How do we understand the idea of *kosmopolis* and the concept of the ‘world citizen’?

I would like to begin my discussion with some brief remarks concerning our contemporary understanding of the idea of *kosmopolis* and the concept of the world citizen. Very often the concept of the world citizen signifies an inhabitant of a ‘world society’ or ‘world republic’. This world republic guarantees a worldwide and perpetual peace – it is understood as an ideal goal of history and should be reached by all means. Cosmopolitan theorizing started already in ancient philosophy; an important historical break in the development of those theories seems to be the *Declaration of Human Rights* from 1789.

Systematically, we can differentiate between ‘moral’, ‘political’, ‘cultural’ and ‘economic cosmopolitanism’. ‘Moral cosmopolitanism’ in its different modes regards the question of the cosmopolitan duties of a human being to all human beings in general. It is based on a concept of humanity (as universal human community) in the sense of traditional anthropology. ‘Political cosmopolitanism’ ana-
lyzes the institutions and mechanisms which help to realize a society or a state of ‘world citizens’. ‘Cultural cosmopolitanism’ again stresses the diversity of the cultural contexts in which the members of different nations, regions or civilizations are involved without going back to national structures or levels of culture. Last but not least, ‘economic cosmopolitanism’ means the international networking of (former national) economies, analyzed already by Marx and a main aspect of the process we today call ‘globalization’.¹

How are these theories linked to Kant? Usually Kant’s philosophical view of the world citizen and the right of the world citizen is seen as one of the most important theories concerning this subject in the period of Enlightenment. Very often Kant is understood as a philosopher who declared the world citizen as the goal of his philosophy. According to this interpretation, Kant developed a ‘cosmopolitan theory of ethics’. Kant is interpreted as a theorist of a universal ethical community that derives its general rules of acting from a common reason. We can find such an interpretation of Kant, for example, in the following definition of the concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’: ‘According to Kant, all rational beings are members in a single (ethical) community. (They are analogous to citizens in the political [republican] sense in that they share the characteristics of freedom, equality and independence, and that they give themselves the law.) Their common laws, however, are the laws of ethics, grounded in reason’.²

Of course, we can find the concept of the world citizen in Kant’s philosophy in prominent places, like the idea of a republic of world citizens and in some way also as an aim of history (providence of nature).³ Nevertheless, in the following paragraphs it will be shown

² Ibid.
³ ‘For my own part, I put my trust in the theory of what the relationships between men and states ought to be according to the principle of right. It recommends to us earthly gods the maxim that we should proceed in our disputes in such a way that a universal federal state may be inaugurated, so that we should therefore assume that it is possible (in praxi). I likewise rely (in subsidium) upon the very nature of things to force men to do what they do not willingly choose (fata vilentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt)’. Hans Reiss (ed.), Kant: Political Writings,
that Kant uses the idea of the *kosmopolis* much more carefully than usually presupposed, and that he stresses possibly very different aspects of a world citizen than that of being a member of a ‘ethical community’. Not only post-modern philosophy at the end of the 20th century warned of being careful when dealing with the demands of common validity in thinking and acting. The experiences of contemporary ethical war rhetoric (good/bad distinctions) also make the dangers of morals clear.

Especially as a citizen of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), I have another problem of a more general nature with the concept of cosmopolitanism. These ‘-isms’ remind me very strongly of the ideological deformations of thinking during the Cold War period. That is why I prefer to use the concept of *kosmopolis* or the cosmopolitan in my chapter.

What can we learn today from Kant about the concept of world citizen? In this chapter it is argued that – if Kant speaks about the world citizen – he uses this concept, on the one hand, more in the sense of a regulative idea than in the sense of a concrete utopia, but, on the other hand, he uses it simply in a very pragmatic way. Two aspects of the Kantian term of world citizen are to be stressed:

First, for Kant the world citizen is, first and foremost, the fellow citizen, who takes his point of view in the world and does not have an Archimedean position above other points of view. In this understanding of world citizen a theoretical, (and the same time) ethical-practical and aesthetical dimension are included.

Secondly, when Kant speaks about the world citizen in the political sense of a member of a world republic, he is mainly interested in the juridical dimension of a civil constitution, which largely differs from the natural law. In this context it is not the question of an ethical category, but a question of the right of the world citizen.

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p. 92; see also *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* [1784].
The difference between ‘own’ and ‘alien reason’ as a basic distinction of the philosophy of Kant

During the 19th and 20th centuries several systems in the philosophy of science, ethics and politics were developed based on Kant’s philosophy, starting from the Neo-Kantian theory of recognition up to the *Theory of Justice* by John Rawls. At the end of the 20th century, under the influence of the so-called post-modern French philosophy, which, to a large extent, refers to Kant, we can find a new way of reading Kant. In Germany this has been developed, above all, by Josef Simon (b. 1930), Professor Emeritus at the University of Bonn.

In 1989, Simon published a book on the *Philosophy of Sign*, which was translated into English in 1995. The book took its inspiration, among others, from Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Peirce and Wittgenstein, and starts from a non-ontological concept of sign and presupposes in a very radical way individuality and temporality as decisive starting points of philosophy. In the traditional metaphysical sense we use signs for ‘something’, for ‘things’ behind those signs. In the perspective of the philosophy of signs everything can become a sign, if it is not understood without questions. As soon as questions arrive concerning the meaning of ‘something’, we must find other signs which can make the meaning clearer, but we will not reach the thing behind the signs. Nietzsche puts it in the following way: things and their history are nothing else than ‘continuing series of signs of ever new interpretations’ (‘fortgesetzte Zeichen-Ketten von immer neuen Interpretationen und Zurechtmachungen’). According to Simon, the other individual can also be understood as a sign. Other individuals use other signs; they understand my own signs in a different and probably strange or peculiar way.

In 2004, Simon’s book *Kant. Die fremde Vernunft und die Sprache der Philosophie* [Kant: Alien Reason and the Language of

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Philosophy] was published.\(^5\) This book sums up Simon’s excitingly new interpretation of Kant’s philosophy. One of the main starting points of this reconsideration is the difference between own and alien reason, which Kant uses already in his work *Träume eines Geistersehers* [Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, 1766] and again in his last books and writings. This difference between own and alien reason belongs to the basic assumptions of Kant’s philosophy, and is as important as the distinctions between a priori and a posteriori or between noumenon and phenomenon. The rediscovering of this basic distinction between own and alien reason calls into question the various attempts of, for example, Jürgen Habermas and his followers to interpret Kant as a theoretician of common reason, and to derive from this a common ethics and other norms. Regarding this, one has to reconsider that Kant is not the philosopher but the critic of pure reason.

There is no doubt that Kant speaks about common reason of human beings, but as a reason in which every individual has their own voice. In Kant’s work, alien reason is thus integrated into the concept of reason. This alien reason tries to find an orientation in the world from its point of view and it is not always comprehensible, without mediation, as reasonable. Whether this mediation is successful, we will see later. In the words of Simon himself: ‘That is why the aesthetic difference between persons which cannot be embraced in common concepts (*conceptus communis*) and which has its place “under” the lowest concept of “the” human being becomes the main topic of philosophy’.\(^6\) Starting from these assumptions, we can understand reason/rationality only in a communicative way. I will come back to the consequences of this difference for the understanding of the world citizen.

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\(^6\) Ibid. VII: ‘Die nicht in gemeinsame Begriffe (*conceptus communis*) zu fassende (ästhetische) Differenz der Personen unterhalb des untersten Begriffs von ’dem’ Menschen wird damit zur Sache und zur eigentlichen Hauptsache der Philosophie’.
The difference between ethics and right as a basic distinction in Kant’s philosophy

Let me first take a brief look at a second decisive distinction of Kant, which has not been realized by the philosophical consciousness in this way until now. But, according to Simon, the strict distinction between ethics and right also belongs to the basic assumptions of Kant’s philosophy.

Kant describes and develops this difference in a very illustrative way in *Perpetual Peace*.7 There he speaks about the ‘moral politician’ (‘moralischer Politiker’) on the one hand, and the ‘political moralist’ (‘politischer Moralist’) on the other hand. Kant takes the side of the moral politician.

A second distinction follows between ‘moral in the first sense (as ethics)’ – of which the main aspect is ‘love for the human being’ (‘Menschenliebe’) – and ‘moral in the second meaning (as right)’, of which the main aspect is respect for the right of the human being.

According to Kant, politics uses one or the other dimension of ethics while realizing its aims. He calls this ‘Zweizüngigkeit der Politik in Ansehung der Moral’ (‘the forked-tongued nature of politics in view of ethics’). It is not so much a problem to accept moral in the first sense (love of the human being), because this is a possibility to give up the right of the human being. Politics has much more problems with moral in the second sense.8 But, for Kant moral in the second sense (as right) is the decisive dimension for constructing the sphere of politics. He understands the moral politician as a politician who bases his politics on the right/ law.

My assumption is that both distinctions – own and alien reason, moral and right – are very important for the understanding of Kant’s concept of the world citizen (please see the table below).

8 Ibid., p. 250.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral politician</th>
<th>Political moralist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Organizes their politics in a way that goes together with ethics. (nimmt die Prinzipien der Staatsklugheit so, ‘daß sie mit der Moral zusammen bestehen können’.)</td>
<td>• Creates an ethics which is useful for their politics. (schmiedet sich eine Moral so, ‘wie es der Vorteil des Staatsmannes sich zuträglich findet’.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principle: starts from the formal principle of practical reason: Handle so daß du wollen kannst, deine Maxime solle ein allgemeines Gesetz werden (der Zweck mag sein, welcher er wolle).</td>
<td>• Principle: starts from the material principle of practical reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Realizes eternal peace as a result of the recognition of duty.</td>
<td>• Realizes eternal peace as a physical good by using the mechanism of nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Moral task</td>
<td>• Artificial task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem of state wisdom (Staats-Weisheitsproblem)</td>
<td>• Problem of state prudence (Staats-Klugheitsproblem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic assumption of moral politics, based on duty: the people shall organize themselves in a state with respect to the juridical concepts of freedom and equality.</td>
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The world citizen as fellow citizen – on Kant’s concept of the *Weltbürger*

In his ‘Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht’ [Anthropology in Pragmatic Concern] (1798) Kant explains the pragmatic knowledge of the human being (‘pragmatische Menschenkenntnis’). Pragmatic knowledge of the human being regards the question as to what this human being as a freely acting being can, should and does make of
himself (‘was der Mensch als freihandelndes Wesen aus sich selber macht, oder machen kann und soll’). According to Kant, this is the recognition of the human being as a world citizen (‘Erkenntnis des Menschen als Weltbürgers’). He makes an explicit distinction between this pragmatic knowledge and physiological knowledge, which aims to investigate what nature makes out of the human being.\(^9\)

Kant starts from the observation of three kinds of egoism. Defining its position in the world, the human being shows the ‘egoism of reason’ (or logical egoism), the ‘egoism of taste’ (or aesthetic egoism) and the ‘egoism of practical interest’ (moral egoism).

The logical egoist is not willing to check or to test his judgements with the help of the reason of others, which, according to Kant, is an essential presupposition for achieving correct judgements. The aesthetic egoist is satisfied with his own taste – but, according to Kant, the beautiful is connected with a collective imagination of a common pleasure. The moral egoist connects every aim only with his own interest (er schränkt ‘alle Zwecke auf sich selbst’ ein) and aims at happiness instead of duty.\(^10\)

According to Kant, the counter-position to these kinds of egoism can only be pluralism, meaning: not to see oneself as having all the world inside, but to see oneself as a pure world citizen and to act in this way (‘die Denkungsart: sich nicht als die ganze Welt in seinem Selbst befassend, sondern als einen bloßen Weltbürger zu betrachten und zu verhalten’).\(^11\)

What does this mean? The counter-position of the world citizen against the modes of egoism is the position of communicative rationality, i.e., regarding my own reason the recognition of an alien reason or, in other words, the recognition of the plurality of perspectives and interpretations of the world.

At the same time, this recognition also means a connection between theoretical and the higher practical thinking. The common duty of showing respect to all other human beings implies the duty

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\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 409–410.

\(^11\) Ibid., p. 411.
to respect the other human being’s logical use of their reason, even if we are not able to understand him. But Kant also criticizes the moral egoism in judgements about the actions of other people, including their reasonable actions (*Verstandes-Handlungen*).

The world citizen, according to Kant, is he or she who respects the perspective of the other in their absolute otherness, at a theoretical level (in knowledge/defining and interpretation of concepts), at an ethical level (Kant speaks about the strangeness/alienness of happiness) and at the level of taste. In *Critique of Judgement* Kant called this way of accepting alien interpretations of the world an ‘extended way of thinking’ (*erweiterte Denkungsart*) or the capability of including the position of the other (at least to try) in order to reach an ‘own common’ point of view.\(^{12}\)

From this perspective, we should understand that it is rather impossible to base a cosmopolitan ethics in the sense of universal moral norms on Kant. The universal moment in Kantian ethics is just the unlimited recognition of the alien individuality, the recognition of the freedom of the individual and its individual responsibility for the own maxims of judging and acting. In the words of Simon: ‘According to Kant this is the responsibility of the human being towards “mankind in every person” and in this sense also towards oneself and one’s relation to other people. The human being should take into consideration that he/she is the other of the others and nobody has a higher point of view’.\(^{13}\)

In order to formulate universal rules, someone needs an Archimedean point of view, from which he can comprehend himself as having all the world inside (‘sich als die ganze Welt in seinem Selbst befassend verstehen’). The world citizen from the perspective of a cosmopolitan ethics explicitly requires a point of view above the world. He will be excluded from the world of his fellow citizens. The world citizen from the perspective of alien reason, on the other hand, is, first and foremost, the fellow citizen in the

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\(^{13}\) J. Simon, Kant, ..., VII: ‘Nach Kant ist das die Verantwortung des Menschen gegenüber der “Menschheit in jeder Person” und insofern auch gegenüber sich selbst und seinem Verhältnis zu anderen. Er soll bedenken, dass er der andere der anderen ist und keiner einen übergeordneten Standpunkt hat’.
world. With Kant it becomes an essential feature of the world citizen that he shares this inside perspective with all his fellow citizens: that he is a ‘mere world citizen’ (‘ein bloßer Weltbürger’).

International law as a condition of the possibility of the idea of Kosmopolis

So if it is not moral in the first sense (as ethics = love of the human being), which guarantees the order or the function of a global community, only moral in the second (legal) sense, is able to meet this target. That is why, according to Kant, only international law – a world citizen law – can be the condition of the establishment of a cosmopolitan community. The society of world citizens can be based only on law. Only the right as the quintessence of the conditions, under which the arbitrariness of the one can be united with the arbitrariness of the other with the help of a common law of freedom (‘Inbegriff der Bedingungen, unter denen die Willkür des einen mit der Willkür des anderen nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz der Freiheit zusammen vereinigt werden kann’) can give normative rules of acting.14

In this context, Kant explicitly speaks about the ‘world citizen law’:

The rational idea, as discussed above, of a peaceful (if not exactly amicable) international community of all those of the earth’s peoples who can enter into active relations with one another, is not a philanthropic principle of ethics, but a principle of right. [---] This right, in so far as it affords the prospect that all nations may unite for the purpose of creating certain universal laws to regulate the intercourse they may have with one another, may be termed cosmopolitan (ius cosmopoliticum).15

In the same way Kant stresses in Perpetual Peace (3. definite article):

15 Reiss (ed.), Kant: Political Writings, p. 172.
Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality. As in the foregoing articles, we are here concerned not with philanthropy, but with right. In this context, hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory.16

So if we come to a conclusion at this point, we may say: according to Kant, the idea of kosmopolis has three dimensions: first, the ethical dimension covers the duty of unlimited recognition of the alienness of the other individual beyond every concept of ‘the human being’. Secondly, the political dimension consists of the orientation towards international law and institutions for its enforcement in order to guarantee the freedom of the individual. It includes a permanent dialogue between the different doctrines of philosophy of right and conceptions and norms of the positive law. Thirdly, if the freedom of the individual is ensured by law, there will also be space for the aesthetic dimension: the pleasure of alienness (Lust an der Fremdheit).

‘World citizen law’ – ‘Human right(s)’

I would like to finish my discussion with a brief remark concerning the relation between world citizen law and human right. These two concepts are not identical. According to Kant, there can only be one human right in the sense of a natural right of every human being: the right to right, the right to live in a community ruled by law (i.e. a civil constitution).

Freiheit (Unabhängigkeit von eines Anderen nöthigender Willkür), sofern sie mit jedes Anderen Freiheit nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz zusammen bestehen kann, ist dieses einzige, ursprüngliche, jedem Menschen kraft seiner Menschheit zustehende Recht.17

Simon speaks in this context about a human right to world citizen law (as a common and powerful right of the peoples – Völkerrecht, Freiheit (Unabhängigkeit von eines Anderen nöthigender Willkür), sofern sie mit jedes Anderen Freiheit nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz zusammen bestehen kann, ist dieses einzige, ursprüngliche, jedem Menschen kraft seiner Menschheit zustehende Recht.17

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16 Ibid., p. 105.
i.e., there are also the institutions which are able to enact laws). As long as this does not exist, we can only try to keep the three existing forms in balance, in order to keep the hope alive that under the limited horizons of political action a common world citizen law can eventually arise.

At the moment, we have law systems at different levels: national law (*Staatsrecht* in the Kantian sense), juridical structures between different nations and states (e.g. European right, which is *Völkerrecht* in the Kantian sense) and elementary forms of international law (*Völkerstaatsrecht* = *Weltbürgerrecht*, e.g., UN Convention of Human Rights). And we have the confrontation between so-called human rights, which are a European invention, and the system of rights within the Islamic world, both formulated in the light of different religious and ethical traditions.

So the only way towards a ‘republic of world citizens’ can be to develop a common law *bottom up* and *step-by-step*, through permanent and arduous dialogue – an illustrative example of this process is the discussion on European rights and a European Constitution. A very important condition for this process is to create a juridical framework for a global discourse on rights.

The practical reality of a world republic, therefore, cannot be put into effect ‘in principle’, but only step-by-step. On the one hand, this is just what Kant means when he speaks about ‘pragmatic concern’: improving the situation as much as possible. Nevertheless, we have to work towards or in Kant’s words:

*There shall be no war […] for war is not the way in which anyone should pursue his rights. Thus it is no longer a question of whether perpetual peace is really possible or not, or whether we are not perhaps mistaken in our theoretical judgement if we assume that it is. On the contrary, we must simply act as if it could really come about (which is perhaps impossible), and turn our efforts towards realizing it and towards establishing that constitution which seems most suitable for this purpose (perhaps that of republicanism in all states, individually and collectively). By working towards this end, we may hope to terminate the disastrous practice of war, which up till now has been the main object to which all states, without exception, have accommodated their international institu-*
tions. And even if the fulfilment of this pacific intention were forever to remain a pious hope, we should still not be deceiving ourselves if we made it our maxim to work unceasingly towards it, for it is our duty to do so.\textsuperscript{18}

Let’s do it.

References


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 174.