

Kantian Cosmopolitanism beyond ‘Perpetual Peace’: Commercium, Critique, and the Cosmopolitan Problematic

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Most contemporary attempts to draw inspiration from Kant’s cosmopolitan project focus exclusively on the prescriptive recommendations he makes in his article, ‘On Perpetual Peace.’ In this essay, I argue that there is more to his cosmopolitan point of view than his normative agenda. Kant has a unique and interesting way of *problematizing* the way individuals and peoples relate to one another on the stage of world history, based on a notion that human beings who share the earth in common ‘originally’ constitute a ‘commercium’ of thoroughgoing interaction. By unpacking this concept of ‘commercium,’ we can uncover in Kant a more critical perspective on world history that sets up the cosmopolitan as a specific kind of historical-political challenge. I will show that we can distinguish this level of problematization from the prescriptive level at which Kant formulates his familiar recommendations in ‘Perpetual Peace.’ I will further show how his particular way of framing the cosmopolitan problematic can be expanded and expatiated upon to develop a more critical, reflexive, and open-ended conception of cosmopolitan thinking.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in Kant’s theory of cosmopolitanism.¹ A number of Kant scholars have published new and innovative interpretations of his essay ‘Toward Perpetual Peace’ that have both challenged

¹ I owe a great debt of gratitude to Christiane Wilke, Jane Elia, James Ingram, Jeffrey Church, Nancy Fraser, Rainer Forst, Andreas Kalyvas, the participants in the ‘Works in Progress’ seminar at the New School for Social Research, as well as the anonymous referee at the *European Journal of Philosophy*, for their helpful advice and comments on earlier versions of this paper and its argument.

All references to Kant’s work will be cited using the Prussian Academy format, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which I will use the traditional ‘A/B’ format. The following lists the abbreviations I will be employing to refer to Kant’s writings, accompanied by references to the English-language editions I consulted for quoting Kant in translation (with the exception of the *Vorarbeiten zur Rechtslehre*):

<i>Anth</i>	<i>Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View</i> (Kant 2006)
<i>CBHH</i>	‘Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History’ (Kant 1991)
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> (Kant 2000)
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (Kant 1997)
<i>CPPr</i>	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (Kant 1996a)
<i>GMM</i>	<i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Kant 1996a)
<i>IUH</i>	‘Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View’ (Kant 1991)
<i>Log</i>	<i>Logic</i> (Kant 1974)
<i>MM</i>	<i>The Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Kant 1996a)
<i>MNS</i>	<i>Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science</i> (Kant 2004)
<i>PP</i>	‘Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch’ (Kant 1996a)
<i>VRL</i>	<i>Vorarbeiten zur Rechtslehre</i> (‘Preliminary Notes for the “Doctrine of Right”’)
<i>WIE</i>	‘What Is Enlightenment?’ (Kant 1991)

traditional readings (Kant's stance on world government may not be as simple as was once thought) and brought to light aspects of his views that had not yet received due attention (such as the systematic importance of cosmopolitan right).² In addition, a number of leading contemporary theorists have weighed in on the continuing relevance of Kant's classic essay, and a few have tried to appropriate or reconstruct his ideas to fit the demands of present-day theory and twenty-first century world society.³ Most of these attempts to grapple with Kant's cosmopolitanism have approached Kant as an ideal normative philosopher—that is, they have generally concerned themselves with Kant's *prescriptive* recommendations for a cosmopolitan order, particularly his three 'Definitive Articles of Perpetual Peace' that call for every state to have a republican constitution, the creation of a voluntary league of free states, and a 'cosmopolitan right' to interact across boundaries. I have no quarrel with this focus, which has indeed proven highly fruitful to political theory; nevertheless, I argue that there is more to his approach than his normative agenda. Kant's approach to international relations betrays a deeper, systematic view of how individuals relate to one another on the stage of world history, a view to which significantly less attention has been paid.

Indeed, one of the reasons Kant continues to inspire contemporary theory is that he was among the first philosophers to recognize the globally interdependent nature of politics. For example, Kant did not believe that the domestic and international spheres could ever be fully separated, asserting that 'the problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is *subordinate* to the problem of a law-governed *external relationship* with other states, and cannot be solved unless the latter is also solved' (*IUH* 8:24, first emphasis mine). Elsewhere he made claims that even the most distant members of the human race were inextricably bound up with one another, even to the extent that 'a violation of right on *one* place of the earth is felt in *all*' (*PP* 8:360). How does Kant arrive at these statements? And how, nearly two hundred years before words like 'globalization'

² For a sampling of this burgeoning literature, see Cavallar 1999, 2002; Flikschuh 2000; McCarthy 2002; Muthu 2003; Kleingeld 1998, 2003, 2004, 2006; Ellis, 2005.

³ Doyle 1993; Rawls 1999; Benhabib 2004, 2006; Held 1995; Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann 1997; Habermas 2006.

and ‘interdependence’ introduced themselves to our everyday political consciousness, was Kant able to identify the unavoidable interrelatedness of purportedly separate, ‘bounded’ societies? Ironically, while many of those who comment on his theory have acknowledged or called attention to his dynamic view of world society and history, few have really endeavored to explore it or comprehend it in any systematic fashion.⁴

The central argument that I want to make in this article is that Kant does not merely propose solutions to the problems of war and injustice, but offers a particular and interesting way of *framing the problem*. We might call this the ‘cosmopolitan problematic,’ which in the first instance has to do not with the *quest for universal principles* of world order but with an *examination of the challenges* facing practical reasoners who must share the earth in common. This level of *problematization*, which I will unpack over the course of this article, can be distinguished from the *prescriptive* level at which Kant formulates his familiar recommendations in ‘Perpetual Peace.’ Accordingly, I will show that an in-depth analysis of the particular (and sometimes even peculiar) way in which Kant formulates the cosmopolitan problematic can prove equally if not more theoretically rewarding than merely looking at his proposed solutions.

To begin with, such an approach will shed indispensable light on what we mean when we speak of the term ‘cosmopolitan,’ which, among other things, is all too often equated with the ‘universal.’ While the two ideas are by no means mutually exclusive, they are anything but synonymous: for while the universal concerns the abstraction of commonality from difference, the cosmopolitan is above all concerned with the unavoidable confrontation of difference on the global stage. As I intend to show, the starting point for reflection on cosmopolitanism is not unity but heterogeneity; it lies precisely in the moment of *disjunction* between the freedom of one and that of everybody else. In addition, we will also find that cosmopolitanism, far from being an idealistic abstraction, is thoroughly historical in the challenge it poses to those who find

⁴ There are valuable exceptions, of course: Sankar Muthu and Pauline Kleingeld have touched on Kant’s underlying logic at various points in their writings with regard to Kant’s understanding of history, and Katrin Flikschuh has provided what is perhaps the most extensive treatment to date of the metaphysical underpinnings of his cosmopolitan ideal. See Muthu 2003; Kleingeld 1999, 2004; Flikschuh 2000.

themselves having to share the earth in common. It thus concerns humanity not as a mere idea but as an empirical set of *interacting* participants who must learn to coexist *simultaneously*. Finally, we will see that cosmopolitanism need not in the last instance be identified with the need to impose a world order or legal regime, though it may at some level involve one. More than anything else, it is an exercise in critical *reflection* on the terms of our relations of community with one another. It is about locating ourselves in the real, historical, and always contingent set of relations that make up the human race. Above all, it is about our capacities as free, thinking and acting agents to critique, affirm, contest, and even transform the terms of our interaction with one another.

Looked at in this way, we can uncover in Kant a *critical* perspective on world history that tasks human beings with the challenge of coming to terms not only with their need to coexist with one another but with the full potential of their own freedom. Such a perspective is still undeniably normative to the extent that it takes the absolute value of human freedom as its point of departure. Yet it does not employ this normative standpoint to forge an ideal theory that contrasts itself with social reality from overhead; rather, it seeks to analyze how the potential for human freedom unfolds in the course of real history.⁵ At the heart of this way of thinking about the cosmopolitan is the concept of *commercium*, which Kant describes as a ‘dynamical community’ characterized by ‘thoroughgoing interaction.’ For Kant, the earth’s inhabitants ‘originally’ compose a *commercium* of thoroughgoing interaction by virtue of their having to share the earth in common and negotiate legitimate relations of community for themselves.

I will spend the first two parts of this essay explicating this concept of *commercium* in formal terms, first as he introduces it in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and then as he applies it in his *Metaphysics of Morals*. In part three, I will show how Kant views the cosmopolitan problematic as playing out over the course of history, as a paradoxical journey of the human race through trial, struggle, antagonism and violence, repeated failures, and subjection to tyranny, yet with a forward-looking eye to the prolonged development of capabilities and an eventual process of enlightenment. In the

⁵ Cf. Fraser 2009: 77.

final section, I will show how his particular way of framing the cosmopolitan problematic can be expanded and expatiated upon to develop a more critical, reflexive, and open-ended conception of cosmopolitan thinking, one that may even prove broader than Kant's own program that he outlined in 'Perpetual Peace.'

I Community as 'Commercium' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

If we really want to think alongside Kant on the cosmopolitan problematic, we need to look deeper into the conceptual framework with which he worked. When we take it down to its very root, we find that his understanding of cosmopolitanism is heavily bound up with a very intricate and unique approach to the concept of 'community.' Now, for Kant, 'community' is not a political-sociological concept in the first instance, but a 'pure concept of the understanding,' one that figures prominently in his table of categories as the third category of 'relation,' alongside 'substance' and 'causality.'⁶ An excursion into the categories may seem a bit out of the way for a discussion of Kant's political theory, but I will argue that the category of community plays a crucial role in its construction. Most of all, we cannot properly comprehend the essential logic of his cosmopolitanism without it.

Traditionally, students of Kant's practical philosophy have tended to focus on his view of *causality*, though not without good reason. For it is along the axis of causality that Kant makes the all-important distinction between the 'theoretical' laws of nature (discoverable relations of cause and effect between phenomena) and the 'practical' laws of freedom (where the causality of actions can be generated spontaneously by human reason).⁷ It is also the focal point of Kant's famous argument with Hume, where Kant asserts against the latter that causality is a necessary concept that subjects bring to the world to comprehend it.⁸ Causality is indeed crucial to Kant's system, but it is only with

⁶ CPR A80/B106, B110-1.

⁷ CPR A532-58/B560-86; CPrR 5:67-9.

⁸ CPR A189-211/B232-56.

community that that system can be brought to full systematic completion. Susan Shell and Eric Watkins have both noted how Kant's interest in 'community' as a concept marks an important point of continuity between his early writings (1755-1770) and the work of his 'critical' period (from 1781 forward), and Watkins has gone on to argue that even his critical-period understanding of causality cannot be fully appreciated without situating it in relation to community.⁹ Béatrice Longuenesse places great emphasis on the centrality of community and the 'Third Analogy of Experience' as a keystone of his philosophical system, and she has provided some of the most thorough analyses of them available to date.¹⁰ Henry Allison even cited his previous neglect of community and the 'Third Analogy' as one of his reasons for writing a new edition of his *Transcendental Idealism*, his now-canonical reading of the first *Critique*.¹¹

Community as a pure concept implies first and foremost a relation of 'reciprocal causality' or 'interaction' (*Wechselwirkung*), and Kant derives it, somewhat paradoxically, from the *disjunctive* form of logical judgment—the exclusionary 'or.' Kant explains that, in such an arrangement, the members comprise a 'whole' (*Ganze*) in which the state of each is bound to the others: the affirmation of one member implies the negation of the others, and the negation of all members but one implies the affirmation of the remaining member. As Allison explains, we cannot engage in the procedure of a disjunctive judgment unless we view the alternatives as initially 'coordinated' with one another without any being 'subordinated' to another (as in the case of 'if-then' judgments).¹² For Kant, the members of a disjunctive whole comprise a community where each determines and is determined by the rest. Hence, 'the parts are represented as ones to which existence (as substances) pertains to each exclusively of the others, and which are yet connected in one whole' (*CPR* B112-3).¹³

⁹ Shell 1996; Watkins 2005.

¹⁰ Longuenesse 1998: 375-93, 2005: ch. 7.

¹¹ Allison 2004: xiii.

¹² Allison 2004: 151.

¹³ See also *Log* 9:106-8.

Kant uses this notion of community qua ‘disjunctive interaction’ to interrogate the transcendental basis upon which we are able to conceive things in the phenomenal world as existing in a condition of community to begin with. He writes that the word ‘community’ (*Gemeinschaft*) as used in everyday language is ‘ambiguous,’ and he distinguishes between two ways of conceptualizing it—as *communio* and as *commercium* (CPR A213/B260). ‘Communio’ refers to the perception of commonality or shared existence, the more or less static condition of belonging together under some identifiable set of criteria that can demarcate that which belongs to the community from that which does not. Yet Kant argues that the world of experience does not come to us already ordered into discrete objects, groups of objects, or types of objects. This mode of spatiotemporal comprehension is rather something *we bring* to the manifold of experience, as an exercise in judgment. In order for this to be possible, he reasons, there must in his words be some ‘objective ground’ that permits us to apprehend the manifold of appearances as a unified but not uniform spatiotemporal horizon. This is ‘commercium,’ what he also calls the ‘dynamical community,’ the community defined by thoroughgoing interaction and reciprocal influence.

Broadly put, we can represent to ourselves an entity, a part of an entity, or an aggregate of entities that may then be identified as a larger entity; we can mentally divide or combine anything perceivable *ad infinitum*. Our ability to make such judgments—to group things into relations of *communio*—first depends on our ability to experience all the candidate parts, wholes, and aggregates as coming to us *already interconnected*—that is, in *commercium*. It is this interconnectedness that provides the ‘objective ground’ or starting point from which we intuit the composition of the world and form judgments about it. We cannot aggregate, individuate, or locate things vis-à-vis one another—and for that matter, vis-à-vis *ourselves*—without first being able to comprehend them (and us) as coordinate participants in a unified horizon of possible experience. From a

transcendental-idealist point of view, community as commercium is a necessary condition of community as communio.¹⁴

In the first *Critique*, Kant makes his argument on this matter primarily with regard to the question of how thinking subjects comprehend time. The three categories of relation provide the human understanding with what he calls ‘analogies of experience,’ schemata through which we synthesize the manifold of appearances (as it is known in Kant-speak) into an intelligible horizon of spatiotemporality. Hence, the category ‘substance’ allows us to apprehend *permanence* or *duration* in time, and ‘causality’ allows us to apprehend temporal *succession*. ‘Community,’ when conceived as ‘commercium,’ is for Kant a necessary condition for apprehending *simultaneity* in time (and space). ‘The simultaneity of substances in space,’ he writes, ‘cannot be cognized in experience otherwise than under the presupposition of an *interaction among them*; this is therefore also the condition of possibility of the things themselves as objects of experience’ (*CPR* B258, my emphasis). In the ‘Third Analogy of Experience,’ Kant illustrates his point in this manner:

From our perspective it is easy to notice that only continuous influence in all places can lead our sense from one object to another, that the light that plays between our eyes and the heavenly bodies effects a mediate community between us and the latter and thereby proves the simultaneity of the latter, and that we cannot empirically alter any place (perceive this alteration) without matter everywhere making the perception of our position possible; and only by means of its reciprocal influence can it establish their simultaneity and thereby the coexistence of even the most distant objects (though only mediately). Without community every perception (of appearance in space) is broken off from the others, and the chain of empirical representations, i.e., experience, would have to start entirely over with every new object without the previous one being in the least connected or being able to stand in a temporal relation with it. (*CPR* A213-4/B260-1)

Paul Guyer notes that it is interesting that Kant endeavors to problematize simultaneity at all, as up until then the condition of simultaneity had been assumed to be ‘directly perceivable’ and require no special conditions of possibility.¹⁵ Of particular importance is the way in which Kant grounds simultaneity in *time* by binding it to a relationalized

¹⁴ *CPR* A214-5/B261-2.

¹⁵ Guyer 1987: 267.

conception of *space*. In community conceived as ‘commercium’, time and space implicate one another and become presuppositions for one another. Kant later applies this concept in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* to link Newton’s law of symmetry between action and reaction to a Leibnizian concept of relational space (In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he will make a direct analogy between this principle of physics and his concept of ‘strict right’).¹⁶ But there is something even more interesting in Kant’s illustration. As Longuenesse points out, community is unique among the categories to the extent that our perception of spatiotemporal simultaneity does not merely require us to perceive interaction among the things we observe, but it also requires us to posit *ourselves* within that interaction as phenomenal bodies that coexist among them.¹⁷ This is how community qua commercium serves as a crowning unifier in Kant’s system: it requires us to locate ourselves in the world. Commercium affords each of us what Longuenesse calls a ‘standpoint on the whole’ that is inherently *reflexive*, inasmuch as it calls upon us to situate ourselves in thoroughgoing interaction with our surroundings. It is only insofar as we can ‘objectify’ ourselves within this thoroughgoing interaction that we can locate ourselves within the larger whole and think and act upon that whole as conscious agents.

However arcane or quaint Kant’s metaphysical arguments might seem to the contemporary reader, his understanding of community as ‘commercium’—as a combination of substance and causality as *interaction*, with roots in the notion of *disjunction*, and which is essential for *locating ourselves* in a spatiotemporal world whose elements coexist in simultaneity—is nevertheless essential to understanding how Kant constructs his cosmopolitan vision. The schema of community compels each of us, as physically existing beings inhabiting a physical world, to locate and identify ourselves relationally to our surroundings by taking ‘a standpoint on the whole,’ a standpoint that is, once again, inherently *reflexive*. But the relevance of this concept need not be

¹⁶ *MNS* 4:544-65; see also Friedman 2006: 315-7. It is worth noting that the conceptual relation between time, space, and community via ‘simultaneity’ has since found its way into sociological theorizing as well, notably in the work of Georg Simmel and Alfred Schutz (see, e.g., Simmel 1908: 616-7; Schutz 1967: 102).

¹⁷ Longuenesse 1998: 391-2.

confined to the purview of a single thinking subject looking outward at the world. Once we move from the notion of *one* person's standpoint to the respective standpoints of *many* empirically existing persons, our concept of a commercium is taken to a whole new level. At the 'practical' as opposed to the merely 'theoretical' level, community concerns the *reciprocal standpoints* of a multitude of individuals who are capable of *physically* interacting with one another.¹⁸

II Commercium as a Template for Thinking about the Cosmopolitan Problematic

Let us revisit Kant's distinction between *communio* and *commercium*, the two ways of conceptualizing community Kant mentions in the first *Critique*. Onora O'Neill once argued that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, at its heart, as much a political treatise as it is a metaphysical/epistemological one.¹⁹ If this is the case, then our example here is no exception. Upon closer inspection we can see that all along both terms have quite tangible *political* connotations alongside the metaphysical meanings Kant gave them:

Communio, as we have seen, refers to a deemed condition of commonality or shared existence. In Latin it is the same word as 'communion,' which figures centrally not only in Christian theology but by extension in Western political thought at least since the High Middle Ages, when participation in the Eucharist was taken to represent the positive community of all Christians. Later, the ideal of communion would provide the model for early notions of national community or civic solidarity, though some natural law thinkers also referred to a 'primitive' state of communion that precedes the establishment of human institutions.²⁰ The Latin 'communio' means 'mutual participation.' but it also means 'to fortify thoroughly on all sides.'²¹ Kant was no doubt aware of the determinate, exclusionary connotations of *communio* as a kind of

¹⁸ Longuenesse 2005: 206-7.

¹⁹ O'Neill 1989.

²⁰ See Wolin 2004: 91-2, 118-23.

²¹ Cassell's 1968: 121.

community defined by protected boundaries.²² In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, he uses the term *communio* to refer to a juridically extant mode of ordering among persons, such as relations of property, territory, or sovereignty. Generally speaking, *communio* only applies to a community that is established by human institutions.

The other conception Kant employs is *commercium*, the interaction community. We can easily recognize the English word ‘commerce’ here, and Kant indeed includes economic exchange in his discussions of cosmopolitan right. Yet even the English ‘commerce’ has connotations much broader than the simple economic meaning, and before the nineteenth century it was used to refer to a variety of kinds of interaction. Similarly, the Latin ‘commercium’ refers to a domain of general intercourse and communication as well as exchange. In *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant again identifies it with *Wechselwirkung*, interaction in the sense of mutually affecting one another (reciprocal causality). As in the first *Critique*, he insists that *commercium* be viewed as the more fundamental of the two conceptions of community, with *commercium* being a necessary precondition of *communio*: ‘all peoples stand *originally* in a community of land, though not of *rightful* community of possession (*communio*) and so of use of it, or of property in it; instead they stand in a community of possible physical *interaction* (*commercium*), that is, in a thoroughgoing relation of each to all the others of *offering to engage in intercourse* [*Verkehr*] with any other...’ (MM 6:352).²³ The point is that before we are nations, states, or even individual property-owners, we are free beings, each with our own standpoint, who are not only capable of determining our own actions vis-à-vis one another but who are capable of negotiating publicly recognized principles for sharing our life on earth. Any determinate relation of community (*communio*) can only exist on the basis of activities and agreements made by the participants themselves, who find

²² Caygill 1995: 117.

²³ I slightly amended Gregor’s translation. This passage is taken from Kant’s description of ‘cosmopolitan right,’ to which we will return later on. The German ‘*Verkehr*’ is often translated as ‘commerce,’ but like much of Kant’s vocabulary, it has a range of connotations. Several commentators have noted that it can mean not only commerce as mere economic exchange, but it can also refer to other forms of social intercourse—social, cultural, religious, intellectual, even sexual (See Kleingeld 1998: 75; Muthu 2003: 195; Benhabib 2004: 38; Leeb 2006: 196-7). Incidentally, this ambiguity in the word ‘commerce’ is not confined to German, but can be found in eighteenth-century English as well as French; see Hirschman 1997: 61-2.

themselves ‘living side-by-side with one another,’ who thus cannot avoid affecting one another, and yet who possess the practical freedom to reflexively and mutually shape their relations to one another (commercium).²⁴ Moreover, even when such a condition of *communio* does exist, participants still remain ‘originally’ participants in commercium to the extent that they still retain the reflexive capacities to build upon, critique, or revise the terms on which they coexist and interact with one another. In brief, we might describe this commercium as a global ‘community of standpoints on community,’ which stands as the basis for any empirically given or possible future community.²⁵

This idea of a global commercium forms the basis of Kant’s conception of the cosmopolitan problematic. There are a number of implications of this application of the idea of commercium that warrant note. To begin with, even though this commercium represents a kind of general ‘community of mankind,’ it is decidedly *not* the universal community Kant describes in the *Groundwork* under his idea of a ‘kingdom of ends.’ This is not a community of ‘noumenal’ beings; it is one of real, physical beings capable of thinking, acting, and affecting each other in real time and space.²⁶ It is precisely in the *physical* encounter of participant’s capacities for thought and action that the concept of commercium acquires practical import, through their ability to affect one another and even use *coercive force* against one another (*MM* 6:231). Commercium is a concept of theoretical reason employed in the service of practical reason: it allows us to schematize and reflect critically upon how our and others’ individual standpoints on community affect one another in the phenomenal world.²⁷

²⁴ *PP* 8:358; *MM* 6:258; 6:262, 6:307.

²⁵ Longuenesse 2005: 206-7.

²⁶ Longuenesse 2005: 206. Moreover, commercium cannot be adequately conceived in ‘universalistic’ terms. While it rests on some pivotal universalistic assumptions, such as the equal status of participants, their equal freedom, and equal capabilities to think and act vis-à-vis one another—these moral underpinnings of commercium are quite thin in comparison with what we tend to associate with Kantian ethics. The kingdom of ends consists in what Kant calls a ‘complete determination’ of maxims derived by *abstracting* from the personal differences of all involved. Commercium, on the other hand, is thoroughly *heterogeneous* to the extent that it is directly concerned with empirically existing persons who exercise free practical judgment *with full regard* to their differences. See *GMM* 4:433.

²⁷ For an interesting discussion of how the tools of theoretical reason already presuppose practical reason in Kant, see O’Neill 1989: 62-3.

Recall from the previous section that commercium is linked to the ideas of simultaneity, disjunction, and reflexivity. Kant writes that the commercium of human participants arises from the fact that human beings must share the ‘surface of the earth’ with one another, whose ‘spherical shape,’ as he puts it, unites all locations and forces everyone to coexist side-by-side with each other. ‘If its surface were an unbounded plane,’ he writes, ‘people could be so dispersed on it that they would not come into community with one another, and community would not then be a necessary result of their existence on the earth’ (*MM* 6:262, 352, and *PP* 8:358).²⁸ A first glance this argument seems a little bizarre—even specious—for surely people formed communities long before they even realized that the earth was in fact spherical. Even Kant recognizes that human beings are inherently social and do not require geographic or geologic constraints to ‘force’ them to live together.²⁹ However, his point makes more sense if we think of it critically, as a statement about the essential *simultaneity* of our coexistence with one another and the limits of our ability to think of ourselves as separate from or independent of one another. Although it might appear that we live in separate places or belong to separate nations, states, or cultures, that appearance is but an illusion. At the very most, it is a temporary condition brought about by contingent circumstances that cannot last, and it must eventually give way to the reality that we all inhabit the same sociopolitical space and must sooner or later come to terms with that fact. Jeremy Waldron makes this point by saying Kant wants to counter the supposed ‘normalcy’ or ‘naturalness’ of national, state, and cultural boundaries, which are and have always been problematic and contested.³⁰ In the end, we must be prepared to think of ourselves as co-participants in a dynamic cosmopolitan whole.

Kant stresses that the ‘community’ that is a ‘necessary result’ of our coexistence on earth is not a community of common allegiance, identity, or law; it is instead a *disjunctive* community that is defined in the first instance by our ability as free, practical

²⁸ *MM* 6:262, 352, and *PP* 8:358.

²⁹ *IUH* 8:20; *CJ* 5:355-6.

³⁰ Waldron 2006: 91-2.

individuals to interact and affect one another. As physically embodied beings, we are required to be located *somewhere* on earth, and we are required to sustain ourselves by making use of various resources we find upon it. This puts humanity in a situation where every person's freedom of action (*Willkür*) is 'unavoidably opposed' to every other's. In his notes, Kant describes this condition as a 'disjunctive-common' or 'disjunctive-universal' possession (*disjunctiv-allgemeine Besitz*) of the earth's surface (VRL 23:320-4).³¹ It is disjunctive by virtue of the fact that each of us possesses our own standpoint on the whole, which, as possessors of reason, affords us the ability to interpret the world and to act and react to those whom we encounter. The disjunctive character of commercium does not have to mean that we are averse to one another or in competition with one another, but it does refer to the idea that as participants in commercium we each always remain free to use our own understanding to make sensible and practical judgments on our relations to one another.

This points to a third characteristic of commercium that we saw in our reading of the first *Critique* above, that our situatedness in commercium is inherently *reflexive*. We are aware of our need to interact with others, and we possess the *freedom* to use our own reason to negotiate the terms of that interaction. It is indeed the matter of reciprocal freedom in interaction that forms the political center of the cosmopolitan problematic, as can be seen in the way he defines 'strict right' at the beginning of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Commentators tend to interpret Kant's term *Recht* either as 'law,' 'justice,' or as 'right' in the sense of 'having rights.'³² Yet while all of these usages are certainly present in Kant's political writings, it is clear that he intends the term to refer at least in the first instance to a kind of relationality—specifically, the relation between two more agents with regard to their respective abilities to act purposively (*Willkür*). It has to do with the 'form' (as opposed to the 'matter') in the relation of the choice of one to the choice of another, not of what one chooses or how one chooses, but the simple opposition

³¹ See also Flikschuh 2000: 167; Shell 1996: 151.

³² See Gregor 1996: 358-9 for a discussion of the difficulties in interpreting Kant's use of this term and the general problems in translating it into English. See also the essays by Wood, Guyer, and Willaschek in Timmons 2002, for an overview of the ongoing debate over the conceptual status of *Recht* and how it relates (or does not relate) to Kant's principles of morality.

between each participant's *freedom* to make choices that translate into actions upon the world and upon each other (*MM* 6:230).³³ This is why Kant identifies 'strict right' (*stricte Recht*) with the condition of 'thoroughgoing reciprocal coercion,' the ability of each to affect and constrain others with their choices, a formulation, he writes, that has its analogy in the 'law of action and reaction' in physics (*MM* 6:232-3). I mentioned briefly how Kant uses this precept in conjunction with a relational concept of physical space; similarly, we can detect a relational construction of space at the *practical* level where equally free participants must continuously negotiate their individual and collective activities vis-à-vis one another. According to Katrin Flikschuh, 'Throughgoing reciprocal coercion invokes a spatial image according to which the free action space of each is delimited and constrained by the equal action space of everyone else.'³⁴ Put this way, Kant's conception of *Recht* speaks directly to the essentially political, contested, even (as we shall see) antagonistic character of free agents in commercium.

Our ability to make judgments regarding *Recht* points directly to our ability to reflect upon our situatedness in commercium as a set of problematic normative relations that can be made subject to our collective will as bearers of practical reason. It affords us the ability to locate ourselves in this commercium and to assess, criticize, and judge the terms of interaction that already govern global relations as we have inherited them from our historical predecessors, and we can take action to bring these terms in accordance with mutually and freely chosen principles. As he writes in the first *Critique*, practical reason invites us to consider how 'everything that *has happened* in the course of nature, and on empirical grounds inevitably had to happen, nevertheless *ought not to have happened*' (*CPR* A550/B578). Kant illustrates this capacity for problematizing extant relations of community by invoking his own version of the 'state of nature' (*communio originaria*). He stresses that this state has no basis in historical reality, but must be conceived as a 'practical-rational concept' (*MM* 6:262). At the same time, his conception

³³ In other words, it does not have to do with the freely chosen action of one in relation to the mere wishes or judgment of another, nor does it have to do with what in particular one chooses. Rather, by concerning the mere 'form' in the relation, Kant is saying that the question of *Recht* is narrowly concerned with the *freedom* one has to choose actions in relation to the reciprocal and equal *freedom* of the other.

³⁴ Flikschuh 2000: 133.

of the state of nature is unmistakably global, and it allows us to distinguish the unavoidable conditions of our existence on earth from those things that are but the contingent products of history and thereby imagine how the world could be otherwise. Among the latter we have relations of property, national borders, governments, and human institutions, while among the former we have only the unified surface of the earth and the commercium of human beings with all their respective standpoints and capabilities for action.

If the above reading is correct, cosmopolitanism's focus, when conceived through the template of commercium, concerns the fundamentally *problematic* set of relations that inhere in the reciprocal relation of particular agents and their free wills to one another. We should also note that this image of 'the cosmopolitan' is very different from what we normally associate with 'the universal,' which aims to *abstract* the moral needs of humanity from all difference and all that is particularistic. The cosmopolitan does not concern humanity in the abstract, but humanity precisely in its full heterogeneity and in the direct confrontation of each with everyone else. If this is the case, then cosmopolitanism is first and foremost about critical reflection upon the multiplicity of perspectives on the whole that dynamically come together to form human history, a history that is the result of real processes of causation but which is nevertheless 'ours.'³⁵ Now, I do not want to create the impression that I am reading something into Kant that is not there: for while cosmopolitanism and universalism may be regarded here as conceptually distinct, they are by no means mutually exclusive, and there are indeed many respects in which Kant *does* pursue his cosmopolitan project under the aegis of universalistic ideals. But if we can analytically distinguish Kant's own ideal universalistic commitments from his delineation of the cosmopolitan problematic, we may yet work out a way to reap the theoretical benefits of the latter without falling into the traps of the former. I will return to this in the fourth section, below. First, let us look at how the cosmopolitan problematic unfolds in history according to Kant.

³⁵ *Conj* 8:123.

III The Cosmopolitan Problematic as Historical Challenge

This notion of humanity as a community of thoroughgoing interaction among conflicting standpoints is a recurring theme in Kant's writings on history and human progress. Kant's views on history are multifaceted and complex, spanning a variety of texts, and they have been interpreted to deal with an array of large philosophical questions, including how to teleologically conceptualize humanity's moral development, whether we have a right or even a duty to believe in future progress, and how we are to understand the relation between politics, ethics, and law.³⁶ I cannot hope to do justice to this broad topic here, but wish instead to focus on one aspect of it: his narrative of how human beings struggle with the fact of inescapable community, and how they use their capacities as self-aware beings to develop, regulate, and transform their relations of community with one another from opposition and strife to cooperation and civility.

In works such as his 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View' and 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History,' he argues that human-made institutions such as territorially bounded states are historically contingent by-products of our haphazard efforts to come to terms with living 'side-by-side' with one another. As moral and cultural subjects, we desire to live in a society where we are able to exercise our freedoms and our talents peacefully; yet we also have 'heteronomous' tendencies toward antagonism that stand in the way of achieving this goal. Kant calls this paradoxical nature our 'unsocial sociability.' Even if the power of autonomy is given to human beings a priori, the capacity to exercise and use this power is not, and reason, while innate, 'does not itself work instinctively, for it requires trial, practice and instruction to enable it to progress gradually from one stage of insight to the next' (*IUH* 8:19).³⁷ Importantly for the purposes of the present argument, he always presents the story of this struggle as being global in scope, and he does so in a way that methodologically questions both the 'naturalness' of bounded communities and the idea

³⁶ Yovel 1980; Ludwig and Brandt 1997; Ellis 2005; Flikschuh 2007.

³⁷ In this respect, he is close to Rousseau's narrative of 'perfectibility' in the second *Discourse* (See Wood 1998: 20-1), although a more direct path might be plotted from Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*.

that activity on one part of the earth does not affect activity elsewhere. Only by uncovering the real relations of 'thoroughgoing interaction' that lie beneath the illusion that humanity is naturally divided into separate communities can we fully take stock of the effects of war and tyranny, and appreciate the real way in which human beings sharing the earth in common always have composed and always will compose a global community.

Kant does not use the word 'commercium' in these essays, but its application is unmistakable in the premium he places on the role of continuous interaction among individuals taken as participants in a dynamically evolving whole.³⁸ Relations of *mutual antagonism* or *resistance* provide the context for the global drama of human history, as human interaction propels the species through successive stages of technical, cultural, and moral progress. In a famous passage, Kant explains this dynamic of unsocial sociability in this way:

Man has an inclination to *live in society*, since he feels in this state more like a man, that is he feels able to develop his natural capacities. But he also has a great tendency to *live as an individual*, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance all around, just as he knows of himself that he is in turn inclined to offer resistance to others. It is this very resistance which awakens all man's powers and induces him to overcome his tendency to laziness. Through the desire for honour, power or property, it drives him to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot *bear* yet cannot *bear to leave*. Then the first true steps are taken from barbarism to culture, which in fact consists in the social worthiness of man. All man's talents are now gradually developed, his taste cultivated, and by a continued process of enlightenment, a beginning is made towards establishing a way of thinking which can with time transform the primitive natural capacity for moral discrimination into definitive practical principles; and thus a *pathologically* enforced social union is transformed into a *moral* whole. (*IUH* 8:20-1)

The key feature is the dynamic of 'mutual resistance,' of which each participant is fully aware.³⁹ Kant is not simply stating that this mutual resistance exists (i.e., from a mere

³⁸ Allen Wood notes that Kant looks at history through a wide lens. He is not interested in the 'microfoundations' that guide individual actions, but only in the large-scale view of history that shows humanity *as a species* on a gradual approach to an end determined by nature (see Wood 1998: 20-22).

³⁹ Susan Shell notes the recurring analogy to physics in Kant's presentation of the telos of unsocial sociability, which resembles 'a dynamic relation between human forces of attraction and repulsion' that gradually approached 'equilibrium' in the form of a just civil constitution (Shell 1996: 168-9).

observer's standpoint), but that each participant is attuned to it in reciprocal relation to others (from a *participant's* standpoint). Social actors are able to comprehend themselves not merely as passive recipients of resistance but as its agents, and they are able to recognize their own powers and inclinations in the behavior of others. This mutual relation, though it begins as one of antagonism, arouses a capacity in each to recognize the humanity in others as it exists in oneself.⁴⁰ At the primitive stage, this baseline level of recognition manifests itself as a strategic competition for status. Yet even status presupposes the beginnings of a social order in the form of customs, manners, and tastes through which individual accomplishments may be socially acknowledged, and these rudiments of culture pave the way for the eventual development of enlightened moral sense.⁴¹

But this progression does not occur in a smooth and straightforward manner. In Kant's narrative, the legacy of the primitive antagonism, even as it gradually gives way to more civil forms of social interaction, leaves its stamp on human history in the form of lasting divisions within the commercium of humanity in the form of rival territorial states. In his 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History,' Kant suggests that the first steps toward civil society occurred with the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and pastoral life. He calls this 'the age of labor and discord,' because with this transition 'strife inevitably arose between those who had hitherto lived together in peace, with the result that those whose ways of life were different became separated and dispersed throughout the world' (*Conj* 8:118). Kant speculates (drawing loosely on the first chapters of Genesis) that as some turned to herding animals and others to planting crops, disagreements arose over the use of the land. The herdsmen's animals would destroy the farmers' crops, leading the farmers to close off their lands and fend off the herdsmen by force. Their continual antagonism leads the two groups to seek *distance*

⁴⁰ This of course conjures the second maxim of Kant's *sensus communis*, 'to think oneself (in communication with human beings) into the place of every other person' (*Anth* 7:228). See also *CJ* 5:294-6; Arendt 1992: 69-72; O'Neill 1989: 25-7; Seyla Benhabib 1992: ch. 4 (regarding Arendt's appropriation of Kant's idea); Longuenesse 2005: 206.

⁴¹ See also *Anth* 7:244; Kleingeld 1999.

from one another and forge internal forms of cooperation in order to protect and further develop their respective ways of life.⁴²

Kant sees the division of the human race into territorially distinct societies as a product of interaction among individuals pursuing opposed material goals. Our development into a world divided by separate states is not merely an example of humanity's tendency toward antagonism, but its direct consequence. The result is a transformation of the commercive relations constitutive of global interaction, as the mutual opposition between individuals congeals into a mutual opposition between states. This evolving constellation has the effect of compelling even peaceable groups of people into conformity out of sheer necessity, 'inasmuch as...each people would find itself in the neighborhood of another people pressing upon it, against which it must form itself internally into a *state* in order to be armed as a *power* against it' (PP 8:365-6).⁴³

This transformation marks a crucial point in human history, and it gives rise to the *paradox* that is central to Kant's diagnosis of the cosmopolitan problematic as we have come to inherit it (by the end of the eighteenth century, at least).⁴⁴ *On the one hand*, the evolution from scattered individuals to rival societies helped to promote social progress domestically within each society. The newfound need for security-driven solidarity paves the way for more evolved forms of cooperation, including exchange relations, common culture, art, manners, and finally a system of public administration under a civil constitution: 'From these first crude beginnings, all human aptitudes could now gradually develop, the most beneficial of these being *sociability and civil security*' (Conj 8:118-9). Kant reflects that such division may indeed have been necessary to this end, and that a premature end to this condition of external antagonism may have even deflated

⁴² Conj 8:118-9.

⁴³ Earlier, Kant states that *war* is the mechanism that has forced people to inhabit all parts of the earth, including 'the most inhospitable regions,' and it is war that compelled them to enter into 'more or less lawful relations' (8:363).

⁴⁴ Cf. Wood 1998: 30.

this driving force of history, allowing a united yet unenlightened human race to fall into cultural indolence.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the costs of living in a world burdened not merely by war but by continuing preparation for war eventually come to exceed the benefits, so much so that a persistent state of war between states would even hinder further domestic progress:

We have to admit that the greatest evils which oppress civilized nations are the result of *war*—not so much of actual wars in the past or present as of the unremitting, indeed ever-increasing *preparation* for war in the future. All the resources of the state, and all the fruits of its culture which might be used to enhance that culture even further, are devoted to this purpose. Freedom suffers greatly in numerous areas, and the state's maternal care for its individual members is replaced by demands of implacable harshness (even if this harshness is justified by fear of external threats). (*Conj* 8:121)

In 'Perpetual Peace,' Kant goes so far as to suggest that this state of affairs is in some ways *worse* than a lawless 'state of nature,' for once individuals have subjected themselves to the power of the state they are no longer in direct control of the battles they fight. Soldiers become 'mere machines and tools in the hands of another (a state), and this cannot well be reconciled with the right of humanity in our own person' (*PP* 8:345). Kant elaborates this point a little later in the essay:

Just as we now regard with profound contempt, as barbarous, crude, and brutishly degrading to humanity, the attachment of savages to their lawless freedom, by which they would rather struggle unceasingly than subject themselves to a lawful coercion to be instituted by themselves, thus preferring a mad freedom to a rational freedom, so, one would think, civilized peoples (each united into a state) must hasten to leave such a depraved condition, the sooner the better; but instead each *state* puts its majesty (for the majesty of a people is an absurd expression) just in its not being subject to any external lawful coercion at all, and the splendor of its chief consists in his being able, without even having to put himself in danger, to command many thousands to sacrifice themselves for a matter that is of no concern to them.... (*PP* 8:354-5)

⁴⁵ Kant considers the institution of the state to be indispensable for true progress, and, as Wood notes, believes its establishment to be one of the crowning achievements in human history (Wood 1998: 28). The purpose of the state is not to put an end to antagonism among subjects but to in fact preserve it in the form of exchange, art, and 'public uses of reason.' Such an arrangement requires—*ideally*—a just civil constitution that provides the greatest possible freedom for its citizens in relation to one another. Still, Kant believes that the first principle of all government must remain the maintenance of *order*, without which progress toward enlightenment would be impossible, and he of course makes this point repeatedly in his injunctions against achieving a just state by revolution or external intervention: 'some *rightful* condition or other, even if it is only to a small degree in conformity with right, is better than none at all' (*PP* 8:373n). See Kelly 1969; Waldron 1996; Pippin 2006: esp. 437.

So long as relations between states remain in a lawless or 'nonrightful' condition, the problem of global disjunction among individuals remains unresolved; instead, it is merely *displaced* from relations between subjects to relations between states, only to boomerang back in the form of the tyranny and inequality that afflicts states overburdened by a prolonged orientation to war. The state system may have institutionalized the condition of violence, given it direction and perhaps even a coherent logic, but it has not resolved it. It decreases the number of participants in mutual antagonism but it increases its magnitude, with the further cost of reducing the freedom of those actually facing violence to choose their ends for themselves or set the terms of their interaction with others.

To be sure, some regard the narratives of the 'Idea' and 'Conjectures' to be mere preliminary attempts at developing a teleological system that does not fully reach fruition until works such as the *Critique of Judgment*, *Conflict of the Faculties*, or *Metaphysics of Morals*.⁴⁶ But there is still something of interest in the dynamic, complex, and interdependent view of societies that Kant offers in these writings, in which institutions arise and congeal through multiple relations of action, reaction, attraction, and repulsion that participants in commercium experience as they learn to use their powers of reason to make their way in the world and shape it for themselves. To be sure, Kant's work as a historical sociologist is undeniably crude, and Kant himself stressed that he intended his 'conjectures' on history to be just that. But even if his conjectures are inaccurate, they are not necessarily wrong. Recent historical sociologists have come to similar conclusions about the transnational processes that underpin the state system, that 'war makes states' as much as 'states make war,' and that the evolution of domestic state structures and modern international relations are heavily intertwined.⁴⁷ Kant wants to draw our attention to the complexity that lies beneath historical processes that have allowed us to reach essential stages of political freedom but which now may be preventing us from progressing further, and which may even risk setting progress *back*.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Arendt 1992; Yovel 1980; Ellis 2005; Flikschuh 2007.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Tilly 1975, 1990; Giddens 1985; Mann 1987, 1993; Ertman 1997.

On this reading, the Kantian dictum to eliminate ‘war’ is not just referring to acts of physical violence but to a *systemic* violence that keeps humanity divided against one another in a state of mutual suspicion. In this respect, it reflects a patently historical-political concern that the way we coexist on the surface of an earth that we all hold in common—that is, *the terms of our interaction with one another*—has come to be determined not by ourselves as free and rational participants, but by states whose power and operation have become detached from our collective wills. To this extent, Kantian cosmopolitanism shares a practical interest the pathological consequences of systemically reinforced power and violence that we might today just as well associate with critical theory as with moral theory. This suggests some new ways for us to continue to engage and develop upon Kant’s original project.

IV Thinking with Kant beyond Kant

As I mentioned in the introduction, quite a number of theorists in recent years have made attempts to revitalize and develop upon the Kantian project of ‘perpetual peace.’ Yet few remain content with Kant’s model of the transcendental ego, his stark distinction between ‘sensible’ and ‘intelligible’ realms, or his notion of a ‘pure practical reason’ from which we can derive universal moral truths that hold valid a priori to all human experience. Additionally, Kant had no way of appreciating the nature of the power that nationalist and other ideological movements would accrue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not to mention the forms of radical exclusion and human violation that would follow in their wake, as well as the ambivalent consequences of global capitalist development.⁴⁸ Contemporary theorists who wish to carry on the legacy of Kant’s cosmopolitan vision thus face the task of ‘thinking with Kant beyond Kant’ by incorporating the lessons of human experience over the two centuries that have passed since his time.

⁴⁸ Arendt 1968: 298-9; Habermas 1997; Benhabib 2004: 25-48; Fine 2007: 22-38.

Thus, John Rawls wonders whether every people really *needs* to be 'liberal' in the modern sense to be a peaceful 'member in good standing' in the global community, and he believes Kant's prohibition against external intervention requires 'qualification' in cases of severe human rights abuses; Jürgen Habermas likewise espouses humanitarian intervention in extreme cases, and he questions whether Kant's purely 'voluntary' league of nations is really a sufficient mechanism to guarantee cooperation and secure human rights; Seyla Benhabib, meanwhile, finds Kant's presentation of cosmopolitan right as a right 'to visit' but not 'to settle' far too narrow to accommodate the needs of modern-day political refugees who are forced to flee their own countries from radically oppressive and genocidal regimes.⁴⁹ There is little doubt that these efforts to reinterpret the articles of 'Perpetual Peace' have proven highly fruitful. What I have been trying to show in the preceding pages, however, is that Kant's cosmopolitan vision runs much deeper than a set of normative recommendations for peaceable domestic governance, cooperation among states, and hospitality across international boundaries.

Even though we have become accustomed to thinking of Kantian philosophy as the very paragon of abstract, ahistorical individualism, Kant always understood human beings to be deeply embedded in their natural and historical environments.⁵⁰ The function of critical philosophy is merely to distill from thought and empirical reality in a systematic fashion the *limits* of what rational subjects may know, do, hope for, and ultimately be. According to Kant, as possessors of reason and imagination we are endowed with a unique ability to *reflect upon and choose* our ways of life.⁵¹ This means that human beings may adopt a wide variety of ways of living, develop diverse cultures, and accustom themselves to a wide range of habitats, obstacles, routines, and points of view. Yet this diversity is the result not of a simple divergence of peoples from one another but of their *interaction*. Indeed, the unsocial sociability that alternately divides and joins people has, for Kant, the beneficial effect of sending humanity off on a multiplicity of

⁴⁹ Rawls 1999: 22-3, 37-8, 59-60; Habermas 2006: 126-32; Benhabib 2004: 25-48.

⁵⁰ Kneller 1998: 2-3. See also Wood 1998 as well as Muthu 2003.

⁵¹ *Conj* 8:III-2.

journeys with potentially as many alternate paths to enlightenment.⁵² But what is most important to Kant is that this diversity is a characteristic not of incommensurable difference among peoples of the earth but, on the contrary, of the *freedom* that we all share: national and cultural difference is made possible by that which makes us all human.⁵³ In the long run, however, the same antagonism that drives us along our individual and collective paths compels us, via the resulting burdens of war and injustice, to recover this common humanity by overcoming the pathologies of unbridled state power. This sensibility requires us to reflect historically on the way our fates have always been bound up with one another; that no society exists in isolation; that in various ways we even owe our existence as individual societies to our interaction with one another; and that even our ability to pursue our separate ways of life still depends on our negotiating relations with one another. Thus, the function of the *idea* of a universal history '*in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*' (which translates alternately as 'with a cosmopolitan purpose' or 'from a cosmopolitan point of view')⁵⁴ is to explain the contingencies of history in order to project beyond them—this, with the ultimate intention of reshaping our social and political world through our own actions and under the guidance of our own enlightened reason.

In historical writings such as the 'Idea for a Universal History,' the 'Conjectures,' and even 'Perpetual Peace,' he suggests that the problems of war and tyranny with which we now struggle are themselves the relics of past attempts of the species to coexist and share the earth in common. There is certainly an extent to which we must accept the realities of the social world we have inherited, and we must not rashly look to tear it down through revolutions or premature attempts at forms of global government for which we as a whole are just not ready. But this 'acceptance' is not the same as 'resignation.' We are still responsible as co-participants in a commercium of humanity to view ourselves as the makers of the world around us, and to strive for change

⁵² Wood 1998: 20-3.

⁵³ This is one of Muthu's central arguments in his chapters on Kant (Muthu 2003).

⁵⁴ Shell 1996: 162-3.

accordingly. The acceptance of our social reality is not a renunciation of our will to change it, but a part of our taking ownership of it precisely for the purposes of changing it. This, writes Kant, is the purpose of studying history:

It must show him [humankind] that he should not blame providence for the evils which oppress him, and that he is not entitled to ascribe his own misdemeanours to an original crime committed by his earliest ancestors, by alleging, for example, that a disposition to commit similar offences has been passed down to their descendants; for there can be nothing inherited about arbitrary actions. It should show him instead that he has every justification for acknowledging the action of his first ancestors as his own, and that he should hold himself wholly responsible for all the evils which spring from his misuse of reason. (*Conj* 8:123)

Our ability to meet the challenge of the cosmopolitan problematic rests with our ability to recognize the contingency behind our present situation. For only by recognizing how the inequalities and divisions among humanity are themselves the result of human action—that is, by human uses of reason and freedom—may we be able to think how they can in turn be resolved by them. The study of history is intimately tied to the idea of rationally motivated critique. Sankar Muthu makes this point well when he writes that, for Kant, ‘the role of progress...is to historicize contemporary injustices and to motivate individuals to confront them. Thus, progress and a universal history are not part of a descriptive account that engages in the *legitimation* of extant societies, states, or political practices...; rather, his narrative of progress and universal history constitutes a *delegitimation* of practices and institutions that might otherwise be taken for granted.’⁵⁵

We can see traces of this principle in Kant’s ‘Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace,’ the one concerning ‘cosmopolitan right.’ It is here that Kant most explicitly addresses head-on the *original* problem of everyone having to share the world in common: ‘This right, to present oneself to society, belongs to all human beings by virtue of the right of possession in common of the earth’s surface on which, as a sphere, they cannot disperse infinitely but must finally put up with being near one another’ (*PP* 8:358). Crucial as domestic law and interstate cooperation may be to achieving peace, in the end it is only at the level of *personal* interaction that, in Kant’s words, ‘distant parts of the world can enter peaceably into relations with one another, which can eventually

⁵⁵ Muthu 2003: 167.

become publicly lawful and so finally bring the human race ever closer to a cosmopolitan constitution' (PP 8:358). Cosmopolitan right does offer certain 'human-rights'-like protections for world travelers, certainly; but it ultimately aims to return powers of *agency* to forge relations of community from states to participants. It is an invitation for individuals to bring their respective standpoints on the whole to bear on relations between societies. Hence, Muthu argues that cosmopolitan right serves the function of what he calls 'cultural agency' in establishing solidaristic bonds across state boundaries by enjoining human beings to bring the standpoints of others into their own, gradually transforming the disjunctive community of reciprocal opposition to a positive community of mutual participation and collective self-determination.⁵⁶ Others have suggested that it provides the groundwork for a 'cosmopolitan public sphere' that facilitates the free public use of critical reason across international boundaries.⁵⁷

There is no reason, however, that we cannot take these sentiments farther by inquiring into the cosmopolitan problematic in a more systematic fashion. As we have seen, Kant does not simply write that societies *ought* to interact, or even simply that they *cannot avoid* interacting, but that their very development into separate societies has been *from the beginning* bound up in contexts of thoroughgoing interaction among globally distributed participants. We tend to think of global interaction as being among societies that are bounded first and interactive second, yet the Kantian framework effectively reverses this relationship by portraying the development of an international system as a displacement of interaction from the level of participants to the level of sovereign states. This reversal allows us to derive resources for normative critique from the disparity between the 'ideal' concept of a commercium among free practical-rational participants, who are capable of openly negotiating their relations of community for themselves, and the historical reality of a commercium broken up by institutions that limit and delimit possible interaction. Again, these resources need not stem from any privileged access to a abstract universalist point of view; rather, they stem from our ability to locate ourselves

⁵⁶ Muthu 2003: 122-209, esp. 194-5. See also *MM* 6:473

⁵⁷ Bohman 1997; Kleingeld 1998; Schmidt 1998: 424-5.

within the commercium of which we are all participants and reflect on our position vis-à-vis everybody else and on where our historical trajectory has taken us—to, as Kant writes elsewhere, ‘think for oneself’ while also ‘thinking oneself [by communication] into the position of everyone else’ (*CJ* 5:294-5; *Anth* 7:228-9).

At the same time, we should be aware that Kant based his concern with state power on an eighteenth-century conception of ‘tyranny,’ on the mercantilist ambitions of European monarchs, and on the then-revolutionary question of republican representation. As such, he relied in his political and historical writings on a rather Hobbesian model of power, reducing it to relations of direct coercion on the part of the government and the voluntary acceptance of coercion on the part of the governed. He did not consider the more complex forms of political and social power that we face in modern society, such as economic, bureaucratic, or ideological power.⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Kant may have underestimated the degree of ‘functional integration’ that has come to inhere both internationally and transnationally. Despite his recognition of a commercium of interaction that lay at the basis of the modern state system, Kant follows many of his contemporaries in portraying the state system as a ‘state of nature’ whose members have come to act as *wholly* independent agents with no norms or social ties binding them to one another. Yet the boundaries of the modern international system have long been reproduced and maintained by an array of functional and administrative components, ranging from standardized time zones, standards of diplomatic spaces and status, postal and telephone conventions, passports and other forms of identification, all of which keep the world of nation-states simultaneously connected and divided.⁵⁹ Perhaps ironically, these modes of institutionalizing identity and community do not contradict Kant’s basic premise that the human race ‘originally’ composes a commercium of interaction. Quite the contrary: they suggest that the effects of commercive interaction are more ‘thoroughgoing’ than even Kant himself considered.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Habermas 1984, 1987; Giddens 1985; Scott 1993.

⁵⁹ Waldron 2006: 83-4; Giddens 1985; Torpey 2000.

Indeed, sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann opt for the rejection of the modern, linearly-bounded ‘nation-state’ as the paradigm for thinking about ‘society,’ while anthropologists like Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson recommend that ‘instead of assuming the autonomy of the primeval community, we need to examine how it was formed *as a community* out of the interconnected space that always already existed.’⁶⁰ Boundaries only acquire significance among participants who are in contact with one another and must structure their common social space. Accordingly, a broadened approach to a Kantian-inspired cosmopolitanism might begin by investigating how we, as free, thinking, speaking, and acting participants in a global commercium ‘of thoroughgoing interaction,’ come to locate and frame our own standpoints on community in relation to others, with whom we are already interconnected and with whom we coexist simultaneously. From a critical perspective, such an approach might interrogate how the various artifacts of history and the values we attribute to them—states, boundaries, cultural symbols, geographic features, legacies of war, economic ties, social power, etc.—serve to mediate these global relations of commercium, and how they might influence our respective standpoints for better or worse. Finally, it might ask what capabilities we possess to reflect upon, critique, negotiate, and transform these relations in accordance with freely chosen practical principles. These suggestions by no means exhaust the possibilities open to a broader understanding of the present-day cosmopolitan project, but they give an idea of how the Kantian-inspired project might be expanded from a narrower ‘Perpetual Peace’-centric focus toward a more expansive ‘cosmopolitan point of view.’

In contemporary discussions, we have become accustomed to associating Kant’s cosmopolitanism with the search for universal normative principles of world order. I have tried to show that Kant’s cosmopolitanism betrays more than an idealist, universalistic agenda, but a concerted interest in guarding against humanity’s falling victim to the contingencies of its own history. If I have in any way ‘overreached’ in my

⁶⁰ Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8. See also Mann 1987: ch. 1; Ruggie 1993; Spruyt 1994; Abbott 1995; Baud and van Schendel 1997; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Tilly 2005.

attempt at an admittedly unorthodox reading of the Kantian project, it is only in the service of the broader point that this task does not merely require policy solutions aimed to patch over these contingencies, but rather it calls for a deep and reflexive interrogation of what humans have achieved over history in terms of its benefits as well as its costs to humanity as a whole. The schema of community as commercium provides the critical means of seeing past the blinders of history and recovering for ourselves that original power of autonomy that inheres in every human being, transcends the contingencies of artificial community, and allows us to conceive ourselves as members of a grand community of humankind capable of shaping the world for itself.

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