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# Introduction: Parts and Wholes – Kant, Communications, Communities and Cosmopolitics

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In his 1770 *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Rousseau exclaimed:

Whatever one says to the contrary, today there are no more Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards or even Englishmen; there are only Europeans. Everyone has the same tastes and the same habits. (Rousseau 1990, 171)

The prospect evoked by Rousseau of a European identity superseding national differences probably seems remote to us today in the wake of the repeated rejection of the European Constitution (2005). Of course, to place the quotation in its context, Rousseau is himself not speaking in favour of an eventual European project: indeed, according to the sentiments expressed in this text, it seems he also would have voted ‘no’ in the referendum. The motivation for his essay is the wish to *affirm* the importance of specific national and cultural identities *against* what he sees as a dangerously formless abstraction. Rousseau regards ‘Europe’ as leading to a generalised state of decadent mediocrity. Uncannily echoing contemporary debates, he presents ‘Europe’ as smothering its inhabitants’ individuality with its all-encompassing uniformity; for him it lacks the animation which properly pertains to a particular, robust and resonating ‘national form’. He considers that the prevailing deregulated, liberalised Europe has spawned an all-pervasive lust after the same materialist ‘values’. Instead of being the site of shared, traditional, cultural activities, the marketplace is dominated by a reifying consumerism. Love of luxury, unscrupulous greed and the cultivation of hypocrisy undo any deeply felt loyalties and affinities between people, and, as a consequence, generalised prostitution reigns supreme.

Drawing his bleak conclusion about the nature of these new Europeans, Rousseau writes:

What does it matter which master they obey, which state's laws they abide by? As long as they find money to steal and women to corrupt, they are everywhere at home [*ils sont partout dans leur pays*]. (Rousseau 1990, 171)

According to Rousseau, the new Europeans' mobile cosmopolitanism is a hollow, unprincipled lack of commitment to anything in particular – either to culture, to a homeland, to a people, or to a community – hence his willingness in this text to turn his sympathetic attention to a potentially re-emerging nation which might just succeed in resisting the debilitating trend. The Poles, who were at the time engaged in a life-and-death struggle with their rapacious imperial neighbours, provide him with a counter-example to the enfeebled and base humans of modern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In his earlier essay on l'Abbé de Saint Pierre's *Project of Perpetual Peace* (1761), Rousseau, despite greatly appreciating the Abbé's worthiness and admiring his bold idealism, again wonders whether a European federative league is actually a desirable goal. He concludes:

There is no prospect of federative leagues being established otherwise than by revolutions, and on this assumption which of us would venture to say whether this European league is more to be desired or feared? It might perhaps do more harm all of a sudden than it could prevent for centuries. (Rousseau 1927, 131)

Rousseau regards the idea of 'perpetual peace' at once as 'an absurd dream' – l'Abbé Pierre reveals himself to be somewhat childish in his belief that rulers might come to see that it is best to serve the public interest rather than foster private gains – and as a 'reasonable project' to be admired (1927, 129). However, for him such a pacific state of affairs can be brought about only by fearfully violent means, which leads him to conclude that it is perhaps for the best that the place, a confederated 'Europe', where perpetual peace would reign actually does not exist (131).

Kant, despite being an avid reader of Rousseau, gives a different focus to his considerations of perpetual peace and a different view of cosmopolitics. He is interested in a system wherein the 'violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere', that is to say, wherein the

*parts* – whether they be individuals, communities, nations or continents – communicate with and through a greater *whole* (1991, 107–8). Unlike Rousseau and l’Abbé Pierre, Kant sees that the project of perpetual peace cannot be limited to an international agreement between European states.<sup>2</sup> Such a eurocentric focus is too partial. The rapid development of long-distance trade and communications technology necessarily means that the scale of the project has to be at least global. As such, the utopia in question for Kant is no clearly demarcated space, tightly contained within recognised borders, such as the Corsican, Swiss and Polish models celebrated by Rousseau. On the contrary, Kant’s utopian world of ‘perpetual peace’ is open, multiperspectival and dynamic.

The use of the terms ‘openness’, ‘multiperspectivism’ and ‘dynamism’ may give the impression that Kant has an unreservedly optimistic view of what the future might hold. This is far from being the case. The project of perpetual peace is presented by him with great ambivalence: it is both eminently desirable as the only way forward for humankind and yet also highly preposterous, profoundly unrealistic in its aims; therefore entertaining such fancies continually runs the risk of becoming a complete waste of time. Sometimes perpetual peace presents itself as an attainable goal towards which humanity is ineluctably progressing. Sometimes, however, it fades like a mirage, leaving one stranded and cynically musing on how, after all, the only place where humans are destined to find permanent peace in this world is the grave (Kant 1991, 93). This structural ambivalence, the volatility intrinsic to the very idea of perpetual peace, is produced by the faulty nature of human beings themselves. In ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose’ (1784), Kant had already identified the source of the human flaw when he wrote that ‘humans neither pursue their aims purely by instinct, as the animals do, nor act in accordance with any integral, prearranged plan like rational cosmopolitans’ (1991, 41–2). It would thus seem that the world of humans is doomed to remain chaotic if the very building-blocks of any constructive project, humans themselves, are, by their very nature, resistant to any systematic organisation and impervious to schemes designed to improve them. Neither wholly determined by instincts like animals, nor ruled by reason like rational cosmopolitans (who would be the ideal citizens of a utopian state), humans unpredictably fluctuate in their behaviour, sometimes complying with civic regulations, sometimes selfishly opting out of any social contract altogether. The manifest nature of human beings would have to be transformed for a global community to take shape and to be maintained.

Like so many utopian schemes, the project of combining humans together into a world community is dependent on the extent to which human nature is regarded as capable of evolution or as needing change. Either utopias are seen to fail because human nature is deemed to be recalcitrantly set in its ways or, alternatively, utopias themselves are regarded as constitutionally flawed because they require a certain type, or certain types, of human for their fragile structures to perdure. It is evidently for this reason that many supposed utopias turn out in fact to be totalitarian dystopias wherein humans are coerced into abiding by fixed, socially useful patterns of behaviour by means of various disciplining devices. The 'brave new world' is thereby unmasked as a repressive society, often run by an elite who ruthlessly employ propaganda, the secret police, drugs and, in more modern times, genetic engineering to enforce the law on otherwise rebellious subjects. Kant himself has been accused of being complicit with such a regime.<sup>3</sup> The Prussian academic has been portrayed as restraining and restricting the human within coldly calculated faculties which prefigure the repression of a fascistic *Gleichschaltung*.

However, Kant can be seen as having a different conception of human nature from those pessimists who see humans as possessing predetermined characteristics which thwart all evolution. He can also be distanced from those ideologues who try to stifle all human potential for growth so as to enforce their regimented worldview.<sup>4</sup> While exploring the specificity of humans by *negative* instruction, by drawing up guidelines of what not to do (i.e. by establishing which intellectual pursuits are ultimately counterproductive, a waste of energy, for humans), he leaves open any positive, determining definition of the human. Similarly, the utopian project of relating *parts* (e.g. human individuals) together into and through a greater *whole* (e.g. humanity within an open global community) is conceived as the birthplace, the 'womb [*Schoss*] within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop' (Kant 1991, 51). Just as any tentative regularity one might be able to trace in human affairs is detectable only at the level of the species, and not to be generated among individuals, here too it is the human species itself, and not necessarily individuals, which can develop its hitherto unconceived and unconceivable potential once a 'universal cosmopolitan existence' is eventually adopted. Specific human individuals do not have to be converted, pacifically or coercively, to the utopian cause; they can remain devilish in their inclinations if they so desire (Kant 1991, 112).

Another important aspect of Kant's notion of cosmopolitics is that the *whole* (the open global community) to which humans as *parts* are to

belong and to contribute is *not* conceived as a self-centred emanation outwards.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the part (the individual and his/her immediate relations) does not relate to the wider world as if through a series of concentric circles.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the inter-communication of the *part* and the *whole* is no linear relation, no gradual consolidation of knowledge originally centred on or located in the individual and his/her intimates. In contrast to the belief of Kant's favourite poet, Alexander Pope, the participation and commitment of the world-aware human does not 'rise from individual to the whole' (Pope 1963, 546: IV, l. 362). Indeed Pope's ambitious analysis, in 'An Essay on Man', of the place of the human within an open – plural and evolving – cosmic system, although often quoted with apparent approval in *Universal Natural History and the Theory of the Heavens*, differs in important ways from Kant's own views.

One example of their divergent views is apparent in the following lines from 'An Essay on Man':

God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul  
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.  
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,  
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;  
The centred mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,  
Another still, and still another spreads,  
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,  
His country next, and next all human race,  
Wide and even more wide, th'o'erflowerings of the mind  
Take ev'ry creature in, of ev'ry kind (Pope 1963, 546–7: IV, ll.  
361–70).

Pope describes how an affective radiation out from the centred self towards 'friend, parent, neighbour' should be followed by the more mental embracing of fellow countrymen and, yet further still, of humanity at large. Once the 'close and natural ties' of the 'family' (the biological family and its neighbourhood, the nation as extended family, and then the family of humankind have been embraced), the human can generously include 'ev'ry creature . . . of ev'ry kind' in his embrace. Hence this conception of the cosmopolitical whole is not only originally self-centred, but also anthropocentric. Despite often reminding humans of the relativity and partiality of their view of the world, by evoking, for instance, the point of view of a 'superior being' to whom the intelligence of a Newton would appear ape-like,<sup>7</sup> Pope's basic message is one purporting to be a consolidation of our notion of ourselves: 'The proper

study of mankind is man,' he states (1963, 516: II, l. 2). Like Kant's critical project, his essay insists on the limits of human knowledge, but his aim is, unlike Kant's, an ethico-theological one: he wants to expose the vanity of presuming to pass judgement on what we cannot know so as to 'vindicate the ways of God to Man' and, concomitantly, prove that 'whatever is, is right' (Pope 1963, 504, 540: I, l. 16, IV, l. 145). Kant, in contrast, does not want humans to be content with their lot and with the ways of the world. A passive acceptance of the status quo as the assuredly wise product of an omnipotent divine being would be akin to leading the peaceful pastoral existence of a golden age (Kant 1991, 45). It would leave unfulfilled the vocation of the human to be substantially self-constructing. The inter-communicating world of 'perpetual peace' is therefore not the originary, quasi-mythical state of nature towards which a Rousseau would have us turn (Kant 1991, 98). Kant's utopia is instead a cultural, artificial construction dependent on constant and careful mediation, given shape by the vigilant conversion process of the categorical imperative: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law' (Kant 1956, 30).

Also, in contrast to Pope's depiction of the cosmopolitical whole and the human's relation to it, Kant's is not predicated on concentric circles originally situated in the self. It is true that the way we understand the world around us, as our understanding is discursive not intuitive, 'must advance' doggedly from parts, amassing and subsuming them into a whole (Kant 1988, 63 §77). However, the utopian idea of perpetual peace is an emergent whole, a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. As a consequence it *cannot* be understood as such, but then *it does not have to be*: we are to regulate our actions in relation to it as project(ion). This task is also supremely difficult for humans and it involves a stretching and straining of the self in relation to 'all rational beings'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the moral law is not to be generated from among us humans. It is not to be the product of a consensual agreement between human beings; it does not permit a comfortable accommodation with human foibles and weaknesses. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant therefore writes:

it is not enough to demonstrate freedom from certain alleged experiences of human nature (though to do this is in any case absolutely impossible and freedom can be demonstrated only a priori): we must prove that it belongs universally to the activity of rational beings endowed with a will. (Kant 1963, 115)



The moral law stretches the human by appealing to his will, encouraging him to muster more than human strength. It applies to us (but not to us exclusively), directs us to act imperatively, 'although every propensity, inclination and natural bent were opposed to it' (Kant 1963, 93). The moral law acts in this demanding way upon us humans as it necessarily structurally encompasses the possibility of other, maybe more rational, creatures, less driven by sensuality, elsewhere in the universe. This appeal to other intelligent life possibly to be found on other planets is one which features throughout Kant's writings. It necessitates a putting into question of what it is to be human in relation to what could be a radically different life-form. It signals a break with earth-bound, strictly geocentric concerns. It also concatenates Kant's thoughts on cosmopolitics with his cosmological writings.<sup>9</sup> In stark contrast to Pope's generation of cosmopolitics from a homely, human base, Kant's analysis decentres the human, obliging him to conceive of himself in relation to a complex inter-splicing of different versions of the world. This obligation structurally to take into account multiperspectival approaches to an undelimited world, wherein each point of view cannot be known in itself, is alimented by technology. Indeed, technology plays a central role in Kant's cosmopolitical utopia: it is a constitutive part of the production of the human, with and against the grain of nature.

For instance, in *Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment* (1784), the technology of the printing press, the postal service and long-distance travel (or, to use a contemporary example, the interactivity of the Internet) all help to construct the public sphere of the 'world of scholars' wherein the 'private self', otherwise a 'mere cog in a machine' obediently carrying out orders in the workplace, is converted into a different sort of animal. By assessing and contributing to the cosmopolitan world of global information and ideas, the 'public' self can express itself and act more freely, by exploring the extension of the (personal and inter-subjective) self through telecommunications (Kant 1991, 56).

In *Idea of a Universal History* (1784), Kant openly admits that the world is often a 'hell of evils' (Kant 1991, 48). Crucial to maintaining the notion of a future-oriented cosmopolitics against such blatantly stacked odds is the cosmological vantage point. This is also informed – given form – by technological practices. One of the means, which becomes *an extension of ourselves as project* – a project which is *also* the fulfilment of our potential, of our 'original capacities' – is the telescope (Kant 1991, 51). Repeatedly Kant refers to the 'different angle', the 'large scale', the 'great world drama' in connection with seeing ourselves as terrestrials (Kant 1991, 41, 42, 53). Astronomical observations, made possible by

telescopes, address the question of the formation of the cosmos, the nature and composition of the universe and the earth's place within it, and the possibility of extraterrestrial life and how it might differ from ours. These enquiries give us the perspectives requisite for thinking a *global* identity and *global* politics. Technology permits us to trace indications of how and when the universe was formed. It also enables us to assume a theoretical – or even, in more recent times, an actual physical – position in outer space which renders the conception of the planet *as a whole* possible. The information gleaned from such observations serves as an index for Kant of 'purposeful natural processes' which can bolster our faith in a development of human nature towards a general, shared interest 'in maintaining the whole' (Kant 1991, 50–1). A Kepler who 'found an unexpected means of reducing the eccentric orbits of the planets to definite laws' and a Newton 'who explained these laws in terms of a universal natural cause' are tool-using tools that enable us to create 'guiding principles' through which to conceive a 'universal history' that implicates us in the future, and past, of our planet and its denizens (Kant 1991, 42). Observation and exploration of the 'starry heavens' become an integral part of our definition of ourselves *and* of our responsibilities.

The microscope complements the telescope's opening-up of ever-larger 'worlds beyond worlds' (Kant 1956, 166)<sup>10</sup> with its revelation of the ever smaller. The technologically mediated realisation that, to cite *The Critique of Judgment*, there is 'nothing so small which in comparison with some still smaller standard may not for our imagination be enlarged to the greatness of a world' (Kant 1988, 97 §25) provokes a disorienting decentering of the human through which the 'feeling of a supersensible faculty within us', our autonomy – our freedom and its responsibilities – is concomitantly 'awakened'. We rely on technology to supplement the fallibilities of our senses so as to see and explore ever further, but technology also demonstrates the relativity and constructedness of our limited, particular world, of our *Umwelt*. However, it thereby triggers off a reaction in us, sparking a rethinking of ourselves, a reinscription of ourselves within the 'entire span of nature [*in dem ganzen Umfang der Natur*]' (Kant 1981, 194). This confrontation with the dynamic world of magnitudes opened out by technology wrenches us out of the world of anthropomorphised nature. No longer is the natural world conceived of as just serving our purposes.<sup>11</sup>

There are other important perspectives which Kant explores in relation to his cosmopolitical project. I can merely allude to them here.<sup>12</sup> There is the technology which permits us to see the earth as a limited, spherical surface (i.e. cartography, the construction of ships and

aircraft). It is this view of the globe as made up of vast, alternating expanses of land and sea which gives force to the law of hospitality. Bearing this view in mind one can see that no one has a primordial right of possession to patches of the earth's surface. The frontiers of nation-states are visibly not anchored in natural – physico-geographical – law (Kant 1991, 106ff). Finally, there is the technologically informed perspective, not of the earth's surface this time, but of the planet's depths. The technologies of the earth sciences plunge below the earth's crust and their discoveries led Kant to dismiss attempts to read natural disasters as divine signs intended for humans. Instead of contorting himself (as others did) to reconcile the 1755 Lisbon earthquake with a presupposed providential harmony, Kant insists that earthquakes happen in supreme indifference to human affairs. The consequence of this relinquishment of the human need for signification and this appreciation of our insignificance as mortals should, Kant suggests, be to activate 'our love of humanity'; it should be to stimulate our sense of needing one another for survival and of belonging together as a community (Kant 1912b, 471).

To conclude, Kant encourages a multiperspectival view of the world, of our place within it and of the nature of the 'our', of human commonality, of human nature, through his analyses of extraterrestrial life, of the earth as a spherical surface, of our life as terrestrial denizens and of the earth as a fiery ball surrounded by a thin crust. This generation of radically different and irreconcilable viewpoints, viewpoints which cannot be fused together to form one overall picture, is part of his cosmopolitical project. We are to feel part of, and act responsibly within, an expanding, evolving whole which we cannot fully conceive of, let alone dominate. It is this cosmopolitical vision that this collection of essays tries to respond to, and make sense of, in terms of the actual present and of the emerging future.

## Notes

1. Unfortunately the Poles' valiant resistance proved to be futile when Poland itself was soon afterwards wiped from the map until its eventual restitution after the Second World War.
2. Despite in effect rejecting a limitation of his project to European nations, he does, nevertheless, conceive of his new world order as a voluntary confederation of sovereign states. For Kant a world republic or a world monarchy would represent 'soulless despotism' as it would signal the collapse of (free) difference into (repressive) monolithic identity (Kant 1991, 113). For a discussion of the problems that this position causes for his project for a world community, see Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann (1997, 59–77). For a more nuanced and detailed account than Kant's of the possibilities opened up by the world state, see Partington's analysis of H. G. Wells' vision in Chapter 8 in this volume.

3. See, for instance, Nietzsche (1987, 140; 1990, 134); Adorno and Horkheimer (1979); Böhme and Böhme (1985).
4. For an analysis of Kant as a keen proponent of human character as potential, see Morgan (2001).
5. This latent 'ecological' consideration by Kant of the human as part of a much wider and diverse system of living and non-living forms was obviously of major importance for Goethe. See Chapter 11 in this volume.
6. For an informative analysis of the mereological discussion between Nussbaum *et al.* and a critique of the either (part) or (whole) nature of that debate, see Chapter 7 in this volume.
7. These lines are quoted by Kant (1981, 190).
8. This reference to 'rational beings', which is constant across the precritical/critical divide in Kant's writings, has received little attention up to now. For one exception, see Crowe (1986). See also Chapter 10 in this volume and Morgan (forthcoming).
9. For an extended discussion of the nature and stakes of 'concatenation', see Chapter 5 in this volume.
10. For an extended consideration of the famous paragraph to which this phrase belongs, see Chapter 10 in this volume.
11. This refusal to tie nature down to anthropocentric 'purposiveness' was one of Kant's main attractions for Goethe; see Chapter 11 in this volume.
12. For a full exploration of the importance of technology for Kant's notion of cosmopolitics, see Morgan, 'Angelaki', Vol. 12, No. 1, April 2007.

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