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Kant's Cosmopolitan Relationality: Global Shape of the Earth, Hospitality, and Cosmopolitan Right

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Abstract

This article interprets Kant's political cosmopolitanism through the metaphor of *globus terraqueus*. This spatial metaphor has important consequences for Kant's political philosophy, namely, to highlight Kant's cosmopolitan relationality. The spherical shape of the earth is not only a feature of this planet; rather it creates the conditions for the emergence of increasingly larger communities. This relational reading of Kant's cosmopolitanism is supported by reading the notion of unsociable sociability as grounding relationality in the components of agency, conflict, and vulnerability. Thus, especially through the notions of universal hospitality and cosmopolitan right, Kant's cosmopolitan relationality is useful for reinterpreting his political cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: Kant; *globus terraqueus*; cosmopolitanism; unsociable sociability; relationality; vulnerability

1. *Globus terraqueus* as a conceptual framework for Kant's political cosmopolitanism

Why are there political communities on the blue marble that is planet Earth, rather than not? In Kant's political philosophy, we can find an interesting, albeit mostly neglected answer: because of the spherical shape of the earth, it is inevitable that individuals meet each other. Upon this initial meeting, it is likewise inevitable that people form social communities which turn into legally and politically consolidated entities. The thought experiment of *globus terraqueus*, which in Kant's idiom refers to the roundness of the globe and being covered by earth and water, is the conceptual framework for his political cosmopolitanism, connecting the spherical shape of the earth precisely with *community* and *commercium*.

It is astonishing to note that there are few engagements with Kant's notion of *globus terraqueus*. Take, for example, Arthur Ripstein (2022), who uses 'globus terraqueus' in the title for a lecture at a recent Kant Congress but quite tellingly does not engage with Kant's metaphor in the body of the text. Central recent commentaries, such as Byrd and Hruschka (2010: 127), do not further elaborate the wording of Kant's metaphor. What is striking, however, is that Kant uses it as a

geographical metaphor in the context of political theory. Cultural theorist Diane Morgan (2014: 142–3) argues that Kant uses the technical-physical terminology of *globus terraqueus* as a reminder of the limitedness of the globe. Acknowledging limited space and, thus, limited resources, Morgan hints, is Kant's attempt to avoid the category of cosmopolitan right drifting off into mere speculation. Of course, it is not entirely surprising that Kant uses a geographical metaphor. In fact, geographical metaphors and compound uses of the word 'world' (*Welt*-) are frequent and wide-reaching in Kant's philosophy (Salikov/Sturm/Zhavoronkov 2025). Kant's long-lasting lectures on Physical Geography speak to his deep familiarity with geographical issues (cf. Buchenau 2023: 191–7). However, it remains puzzling why Kant utilizes the metaphor of *globus terraqueus* within the confines of his political cosmopolitanism.

To answer this puzzle, this article advances a relational reading of Kant's political cosmopolitanism. Starting from his social theoretical notion of 'unsociable sociability' in the *Idea for a Universal History* (1784), this article argues that Kant's cosmopolitan relationality is conceptually finalized in the notion of *globus terraqueus* through which he brings together earlier notions of temporal and spatial cosmopolitanism and conceptions of an a priori creation of legal communities. This argumentation thus situates the contemporary literature on Kant's political cosmopolitanism and bridges various strands of his thought (Huber 2022; Massimi 2023; Milstein 2013, 2015; Pinheiro Walla 2016, 2026; Taraborelli 2019). For example, Jakob Huber (2022), who is building on Byrd (2010: 107), has grounded Kant's cosmopolitanism by starting from 'earth dwellers'. I further this approach by taking Kant's notion of *globus terraqueus* seriously. By shifting nuances in recent interpretations, such as the common possession of the earth, which is the logical endpoint of Kant's cosmopolitanism as an apriori legal space (cf. Huber 2022), this article argues that *globus terraqueus* is the conceptual framework which ties cosmopolitical notions such as the spherical shape of the earth, community, and commercium together in a relational manner. Kant's political cosmopolitanism is, thus, held together through a conceptual bracket in a kind of cosmopolitan relationality which is characterized by the components of agency, conflict, and vulnerability.

The article starts by outlining the sources of Kant's cosmopolitan relationality and its components of agency, conflict, and vulnerability based on a reading of his *Idea for a Universal History* essay (section 2). Then follows a detailed discussion of references to the global shape of the earth, original common possession, and argument from earth dwellerhood in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and recent interpretations (section 3). On this basis, the central contributions of this article are elaborated by carefully reconstructing §62 of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in which the sole reference to *globus terraqueus* is found (section 4). In section 5, the components of Kant's cosmopolitan relationality are then applied to the recent debates about the content of cosmopolitan right in the notion of universal hospitality. Section 6 concludes.

2. Sources of relationality: agency, conflict, vulnerability

We begin where Kant first mentions cosmopolitanism in the essay *Idea for a Universal History*, in which he introduces the social theoretical concept of 'unsociable sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) (IUH, 8: 20).¹ Unsociable sociability is not only to be seen as a basic human condition or a social phenomenon with which humanity has

learned to cope. Unsociable sociability, on my reading, does not even strictly presuppose specific views of human nature. Rather, I take Kant's conception of social antagonism to refer to conflict as a feature of how individuals and groups relate to each other. On this reading, unsociable sociability is the driving force of Kant's first conceptual articulation of cosmopolitanism. I argue that unsociable sociability prompts three components of relationality – agency, conflict, and vulnerability – which can be utilized as a starting point to reinterpret Kant's cosmopolitanism. In highlighting these three components, this interpretation avoids essentialist assumptions about human nature but rather points to practical features characterizing humanity. Recall how Kant introduces the concept:

The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is their *antagonism* in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order. Here I understand by 'antagonism' the *unsociable sociability* of human beings, i.e. their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society. (IUH, 8: 20)

Recall the context of the essay. The central aim for Kant in this essay is to reconcile a teleological view of nature with the autonomy of human agents. Granting humans agency – and thus, all kinds of human freedoms, such as freedom of choice, decision, and belief, or values – is hard to square with natural teleology because humans are part of nature too and because humans are drawn to make mistakes, either unintentionally or willingly. In a way, Kant addresses the ambivalences between nature and culture. In this opening statement to the fourth proposition in *Idea*, Kant introduces unsociable sociability to bring this ambivalence to adequate terms. The antagonism in society is a driving force and mechanism in which humans develop 'their lawful order'. Antagonism is a mechanism in which human needs and inclinations enter conflict. Humans need interactions with others; that is what Kant calls to 'enter into society' (*in Gesellschaft zu treten*), and they also need to be left alone, or as Kant says, humans wish to be 'individualized (*isolated*)' (IUH, 8: 21). Quite remarkably, taken together, Kant describes this as 'inclination to be socialized' (*Neigung sich zu vergesellschaften*) (IUH, 8: 20).

This ambivalence can also be described as the component of conflict in relationality. In *Idea*, Kant is in the business of identifying mechanisms that make plausible that history and nature are continuously progressing. Of course, this kind of faithful optimism is rather unpalatable today. However, for Kant, this optimism is rather an expression of a belief in the values of the emerging modern sciences. Conflict, as it is expressed through Kant's concept of unsociable sociability, is a speculative example of identification of mechanisms in nature in which humans do interfere.

According to Kant, unsociable sociability is based on the predispositions of human nature (*Anlagen der menschlichen Natur*) (IUH, 8: 20). However, the predisposition of unsociable sociability does not rule out agency. Otherwise, the driving force which Kant ascribes to conflict in history and society would be at a standstill. Therefore, I take Kant to grant humans agency in their own life chances.² An example is that Kant argues that humans seek concord (*Eintracht*), but that nature delivers discord (*Zwietracht*) (IUH, 8: 21). Notice that Kant is mostly arguing about individual

dispositions or attitudes for action and not necessarily about dispositions in the whole of humanity. This is remarkable because by analogy the adversary of each individual is nature itself. The following exposition drives this observation home: a human 'wills to live comfortably and contentedly; but nature wills that out of sloth and inactive contentment he should throw himself into labour and toils, so as, on the contrary, prudently to find out the means to pull himself again out of the latter' (IUH, *ibid.*). This argument by Kant shows the entwinement of human action and an alleged human nature, which is posed negatively here as sloth and contentment. Therefore, I follow Williams (1983: 8) who stresses that Kant thinks that abilities and capacities are strengthened within society and through interaction with others.

Further textual evidence for my relational reading is found in the fifth proposition which follows the initial exposition of the concept of unsocial sociability. Kant argues that the conflict through which unsociable sociability leads agents will eventually cause a change in the social structures in which agents find themselves. There, Kant argues that the biggest problem for the human species is the question of how to administer justice universally to build and maintain a just civil constitution (IUH, 8: 21). This leads him to imagine a 'cosmopolitan condition' (IUH, 8: 28). My relational reading argues that here Kant is neither solely proposing some epistemological or individual predispositions to express cosmopolitan sentiments, nor only putting forth a rationally valid proposal for a universal institutional design, but rather referring to how people behave and act and expect to be treated.

Expectations and realities of human interaction diverge. This brings the risk of being injured into view. Therefore, the component of vulnerability needs to be addressed. That vulnerability is in the background of Kant's views on cosmopolitanism is plausible when highlighting a closing thought from *Perpetual Peace*:

Since the (narrower or wider) community of the nations of the earth has now gone so far that a violation of right on *one* place of the earth is felt in all, the idea of a cosmopolitan right is no fantastic and exaggerated way of representing right; it is, instead, a supplement to the unwritten code of the right of a state and the right of nations necessary for the sake of any public rights of human beings and so for perpetual peace; only under this condition can we flatter ourselves that we are constantly approaching perpetual peace. (TPP, 8: 360)

Vulnerability of agents is in the background of this passage because Kant acknowledges that violations of rights might occur anywhere at any time. Vulnerability is, therefore, a social phenomenon in the political and social life of individuals regardless of place or social position. Note that *Perpetual Peace* was written by Kant with a public audience in mind. This is reason enough to think that the rhetorical structure of this concluding statement is part of Kant's argument. Kant ties progress towards perpetual peace to an acknowledgement and redress of violations of right. As a response to these violations, Kant argues that cosmopolitan right is a convincing mechanism to address violations and to protect individuals anywhere. The feature of vulnerability sits in the background here because as long as humans are living among each other, there is potential to violate others' rights and to injure one another.

In drafts and notes, which Kant wrote as preparation for his treatise on peace, we find another interesting and related passage: 'A spark of a violation of human rights

suffered in another continent, in accordance with the flammability of the material of thirst for power in human nature, above all in their leaders, lights the flame of war that reaches the region where it had its origin' (Kant 2016: 223; 23:175).³ Furthermore, the formulation found in the drafts does not only directly resemble the 'violation of rights' formulation which Kant ultimately uses in his *Friedensschrift*, but rather this is an instance in which he merges anthropological assumptions with a naturalistic metaphor for a political-theoretical purpose. Kant uses natural metaphors – spark, flammability – to say that violations of human rights negatively indicate a mechanism that points to something akin to human nature. If this were a statement about human nature, it would be much more backhanded than Kant usually formulates such things. Hence, it seems valid to relate the emphasis in both violation-formulations to the fact that violations need to have been actively committed by an agent through measures of conflict. Therefore, I have distilled a conception of relationality with the features of agency, conflict, and vulnerability from this initial discussion in Kant's *Idea*.

Of course, vulnerability is not a uniquely Kantian feature in ethics or political theory. Vulnerability has been recently taken up in feminist thought as a relational and ethical concept (Mackenzie/Rogers/Dodds 2013). Formosa (2013: 88–109) has highlighted the role of vulnerability in Kantian ethics. These recent efforts show that to be vulnerable means to be susceptible to harm, injury, or misuse (Formosa 2013: 89). Both individuals and social groups are vulnerable. Children may be perceived as especially vulnerable and even dependent on their social surroundings, whereas states are both vulnerable and tend to perpetrate atrocities. Furthermore, these contemporary observations lead to the construction of a distinction within the component of vulnerability. Namely, vulnerability as a relational feature in conflicts of agents can either be understood as *vulnerability to harm* or as *vulnerability to a violation of rights*. This distinction will prove to be useful in the ensuing reconstruction of universal hospitality.

My proposed reading of *Idea* has a different thrust than that of most commentators who take this passage to prepare the way for Kant's later anthropology. My conceptual rendering of unsociable sociability is aimed at making plausible that *Idea* provides a conceptual starting point for developing Kant's cosmopolitan relationality – through the components of agency, conflict, and vulnerability. Most commentators view the concept of unsociable sociability as a preparatory statement of Kant's anthropology or in direct reference to his view of human nature (Nehring 2015a, 2015b; Guyer 2009; Wood 1991, 2009). Contrary to this standard manner of connecting unsociable sociability with anthropological commitments and civilizational progress, interpreters like Darwall (2014: 203, 215–16) argue that 'sociability' can be understood as a second-personal relation. However, my conceptual rendering of unsociable sociability is not meant as a full-fledged counterargument to the prevailing opinions of Kant interpreters. Rather, I reconstruct central textual evidence which gives initial suspicion towards identifying Kant's notion of the *globus terraqueus* as a conceptual frame for his view of cosmopolitan relationality.

3. Dwelling on the spherical surface of the earth

Before addressing Kant's conceptions of cosmopolitan right in his late writings in the *Doctrine of Right* and *Perpetual Peace*, it will be useful to flesh out some connections

between Kant's arguments regarding property and his cosmopolitanism. Doing so strengthens the case for the importance of relationality for cosmopolitan thought. Recall Kant's argument regarding property in the state of nature. Ownership of external things in the state of nature is, according to Kant, only possible in the form of possession. There are no strict guarantees for ownership claims in the state of nature, where possession of property can only be valid provisionally.⁴ A civil condition, however, can adjudicate rational and legal claims to possession. Kant conceives of property inherently as a relationship, but not as a relation between a person and a material good. Rather, Kant conceives of property as a relation between persons that organizes access and claims to goods, both materially and noumenally. Oliver (2014: 23–4) argues that Kant's cosmopolitanism is an offshoot of his relational account of property. Kant's cosmopolitanism, according to Oliver, outlines conditions of possibility of commercial and juridical relations between individuals and nations making claims to property. Kant makes these metaphysical claims, Oliver argues, on the basis of two facts, namely that the earth is a sphere or a globe and that 'all human beings live on this same planet' (Oliver 2014: 24). The spherical shape of the earth, thus, is the (meta-)physical condition both for Kant's theory of property relations and his cosmopolitanism.

There is, however, a different argumentation ongoing where Kant connects the idea of original common possession implicit in this notion with his own cosmopolitanism. This connection is highlighted by Huber's (2022: 137) 'argument from earth dwellership', which refines Kant's political cosmopolitanism. Huber's reconstruction of the idea of earth dwellership' starts from §13 in the *Rechtslehre*:

All human beings are originally (i.e., prior to any act of choice that establishes a right) in a 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. This kind of possession (*possessio*) – which is to be distinguished from residence (*sedes*), a chosen and therefore an acquired lasting possession – is a possession in common because the spherical surface of the earth unites all the 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. (MM, 6: 262)

This passage presents, for Huber (2022: 4–6), the textual evidence for Kant's grounded cosmopolitanism. Two features of §13 are especially interesting to discuss here in more detail. On the one hand, 'original possession in common' has cosmopolitan implications. On the other hand, Kant's reference to the 'spherical surface of earth' reappears verbatim in his conceptualization of cosmopolitan right in §62 of the *Rechtslehre*.

Huber highlights that humans are agents who are corporeal beings grounded on the earth: 'human beings are not only morally accountable, but also physically embodied agents who necessarily act in time and space' (Huber 2022: 20). Huber, who in turn follows Sharon Byrd (2010: 107)⁵, calls embodied agents 'earth dwellers' who are 'corporeal beings who have to share the earth in common with a plurality of

agents of the same kind and who (unlike lions, rabbits, and bees) are able to grasp the normative implications of this fact' (Huber 2022: 20). The idea of earth dwellership, as Huber argues, grounds relations of possessions as they matter to agents on a limited and finite space of the earth. From this possession-based argument, he reconstructs an innate right to be somewhere (2022: 22ff).⁶ Kant brings out a related thought that is a hallmark in contemporary cosmopolitan political thought: the moral contingency of one's birthplace. Cosmopolitans today argue that because of this necessity, borders do not matter morally speaking. Kant addresses this in his drafts in preparation for his legal and political philosophy:

Originally I find myself on some land since it is inseparable from my existence (that I once as it were took it by birth is a related concept which can be set aside). Thus I am the occupant of this land [*Innhaber des Bodens*]; whether by right this occupancy is to continue permanently so that the occupancy is at the same time possession can here remain unspecified. (23: 237; Kant 2016: 273)

Being born somewhere gives someone a right to be there and puts them in a relation of right with the place they happen to be in. Thus, everyone is an occupant, or as the German original says *Inhaber*, which connotes that you are responsible for the upkeep of this spot. Kant continues by emphasizing that everyone needs to be somewhere:

This *detentio* (occupancy [*Inhabung*]) as such is bound with the use which is required for my existence, and I do not become obligated to anyone through that occupancy when it does not depend upon my power of choice. This even holds if I involuntarily end up on some land, because I must be able to be somewhere: even if there are also previous occupants of it specifically in relation to borders. (23: 237; Kant 2016: 273)

Kant focuses on the idea of landing somewhere involuntarily. Starting or ending up somewhere involuntarily is not supposed to bring anyone negative consequences. This broad claim is cosmopolitan as it is a claim which is universally applicable.

A final note is in order before moving on to the discussion of Kant's specific notion of cosmopolitan right. As Kant says in §13, the lands of the earth constitute original possession in common. In the drafts we also find the following, perhaps even more succinct, statement: 'All human beings on earth are in an original community of possession (*communio originaria*) of the surface of the earth as a whole, the extent of which is determined and is incapable of enlargement' (23: 322; Kant 2016: 317). As the earth is limited in extension, and thus incapable of being enlarged, everyone initially shares possession of the earth. Huber (2022: 31ff.) reconstructs from this original possession in common the idea of 'constructing right in an a priori space':

The empirical circumstances of our coexistence on the earth are (for the time being) not in principle open to modification by human willing and agency. . . . they constitute an objectively given condition within the limits of which human agents are constrained to establish possible rights relations. (Huber 2022: 35)

Huber argues that it follows from the right to be somewhere, and the connected original possession in common, that Kant constructs right from an a priori point of view. This establishes juridical relations in general.

In the remainder of this article, I aim to connect the components of relationality established above with the cosmopolitan upshot that I take to follow from these ideas of common possession, the right to be somewhere, and the establishment of judicial communities in an a priori space. The proposed reading of relationality in Kant argues that attention to relations of conflict, *commercium*, and vulnerability are needed to refine metaphysical justifications of the genesis of rights on the *globus terraqueus*. In particular, it is crucial to see that Kant's argument regarding the *globus terraqueus* does not merely hinge on the hypothetical first contact of creating legal communities but rather seeks to conceptualize what might happen next. In this sense, temporal and spatial perspectives overlap in Kant's political cosmopolitanism. Thus, Kant's cosmopolitan relationality moves forward through conceptualizing cosmopolitan right on the 'spherical surface of the earth' as the a priori space of universal hospitality.

4. The spherical surface of the earth and cosmopolitan right

The second part of the *Doctrine of Right* is concerned with public right, of which there is a tripartite structure. Section one deals with The Right of a State (*Staatsrecht*) (MM, §§43–52); the second with The Right of Nations (*Völkerrecht*) (MM, §§53–61); and the third is entitled Cosmopolitan Right (*Weltbürgerrecht*) (MM, §62). This third section is merely two pages long but is central to Kant's international political theory. It contains only a single numbered paragraph. Kant's brevity leaves quite a few questions open which are important for this article.

To open this decisive paragraph, Kant calls peace a *Vernunftidee* (idea of reason), which for Kant implies that peace needs to be grounded in a juridical relationship and cannot be achieved merely through philanthropy or ethics:

This rational idea of a *peaceful*, even if not friendly, thoroughgoing community of all nations on the earth that can come into relations affecting one another is not a philanthropic (ethical) principle but a principle *having to do with rights*. Nature has enclosed them all together within determinate limits (by the spherical shape of the place they live in, a *globus terraqueus*. (MM, 6: 352)

In the previous section, we already encountered the turn of phrase 'spherical shape of the earth' (MM, 6: 262). Kant argues that there is no universal legal community possible without the spherical shape of the earth. If the earth were an unlimited plane, people would not find it necessary to form binding kinds of legal communities. They would mingle amongst each other when it pleases and avoid any further interaction when it is a nuisance. Thus, the spherical limitation of the planet creates conditions not only for people to live together but also to live in universally administered ways.

Recall the postulate of public right from §42 of the *Doctrine of Right*, which says that it is a rational and legal duty to create a just civil condition when and where avoiding others is not possible. These two components, the spherical shape of the earth and the

postulate of public right, ground the claim that cosmopolitanism is going to have ‘to do with rights’ rather than with philanthropy.

Another striking feature is of course Kant’s notion of *globus terraqueus*. In fact, it is the only time that Kant uses this term. *Globus* is Latin for ball, sphere, and globe. *Terraqueus* is derived from the words for earth and water. Kant uses other adjacent terms such as *Kugelgestalt*, *Kugelfäche*, and *Erdfläche* more often. *Kugelgestalt* quite literally refers to the shape of the earth (De Bianchi 2015a: 520; 2015b: 520–21). However, these terms are almost exclusively used in contexts of the natural sciences or geography. Kant only uses *Kugelgestalt* once more in a context of history when reviewing Herder’s *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humankind* (1784–1791), where Kant notes that Herder uses natural phenomena to construct a theory of human history – a theoretical move not unlike Kant’s.⁷ The context in which Kant uses the term *globus terraqueus* is, therefore, unique. The fact that the shape of the earth has a political and social function is quite remarkable.

The globe represents a totality. A whole is a relational framework. For Kant and his contemporaries, the thought that earth is round is familiar, but drawing moral, legal, and political conclusions from it is a novel feature in Kant’s political thought. Following the remarks about the spherical surface of the earth, which is the spatial condition of creating a social community, Kant returns to already familiar arguments regarding property:

And since possession of the land, on which an inhabitant of the earth can live, can be thought only as possession of a part of a determinate whole, and so as possession of that to which each of them originally has a right, it follows that all nations stand originally in a *community* of land, though not of *rightful* community of possession (*communio*) and so of the use of it, or of property in it. (MM, 6: 352)

Whereas the spherical surface of the earth grounds the social community and rationally leads into a more just civil condition, it is the possession of external things which creates a legal community. However, Kant introduces another kind of community. A community of interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) in commercial relations:

[T]hey stand in a community of possible physical *interaction* (*commercium*), that is, in a thoroughgoing relation of each to all the other *offering to engage in commerce* with any other, and each has a right to make this attempt without the other being authorized to behave toward it as an enemy because it has made this attempt. (MM, 6: 352)

The issue of commerce and Kant’s notion of *commercium* hold some ambivalences (Milstein 2013, 2015). However, what I wish to highlight within the confines of the argument here is the explicitly relational feature which Kant brings to the fore in this sequence of his elaborations of cosmopolitan right. ‘Offering to engage in commerce’ is exactly an offering to enter a relation of mutual benefit with some other, potentially a stranger, be it in a local civil society or in unknown lands. This channel of interaction must be open without being met instantly with hostility or adversity.

This exposition of this central feature of Kant's conception establishes that cosmopolitan right creates different kinds of relational frameworks which are, for lack of a better term, institutionalized through formal and habitual communities. Kant refers to social, legal, and economic communities as such relational frameworks. He brings these together in §62 to show in which kinds of relational scenarios individuals might find themselves. A cosmopolitan rightful community is one of manifold relationships. In synopsis, these kinds of relational frameworks show why recognition of cosmopolitan right is recognition of a rightful relationship and not merely a matter of a philanthropic attitude, a humanitarian view, or charity. At the end of the day, Kant thinks of these relational frameworks as creating claims of individuals against each other: 'This right, since it has to do with the possible union of all nations with a view to certain universal laws for their possible commerce, can be called *cosmopolitan right* (*ius cosmopoliticum*)' (MM, 6: 352).

5. Hospitality as cosmopolitan relationality in practice

The task of this article is to show that the trifold relationality of agency, conflict, and vulnerability is a central feature within Kant's cosmopolitanism. With the following discussion of Kant's idea of universal hospitality within his specific conception of cosmopolitan right, we in fact arrive at the conceptual content of Kant's notion of cosmopolitan right. My argument is that, precisely at this point, it is helpful to interject the relevant components of relationality – agency, conflict, and vulnerability – into the conceptual content of Kant's political cosmopolitanism in the notion of hospitality. In this respect, I think that Kant's formulation in *Toward Perpetual Peace* takes systematic priority over the lead-up and construction of the argument in the *Doctrine of Right* which was published two years later. Furthermore, I hold that the formulation of cosmopolitan right as found in §62 of the *Doctrine of Right* and the third definitive article in *Toward Perpetual Peace* are compatible and function complementarily. The third definitive article reads: 'Cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal *hospitality*' (TPP, 8: 357). This axiomatic statement is elaborated in detail. Kant again distinguishes philanthropy from cosmopolitan right:

Here, as in the preceding article, it is not a question of philanthropy but of *right*, so that *hospitality* (hospitableness) means the right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility because he has arrived on the land of another. The other can turn him away, if this can be done without destroying him, but as long as he behaves peaceably where he is, he cannot be treated with hostility. (TPP, 8: 357–8).

The analogy of hospitableness and right is quite irking.⁸ Contrary to common-sense intuitions, which would promote hospitable behaviour on the basis of ethical inclinations, Kant describes hospitality by reference to a negative right of expecting not to be treated with hostility when arriving elsewhere. The corresponding negative duty, from the point of view of the greeting parties, extends to anyone who 'has arrived on the land of another'. As Owen (2022: 154–5) argues, hospitality can be conceptualized both in terms of ethics and of right. Hospitality as a matter of ethics is situated on the interpersonal level and is first and foremost an 'attitude towards

others' and a way of standing to the other that 'expresses one's acknowledgment' (Owen 2022: 154). By contrast, Kant provides the conceptual innovation of understanding hospitality as a right. As Owen (2022: 156) argues, Kant thereby transforms both cosmopolitanism and hospitality.

A recent debate within Kant scholarship is helpful to carve out the relationship between relationality, hospitality, and cosmopolitanism. This debate between Christopher Meckstroth, Pauline Kleingeld, and Peter Niesen – which is mediated and staged by David Owen (2022) – is essentially about the scope and content of Kant's conception of hospitality. The scope of Kant's conception has implications for the applicability of cosmopolitan right.

Meckstroth (2018) argues that Kant's conception of cosmopolitan right as hospitality does not entail any positively enforceable claims and rather is a purely negative category. As Meckstroth reconstructs Kant: 'his right of hospitality was framed just so that it could never be invoked to start a new war in the name of pursuing one's rights' (p. 539). He argues against standard interpretations of Kant's conception of hospitality to include some positive values. As Meckstroth would have it, hospitality and cosmopolitan right are categories critical of the cosmopolitan and natural law traditions. Meckstroth's (pp. 543–4) reading of Kant's reception of the *ius gentium* tradition from Grotius to Pufendorf and Vattel and others is characterized by the conceptual innovation of limiting cosmopolitan right and by redefining hospitality. As Meckstroth puts it: 'Kant's aim was not to add new rights, but to reformulate the traditional law of nations strictly on the basis of a demand for peace compatible with the consent of all subject to law' (p. 544). He takes Kant to reinterpret the natural law tradition so as to prevent further justifications of colonial conquest and warfare (p. 550). Meckstroth has a restrictive view of the purpose of Kant's third definitive article, namely, to rule out war as a legitimate strategy in international affairs. On this ground, cosmopolitan right does not need to be binding or coercive and does not need to be institutionalized. Cosmopolitan right, on Meckstroth's reading, is sufficiently covered in international law and can be realized through the tools of adjudication of international law. Hence, Meckstroth limits the scope and applicability of cosmopolitan right as hospitality.

However, Meckstroth's reading has some value from the perspective of a Kantian cosmopolitan relationality. Namely, Meckstroth's purely negative reading of Kant's notion of hospitality and the third definitive article show the indebtedness of Kant's political cosmopolitanism to the value of harm reduction, or in our terms: vulnerability to harm. Cosmopolitan right, on Meckstroth's reading of Kant, is a structural feature to reduce harm through mechanisms of international law on a diachronic basis. However, the other two components of relationality, agency and conflict, and with them a more synchronic perspective, are slightly neglected in this picture. In my view, Meckstroth's reading of Kant's cosmopolitan right over-emphasizes the *content* of hospitality as cosmopolitan right over the *form* of vulnerability in cosmopolitan right. I think that shifting the emphasis on relationality in Kant's conception of hospitality highlights the fact that cosmopolitan right hinges on a connection between content and form. In a relational reading of Kant's cosmopolitan right and hospitality, vulnerability to harm and vulnerability to a violation of rights must be interpreted together. On Meckstroth's account of

hospitality, only vulnerability to harm would arise as an issue of international dispute. Violations of rights would be handled under the auspices of international law.

On the relational view which encompasses both vulnerability to harm and vulnerability to a violation of rights, Kant's cosmopolitan right does not and cannot be subsumed under historical or even contemporary forms of international law: the normative content of cosmopolitan right creates the necessity to rethink the institutional landscape adjudicating the vulnerability of individuals and non-state peoples. Thus, hospitality and cosmopolitan right could not be handled under the auspices of international law. The *content* of cosmopolitan right needs to be put under consideration through different kinds of institutional settings.

Kleingeld (2012: 73) takes Kant's conception of hospitality to mean 'somewhat surprisingly perhaps, that states and individuals have the right to request interaction with other states and their inhabitants, but not a right to enter foreign territory'. She aptly describes (p. 76) hospitality as the *content* of cosmopolitan right. This is formulated as a negative right and is conceptualized in a minimalist way which contains not to be treated with hostility as a foreigner (TPP, 8: 358). This amounts to what Kant distinguishes as *Besuchsrecht* (right to visit) as juxtaposed to *Gastrecht* (right to be a guest) (ibid.). Additionally, Kleingeld emphasizes (p. 77) that Kant defends the rights of non-state nomadic peoples. From the perspective of a Kantian cosmopolitan relationality, Kleingeld focuses on the dimensions of agency. The right to visit as content of universal hospitality and cosmopolitan right gives individuals and non-state peoples agency over their wellbeing when entering unsettled and dynamic legal situations.

In comparison to both Meckstroth and Kleingeld, Niesen presents the most far-reaching interpretation of Kant's conception of hospitality in relation to the illegitimacy of colonial engagements. He argues that Kant's conception of hospitality should be read in light of the critique of European colonialism and identifies cosmopolitan right as hospitality to entail 'communicative rights' (2007: 91). Niesen shows (2005: 209–15, 2021, 2024: 153–55) that cosmopolitan right should be understood as subjective right which can be claimed against any state. He then proceeds to emphasize cosmopolitan right as a 'communicative right', which is a subjective and collective claim to interaction. Niesen concludes (2007: 104): 'Starting from the assumption that hospitality entails communicative rights and duties, I have identified legal rights and obligations that appear both more and less extensive than human rights to free communication'. However, Niesen argues that there is an aporia in Kant's conception of cosmopolitan right because the 'communicative entitlement to seek institutional access' relies rather on Kant's argument regarding the common heritage of humankind and not on original possession in common (2025: 210). On Niesen's reconstruction, Kant misjudges the scope of his own conception of hospitality as it should provide more robust kinds of institutional access. Niesen (2025: 211–14) aims to reconcile these two sources of cosmopolitan right in Kant by proposing to provide institutional provisos to establish global rights of communication and mobility as safe corridors of passage and interaction. In the conceptual terms of this article, Niesen's emphasis on hospitality as communicative right articulates the component of *vulnerability to a violation of rights*. With this emphasis, furthermore, the conflictive nature of hospitality becomes clear as well. Thus, it is the advantage of

a Kantian perspective of cosmopolitan relationality to combine all three components of relationality.

When bringing these debates on universal hospitality as the content of cosmopolitan right together, we see that a Kantian perspective of cosmopolitan relationality might cover all the bases of the components of relationality. The components of agency, conflict, and vulnerability – which were reconstructed from the notion of unsociable sociability in *Idea* – help to illuminate the scope of cosmopolitan right as well as the conceptual content of universal hospitality. Recall that my argument is both to develop an account of Kant's cosmopolitan relationality based on an interpretation of unsociable sociability and to show the compatibility of Kant's renderings of cosmopolitan right in §62 of the *Rechtslehre* and the third definitive article in *Perpetual Peace*. Each of these texts brings decisive evidence with the notions of the spherical shape of the earth and universal hospitality as cosmopolitan right, respectively. The spherical shape of the earth creates, both in hypothesis and in reality, the conditions for human beings to enter juridical and social communities. What might happen next is answered in both the notions of unsociable sociability and universal hospitality. Vulnerable agents potentially enter conflicts over resources or standing. As real human beings we are vulnerable to harm, and as legal entities we are subject to vulnerability to a violation of rights. Through the joined forces of a relational perspective, the cosmopolitan dimension of Kant's argument is emphasized. Universal hospitality, for Kant, applies to individuals and to non-state peoples. If non-state peoples would constitute themselves and their respective community as a state, then international law and not cosmopolitan right would be applicable on Kant's view.

Relationality motivates the structure of Kant's conception of cosmopolitan right and conditions the content of hospitality. Relationality is not limited to the ethical and common-sense view of hospitality but is a baseline for hospitality if it is codified as a subjective and collective right. Notions such as *Inhabung* or common usage are a further moment in which Kant ascribes relationality an important place in his cosmopolitan thought.

6. Conclusion

This article set out to connect various strands of Kant's political cosmopolitanism through a conceptualization of cosmopolitan relationality. By interpreting *Idea* in connection with Kant's later political-philosophical writings in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace*, the notion of *globus terraqueus* appears as a conceptual framework of Kant's political cosmopolitanism. As is well-known, Kant's political cosmopolitanism expresses both temporal and spatial vectors. Typically, *Idea* and its conceptualization of cosmopolitanism are read as a statement of a philosophy of history. For example, Milstein (2015: 108–10) argues that the cosmopolitan problematic unfolds in history. However, the notion of unsociable sociability, and the components of relationality which it includes, show not only a diachronic but also a synchronic dimension. Kant does not merely outline ideal scenarios for institutional proposals which would eventually lead to perpetual peace. The standpoint of the *globus terraqueus* as a basic feature for human interaction on the spherical shape of the earth does not merely create an a priori legal space.

Based on an account of unsociable sociability which highlights agency, conflict, and vulnerability, Kant's notion of the 'earth dweller' does not appear to construct an a priori legal space but rather places humans into relational frameworks wherein they relate to each other as inhabitants of the earth. In turn, this slightly amended version of this concept takes Kant's notion of the spherical shape of the earth or *globus terraqueus* seriously. Hence, this article has developed a relational reading of Kant's political cosmopolitanism which is then further advanced with a reading of his notions of hospitality and cosmopolitan right. Relationality motivates the structure of Kant's conception of cosmopolitan right and conditions the content of hospitality. This relational reading, thus, begins to understand the social implications of Kant's political cosmopolitanism.

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Notes

1 This article follows conventional practice in citing Kant's work. Abbreviations are the following: IUH: *Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*; MM: *Metaphysics of Morals*; TPP: *Towards Perpetual Peace*.

2 I do not investigate 'agency' in the sense of moral agency or ethics to conceptualize relationality in this section. Of course, Kant is associated with arguing for a thick conception of moral agency, for example, in his formulations of the Categorical Imperative in the *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785). I employ agency rather as a loose term to describe how individuals or social groups set practical aims, which they follow in their behaviour and actions.

3 It is useful to provide the full German original sentence: 'Ein Funke der Verletzung des Menschenrechts auch in einem andern Welttheil gefallen nach der Brennbarkeit des Stoffs der Herrschaft in der menschlichen Natur vornehmlich ihrer Häupter die Flamme des Krieges leicht bis zu der Gegend verbreitet wo er seinen Ursprung genommen' (23:175). Note that *Welttheil*, which can be translated literally as 'part of the world', is clearly picked up in Kant's final formulation in *Perpetual Peace*.

4 However, it is important to note that I do not take Kant to be arguing that the property argument is the only argument validly justifying the transition to the civil condition or the 'necessity of the state'. Overemphasizing Kant's property argument would place him firmly in the Lockean and natural rights traditions. This is a prominent and mostly standard reading of Kant's justificatory strategy; see Guyer (2006: 268–94), Byrd/Hruschka (2010: 20, 45, 100). Contrarily, I think that Kant is using the property argument as a proxy to excavate the logic of right in general. Gregory (2023) has recently argued that Kant employs a 'hylomorphic' argumentative strategy to justify the necessity of the state, which says that the necessity to form a state lies *within* the concept of right itself and not primarily in external reasons such as property.

5 Byrd (2010: 107) argues: 'Since the earth is not an unlimited plane, we cannot scatter indefinitely on it but instead form a community of earth dwellers. This community is the idea of a community and not any actual community of individuals'. This emphasis on an *idea* of community in Kant is, as I would argue, evidence for relationality in cosmopolitan thought because Kant refers abstractly to the practice of human agents relating to each other.

6 For the sake of pursuing the arguments of this article, I do not problematize Kant's distinction between innate and acquired rights.

7 Addressing Herder's philosophy and political thought lies outside the scope of this article. On Herder, see Beiser (1992: 189–221), who puts Herder into the camp of the early Romantics.

8 In the German original text, Kant uses the terms *Hospitalität* and adds *Wirtbarkeit* in parentheses (8: 357). These accompanying terms are, for Derrida (2000: 3), a sign that hospitality has more

etymological sources that Kant wishes to connect with the German term *Wirtbarkeit*. Derrida provides the whole array of linguistic connotations and possible meanings:

Wirt (*Wirtin* in the feminine) is at the same time the *patron* and the host [*hôte*], the host who receives the *Gast*, the *Gastgeber*, the *patron* of a hotel or restaurant. *Wirtlich*, like *gastlich*, means ‘hospitable’, ‘welcoming’. *Wirtshaus* is the café, the cabaret, the inn, the place that accommodates. And *Wirt* governs the whole lexicon of *Wirtschaft*, which is to say, economy and, thus, *oikonomia*, law of the household ... (Derrida 2000: 4).

Derrida then notes that Kant’s interjection that hospitality should be framed in terms of a right ‘imposes a contradiction’ (*ibid.*) by claiming that hospitality must be limited. Furthermore, Derrida argues (p. 6) that hospitality is a practice which is yet to be learned by humans. Hospitality is a practice for the future. The more Derrida elaborates the concept of hospitality, the further away he drifts from the problem of hospitality posed by Kant. Ganesh (2018: 162) proposes to read Kant’s cosmopolitan right as a reference to hospitality strictly from the perspective of ‘external freedom’ as the possibility of making choices on the basis that others might be in a position to make the same choices.

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