

Kant's cosmopolitanism as a task set to mankind

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Abstract: According to a widespread reading, Kant takes a cosmopolitan political order to be merely instrumental to the ethical perfection of mankind. The article challenges this interpretation by reconstructing how, in the course of his writings on politics, Kant comes to conceive of the creation of global institutions as a task in its own right that is intended solve a distinct moral-juridical problem. I develop this argument through a discussion of the notion of 'mankind' as Kant's cosmopolitan collective. While Kant consistently presents the creation of a cosmopolitan order as a task set to mankind as a whole, what this amounts to changes decisively as he develops a distinctly juridical cosmopolitanism. In particular, I trace a shift from what I call 'mankind as the human species' – a spatiotemporally unbounded collective encompassing all human beings in the past, present and future – to an understanding of 'mankind as disjunctive community', that is a spatiotemporally bounded collective of corporal agents who (have to come to terms with the fact that they) exist concurrently on the spherical surface of the earth.

Keywords: Kant; Cosmopolitanism; Right; Ethics

Introduction

That Kant's political thought is inherently cosmopolitan in nature is well understood among his interpreters. In what way precisely this is the case, however, less so. According to a widespread reading, Kant conceives of a cosmopolitan political order merely as instrumental to the ethical perfection of mankind.¹ In this article, I shall challenge this view by pointing to the way in which, in the course of his writings on politics, Kant comes to see the creation of a global political order as a task in its own right that is intended to solve a distinct moral problem.

I will develop this argument through a discussion of the notion of "mankind" which – I suggest – we can think of as Kant's cosmopolitan collective.² Throughout his political writings, Kant consistently presents the creation of a cosmopolitan order as a task set

to mankind as a whole. Yet, what this amounts to shifts as Kant develops a distinctly juridical cosmopolitanism in the course of the 1790s. His occasional essays on politics and history as well as the *Anthropology* operate with a conception of mankind as the human species, that is a spatiotemporally unbounded collective including all humans in past, present and future. In contrast, the late *Doctrine of Right* construes mankind as *disjunctive community*, that is a spatiotemporally bounded collective of corporeal agents who have to come to terms with the fact that they concurrently exist and interact on the spherical surface of the earth. The shift in Kant's understanding of mankind thus helps us to trace a wider change in the way he conceives of a cosmopolitan political order and the final end it is directed towards.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part (sections 1-3) focuses on Kant's occasional essays on politics and history as well as his *Anthropology*. There, Kant construes the cosmopolitan project as aimed at the moral perfection of the human species as a whole. The idea is that, throughout history, mankind gradually progresses towards realising its destiny: the creation of a cosmopolitan society in which all our rational capacities will be perfectly developed. Political institutions are seen as instrumental to the development of man's latent moral capacities.

The second part (sections 4-6) turns to the mature, systematic political philosophy of the *Doctrine of Right*. There, the notion of a disjunctive community depicts a spatiotemporally bounded community of physical beings who act and affect one another in real time and space in virtue of coexisting on the limited surface of the earth; a conundrum that raises distinctly political questions. The transformation of this disjunctive community into a community of juridical subjects is a distinctly institutional task.

In a wider context, Kant's reconceived notion of mankind speaks to his attempt, in the course of his writings on politics, to theorise the realm of right as a separate, independent domain of moral

agency. Only as he comes to think of politics as *constitutive* of a distinct kind of moral relation – rather than being exclusively instrumental to the ethical perfection of mankind – is Kant able to conceptually separate the political end of a just global order from the ethical end of the moral perfection of mankind.

1. The Vocation of Mankind

The idea of a cosmopolitan order plays a vital role in Kant’s political thought from the beginning (for instance Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism*). And throughout, its creation is characterized as a task set to mankind as a whole (e.g., IUH 8:28, Ant 7:331, TP 8:310, DoR §51).³ In order to get a grip on the implications of this claim, I will start, in this section, with a closer look at Kant’s occasional essays on history and politics such as *Idea for a Universal History* and *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History*, as well as his *Anthropology*.⁴ My claim is that in these writings, Kant operates with a notion of *mankind as the human species*, which reflects a cosmopolitan project in which ethical and political ends are enmeshed; in particular, the latter is conceived as instrumental to the former.

The nature of human beings is a question that consistently occupies Kant throughout these writings (e.g., Ant 7:324-5). Importantly, he approaches it from a teleological perspective. That is to say, Kant assumes that we need to understand human beings as purposively directed towards a certain (final) end. Like all other living beings, they are to be conceived of as directed towards the complete development of certain “germs” (*Keime*) or “predispositions” (*Anlagen*), inheritable tendencies whose full actualization any organism is destined or determined to reach (UTP 8:179, see also Louden, “Cosmopolitical Unity”, 215). We must keep in mind of course that, unlike Aristotle,⁵ Kant does not assert that teleological judgements

actually make claims about the purposive nature of their very objects, but only about the way in which we (analogously) reflect about those objects (Breitenbach, “Biological Purposiveness and Analogical Reflection”; Ginsborg, “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability”): we (reflexively) ascribe to ourselves certain attributes – inherent goals and purposes – the full development of which we take ourselves to be destined to. The question of the nature of human beings thus presents itself for Kant as one about their vocation.⁶

Importantly, Kant identifies two aspects that distinguish human beings (and their destiny) from that of other terrestrial creatures such as plants or animals (Louden, “Cosmopolitical Unity”, 217-220). First, humans have a *rational* capacity that they are capable of perfecting. That is to say, they can reflect, deliberate and choose for themselves “a way of living and not being bound to a single one, as other animals are” (CBHH 8:112). The implication is that the human vocation includes a certain indeterminacy, an openness such that the human being “has a character which he himself creates” (Ant 7:321) – we must think of ourselves as predestined rather than merely predetermined to fulfil our vocation.⁷ Realising our destiny requires work and effort on our own part, for nature has bestowed on the human being the “great honour” to “owe everything to his own efforts” (Mrongovius 25:1417).

Kant further distinguishes our *technical* predisposition to devise means to our ends for the sake of self-preservation (which needs to be cultivated), our *pragmatic* predisposition to pursue our happiness through communal modes of life (which needs to be civilized through tradition and education) and our *moral* predisposition to obey autonomously given laws of reason (Ant 7:322). The latter unquestionably has the highest significance: the ultimately goal of rational development consists in increasing conformity of our actions with the moral law. Our technical and pragmatic dispositions are mere stages in a process of gradual emancipation from the limitations of nature in order to become self-determining, autonomous beings

(Brandt, “The Guiding Idea”, 94). The complete development of the human predispositions for the use of reason is to culminate in *moral* agency, that is humans using their reason to determine their will.

Second (and relatedly), unlike other species in which each member tends to attain the complete development of its predispositions, in the case of humans it is the species as a whole, rather than the individual human being, which can work towards reaching its destination. Animals, Kant thinks, attain the purpose of their existence (*Daseinszweck*) as individual specimens: a bee, for instance, “is born, learns to make hives, to produce honey, and dies, thus it has come to the highest degree of its destination” (Pillau 25:839). The human race, in contrast, can “work itself up to its vocation” – the development of its rational predisposition – only through a progressive and cumulative effort “throughout a series of innumerable generations” (Ant 7:324, see also Brandt, “The Guiding Idea”, 98/99). We are bound to build and improve upon the achievements of our predecessors, such that each generation “always adds something to the enlightenment of the previous one, and thus it makes the next generation more perfectly endowed than it was” (Mrongovius 25:1417).

The upshot is that Kant looks at individual human beings always through the prism of the fate of the whole species. We can only understand the vocation of the human being in the context of its role within the development of mankind, conceived as the human species, towards the realisation of its own rational nature.

2. A Task Set to the Human Species

We have just seen that, in his occasional essays on history and politics as well as the Anthropology, Kant tasks the human species with the perfection of its rational and ultimately moral predispositions. Before focusing on the way in which this is also a political (and hence cosmopolitan) project, we need to get a better idea of Kant’s motivation

for conceptualising moral perfection as a task set to mankind as a whole. To that effect, let us look a bit more closely at the idea of the human species as Kant develops it.

At first sight, it may seem as though the concept simply refers to our phenomenal nature as individual members of the race. After all, the relevant predispositions are, in some sense, characterized as being part of our natural, even genetic makeup. On this level, mankind is just a descriptive identifier: a biological species among others. Yet, upon close inspection we notice that the notion contains both non-normative and normative elements:

One sees what is characteristic of the human species if one places the human being next to the animal and compares the two. In the system of nature, the human being belongs to the animal kingdom. However, if I view the human being as part of the world system he belongs to the rational beings. (Mrongovius 25:1415)

What sets the human race apart from the rest of nature, Kant suggests here, is its rational nature as *opposed* to its animal nature: its membership in the class of rational beings rather than (merely) the animal kingdom. It is precisely its capacity to rise *beyond* nature, which leaves the human species destined rather than merely determined to realize its predispositions and thus distinguishes it from all others. Consequently, the primary way in which we as individual human beings are members of future mankind is not through our biological make-up (i.e., by passing on our genetic material) but our shared rational capacity to rise *beyond* nature.⁸ Our self-conception as members of the human species is tied to our self-conception as moral agents. It is through our capacity for moral agency that we can “become a member and a means to the future humanity” (Brandt, “The Guiding Idea”, 98). When we act as cosmopolitan agents and thus in furtherance of developing our predispositions we do so from the (timeless) perspective of our co-membership in ‘humanity’ in the (shared) noumenal sense.

There is thus a sense in which the concept of the human species is aligned with and leads back to the idea of humanity as a non-sensible existence, depicting a specific property of human beings as rational agents (that is, their property of being agents with pure practical reason). This technical notion of humanity plays a central role in Kant's ethical theory as laid out in both *Groundwork* and second *Critique*. There, the argument is that in so far as we think of ourselves as subject to an unconditionally valid law, we are constrained to think of ourselves and every other rational being as rising above natural determination, thus existing apart from our spatiotemporal existence as phenomenal beings. For, while a categorical imperative (as an unconditional law) is possible only if there is an unconditional end – one “whose existence has in itself absolute value” (Gr 4: 428) – everything *within* nature has merely conditional value. Hence, Kant famously concludes, only ‘humanity’ or rational nature as such – in which individual agents participate in virtue of their capacity for morality – has the incomparable worth of an ‘end in itself’.

Now, Kant's attempt to fold this notion of humanity as a class of rational, supersensible beings outside the bounds of time and space *into* the concept of the human species illuminates his motivation to conceptualise moral progress in terms of the latter. Notice that in *Groundwork* and second *Critique*, the tension between the need for gradual moral progress and the finite lifespan of each individual human being forces Kant to conceive of moral progress in a-historical, indeed a-temporal terms: the postulate of immortality assures us that we can reach complete conformity of our moral dispositions with the moral law at least in the afterlife.⁹

By contrast, in the essays on history and politics Kant is able to conceive of moral progress as historically mediated by relocating it to the collective level of the human species. The problem that “every individual would have to live for a vast length of time if he were to learn how to make complete use of all his natural capacities” (IUH 8:19) is

now attenuated by embedding individual efforts in a progressive development whose agent is the human species as a whole. The picture that we thus end up with is one on which all individuals are duty-bound to play a marginal part, within the non-infinite duration of their human lives, in the historical process directed at the moral perfection of mankind. In each improving morally, we contribute to a cumulative learning process of the human race across generations. There is thus a (somewhat curious) sense in which we, as individual human beings, function as a means to future mankind.

3. Cosmopolitan Institutions

So far I have argued that, in the writings currently under consideration, Kant employs the notion of the *human species* in order to conceptualise the moral perfection – the cumulative development throughout history – of mankind as a whole. I have more or less tacitly proceeded on the assumption that this project is in an important sense of a cosmopolitan kind. And Kant could hardly be clearer that he takes this to be the case. In the early *Idea*, for instance, he argues that a “universal cosmopolitan condition”, which “nature has as its highest aim”, is “the womb in which all of the original predispositions of the human species will be developed” (IUH 8:28). In the *Anthropology*, he claims that “throughout a series of innumerable generations” (Ant 7:324) mankind gradually progresses towards realising its destiny: the “progressive organization of citizens of the earth into and towards the species as a system that is united cosmopolitically” (Ant 7:334). And in a marginal note to the handwritten manuscript of that text (7:412, see also Louden, “Cosmopolitical Unity”, p. 217), he even literally *equates* the development of our moral predisposition with the development of what he calls our “cosmopolitan predisposition”. We live up to our moral vocation, Kant seems to suggest, *through* the development of our cosmopolitan disposition.

This raises the question why precisely the endeavour that consists in mankind's cumulative development throughout history is described as distinctly cosmopolitan. In what way is a cosmopolitan *political* order vital to the perfection of the human species? The answer is that an appropriate political environment is the single most important external factor for us to be able to live up to our moral vocation (Louden, "Cosmopolitical Unity", 216). "The point in time when the talents of the human being can properly develop", Kant argues in the *Anthropology*, "actually only arises in a civil constitution" (*Menschenkunde* 25:1199). Only if the human race gradually works itself out of the chaotic state of its political relations can it work itself up towards fulfilling its original predispositions. Political institutions are thus first and foremost conceived of as a (vital) component of the external circumstances that allow us to develop our *Anlagen*. A rightful political order domestically and internationally encourages the perfection of our latent moral capacities. Let me briefly lay out two mechanisms through which political institutions may be thought to be conducive to the moral development of the human species. These are located on the synchronic and diachronic levels respectively.

The first thought, rather well rehearsed in the literature,¹⁰ is that in virtue of being *public* (i.e., transparent) and *coercive*, juridical laws encourage the development of ethical predispositions of each individual agent (Taylor, "Kant's Religion"; Ypi, "Historical Progress", Lindstedt, "Progress in Universal History"). By coercively enforcing the specified duties, public laws increase the trust among citizens and everyone's confidence that others will behave justly – it allows us to rest assured that our own respect of others' rights will be reciprocated. The idea is that individuals "cannot follow their inclinations with impunity, because if they violate the law they are subject to sanctions" (Kleingeld, "Kant's Changing Cosmopolitanism", 172/3). On the long term, this will enable them to *self-discipline*, that is to discharge their duties of right even without assurance or "regard for return" (*IUH* 8:25–26).

The second mechanism focuses on the diachronic dimension of political institutions, that is how they bolster the process of making mankind more virtuous across time and generations. On this level, the problem of the temporal limitation of all individual efforts to cultivate moral dispositions comes into the picture. Recall the last section: the non-infinite duration of human life entails that individual agents can at most play their marginal part in the process directed at the moral perfection of the human species as a whole, which requires a cumulative effort and learning over many generations. Now, the idea is that political institutions can go some way in closing this gap and thus alleviating the tension that emanates from it. What they do is “knit together” the respective efforts of individual agents and consecutive generations, coordinating them over time and continuing them into the future. They reflect the moral development humans have reached at a certain stage in history, thus serving as a “set of cultural, social and political resources upon which future generations may draw in their incessant attempts to realize a just cosmopolitan order” (Ypi, “Historical Progress”, 123). In so doing, they allow us to think of moral learning as a collective, cumulative effort.

Notice, hence, that the kind of cosmopolitanism we get on the human species reading is one in which political institutions, or a law-governed social order more broadly speaking, are in the service of the higher goal of attaining a genuinely ethical community. The single final end of history consists in the complete development of human’s predispositions for the use of reason, their wills being perfectly determined by reason. Political community is limited to playing an instrumental role in the process of the full development of our moral predispositions by forming a part, if an important one, of the external framework most conducive to it. Yet, the task of creating cosmopolitan *institutions* always remains subordinate to the ethical task of the “historical actualization of the kingdom of ends” (Ypi, “Historical Progress”, 126; see also Taylor, “Kant's Religion”, 20-22). The political

cosmopolitan ideal is a condition for the possibility of the full development of human capacities.

I think this is an accurate depiction of Kant's view of cosmopolitan institutions as far as the pertinent writings are concerned, and a familiar one at that. Yet, we should be wary of taking this to be Kant's final word on the matter. For it rests on a wider picture in which the spheres of ethics and right are not (yet) clearly separated as two distinct domains of moral agency setting distinguishable tasks. And as this relation is fundamentally reconceived by Kant in the course of the 1790s, so is his cosmopolitanism. Notice that my argument in the remainder of this paper does not imply that Kant gives up entirely on the picture I have sketched in previous sections; this claim would be untenable both on philological and conceptual grounds. Philologically, Kant continued to give his lectures on Anthropology throughout the 1790s; their published version (on which my reconstruction partly relied) did not appear until a year after the Doctrine of Right, in 1798. And conceptually, my claim that cosmopolitan institutions acquire a moral significance of their own in the course of Kant's writings on politics is perfectly compatible with saying that he holds on to ascribing them instrumental significance *from an ethical perspective*. All I shall argue is that this is no longer their only or indeed most important role.

4. On Original Common Possession

In the last section, I introduced Kant's construal of *mankind as the human species*, which I took to focus on the cumulative development, throughout history, of our ethical predispositions. The present section leaves Kant's occasional essays on history and politics behind in order to turn to his most systematically articulated political philosophy as laid out in the Doctrine of Right. There, I will argue, Kant operates with a different notion of *mankind as disjunctive community*, depicting a spatiotemporally bounded community of physical beings who act and

affect each other in real time and space in virtue of coexisting on the limited surface of the earth. My aim is to show that this construal of mankind allows us to understand the inherently juridical nature of Kant's mature cosmopolitanism, according to which political institutions are not of instrumental value but constitutive of a distinctive kind of moral relationship.

In the *Doctrine of Right*, the notion of mankind as disjunctive community surfaces through another concept, that of original common possession of the earth.¹¹ It is the original community of possession which Kant repeatedly characterizes as being "disjunctive" (Preparatory DoR AA23:311, 322, 323). In order to get to the bottom of this idea, we need to do some textual groundwork. Kant first makes the claim that we need to think of the earth as possessed "in common" (DoR 6:262) by all human beings in the context of discussing the possibility of property rights in the *Doctrine of Right's* section on "Private Right". The section relevant to us is concerned with the rightful acquisition of external objects (DoR 6:258ff.). In particular, Kant is interested in the possibility of acquiring something originally, as opposed to deriving it from what belongs to someone else (through a contractual exchange). Somewhat surprisingly, he argues that "first acquisition of a thing can only be acquisition of land" (DoR 6:261). Hence, he follows,

all human beings are originally (i.e. prior to any act of choice that establishes a right) in possession of land that is in conformity with right, that is, they have a right to be wherever nature or chance (apart from their will) has placed them. (DoR 6:262)

In order to elucidate this claim, notice that the kind of possession Kant has in mind here is not ownership in the sense of private property (something which I can claim as mine regardless of whether I am physically connected to it), but mere physical possession or occupation. Relatedly, he is not referring to land in the sense of a fenced-in plot of

territory – described as “residence (*sedes*), a chosen and therefore an acquired *lasting* possession” – but merely as “habitable ground” (DoR 6:261). Hence, I take it that what Kant is doing here is to reflect on the circumstances of embodied agency on the earth. As corporal agents capable of acting in time and space, humans inevitably make a particular kind of seizure: the piece of land that they take up by virtue of the very fact that they enter the world. The upshot is that, in virtue of the very nature of human existence, people’s relationship to the land precedes their relationship to other external things.

Yet, an additional fact of human existence with similar importance – besides our own embodiment – complicates the picture: the earth’s spherical surface. The finitude of the globe, Kant explains

unites all places on its surface, for if its surface were an unbounded plane, people could be so dispersed on it that they would not come into any community with one another, and community would not then be a necessary result of their existence on the earth. (DoR 6:262)

Humans do not act in empty space, we are reminded here, but on the earth’s limited surface. This, in turn, makes it impossible for them to get out of each other’s way once and for all. The earth’s spherical surface constitutes the unavoidable condition of (potential) interaction in the sense that where and how *we* pursue our ends necessarily impacts where and how *others* can do so – quite simply, because the space we take up at every particular point in time cannot be taken up by another person.

This gives us some idea of Kant’s motivation for introducing the idea of original common possession. While we cannot be blamed for the the very fact that we are present and act within time and space, this fact has normative implications: it implies that “the choice of one is unavoidably opposed by nature to that of another” (DoR 6:267). And we acknowledge these implications by thinking of the piece of land we are bound to acquire originally – and thus the earth as a whole – as

possessed in common with all of mankind. Kant thus introduces the idea of original common possession in order to elucidate the way in which human beings stand, from the beginning, in a relation of “*possible physical interaction*” (DoR 6:352) with everyone else globally given that, as physically embodied beings, they are constrained to occupy a portion of space on the earth (which cannot simultaneously be occupied by anyone else). The idea is that the mere coexistence of a plurality of embodied agents on the spherical surface of the earth puts them into a particular kind of interdependence relation: one of original common possession.

Hence, I want to suggest that in the *Doctrine of Right*, Kant’s cosmopolitan agent is modelled on the idea of original common possession of the earth. It is the mere fact that embodied agents can affect and constrain one another with their choices which unites them in a community with all those who jointly inhabit a bounded territory, the earth. That the pertinent community is global in scope is confirmed explicitly little later in the text when the notion of original common possession is, additionally, ascribed fundamental significance for the domain of “Cosmopolitan Right”. Echoing the earlier passage, Kant there argues that in virtue of the fact that “nature has enclosed [us] all together within determinate limits (by the spherical shape of the place they live in, a *globus terraqueus*)”, we stand “originally in a community of land”, which is a “community of possible physical interaction” (DoR 6:352).

5. On the Idea of a Disjunctive Community

In the last section I introduced original common possession as that notion on which Kant’s global community is modelled. Before we go on, in the following subsection, to draw out how this reconceived cosmopolitanism collective reflects a wider shift in Kant’s political thought, the present section sets out to characterize the relevant

community further. In particular, I want to highlight the *spatiotemporally bounded* nature of the original community of possession: rather than encompassing all humans in past, present and future, it is constituted by a plurality of physical beings capable of thinking, acting, and affecting each other in real time and space – an empirical set of interacting participants who must learn to coexist simultaneously. It is Kant’s characterisation of his global community as “disjunctive” (e.g., Preparatory DoR AA23:321, 322, 323) that will help us to make good on this claim.

What does that mean to characterize a community as “disjunctive”? The idea of disjunction is first introduced by Kant in a completely different context, namely in the course of the first *Critique*’s argument that human beings’ knowledge of the world is mediated by a system of fundamental categories. Controversially, Kant thinks that he can develop these categories from nothing more than logical forms of judgement expressed in a systematic table (CPR A70/B95). One of these forms of judgement is the “disjunctive judgement”, the exclusionary “either...or” (CPR A69/B94, A81/B106). In a disjunctive judgement one divides a concept A into its mutually exclusive specifications B, C, and D. The assertion of any of these specifications of A is then considered a sufficient condition for negating the others (if A is B, it cannot be C or D), and conversely the negation of all but one is a sufficient condition for asserting the remaining one. A disjunctive judgement, that is to say, relates subordinated concepts to a unified logical space within which they reciprocally delimit each other’s sphere and meaning.

As already mentioned, the logical forms of judgement then ground categories or “pure concepts of the understanding”. The idea is that the same acts of mind that generate the forms of judgement also generate the synthesis of spatiotemporal manifolds under concepts. In our case, the disjunctive form of judgement yields the category of “community” as the third category of “relation”, alongside “substance”

and “causality” (CPR A80/B106, B110-11). Kant’s basic idea is that, just as in a disjunctive judgement, a concept is divided up into its constituent components (bringing them into a relation of mutual determination *and* exclusion), so in a material whole, things mutually determine one another in an object or body considered as a whole (CPR B112/3). In both, members are represented as reciprocally coordinated with one another as parts that come together to constitute a whole. Just as two logically opposing propositions exclude each other, so two objects cannot occupy the same spatial position (at the same time). And just as the constituents of a disjunctive judgement, taken together, include the entire sphere of knowledge in that particular domain, so substances, in order to be objects of experience, must stand in a unified space, a whole that is the product of its various constituents. Consequently, the pertinent category is called both “reciprocity” (with an emphasis on the relation of causal interaction) and “community” (with an emphasis on objects’ being part of one space).

The argument is less obscure than it sounds: notice that Kant assumes that we have no given (absolute) framework within which we might locate events and states of affairs in space and time. Yet, he thinks, we always apprehend objects successively (we see one object first, then the other). Thus, we can only judge that two objects exist simultaneously in one spatial whole (instead of being two perceptions following on to each other) with the help of a category that, in Kant’s words, relates the perception of objects in time “prior to all experience, and indeed make[s] it possible” (CPR A177/B219). This entails that simultaneously existing objects determine certain spatial features of each other: given that they mutually exclude one another, each is in some sense responsible for the position of the other. And given that, reversely, only spatially separated objects are capable of coexisting simultaneously, spatial positions condition temporal positions.

We can now return to the political context in order to illustrate in how far Kant’s “disjunctive” original community of possession is

spatiotemporally bounded. Concerning the spatial aspect, Kant invites us to understand his original community of possession as a system of mutual exclusion where persons stand in a relation of possible physical interaction by virtue of occupying different parts of the the same space, the earth's surface. The space they take up at every particular point in time cannot be taken up by another person. Just as a disjunctive judgement relates mutually exclusive concepts to a unified logical space, so does the idea of a disjunctive community elucidate how in virtue of sharing the earth in common, agents act, affect, and physically encounter each other in it.

Now, recall that in the category of community, the spatial and the temporal are intricately intertwined: the thought was that a certain temporal judgement (two objects existing at the same time rather than just constituting consecutive sensible intuitions) requires a certain spatial judgement (that the objects are part of one and the same spatial whole), and the other way round.¹² More specifically, we can only experience appearances as co-existing *simultaneously* by applying the concept of community, which is to suppose that the objects are in relations of mutual interaction – they “reciprocally contain the ground of the determination” of the other (CPR B258). Analogously, we can say that the idea of disjunctive original community grasps the *essential simultaneity* of our coexistence with one another on the earth's limited surface (Milstein, “Kantian Cosmopolitanism”, 126). In explicating the notion of original common possession, Kant thus clarifies that the relation among participants in the original community of possession is not “a relation to the land (as an external thing) but to other humans in so far as they are *simultaneously on the same surface*” (Preparatory DoR AA23:322, my emphasis). Our own corporeal nature and the earth's surface are only normatively relevant in virtue of our *concurrent* existence.

6. A Political Task Set to Mankind

I have characterized the notion of mankind as disjunctive community as a spatiotemporally bounded collective consisting of a set of corporeal agents who, in virtue of sharing a limited space, interact with and affect one another. Our own physical nature on the one hand, and the limited space circumscribed by the spherical surface of the earth on the other hand, in conjunction constitute the empirical circumstances of our concurrent corporeal existence and thus the stage on which Kant's (juridical) cosmopolitan project unfolds. Kant's transformed notion of mankind has a number of interesting implications worthy of further exploration. One aspect concerns the the temporality of Kant's cosmopolitanism: rather than conceptualising a successive temporality of progress, the notion of mankind is now employed in order to illustrates the (juridically!) problematic nature of the very fact that a plurality agents each with the capacity for choice and action simultaneously coexist on the earth's circumference.¹³ Another aspect pertains to the way individuals agents relate to mankind as a collective of which they are a part: in the *Doctrine of Right*, individuals are not conceived of as means to the end of mankind's moral perfection, but as constitutive components of a set of relations that together first constitute the relevant collective.

Rather than pursuing either of these ideas further, in this section I shall focus of showing how Kant's conception of *mankind as disjunctive community* reflects a modified cosmopolitan project – in other words, what it means to think of the creation of the pertinent state of affairs as a task set to mankind. Recall the main insight underlying the idea of disjunctive community: by virtue of sharing the earth in common, there is a sense in which individuals' fates are inevitably bound up with one another. The task set to participants in the original community of possession is thus to come to terms with the fact that, as embodied agents, they exist, together with a plurality of other such

agents, within limited space. They are not each bound to become more virtuous, thus contributing over time to the moral perfection of mankind at large. Rather, their task pertains to the way in which they immediately relate to one another through their respective capacities for choice and action. Arthur Ripstein has articulated this contrast in terms of the incompatibility relations pertinent to right as opposed to ethics (Ripstein, *Force and Freedom*, 355-388): instead of being concerned (as the domain of ethics) with incompatibility relations internal to an agent's will – that is, with the logical consistency of maxims for action – right pertains to the way in which the choices of multiple agents confront and relate to one other in time and space.

It is this very problem – the reciprocal relation of choices of embodied agents interacting under circumstances of spatial constraint – that the moral domain of right, as developed systematically in Kant's mature political philosophy, is concerned with. In the *Doctrine of Right's* Introduction, Kant lays out this irreducibly relational normativity: whether an action is rightful cannot be determined except through its relation to those of other agents – according to the universal law of right, “any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law” (DoR 6:230). Kant illustrates this point by likening the coordinated actions of a plurality of externally free agents to the law-governed interaction of constitutive elements within a system of physical objects, held together by the Newtonian law of equality of action and reaction (DoR 6:232).

The crucial insight is that, on Kant's view, the problem *thus conceived* has distinctly political implications. The core line of argument throughout the *Doctrine of Right* seeks to establish that the reciprocal relation of individual choices that is constitutive for this moral domain requires a shift to a distinctly public standpoint. Only principles (that is to say, laws) issued by a public, “omnilateral will” (DoR 6:263) allow a plurality of agents to coexist and justly coordinate their interactions. Only they have the required authority to equally bind

all of them while acknowledging their equal moral status. What coercive political institutions do is to limit the capacity for choice and action of each to the condition of its compossibility with everyone else's equal claim. In turning the disjunctively related choices of each agent into a consistent set of rightful relations, they "determine with mathematical exactitude" what "rightfully belongs to everyone" (DoR 6:232-3).

This fundamentally changes the way in which we think of the creation of a cosmopolitan order as a task set to mankind. Most importantly, the final end of this project is not a world of fully virtuous agents that consistently act from the moral law – a moral whole or cosmopolitan kingdom of ends. Rather, it consists in the creation of a *political* order, a legal state of affairs in which a set of juridical norms regulates external relations between persons. This order is not in the service of or subordinate to a further value, state of affairs or kind of community that it would be ideally conducive to. Rather, a just legal regime is itself constitutive of a distinct kind of moral (juridical) relation. The task set to mankind in Kant's mature political philosophy thus consists in nothing more or less than the creation of a juridical condition, which is consequently characterized as "the entire final end" (DoR 6:355) of the moral domain of right. In creating such a condition, we transform the disjunctive "community of thoroughgoing interaction" into a rightful community of juridical subjects.

Such an institutional order does not require perfectly virtuous individuals who always act from the right incentive. For, in instantiating a distinctly external and interpersonal kind of morality, right focuses entirely on the way in which a plurality of persons relate to one another through their choices: it is a matter of action rather than motivation. The pertinent principles abstract from intrapersonal good willing (the maxims or right reasons for action) and can be externally enforced.

This leads us to the wider interpretive context. Recall my claim that the shift in Kant's construal of mankind as the relevant

cosmopolitan agent reflects a wider transformation of the nature and final end of his cosmopolitan project. Now, it is vital to understand this transformation in the context and against the background of Kant's attempt, in the 1790s, to distinguish the domains of right and ethics as two separate domains of moral agency. We saw how, in Kant's essays on history and politics, ethical and political ends are still enmeshed – the political, to be more precise, is in the service of the ethical final end. Only as Kant develops the sphere of right as a distinct domain of moral agency is he able to conceptually separate the political goal of a just global order from the ethical goal of the moral improvement of mankind. In its final form, Kant's cosmopolitanism is concerned with the creation of a set of institutions that establish rightful relations among individuals globally. This is a task in its own right rather than being in the service of the final end of history from an ethical perspective, which consists in the complete development of humans' predispositions for the use of reason.

Conclusion

Across his writings on politics, Kant conceives of the creation of a cosmopolitan order as a distinctly *collective* task – one that is set to mankind as a whole. The aim of this paper was to go some way in elucidating in *what way* precisely this is the case. In particular, I contrasted two different notions of mankind – as the human species and as disjunctive community – that I identified in Kant's occasional essays on history and politics, and his mature systematic political philosophy respectively. This shift, I hope to have shown, represents a vital and more fundamental change in Kant's view of the domain of right or politics, which he comes to conceive as constitutive of a distinct kind of relationship rather than being (merely) instrumental to ethical perfection. In its final form, Kant's cosmopolitan collective is not made up of all humans in past, present and future, but is constituted by a

delimited set of corporeal agents that stand in rights relations by virtue of concurrently coexisting on the earth's circumference.

I concede that nothing I have argued necessarily implies as such that we should welcome this shift or think of it as an improvement.¹⁴ I do believe, however, that we have strong reasons to prefer the *Metaphysics of Morals'* more differentiated account that demarcates right and ethics as two distinct territories on the map of practical normativity. I take Kant's recognition that (intra-personally) consistent willing and (inter-personally) consistent interaction are different kinds of moral problems that warrant different kinds of solutions to be a genuine achievement. What is particular intriguing – and informative even to contemporary debates about the relation between moral and political philosophy – is his development of a domain of genuine *political* normativity that is of a moral kind without thereby collapsing into applied ethics. Finally, the idea that the need for politics arises from the basic fact of human coexistence under conditions of spatial constrain strikes me as more appealing than the earlier view, according to which “if everyone had a completely efficacious good will, there would be no Kantian politics to study” (Riley, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, p.17). Yet, defending the later Kant against his former self by making good on any of these claims has not been the main purpose of this paper. For before we engage in *that* task, we must be aware that there is a significant difference between the two in the first place.¹⁵

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¹ On the cosmopolitan context in particular, see for instance Kleingeld 2009; Lindstedt 1999; Taylor 2010; Ypi 2010. With regard to Kant's political thought as a whole, this position is most famously defended by Guyer 2000; Riley 1983; Wood 1999.

² On the central role of the notion of mankind in Kant’s philosophy, see for instance Frierson 2013; Louden 2011.

³ All citations refer to volume and page numbers of the Prussian Academy Edition of *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*. Where available, I have used translations from the Cambridge Edition of Kant’s works, published under the general editorship of Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Abbreviations used are Ant (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View), CBHH (“Conjectural Beginning of Human History”); CPR (Critique of Pure Reason), CrPrR (Critique of Practical Reason), Gr (Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals); IUH (“Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent”); DoR (Doctrine of Right); Preparatory DoR (Preparatory works for the Doctrine of Right); TP (“On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but it is of no use in practice”); UTP (“On the use of teleological principles in philosophy”).

⁴ I will refer both to the notes some of Kant’s students (Menschenkunde, Mrongovius, Pillau) took during the lectures Kant gave since the 1770s and the version eventually published in 1798 as the *Anthropology from A Pragmatic Point of View* (Ant).

⁵ For Aristotle (1984), organisms and the processes maintaining them really are teleologically structured (see also Ginsborg 2004, 60).

⁶ These teleological underpinnings motivate Brandt and Stark (1997, xxv) to even call Kant’s philosophy of history “a component of anthropology”.

⁷ Kant capitalizes on an ambiguity in the German ‘bestimmt’, which can mean both [causally] *determined by* and [normatively] *destined to*. See Brandt 2003, 96.

⁸ There is a (primitive) sense, Kant argues, in which *all* living things are part of and contribute to their species as a whole, namely simply in virtue of perpetuating it by passing on their genetic material to subsequent generations (Ant 7:303).

⁹ This raises the difficult conceptual question how and whether we can even conceive of something like timeless moral progress. See also Kleingeld 1999, 70/71.

¹⁰ This argument is particularly familiar from interpretive accounts that reduce Kant’s politics more generally to its instrumental value to the ethical

domain, see supra note 1.

¹¹ The present section draws on some material from my ____.

¹² In the Analogies (CPR A 177-218, B 218-265) Kant sets out to show how each of the categories (of relation) constitutes the condition of a particular type of temporal experience. The second Analogy illustrates how the category of community is required in order to experience simultaneity.

¹³ This is not to deny that the disjunctive community is constituted by a constantly changing set of individuals (some of which are born while others pass away) and thus highly dynamic. Yet, at every point in time there is one particular set of concurrently coexisting agents.

¹⁴ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for urging me to clarify this.

¹⁵ I am grateful to the audiences at the LSE Political Theory workshop, the UK Kant Society conference in Southampton and the Leuven Kant conference, where earlier versions of this article were presented. Special thanks to Luke Davies, Katrin Flikschuh, Jeanine Grenberg, Paola Romero, Lea Ypi and Michael Oberst.

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