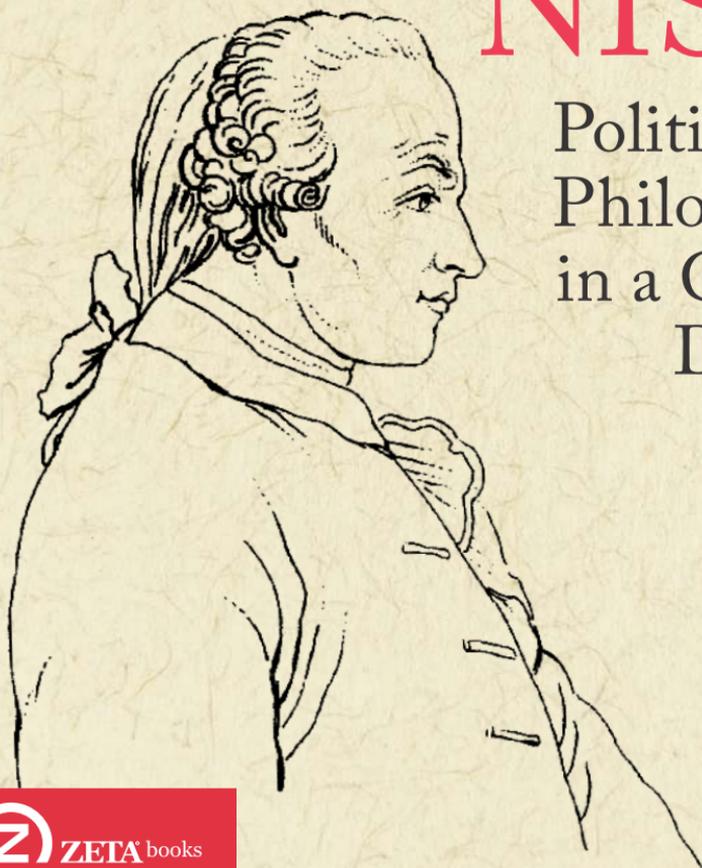


Áron Telegdi-Csetri

# KANT'S COSMO POLITA NISM

Politics and  
Philosophy  
in a Global  
Debate



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*For my son and wife*



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## Introduction

A work in the political philosophy of cosmopolitanism, this book aims at a Kantian interpretation concerning the role of philosophy in modeling the societal horizon of a cosmopolitan sense of politics. The primary philosophical work interpreted here is Kant's *Towards Perpetual Peace*, all the reflections contained herein being inspired by a dialogue with its text. As such, this book stands at the crossroads between Kantian studies and contemporary theories of political-philosophical cosmopolitanism. It has not been conceived as a monolithic whole, rather has emerged as the result of renewed attempts of approximation of the issue at hand, originally written as independent essays (see below). However, given the organic evolution of the research behind it, the texts within the book at hand do have their own conceptually coherent perspective on the details of the subject-matter of this research, spanning from the theoretical philosophy of the knowing subject under the concept of temporality, through a Kantian definition of politics as a concept of practical philosophy, towards a cosmopolitan use of philosophical critique within the area thus defined. We shall delineate this perspective within the present introductory remarks.

Although Kant's philosophy has an overall practical orientation, the foundations of his system are laid down within his theoretical philosophy, one that we may call a metaphysics of the knowing subject. In order to ensure a legitimate passage to a practical philosophy in a full, empirical, social, historical—and,

for our present purposes, political—sense, one needs to crayon the conditions under which this theoretical knowledge may be applicable to realities that describe man in her empirical existence. More yet, this applicability should itself be based on this very theoretical philosophy.

This is what **chapter 1** aims at, and namely, through introducing an anthropological perspective within Kant that is based on the existential temporality functioning as the living core of his theoretical system. The concept of life is used as a bridge between the theoretical and the practical perspective, the latter culminating in an autonomous idea of politics, while critique itself is defined as the elucidation of the limit between the two, following Josef Simon. While these all point towards the cosmopolitan aim of Kant's political philosophy, its temporal foundations are laid here and will return later on. At this stage, the issue of this temporality marked by finitude is signaled by the paradoxical treatment of the world state—a purported cosmopolitan goal—by Kant. Further, the paradoxical elements of a possible political philosophy are put into the context of *Perpetual Peace*, where a highly interesting performative play of irony is uncovered that points beyond the elements of a mere “philosophy of right”. Through these inquiries, the chapter lays the groundwork of the book's entire subject matter, in the following structure: temporality as the existential core of Kantianism; politics as the perspective of analysis for the present research; cosmopolitanism as the general moral-political horizon of Kant's philosophy; and, implicitly, cosmo-politics (i.e. cosmopolitanism seen as a political, not just a moral endeavour), as the idea serving as a tentative research goal of such an inquiry.

Thus having located the issue in general terms, **chapter 2** takes the inquiry into a Kantian concept of politics to the next level. This happens by confronting Hannah Arendt's influential interpretation that places the concept into the context of the Third Critique. A more faithful interpretation is found in

Habermas' account of Kantian publicity, one that is closely linked to philosophy's historical role that also posits a paradoxical relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal world. An aesthetical understanding of the world—as a reflection of universal morality, hence playing a role of moral guidance—is admitted as a necessary condition of the concept of politics, however its *locus* proper is not found within aesthetics, but in the ideas presented in *Perpetual Peace*. As deduced from the performativity of Kant's writing, the personal—existential—involvement of the class of philosophers into history through the philosophical critique of politics is reaffirmed.

This role of philosophy is more clearly outlined in **chapter 3**, only to come back to the idea of a possible aesthetical interpretation and to point forward to a more faithful, more Kantian and more revolutionary interpretation—that of Volker Gerhardt—as opposed to the Arendtian one sketched above. Peace itself is found to be the very foundational act of politics—as against the idea of beauty—that is in turn based on an understanding of politics where a rhetorically animated political intelligence creates political culture—not merely culture as such. This, in turn, builds up to the idea of politics as societal self-definition—a flesh-and-blood result no mere culture could produce. On these grounds, following Patrick Riley, Arendt's interpretation is shown to be for what it inherently is—a very productive paraphrase that is as famous as it is, at times, malicious.

Having clearly outlined our interpretation of Kant's idea of politics, we address the specific relationship between politics and philosophy—a relationship that is mutually defining in a conceptual as well as a societal sense. While politics pertains to the field of practice, it does not simply subsume to morality—something philosophy could treat as its own. On the contrary, as we find out in **chapter 4**, philosophy and politics are both mutually independent—and namely in the manner of indeterminacy—as well as complementary, to the point where we can talk, together

with Volker Gerhardt, about a “division of labour” between them. Mainly following his interpretation, the chapter clarifies Kant’s prohibitive, anti-Platonistic stance regarding philosophy’s possible—purportedly desirable—involvement in politics. This very relationship, however, remains within the terrain of philosophy—as critique—since the practical knowledge at the heart of politics can be tackled conceptually no less than morals can. Philosophy itself takes on a more empirical role while being active in this manner—hence it acquires a perspectival character that is a sign of its temporal, empirical, finiteness. Kant introduces a new concept of practical rationality—politics as the executive doctrine of right –, an idea only matched by the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. This existentialistic sense of normative and perspectival rationality both allows philosophical critique on and excludes philosophical involvement from political action: it presupposes the here-and-now of the acting subject that is not open to discursive deliberation. This overturns the theory-practice relationship, making reason itself into an act, i.e. a reality—and the reality of philosophy consists in its abstraction from political, societal involvement. This strict distinction is however accommodated within a general concept of culture that mediates exactly such divisions of labour; indeed, a democratic division of powers institutes exactly such a relationship between the legislative and the executive branches, hence, by analogy, this seems to be an institutionally, at least tacitly, legitimate setup.

Having thus outlined philosophy’s position against politics, Kant’s political theory is now applied to the concept of deliberation in **chapter 5**. Deliberation is not however understood in terms of domestic—social contract-based—politics, but in terms of a radically Kantian, cosmopolitan politics, or cosmo-politics. Following the relevant ideas of several contemporary authors, this interpretation of Kantian politics is shown to be its authentic reading, one that mediates the traditionally addressed conflict between a social-contract-based domestic politics and an

anarchistic international politics by restating both on the common ground of a primary cosmopolitan dialogue. Kant's nation of devils argument—positing a legal community that emerges out of natural necessity irrespective of any kind of moral drive—is shown exactly as the grounds to argue for a truly public, hence cosmopolitan, hence morally adequate politics, as the overcoming of the state of nature—now between states, not individuals. Therewith, security-based arguments within both internal and external politics are grasped as non-cosmopolitan.

On the temporal side, the idea of the provisionality of the international sphere is introduced, following Elisabeth Ellis, as a relatively rightful condition that only makes normative sense as temporally pointing to—and logically claiming—a genuinely rightful condition. Therein, the idea of practical necessity is stipulated, an autonomous dimension of practical reason that shows a close functional resemblance with Gerhard's practical rationality. In order to differentiate between the moral and the legal aspect of this rationality, we come back to Kant's concept of "right"—the concept standing behind his idea of politics. The state is legitimized through the transcendental normativity expressed in right as the obligation to exit the state of nature, which is valid cosmo-politically, i.e. meta-nationally, which also makes it prone for a critique that might point towards an equal degree of legitimacy of revolutions. However, given this same transcendental normativity exemplified by the conceptual genesis of the concept of property, revolutions are found to be forbidden except very special cases where the illegitimacy of the state is blatant. Hence the social contract is seen as a stepping stone for any moral evolution, the latter being brought about through the cosmopolitically moralizing work of philosophy—as an *etalon* of public debate.

While revolutions are thus forbidden by Kant, he nonetheless develops a complicated argument to legitimize the French Revolution by highlighting that the king illegally renounced his

sovereignty to the Orders. From a philosophical perspective, revolutions are in turn presented as natural events, hence all that is relevant about them is the reaction of disinterested publics—the enthusiastic reaction of Germans to the providential strive towards freedom expressed in the French Revolution—a cosmopolitan argument for faith in the betterment of the human race. A great opportunity for critique—a great *a propos* for philosophy: the philosophical idea of rational faith complements the concept of practical rationality grounding politics.

**Chapter 6** analyzes the purported cosmic allegiance of philosophy—in a Stoic sense—and delimits Kantian cosmo-politics from it, in the sense of the latter’s quasi-political, practical engagement. Kant’s notion of “philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense” is brought into discussion again, showing the more general cosmopolitan thrust of his philosophy as a whole. As compared to present notions of cosmopolitanism, his specific cosmopolitan right is found to be rather restrictive, namely, to the right to hospitality, something that protects both “others” as well as “locals” from harmful interference. On a second level however, his cosmopolitanism builds up to much more—in the light of his cosmopolitan sense of philosophy—, namely, to the right for an actual capability for the public use of reason, that is, a right to communicate. This is the ultimate sense of the cosmopolitical engagement of philosophy: the obligation to heed the voice of reason, in any of its possible occurrences, hence in all *bona fide* communication, irrespective of its source. Indeed, hospitality itself is shown to stem from such communicative freedom, making the latter indispensable for the construal of the former. Based on such a universal fundamental right, the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship is proposed as the juridical correlatum of universal right. Therewith, justice is also done to the late modern phenomenon of dissent, as to an agency of meta-national politics empowered by universal right.

On the other hand, Kant's cosmopolitanism displays a plethora of further meanings that may be exploited beyond this programmatic approach. As **chapter 7** clarifies, his doctrine is in fact the conglomerate of as much as seven different senses of cosmopolitanism. Beyond the mere richness of this level of complexity, his philosophy should be measured according to its potential to confer a cosmopolitan sense of political philosophy—cosmopolitics—that makes justice both to his cosmopolitan orientation and to his politics. We come back in more detail to Kant's philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense, now in a phenomenological sense—as to the existential worldliness of the knowing subject. While all the meanings of cosmopolitanism are found to be non-political therein, its very goal—humanity itself—is, by contrast, political. The subject adequate for such a goal—a good-willed community of rational beings or a voluntary societal association—is not the subject of duty, but of virtue, hence treated under headings such as religion. This also sheds light to Kant's idea of a voluntary league of—good-willed—states as the ideal of a cosmopolitan community—his ultimate cosmopolitan proposal. At the same time, the plurality of cosmopolitan cultures is brought into question—as an anthropological perspective—leading to the cosmopolitanism of social sciences, connected, again, to the issue of culture. Answering the post-modern criticism of Kantian cosmopolitanism, culture is understood as a temporal expression of atemporal contents, hence purposefully plural within the teleology of nature, accounting both for discord as well as concord, both enabling and blocking a singular cosmopolitan community understood as a regulative idea. On the other hand, the individual gains a position where she may overcome this culture through the idea of work, making her agency objectively valid rather than culturally communicative. Difference is preserved, in analogy with the plurality of states in the cosmopolitan league safeguarded against a possibly tyrannical world state. Virtue as the ultimate terrain of cosmopolitical action

remains an open issue from the point of view of the book at hand.

What exactly Kant envisaged as an ideal—however practically impossible—world-state is the subject of **chapter 8**. The Kantian view of cosmopolitan right is presented as different from his general cosmopolitanism, this difference being applied to his proposal of a world-state. In order to address this relationship—inscribed into the problematic Kantian dichotomy of the noumenal and phenomenal world—reference is made, again, to the idea of provisionality. Under the term of provisionality, the idea of a world state—one that Kant quite seriously proposes at times—is put into a different light. Namely, the voluntary league presented in *Perpetual Peace* is shown to be a related, but ultra-minimalist version of the meta-state, i.e. a quasi-legal entity without an enforcement- or security-perspective—the only non-contradictory model of a state of states that maintains both state sovereignty and political universalism. Indeed, a state of peoples is found to be an idea or reason, hence a necessary ideal. Still, the voluntary character of the pacific league means that adherence is not enforceable—hence provisionality remains indefinitely valid, and historically given states remain indefinitely, but only provisionally legitimate. As such, perpetual peace and the cosmopolitan state it is dependant upon remain unattainable, yet desirable ideals, with a conjectural practical dialectic ensuing from them. To merely hint towards a possible solution, provisional right is applied, together with Ellis, to international law, resulting in an idea of right without guarantee. Provisional right shifts its legitimacy to the cosmopolitan contents of its processes and norms—maintaining a simultaneous state- and world-state legitimacy. The public sphere is therewith highlighted as the surrogate of the third-party legislator of the unattainable world state. Strict as against imperfect moral imperatives—duties and virtues, if we like—are separated by the philosopher standing for this very public sphere—the first being out-of-hand

cosmopolitan, the second only indirectly, hence being left provisional or political. Philosophers hence step forward again as a temporal surrogate of an atemporal community—more a reality than a speculative idea in Kant’s time—and their autonomy, as an expression of the non-binding character of the ultimate universal goodwill of the latter. The increasing juridification of international affairs or their cosmopolitization is deemed unavoidable by analogy of the nation of devils argument, i.e. on non-cosmopolitical grounds, to the same result as in the case of individuals: renouncement of arbitrary freedom for the sake of protecting legally sanctioned sovereignty, a process pioneered by public discourse. In conclusion, the cosmopolitan process as perpetual provisionality internalizes conflict instead of dissolving it, hence it maintains antagonism as pertaining to sovereignty, not agonism pertaining to an already-definitive pacific institution.

As mentioned above, the book progresses in its intellectual endeavour through a series of self-standing units that have partly been published before, hereby presented in a significantly reworked form that constitutes a coherent whole mirroring the organic flow of years of research. Publications of previous versions of chapters or parts thereof include the following: “Kant’s Cosmopolitanism and the Idea of Culture,” *The International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 4(1), 2011; “Temporality and politics in Kant,” *The Odobleja New Europe College Yearbook*, 2011; “Kantian Politics and Methodological Cosmopolitanism,” *Jagielonian Cultural Studies* 20(3), 2012; “Cosmopolitism și folosirea publică a rațiunii,” *Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria Filosofie* 30(2), 2012; “Cosmopolitanism and deliberative democracy: lessons from Kant to deliberation and back again,” *Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria Filosofie* 32(2), 2013; *Filosofia politică a lui Immanuel Kant* (Argonaut, 2014); “Confronting cosmopolitanism: histories and alternatives,” in: *Problematising Cosmopolitanism* (Argonaut, 2014); “Cosmopolitanism in The

Social Sciences and the Return to Kant,” in Vittorio Cotesta, Vincenzo Cicchelli, Mariella Nocenzi (eds.), *Global Society, Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); “Kant’s World-State Ideal and its Provisional Surrogates,” in *Cosmopolitanism and Difference: Politics and Critique*, *Transylvanian Review* 25(2), 2016.

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