minded, polarising partisanship, retribution, vengeance, and redemptive violence – is "the gospel vocation of peacemaking" and the moral purpose of bringing faith into "the public square" to exert "a fundamental presumption against war" (pp. xxi, 3-4, 67-68, 94).

Addressing primarily, but not exclusively, Christian Americans, Wallis advances a humanising aesthetic based on "good theology" over the President's demonising rhetoric based on "bad theology" (Wallis 2005, 13, 16, 101, 105). Evil, he underscores, is "deeply human"; not all of it exists "'out there' with our adversaries and enemies"; at least some of it exists "'in here' with us – embedded in our own attitudes, behaviours, and policies" (Wallis 2005, 5). Hence, "to name the face of evil in the brutality of terrorist attacks is good theology, but to say they are evil and we are good is bad theology that can lead to dangerous foreign policy" (p. 16). Evil exists on both sides of the equation, indeed, is inherent to being human. Thus, it is dangerous to avoid looking inward by defining the war on terrorism as "simply a battle between good and evil" (p. 101).

Wallis's "wind changing" advocacy aims to shift the drift of public opinion to which political leaders ("with their fingers up in the air") adjust their own positions. It seeks to "create new ways of looking at and talking about crucial questions that could significantly alter the framework and spirit of the current debates." It articulates "paradigm shifts" as a function of prophetic "vision" (pp. 22-23; 30). And it promotes self-reflection and soul searching as a matter of perspective taking, that is, by recognising that the religious community "is itself an international community and not just an American one," a wider community that should increase its capacity for "self-criticism and even repentance." Americans, he insists, must be reminded to "*listen to the different perceptions of Sept. 11 around the world.*" Minimally, as members of a worldwide church, they ought to consider "what other Christians around the world think about what the United States does" (pp. 97, 105, 109; his emphasis). They must, in short, listen to the prophetic voice of their own worldwide religious community to "re-establish respect for human beings" and resist the politics of fear, for fear is the root of war, according to Thomas Merton (pp. 88-89, 132).

Wallis' prophetic vision achieves a certain breadth of perspective – broader than a constricted, unreflecting view of sheer evil – by adopting the transnational viewpoint of a worldwide church, which transcends the narrow attitude of unqualified nationalism and righteous imperialism. He rises above and beyond the strictures of mere Americanism through the body of Christ. His consciousness-raising aesthetic, by way of the trope of the Sacrament, invites Americans to take communion with "the rest of the church worldwide" in order to achieve the benefit of a more global perspective, specifically to become more self-critical and less tempted by "easy certainty" (p. 141). "American Christians," he writes, "will have to make some difficult choices. Will we stand in solidarity with the worldwide church, the international body of Christ – or with our own American government," a government that reduces the "global view of God's world" to a "national theology of war" in the service of "America's imperial ambition"? "No nation-state," Wallis insists, "may usurp the place of God." Simply put, "Bush theology" is bad theology: "Do we really believe that America and George W. Bush have been divinely appointed to root out evil in the world?" Such a "simplistic" theology, Wallis maintains, "covers over the opportunity for self-reflection and correction. It also covers over the crimes America has committed, which lead to widespread global resentment against us." Thus, the real problem is the "nationalist religion of the Bush administration, one that confuses the identity of the nation with the church, and God's purposes with the mission of American empire," which is "theologically presumptuous," "dangerously messianic," and "bordering on the idolatrous and blasphemous" (pp. 119, 141, 144-145, 149, 151-152, 154).

Arguing that the wider vision of the larger religious community offers "a better way" to address the evil of terrorism, Wallis calls for a "transformational protest" that is both "instructive and constructive" rather than "just a ritual of resistance, offering a laundry list of grievances." Rejecting "the demonization of perceived enemies" and the "false teaching" that those who criticise or otherwise resist US policy are "evildoers," which is an expression of the Manichaean heresy that divides the world between absolute good and absolute evil, Wallis affirms that peacemaking is the principal vocation of Christians living in a troubled world and thus their first loyalty. His prophetic discourse of dissent renders a leader and nation dangerously foolish and profoundly misguided when they lose sight of a guiding moral principle and forget the admonition of Matthew to "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (pp. 45-47, 144, 154, 190).

By adopting a Christian view of human nature and sin, Americans are reminded that power corrupts, that no one can be trusted to dominate others at home or abroad, and that the image of God exists in every person, including one's enemies. Humility is the spiritually appropriate trait of Christian peacemakers, "while self-righteousness is both spiritually inappropriate and politically self-defeating." Thus, working for peace requires working for social justice, not by following the way of war (pp. 146, 149, 163, 171, 191, 201). The way forward – which is to mobilise international law enforcement against terrorism in the immediate term while following the path of advancing social and economic justice in the longer term – is more readily grasped when Americans consult the wider perspective of their fellow Christians around the world, which leverages a theological critique of a narrow,

nationalist religion of imperial warfare and raises our regard for the common good and for the humanity of others, especially those who are recruited to terrorism out of desperation. It articulates an interdependency that is both a practical matter of increasing our own and the world's security and a moral matter of adhering to our deepest values – that is, doing the right thing is a way of doing the practical thing. Bush is not the devil incarnate, according to Wallis, but instead a man of faith who has lost his way, a man with a messianic vision, a man without the depth of perspective that comes from good theology, a man who failed to consider the plight of the poor or to embrace the global perspective of a sacred sacrament that teaches humility and empathy over the arrogance of empire (pp. 138-145).

## Toward a Humanising Aesthetic of Dissent

Wallis' dissent from war calls forth a particular audience, speaking in a Christian progressive idiom that resonates with other prophetic voices opposed to polarising appropriations of the language of faith in contemporary politics (Borg 2006; Hendricks 2006; Nelson-Palmeyer 2005; West 2004; Avram 2004). Yet, it articulates a humanising aesthetic that in some important ways is analogous to the deescalating discourse of the Kennedy-Khrushchev exchange. Both discourses attempt to finesse the demonology of war, each with a compound trope of vision and position. In each instance, asking the humanising question of motivation elevates the image of the adversary above the base level of utter evil, where no explanation other than wickedness, per se, exists. Moreover, the question of why prompts the language of perspective, of looking back at one's own position from the vantage point of the other, and promotes an attitude of critical reflection, of considering how one's conduct has troubled the other's demeanour. The rhetorical function of this stereoscopic gaze is to humanise the parties in conflict by raising the image of the damned while lowering the conceit of the self-righteous. Such a move is pragmatic in its recognition of the interdependency of adversaries, which does not demand a consensus of opinion on divisive issues but instead promotes an act of cooperation at the intersection of otherwise divergent interests. This, in the main, is the basic form of the humanising aesthetic abstracted from distinct discourses in differing circumstance, each resisting the demonising rites of war by finessing evil rather than simply projecting it.

The differences between these cases are also instructive. Kennedy expands his vision of the crisis by considering how allies, enemies, and affected bystanders might view the issues at hand. Wallis seeks a new vision by differentiating between evil acts of terrorism and correlated acts of desperation, thereby redefining the adversary at hand, and by extending the identity of Christian Americans beyond a narrow nationalism into a worldwide body of shared aspirations, thus leveraging patriotism with conscience to open a wider space for critical reflection from a transnational perspective. Khrushchev defines missiles as defensive without disallowing Kennedy's characterisation of them as offensive so that the interests of both sides might appear to be served by the terms of withdrawal. Wallis's construction of interdependency redefines the parties in conflict, positioning Americans as Christians first and rendering the evil of terrorism dependent on the desperation of the deprived and dispossessed, so that draining the swamps of injustice will eliminate the disease of terrorism. Kennedy and Khrushchev operate with their

hands on the levers of power. Wallis speaks moral truth to power in hopes of changing the direction of political opinion and building toward a cultural presumption against war.

These and other differences in the cases at hand suggest that, while diverse tactics are mandated by unique circumstances when strategically articulating a humanising aesthetic, the stereoscopic gaze is a key resource of the language-using animal to perceive crosscutting ties that confound the simple projection of evil. It is a heuristic gaze – an alternative attitude or elevating stance – that humanises by attributing purpose to others and engaging in self-critique from their perspective. It does not seek to efface differences or achieve consensus but instead to make asymmetrical adjustments within hierarchical relations whereby each side gains something substantial. It elevates the estimation of an adversary by widening one's point of view, which is achieved variously by creative uses of language, especially the language of position and vision as it enlarges perspective.

Finally, as a humanising aesthetic of constructive contestation, discourses of reflective perspective taking build toward a positive peace based on non-violent struggle over competing versions of social justice. Dissent of this kind serves the democratic purpose of tactically resisting and strategically transforming the demonising discourse of war culture. Like Sheldon Wolin's (2004) "fugitive democracy" and in the spirit of Michel de Certeau's (1997; 1984) quotidian politics, it manoeuvres rhetorically to avoid being bureaucratised and disciplined within a governing formation and to offer correctives to ruling frameworks of interpretation. Short of transcending the demonology of war, it at least confounds the reciprocal projection of evil and disrupts rituals of redemptive violence. In this sense, the humanising aesthetic of the stereoscopic gaze resists the pull of enemy-making war propaganda. It is a form that may even link popular dissent from the outside to elite critiques inside the domain of power, thus reinforcing a pragmatic turn away from demonising rhetoric and toward peace-building communication.

Dissent from war is a quintessentially democratic mode of peace-building communication when it balances the sharp edge of criticism with a reassuring embrace of shared values in a double gesture of nonconforming solidarity (Ivie 2007a). Speaking in the idiom of reconciliation, rather than retribution and redemption, is an artful act of democratic citizenship that involves resisting demonising language, fostering the language of political friendship, and apprehending an adversary's perspective. Unfortunately, we know more about, and are more strongly inclined toward, demonising rituals than humanising rites of political communication. Projecting evil onto others instead of hunting the devil within is democracy's strongest impulse (Ivie and Giner 2007). It is a deeply mythic and dark force that cannot be confronted directly but instead must be deflected from an oblique angle by drawing creatively and strategically on the symbolic resources of language and culture. Self-critique by indirection – that is, by taking the perspective of others to reflect back upon oneself at a societal or state level – is one way to transcend partially the narrow framework of good versus evil to which war culture defaults. However political actors – those who dissent and/or decide – prompt the stereoscopic gaze to avert tragedy is a lesson we should readily wish to learn.

## Note:

1. Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was a socialist journalist, social activist, and pacifist founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, who espoused nonviolence in an era rented by war. She advanced progressive causes and practiced civil disobedience to resist both world wars, the Vietnam war, and the nuclear armaments race.

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