

In Defense of Cosmopolitanism: Kant's Conceptions in a Neocolonial World

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*This article engages with Immanuel Kant's timeless essay *Perpetual Peace* in order to explore the colonial aspect of cosmopolitanism. Mainly, it explores the question can Kant's cosmopolitanism exist outside of colonialism? It will investigate three key aspects of Kant's essay. Firstly, his calls for a loose federation of nation states, secondly, his insistence that the citizenry must be in charge of all decisions of warfare, and lastly, his assertion of existing universal moral codes. By investigating these three key, yet often misunderstood, aspects and using recent case studies as evidence, this essay concludes that colonialism is not a presupposition of Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism. Kant's cosmopolitanism is a separate and legitimate entity that exists outside of and can transcend colonial relations.*

Introduction

Our modern world exists within a series of colonial interactions governed by dominant Western historical discourse. Reviewing history, it is impossible to deny that colonialism shaped and is still shaping the global sphere of international relations. By WWI imperial powers occupied nine tenths of the planet, and only after the 1960s did nation-states emerge out of these colonial empires (Go 2013, 209). Accounting for this history is the reason that cosmopolitanism has widely been critiqued as neocolonial. Indeed, much of the literature surrounding cosmopolitanism has been focused towards a Eurocentric discourse that privileges Western knowledge. But the question remains: can cosmopolitanism exist outside of colonialism? To answer this, we must explore one of the fundamental documents in cosmopolitan literature: Immanuel Kant's essay *Perpetual Peace* (1903). In it, Kant lays out six preliminary articles to move towards perpetual peace and three definitive articles that act as a guide for states to follow. Many theorists argue that cosmopolitanism is synonymous with colonialism because it fundamentally calls for a consolidation of human communities into a global citizenry (Go 2013, 210). This position is strengthened by turning to the critique of open interactions between nations as being wrought with colonialist power relations. Janet Conway (2011) argues that an attempt to transcend these histories would further entrench the inequality that privileges Western discourse (219). I do not argue that this is indeed true. Whether through political project or sheer ignorance, the failure to acknowledge power relations in the contact between historically unequal nations is detrimental, yet it does not provide

sufficient argument to denote cosmopolitanism as a wholly colonial project. Therefore, in this article, I wish to argue that Emmanuel Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism does not lend itself to colonial ideals. Contrarily, it notes the independence of each state, calling for a total transformation of each government, while engaging with a nuanced version of a human moral code. Therefore, this article will look at three ways in which Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism is traditionally misunderstood. Firstly, it will examine the assumption that cosmopolitanism calls for a universal world republic of peoples. By employing Andrew Linklater's conception in *Cosmopolitan Citizenship* (1998), Kant is specifically seen as theorizing about a loose league of cosmopolitan ideals through which a global social contract can be implemented (27). Secondly, I will explore Kant's favouring of a republican model of government. This was traditionally used to argue for the advancement of Western values throughout the world, however, using Kant's logic, citizens of the state must consent to all decisions of warfare. Using examples from the protests against the Iraq War in Britain as an empirical case study, I will argue that the application of republican modes of government does not imply the dissemination of Western values, it, instead, calls for a reordering of all state governments. Thirdly, I scrutinize the argument that Kant employs a universalist definition of morality to consolidate all political communities into one is unfounded. I use Kwame Anthony Appiah's (2006) nuanced thesis that, while moral codes for each community are different, there are certain values that could be considered universal to the human condition. In exploring these three topics, then engaging with a more modern critique, this paper will conclude that Kant's *Perpetual Peace* is not a neocolonial project, but a nuanced document of hope to escape the perpetual warfare that humans have inflicted on each other throughout conceptualized history.

Terms and Definitions

Before beginning the arguments, a clarification of terms used and an exclusion of certain fields of cosmopolitanism are needed. Cosmopolitanism, very broadly, is founded on the assumptions of a moral obligation existing between all humans based on the very fact of their humanness. Generally, cosmopolitanism calls for a world political community to engage with and be accountable to the rights of all humans so to delineate the moral worth of humans as relying solely on the state (Fine 2007, X). Therefore, cosmopolitanism in this sense is foundationally based on the moral worth of all human beings. It is, in full, is a multi-leveled concept that can be divided into innumerable subfields. These include but are not limited to critical cosmopolitanism, unbounded cosmopolitanism, methodological cosmopolitanism, Fanon even discusses a postcolonial cosmopolitanism (Go 2013, 211). With a term of this diversity, it would be impossible to discuss cosmopolitanism in full, and I recognize here that many forms of cosmopolitanism do indeed employ colonial discourse. Therefore, because of its lasting prevalence and relevance in modern times, I wish to focus solely on Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism in *Perpetual Peace* (1903). It is not in the scope of this article to explore whether cosmopolitanism in Kant's perception is a plausible political project, nor suggest normative ways in which we can begin to implement cosmopolitanism. I stress that an overview of the misconceptions in Kant's work is needed in order to reposition Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism as useful. Especially in a time when humans across the globe seek to implement different ways in which the international system can be organized.

Loose Federation of Free Nations

The moral worth of human beings needs to be protected outside of the scope of state institutions. The Declaration of Human Rights conceptualized in 1949 and regarded as a push towards cosmopolitanism, is entirely dependent on philanthropy to protect chosen groups from persecution (Linklater 1998, 28). Modern day examples of groups needing charity in order to be anointed with the same rights as privileged others can be found worldwide in situations such as the treatment of Indigenous people, internment camps for refugees, and police brutality against certain isolated sections of particular societies. Where the present system of global organization depends solely upon the state bequeathing moral worth onto a human, Kant's loose federation of states would assure multiple sites of moral guarantee as opposed to just one (Kleingeld 2012, 52). Yet, Kant is careful not to call for a world republic, which would be controlling and homogenizing in its effect, but instead calls for a federation of free republics (Lutz-Bachmann 1997, 60). Effectively, Kant argues for the creation of this political community to bring states out of the state of nature, much like the alleviation from the state of nature individuals enjoy in Hobbes' social contract theory (Kant 1903, 128). A rational state is conceptualized, and if some of these states preferred "their senseless freedom to a reasoned governed liberty" they should be equated with "barbarism" (Kant 1903, 130). The idea that states operate comparable to the way individuals would in a state of nature has been employed since the post-Westphalian period. However, from a realist perspective, there is no possibility of a social contract, because there would be no overarching authority (Hutchings 1999, 14). It could be difficult to conceptualize the analogy between states and individuals, due to the vastly different spheres they both occupy. However, this analogy can exist because both entities, beforehand being only responsible to themselves independently of others, are able to relinquish some of their rights into a new sphere by "free contractual agreement" (Lutz-Bachmann 1997, 72). Therein lies the completeness of the contract theory in relation to states that Kant uses – while individuals and states are vastly different, they can both be subject to a social contract theory for they are both rational actors who can give up their freedom to adhere to a new standard of living.

For a more concrete conception of this theory, I use Andrew Linklater's essay on *Cosmopolitan Citizenship* (1998). Although he admits that his description extends from what Kant explicitly wrote, I believe that Linklater's conception of human rights within the federation of states provides empirical insight into what this sometimes vague approach would conceptually resemble. Linklater (1998) describes this conception as a system of politics which would not seek to overthrow the state, yet, supplement it in a political arrangement which would not wish to acquire power but only wishes to pursue multiple sites of political responsibility (29). Pertaining to the moral obligations at the heart of cosmopolitanism, human rights would cease to be built on charity, but instead, the creation of a cosmopolitan community where the politically weak could dispute their own grievances while the moral obligation of others would be to listen and respond (Linklater 1998, 28). In fact, I argue that, in reality, the ability of the disadvantaged to have their own platform in speaking against injustices would be a grandiose defeat of colonialism. Instead of waiting on powerful institutions (like the WHO or IMF or UN) or NGOs (like UNICEF or World Vision) which incidentally are almost all Western-lead and have been questioned for their values and effectiveness, to draw awareness to and 'save' vulnerable people from harm, the citizens of the world would be instilled with their own agency to fight their own battle against immoral activities.

Therefore, this conception of a cosmopolitan organization of states into producing political sites where individuals have more freedom to voice concern should not be viewed as a colonial ideal. Nor should it be conflated into states giving up the entirety of their sovereignty. Instead, it is useful to conceive of this concept as a contract, as well as a creation of a world communication system. Just as a citizen is not able to murder another without repercussions, effectively submitting to a governing body, states should not be free to pursue certain goals of their own – mainly their right to declare warfare (Lutz-Bachmann 1997, 69). In exchange for that sacrifice, they would be free from the fear of others inflicting war on them.

All States Must be Republic

Kant's first definitive article in *Perpetual Peace* excludes any state that does not have a republican constitution from joining the federation of states. This should not be taken to mean that, firstly, all countries need to adhere to a Westernized version of government, nor secondly, that he calls for interventionist practices to force states into submission. Instead, the intricacies of the word 'republic' must be examined and critiqued for full comprehension on this topic. 'Republic' is a generally contestable term that has come to have many different definitions throughout the centuries it has been employed. Indeed, in the 16th century Jean Bodin described a republic as any sovereign state who has the common concern of the masses in mind, therefore, any state, including one run by a monarch that is not totalitarian in nature, was a republic (Wilson 2008, 243). However, after the 17th century, the definition became narrowed to modern day conceptions in which a republic is a realization of government that is ruled by elected citizens of the state (Munro 2016). Although, even with this definition, there are many states with republic in their name, yet they do not uphold a republican constitution. The inverse is also true. Britain, for example, as well as the last vestiges of their world empire, are technically ruled by a monarch, although they elect a Prime Minister to carry out the will of the people, therefore, for all intents and purposes in this essay, Britain will be defined as a republic. Therefore, it is still a vastly convoluted term, especially in consideration that Kant wrote the text in 1795 and the first complete English translation from German, which was an extremely difficult task by self-admission from the publisher, was only published in 1903 (Kant 1903, VI).

For this reason, it is useful to use other factors that Kant describes in regard to this notion of republic. For this we turn to his assertion that, in order to maintain peace, the citizens of the state must be the ones with whom the decision lies to go to war or not (Kant 1903, 122). This is imperative in his conception because of the logic that, the citizens will be the ones funding the war, fighting the war, and dealing with the war in their own country. Therefore, it is only natural that they be the ones deciding whether a war should rightly be fought (123). This is such an important concept to consider in his article because of the nature of present republics.

For simplicity's sake in this section I will specifically use only Britain as an example. Their protests against the Iraq War were one of the largest and most chronicled before the 2003 decision by Tony Blair (the former British Prime Minister) to follow the USA into battle. I use it also because, if any, Britain is the archetype for colonialist expansion, having the largest empire the modern world has ever seen at its territorial peak in 1921 (Wilson 2008, 242). In February 2003, the American Secretary of State announced the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq with what retrospectively flawed

and biased knowledge. More than a million people amassed in London's streets and 2 million across Britain, to protest against involvement in Iraq (Barkham 2013, Tharoor 2013). It is cited as being the biggest public protest that has taken place in Britain's history (Fishwick 2016). Although, despite massive public outrage and dissent, little over a month later Tony Blair declared Britain would join the USA in invading Iraq (Tharoor 2013). This decision is pertinent to this discussion because of the implications it has in drawing up a republic conception that Kant explains in his essay. While Britain prides itself with being democratic and for all purposes follows the principles of republic constitution, it did not, as Kant suggested, follow the primary law in which the citizens of the state must be the determinants of decisions of war. Exploring this divisive time in not so distant history, it is obvious that Kant does not call for a Western expansion of values through the conversion of otherwise ruled states to republics, he instead, in his conception of what a republic is, calls for a transformation of all states. Western superpowers like USA and Britain would all have to change to accommodate Kant's conception of a republic rather than try to promote their brand of politics through expansionism and colonialism.

It is also important to note here that, even if Western countries were to change their governmental bodies in order to adhere to Kant's conception of lasting peace, Kant himself does not call for interventionist practices. In Kant's fifth preliminary article, he commands that states must not interfere with the constitution of another. He calls on these states to serve as an example of what not to do, but also implores that the people of a state must be the ones to bring themselves out of despotism (Kant 1903, 112, 137). Where Kant can get convoluted, yet vague at times, Kleingeld (2012) outlines this conception in simpler terms. Even if subjects appear to wish to be free from a despot, it does not necessarily mean that they will want to be liberated on the liberator's terms. In fact, that would lend itself, once again, to simply a different type of despotism (Kleingeld 2012, 54). Instead, the subjects of non-republics, should be neither forced nor coerced into choosing a republic government. For this will preserve their freedom as individuals. Therefore, the colonial aspect of the spread of republic governments cannot be viewed as colonial but as a very real and tangible condition for lasting peace. Countries must be seen as independent agents who can, if desired, pull themselves out of non-republic governments and submit, voluntarily to the social contract between states.

Universalism in Human Morality

The last critique of Kant in colonial terms that will be discussed in this essay is the universalism that he seemingly treats human morality with. Indeed, Kant does call for some sort of universalist value to recognize all citizens as having a right to go anywhere in the world (Kant 1903, 137). In order to live amongst each other peacefully, it is assumed on some level that you must adhere to the same morals. Likewise, in recognizing that there is a moral worth of all human beings, one must agree on what is moral and immoral. However, a more nuanced version of the ways in which humans interact and how morality plays a role in their interaction is key. In fact, Skrbis and Woodward (2013) go so far as to say that acceptability of diversity is the "leitmotif" of cosmopolitanism (14). Cosmopolitanism in Kantian terms calls for a dialogue to be created between different cultures and while moralities can differ, human values, in many senses can be similar. Gray (2006) calls on us to review the difference between morality and human values (26). As rational humans, one can converse with a morally opposite other, while still valuing their worth as a human, because they are a human. Even if we live differently from the Other, we can still value that their protection from genocide, war, and torture is valid because humans, despite vast

differences, have many similarities (Appiah 2006, 97). Appiah believes these similarities to not be universalist values that exist, but similarities in which we can converge on. We can create a community surrounding them while not encroaching on the Other, diverse moralities that exist throughout the world (98).

Appiah takes these human values to understand what Kant was referring to by his universalist conversations regarding human rights. Appiah, firstly criticizes any form of global ethic that is supposedly applied to the international realm, mainly ‘do unto others as you would have done unto to you’, or as it is dubbed in the Parliament of World Religions ‘the Golden Rule’ (Appiah 2006, 60). He argues that people will want, according to their morality, different things done to them in different situations. However, he also says that the spirit of the ‘Golden Rule’ lies in the fact that we should take the morality of other people seriously, and, in effect, learn what Others want done to them (61). With this logic, instead of the imposition of universalist ideals, it is argued that we should enter into a conversation celebrating and respecting differences, while keeping in mind the human values that we share as a human community. Those who disagree with the fact that genocide, torture and warfare are fairly slated as human values are called upon to separate the distinction between *what* we should do in a situation and *why*. While most all citizens of the world would agree to these three values as being critical to protect, they could disagree on *why* they agree with it for a number of reasons (71). Furthermore, most moral ‘decisions’ (in quotations here because Appiah questions the idea of rational decisions to comprise morality) are, more often than not, simply ingrained socially constructed mores. Therefore, when entering into a conversation of morality, it is less about values and more about the way things have always been for a community (75). For example, Appiah utilizes the fact that, while the place of women in earlier half of the 20th century was in the home, arguments in fundamental human morality were not the factor that shifted this view and allowed women a place in the workforce (76). Instead, it was people getting used to the way things were going to be from thereon in. He argues that morality does not play a crucial role in our fundamental conversations towards changing behavior, therefore, a universal morality is not needed nor useful in the cosmopolitan project. Instead, looking onto other cultures, understanding and respecting their community and respecting differences (as Kant conceived of doing) becomes much more important than imposing a universal morality onto all humans.

This challenges the fundamental Western belief that, in order to get along, two entities must be similar. This, after all, was the leading justification of the Western invasion of Iraq previously explored in this paper (Fallows 2015). Although, through his exploration of states and hospitality between states, Kant would also fundamentally be opposed to that ideal, since he calls on citizens of the world to have their rights limited only “to the conditions of universal hospitality” (Kant 1903, 137). This means, that citizens of the world have a right to leave any place and enter into a new one because the place you were born into, after all, is determined by chance. These newcomers, then, ought to be treated with hospitality so long as they are not violent towards anyone else. While Appiah does admit that occasionally the “universalist concern and respect for legitimate difference...clash” he labels this, not as a drawback to cosmopolitanism nor a reason to abandon it, yet, a “challenge” for cosmopolitans to overcome (Gray 2006, 26). The normative way in which these challenges can be defeated will not be explored in this essay, but Appiah and Kant, through their emphasis on conversation across borders would probably cite discussion between cultures as being a starting point for the discovery of new ways in which to work together.

Counter-arguments and their Critiques

While the primary premise of this essay was to engage with critiques commonly conceptualized in Kant, I will bring up a fourth that would be impossible to rebut as a misunderstanding simply because Kant would not have conceived of it during the writing of the text. This last critique, is perhaps the most pertinent and well-founded of the critiques against cosmopolitanism and I will do my best in order to argue that the situation can be avoided. This is the critique that cosmopolitanism, or attempts at cosmopolitanism, ignore the very real power hegemonies that exist in a world that continues to be wrought with colonial histories, relations and imbalances. This is brought to the attention of readers by Conway when she critiques the World Social Forums (WSF), traditionally cosmopolitan in nature, instead as being wrought with Western Eurocentrism and favouring colonial knowledge over other ‘untraditional’ cosmologies (2011, 218). Considering the WSF, or in the case of this essay, all forms of cosmopolitan interactions, as free from the colonial relations that shape the world is akin to perpetuating and entrenching these powers deep within global society. An empirical example of this will now be examined to situate this argument in real situations that exist in the world.

The WSF is dedicated to exploring ways in which social groups across the world can unite for the sake of a more inclusive and sustainable world. The topic of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has been taken on by WSF at various meetings since the organization was developed in 2001 (World Social Forum 2016). In 2007, when the annual assembly was held in Nairobi, thousands of people protested the practice outside the meetings, and many countries, including Britain, have pledged millions of dollars to help end the practice (Dorkenoo 2013). While Western forms of knowledge conceive of this action as a human rights issue that must be eradicated, many women in nonwestern countries have been taught that it is a normal practice, if not a title of honour and a vestige of female empowerment (Ahmadu 2009,14). These two positions are not given equal clout in the WSF, nor in other international spheres. Contrarily, one of them is highly favoured as being ‘right’, whereas, traditional forms of knowledge regarding FGM are subordinated as barbaric. Even the use of the FGM instead of a less politically charged term like female circumcision, or traditional nomenclature, such as Bondo, as it is called by the Kono people in Sierra Leone, is indicative of the colonialism influence in the debate of this practice (Ahmadu 2009,14). This is a convoluted field to navigate in terms of colonialism and cosmopolitanism. In this situation, there are two moralities in which Appiah would say are rooted in their beliefs because of historical practices. No less, they are still completely different from each other and pose difficulties in ameliorating relations between those countries that outlaw FGM and those countries that advocate for it.

However, I disagree that this example shows the shortcomings of cosmopolitanism. In fact, it is a pertinent example to illustrate that cosmopolitanism would help ameliorate these issues. Recall in the first section where Andrew Linklater (1998) argues a way for individuals who are unjustly treated to call out their grievances (29). Cosmopolitanism, in its complete form, which admittedly has been extrapolated from Kant’s historical conception, would conceive that discussions regarding the moral worth of all humans are equal. This can be taken to mean as well, by the same logic, that all forms of human morality are equal. In short, humans are a part of a global community and, therefore, have equal worth across the globe. Humans then, can have different moralities cross culturally, yet no morality is greater or lesser in value. Therefore, while one may say that we have a cosmopolitan moral obligation to save women from FGM because it is a human rights violation, a differing cosmopolitan conception would

say that these ideas are distinctly colonial in two ways. Firstly, non-Western knowledge is dismissed and it is assumed that this practice is barbaric and has no moral worth. Secondly, it is assumed that these women *want*, and indeed *need* to be saved from what is often seen as a right of passage and celebration of female empowerment, takes away their own agency in a distinctly colonial way (Ahmadu 2009, 15). I do not wish to comment on my own assumptions of FGM, just to say that, if women who have grown up with FGM, who understand FGM, and who have experienced FGM want to change it, they can change these systems (with *listening* members of Western communities). Western feminists imposing their own conception of 'human rights' is not a cosmopolitan ideal. Therefore, instead of creating a WSF to discuss this in terms of Western discourse, cosmopolitanism seeks to create ways in which humans can discuss, yet respect their differences on a human level, and come to understand each other on this plain.

Conclusion

While cosmopolitanism is a very prevalent term throughout the social sciences, including philosophy, sociology, and political science, it remains to be effectively implemented on a global scale with success. Many authors uphold that this is because, while cosmopolitanism works well in theory, it does not function in practice (Kleingeld 2012, 35). I reject this notion, and argue that due to the historical complicated diversions of power that existed and continue to exist today, cosmopolitanism must be constantly redefined in order to fit into normative theories of cosmopolitanism in practice. While this paper does not engage with these normative theories, it is still useful in the fact that, instead of discrediting cosmopolitanism as an ancient theory mired in colonial jargon and intention, cosmopolitanism, from its very roots in Kant, acts as a way to transcend these violent relations. It extends not only the moral worth of humans but the worth of human morals on a global scale. Contrary to many critiques, it does not wish to conglomerate all states into a world republic, yet, instead, pushes for a federation of republic-states, in which, analogously to individuals in the state of nature, states would give up freedoms in order to guarantee peace. Likewise, while many people perceive the imposition of a republic constitution as promoting the spread of Western ideals, Western states themselves do not even embody the view Kant employed of a republic. Fundamentally, citizens of these 'republics' cannot decide themselves whether or not they want to go to war. Also, even if republics were a project of Western states, Kant would not call for them to impose their views on different states, for this would lead to other forms of despotism. Instead, a key conception of the federation of states is that the states must *voluntarily* accept the parameters of the social contract. Finally, I argue that, those who believe that cosmopolitanism infers that universal moral codes must be outlined and agreed upon must subscribe to a more nuanced understanding of morality and human values. While some human values (torture, warfare, and genocide) are condemned by virtually all humans, common morality is not imperative to cosmopolitanism nor a preliminary obligation to get along with one another. Therefore, Kant does not call for a homogenation of all morality, simply hospitality to Others who are different. I then engage with a common yet simple critique of Kant that cannot be refuted by using his explicitly stated logic since, at the time of writing colonial hegemonies were not problematized to the extent they are now. FGM is used as an example of how Western discourse is valued above Other cosmologies of knowledge in supposedly 'free' relations between states (such as WFS). It is argued that this favouring of knowledge is promoted because of the lack of cosmopolitan discourse that would call for the moral worth of the human as well as the equality of diverse moralities. It is important to realize these conceptions are critically different from neocolonialism so as to move past this critique, while still recognizing the past

and present inequalities. Therefore, we can undo the power relations that have been entrenched into society since the start of globalization and move beyond them to a world where perpetual peace is not unimaginable but a fact entrenched in everyday life.

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