

Cosmopolitanism and Human Reason An Introduction

Cosmopolitismo y razón humana Una introducción

ANGELO CICATELLO*

University of Palermo, Italy

Abstract

Over and above the modalities with which it is expressed in the domains of Kant's system, the theme of cosmopolitanism embodies the meaning of a philosophy seen as a plan to build on the connection between man, *polis* and reason; an essential connection that in human reason identifies not a simple endowment which everyone has by nature but a form of life to be realized in the world, a purpose whose binding strength is only fully expressed in the public dimension.

Keywords

Kant, Cosmopolitanism, Cosmic philosophy, Moral community, Human Reason

“Cosmopolitanism” is a key word in Kant's thought, in that it voices a theme or, more exactly, a semantic constellation within whose perimeter there orbit issues that run through the whole system of pure reason. In effect, around the figure of the citizen of the world there do not only rotate reflections pertaining in a narrow sense to cosmopolitical law as a necessary complement of a legal system aiming to guarantee world peace. Kant's cosmopolis covers a much larger space, which can be fully accounted for by a systematic

* Angelo Ciatello is Associate Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Palermo, where he teaches Metaphysics. A researcher on Kant and German classical philosophy, he has also taken an interest in the themes of Classical Critical Theory and developments of ontological-metaphysical problems within contemporary reflection. E-mail: angelo.ciatello@unipa.it

discourse on the different forms of experience of human reason. Thus we must not see as an exaggeration the position of George Cavallar, who identifies the presence of several “types of cosmopolitanism” in Kant, distinguishing between cognitive, cultural, political, legal and ethical-theological cosmopolitanism.¹

Obviously it is not simply a matter of juxtaposing different, or even divergent, cosmopolitanisms.²

On the contrary, the cosmopolitan point of view is necessary in Kant in order precisely to trace out the architectural profile of a philosophy that, worked out according to a “*Weltbegriff (conceptus cosmicus)*”,³ that is to say according to a gaze that goes beyond the limited point of view of the different forms of scholastic knowledge addresses man’s deepest interests, or, as we read explicitly in *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, the “essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*).”⁴

That is to say the need, not by chance discussed in *Critique of Pure Reason*, for philosophical knowledge that will not remain a mere apurage of schools is substantiated in the idea of knowledge that addresses man in his entirety, his intellectual development, and his civil and moral growth. And this knowledge calls reason into play not as a simple means to acquire other forms of knowledge and competences, but as an end to be pursued in itself, that end that is specified, in the last analysis, in man’s moral destination.

Over and above the modalities with which it is expressed in the domains of Kant’s system, the theme of cosmopolitanism thus embodies the meaning of a philosophy seen as a plan to build on the connection between man, *polis* and reason; an essential connection that in human reason identifies not a simple endowment which everyone has by nature but a form of life to be realized in the world, a purpose whose binding strength is only fully expressed in the public dimension.

This is like saying that the *polis* is the place in which the individual’s affiliation to humankind is *mediated*. Further, humankind in its evolution, its development and its history is only comprehensible *from the point of view* of the formation of a “universal cosmopolitan condition”⁵ that, says Kant, constitutes the “womb”,⁶ in which alone there can fully develop man’s natural dispositions and, in the end, the very disposition to the use of reason.

¹ Cf. Cavallar 2012, pp. 95-118.

² Cavallar himself emphasizes the inadequacy of readings that proceed in a sectorial way not correctly taking into account the systematic holistic vocation that connotes Kant’s philosophy in a fundamental way (Cf. Cavallar 2012, pp.110-111).

³ KrV, A 838/B 866.

⁴ KrV, A 839/B 867; Eng. translation, in Kant 1996, p. 695. Cf. also *Logik*, AA 09: 23; *Metaphysik L2*, AA 28: 532.

⁵ IaG, AA 08: 28; Eng. translation, in Kant 2006a, p. 14.

⁶ IaG, AA 08: 28; Eng. translation, in Kant 2006a, p. 14.

Indeed, in the final sentences of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* we read about a “progressive organization of citizens of the earth into and toward the species (*in und zu der Gattung*) as a system that is cosmopolitically united”⁷.

To say it differently, in the terms of the famous formula of the published *Anthropology*, the *animal rationabile* must become an *animal rationale*; and, in man’s case, this can only happen through the institution and maintenance of forms of pacific cohabitation that mark a break with the natural condition and entry into a condition of effective progress.

Moreover, since it has to concern the whole of humanity, this progress does not only bring into play the institution of a legal order that regulates antagonisms between men and peoples, but allows us to glimpse in the background the formation of an ethical community⁸ in which moral good is not only represented as an individual assignment but as the purpose of a whole community able to recognize itself as a common body.⁹ In conclusion, it can be said that in Kant the design of a cosmopolitical society appears to be intimately connected with the idea that man’s “destination” can only be seen as fully realized in the ethical-community terms of a moralization of humankind. In this way, while Kant’s cosmopolitical project on one hand is able to profit by the mechanism of nature – which as an interplay of antagonisms that encourages man, even despite himself, to form bigger and bigger political bodies to protect him from the risk of self-destruction – on the other hand it reveals its deepest meaning as a prescription of practical reason. In this perspective, every individual, as part of humankind, is called on to form a society of terrestrial reasonable beings whose meaning cannot be reduced to a mere contractual agreement between egoisms and individual antagonisms. This is what Kant suggests when he speaks of “education of the human race, taking its species as a whole, that is, collectively (*universorum*), not all of the individuals (*singulorum*), where the multitude does not yield a system but only an aggregate gathered together.”¹⁰

The pragmatic-prudential dynamics that innervate the idea of cultural and civil progress thus interweave, inextricably, with the deepest demands of a normative-teleological design that is anchored in the idea of a “moral whole”¹¹ – Kant, not by chance, also speaks of a “morally grounded system”¹² – or more exactly anchored in the principle of the constitution

⁷ Anth, AA 07: 333; Eng. translation, in Kant 2006b, p. 238.

⁸ “[S]ince the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community. Hence a multitude of human beings united in that” (RGV, AA 06: 96; Eng. translation, in Kant 1998, p. 107).

⁹ “In addition to prescribing laws to each individual human being, morally legislative reason also unfurls a banner of virtue as rallying point for all those who love the good, that they may congregate under it and thus at the very start gain the upper band over evil and its untiring attacks” (RGV, AA 06: 94; Eng. translation, in Kant 1998, p. 106).

¹⁰ Anth, AA 07: 328; Eng. translation, in Kant 2006b, p. 233.

¹¹ IaG, AA 08: 21; Eng. translation, in Kant 2006a, p. 7.

¹² KU, AA 05: 433; Eng. translation, in Kant 2000, p. 300.

of an ethical community of reasonable beings as the *final end* and at once a *point of view* in light of which we can understand the meaning of every human organization on earth.

This is like saying that the natural-anthropological pathway that from civilization leads to moralization always waits to be integrated by a normative-rational pathway that, according to Kant, can only go in the opposite direction, that is to say from the principle of morality to civilization.

Now it is almost superfluous to remember how problematic in Kant's philosophy is the issue that pertains to the relationship between civil progress and moral improvement; problematic to the point of raising a question on the effective existence of such a relationship. In any case, however, there can be no doubt that the theme of cosmopolitanism, understood in that ampler meaning that brings into play the terms of an essential connection between man, *polis* and reason, implies the need to move in a border zone that if on one side it marks the confines between different spheres of the Kantian system, on the other also implies that these spheres communicate with one another under the banner of an ampler vision of man in his entirety, his existence and his destination.

The essays collected together here move in this border zone, tracing out a multi-voice scenario in which the treatment of specific issues like those concerning the political-legal profile of the project of permanent world peace is accompanied by reflections of a metaphysical-moral character in which the destinies of the citizen of the world are connected to the goals of the rational being.

Thus the essay by **Angela Taraborrelli** underlines the motif of an inseparable bond between the cosmopolitical ideal of a world republic and the possession of single states and their confines becoming peremptory. Here there is stressed, also through a careful analysis of the concepts that innervate Kant's discourse on cosmopolitical law, how useful for a correct understanding not only of Kant but of our present reality, a reading can be in a not merely antagonistic key of the relationship between world republic and national state.

On the same theme, though in a different perspective, is also the paper by **Ewa Wyrębska-Dermanović**, who reflects on the possibility of comprising in a coherent scheme Kant's positions regarding the conception of a world legal order. This is a reflection that in the last analysis involves the complex relationship between the binding demands for justice of practical reason and the specifically political issue of the feasibility of every normative theory.

The relationship between the ethical-normative plane and that of the feasibility of norms on the terrain of political-institutional interactions is examined in the reflection by **Anton Friedrich Koch**, who defends the Kantian perspective of a metaphysical foundation of the institutional state and the different political forms that are linked to the international and cosmopolitical order, insofar as Kant glimpses in the constitution of a world ethical community on one side the only true antidote against the possible rise of authoritarian and

despotic elements that are also inherent in a democratic constitution, and on the other the only element that can oppose resistance to the processes of an entirely secularized society that ends up engulfing every residual space of individual freedom.

The concept of a morally organized society is at the centre of the analyses by **Michael Städtler**. In emphasizing the distance between political progress and moral progress, the author identifies in our time the terms of the realization of a cosmopolitical society that, if on one side it seems to bring Kant's project true, on the other seems to have nothing to do with the ethical dimension of the kingdom of goals and with the idea of an ethical community, remaining tied to the competitive scheme of a society that is constituted simply as an equilibrium of antagonisms.

Also dealing with questions that face the present-day world with particular urgency is the paper by **Alyssa Bernstein**, who proposes a reading that, challenging the perspective of David Held, identifies in Kant's cosmopolitical solution the tools for a theoretically aware approach to the issues of justice raised by the climate crisis and global warming.

Reflections on climate change and, in general, on issues connected to the environment, if on one side they afford material for a theoretical proposal that in the formation of a cosmopolitical society identifies the solution to a crisis of a global character, on the other they constitute an occasion to reflect on how much Kant still has to tell us regarding the possibility of conceiving an image of the world that is not entirely reducible to anthropocentric models and that for this reason points to an understanding of the world as a *whole* of which man is and remains a part, certainly a decisive one but one which, precisely as a part, cannot requisition for himself the meaning of the whole.

The essay by **Pablo Adrian Genazzano Momo** on this theme furnishes important indications beginning from an analysis addressing in a circumstantial way the particular position that Kant in his early writings takes up in relation to the problem of theodicy, of optimism, and of evil, as terms of a relationship between man and cosmos destined to remain problematic, in his later production too. According to the author this already prefigures in the early Kant the idea that the world, understood as a play space in which man satisfies his desires and realizes his projects, does not also contain the ultimate purpose of human intentions, and therefore the very meaning of man's moral destination.

The cosmos in which every man is called on to settle his abode and to found his *polis* brings into play the idea of a *whole* whose meaning and scope are not in turn reducible to the pragmatic order of what man can do, or is capable of doing thanks to the development of forms of knowledge and skills serving for the formation of the world as the human habitat.

There thus returns the theme of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and man's ethical-community dimension; a theme that can be seen here as a trace that in a more or less explicit way runs through the contributions of the issue that we are presenting.

This theme is dealt with in a circumstantial way, though they follow different lines of investigation, in the essays by **James DiCenso** and **Roberta Pasquaré**.

The former examines the Kantian concept of *Bestimmung*, which in its complex semantic articulation of *determinatio*, *vocatio* and *destinatio*, affords a privileged key for understanding the relationship between the prescriptions of moral law, the rational ability to set goals in a framework that is not merely instrumental and the design of their possible realization on earth.

In the text by Roberta Pasquaré, which specifically deals with the theme of cosmopolitanism in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, once again the concept of *Bestimmung* embodies the meaning of a cosmopolitical vocation of humankind, as a species of terrestrial reasonable beings that can only be understood in the context of close cooperation between empirical investigations on the nature of man and issues connected to pure use of reason and, in conclusion, to normative-foundational profile of practical reason.

In short, the reader that approaches this issue will be able on one side to come face to face with some of the perspectives starting from which the theme of cosmopolitanism takes shape in Kant's philosophy. On the other side, with further focusing, all the approaches show that they intercept basic questions referable to the connection between legal interrogation in Kant on the possibility of a correct life as a condition of permanent peace with the ethical question around man's destination on earth as a being able to face goals not simply referable to the satisfaction of his own needs.

The researches contained in this issue thus reprise and relaunch issues that today are extremely topical, like those pertaining to the relations between state sovereignty and world legal order, between natural law and public law, property and citizenship, individual freedom and institutional order, justice and happiness. At the same time they appear, in a more or less explicit way, to be shot through by the ethical question regarding the resources of which the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* can dispose in order to satisfy man's deepest demands; demands that cannot be reduced to the Leviathanic *ratio* that regulates relationships of an antagonistic or competitive type, but are linked to fundamental prescriptions of practical reason.

References

Cavallar, G. (2012), "Cosmopolitanism in Kant's Philosophy", *Ethics & Global Politics*, 5, 2, pp. 95-118.

Kant I. (1996), *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kant I. (1998), *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kant I. (2000), *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, translated by P. Guyer and A. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kant I. (2006a) *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, translated by D. L. Colclasure, in: P. Kleingeld (ed.), *Immanuel Kant, Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, pp. 67-109.

Kant I. (2006b), *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, translated by R. B. Lauden, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

