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### Book section

**Original citation:**

Originally published in Ypi, Lea (2014) *Commerce and colonialism in Kant's philosophy of history*. In: Flikschuh, Katrin and Ypi, Lea, (eds.) *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*. [Oxford University Press](#), Oxford, UK, pp. 99-126. ISBN 9780199669622

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Available in LSE Research Online: March 2016

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## 4

# Commerce and Colonialism in Kant's Philosophy of History

*Lea Ypi*

## 4.1 The Controversy about Kant and Commerce

Celebrated as a pioneer of liberal freedom and damned as an apologist of imperialism, Kant's reflections on the role of race and commercial relations contain many ambiguities. On the one hand, Kant shares with his Enlightenment predecessors the appreciation of the virtues of the *doux commerce* and an emphasis on its role in promoting domestic stability and peace amongst nations (IaG 8:27). On the other hand, he applauds restrictions on trade and praises the protectionism of states like China and Japan in placing barriers on the import of foreign products (ZeF 8:359 and GTP 8: 299n). Kant defends the 'right' to attempt to make commercial contact with distant others as an instance of universal cosmopolitan relations (ZeF 8: 358), but he also insists that such right can never be imposed, despite the coercive nature that relations of right typically display (MdS 6: 353). In some of Kant's writings the commercial spirit is praised for cultivating moral predispositions that will progressively bring about the enlightenment of political institutions (IaG 8: 27–8). In others that very same spirit is scorned for fostering selfishness, cowardice, and a general debasement of human beings (KdU 5: 263).

Given such disparate evaluations it is not surprising to see that those few critics who have explicitly engaged with Kant's thoughts on race and commercial relations are as sharply divided on the matter as Kant himself appears to be. For some authors, Kant's views of trade render him an all too typical representative of the Enlightenment expansionist model of civilization,<sup>1</sup> insensitive to the diversity of non-European forms of life,<sup>2</sup> and complicit in racial discrimination and colonial exploitation.<sup>3</sup> For others, to the contrary, Kant champions an anti-imperial discourse that places him side by side with progressive critics of European colonial projects, such that his theory of cosmopolitan right should be seen as a vehicle of empowerment and resistance to colonialism and domination.<sup>4</sup> In one prominent reading, Kant is as much an apologist of unrestricted trade and free markets as his 'beloved' Adam Smith.<sup>5</sup> In another one, Kant regarded 'just trade' as more important than 'free trade', and his entire theory of international justice can be seen as an attempt to formulate the right way to engage in commerce with distant others.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to revisit these debates by placing Kant's reflections on race and commercial relations in the context of a systematic discussion of Kant's philosophy of history, its teleological principles, and the related development of Kant's theory of right and politics. It is well known that Kant's views on teleology developed significantly during the 1790s, culminating in a new assessment of the role of the principle of

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Anthony Pagden, 'Stoicism, cosmopolitanism and the legacy of European imperialism', *Constellations* 7, no. 1 (2000), pp. 3–22.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas McCarthy, *Race, empire, and the idea of human development* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Bernasconi, 'Who invented the concept of race? Kant's role in the Enlightenment construction of race', in *Race* ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 11–36; C. W. Mills, 'Kant's Untermenschen', in *Race and racism in modern philosophy*, ed. A. Valls (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 169–193.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Sankar Muthu, 'Conquest, commerce, and cosmopolitanism in Enlightenment political thought', in *Empire and modern political thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 199–231; Peter Niesen, 'Hospitality and colonialism', *Politics and Ethics Review* 3, no. 1 (2007), pp. 90–108.

<sup>5</sup> S. Fleischacker, 'Values behind the market: Kant's response to the "Wealth of Nations"', *History of Political Thought* 17, no. 3 (1996), pp. 379–407. The idea that Kant had referred to Smith as his 'lieblich' philosopher, comes from a letter of Marcus Herz, written in 1771 (Brief 10: 126).

<sup>6</sup> Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and cosmopolitanism: The philosophical ideal of world citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 124–48.

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conformity to ends in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.<sup>7</sup> It is also well known that this development had important implications for a number of areas of Kant's philosophy, including his political philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Until now however, few attempts have been made to explain what exactly motivated these revisions from a systematic perspective and where they lead the overall assessment of Kant's account of colonialism and commercial relations.<sup>9</sup>

The present chapter examines such a neglected link by focusing on the development of the concept of 'predispositions' (*Anlage*) and its place in Kant's philosophy of history. The concept is interesting as an entry-point to Kant's earlier account of the relation between nature and freedom; it also plays a central role in motivating Kant's defence of commercial relations as the sort of social relation that naturally grows with the development of the 'predisposition' to 'unsocial sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). The following pages analyse that predisposition by placing it in the context of a wider eighteenth-century philosophical debate about the role of natural predispositions (*Anlagen*), and the related concept of 'germs' (*Keime*), in explaining the persistence or transformation of particular traits of the human species. As we shall see in what follows, Kant's remarks matured in the context of a preformist view of organic development that conceded the plausibility of natural teleology to illustrate the development of humans as a species, and linked this to a qualified endorsement of the physical theological proof for the existence of God. His earlier defence of commercial relations therefore cannot be understood without examining how this account of the predisposition to unsocial sociability is related to a teleology of nature with important implications for Kant's hierarchical account of human races and their development in different societies. Conversely, Kant's later sceptical stance on both colonialism and commercial relations

<sup>7</sup> I have discussed this issue in Lea Ypi, 'Natura daedala rerum? On the justification of historical progress in Kant's guarantee of perpetual peace', *Kantian Review* 14, no. 2 (2010), pp. 118–48.

<sup>8</sup> This last claim has been made persuasively by Pauline Kleingeld, who argues that Kant's views on race, for example, significantly changed after 1792: see Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant's second thoughts on race', *Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 229 (2007), pp. 573–92. Although she suggests that the change might be related both to the influence of the French Revolution and to developments in Kant's philosophy of biology, she does not pursue the thought further.

<sup>9</sup> One exception is Ian Storey, 'Nature's law and empire in Kant's "second thoughts" on race' *History of Political Thoughts* (forthcoming). For a discussion of the role of nature for Kant's critique of colonialisms, see Muthu, *Enlightenment against empire*: pp. 135–138.

makes sense in the light of his mature reflective approach to the question of natural teleology, the abandonment of physical theology in the third *Critique*, and the related separation of the moral from the natural realm when it comes to the standing of different human beings and their societal development.

## 4.2 Unsocial Sociability, Teleology and Nature

As many interpreters have emphasized, Kant's earlier thoughts on the role of trade interdependence in relation to the promotion of peace are continuous with a tradition that links the expansion of commercial sociability to the promotion of public order and the development of cosmopolitan political relations.<sup>10</sup> Like Vitoria, Pufendorf, Wolff, and Vattel before him, Kant saw the predisposition to communication as an effective antidote to a radically pessimistic view of human nature and to the prospects for political order following from it. In Vitoria and others the natural inclination to communicate and the right to enter in commercial relations served to justify imperial expansion and the right to subjugate non-European peoples on grounds that they violated the natural duty to behave hospitably to foreign travellers.<sup>11</sup> Although the link between the right to make commercial offers, colonialism, and cosmopolitanism is examined in much greater detail in Kant's later writings, it is worth emphasizing that in the earlier stages of his work he was not too distant from his predecessors' remarks.

One potential source of evidence is his 1784 essay *Idea for universal history from a cosmopolitan perspective*. Kant's analysis of the role of unsocial sociability of human beings and the sympathetic remarks on the commercial spirit that accompany it is particularly clear in two distinct passages. The first is when Kant discusses the transition from the state of nature amongst human beings to a condition of freedom under external laws guaranteed by state institutions. The second is when he examines the dynamic of antagonistic relations between states and the conditions under which a lasting peace can be achieved.

<sup>10</sup> See, for one example, Pagden's contribution to this volume.

<sup>11</sup> See for an excellent discussion of this point, Pagden, 'Stoicism, cosmopolitanism and the legacy of European imperialism'.

With regard to the first, Kant's defence of commercial relations arises in the context of his attempt to identify a pattern of collective development showing that human beings' moral predispositions can be realized in the historical world. This can occur through the achievement of an instituted political society able to administer justice universally (IaG 8: 22). This problem, however, is also difficult to solve: the human being 'is an animal [...] which needs a master' yet 'this master is exactly as much an animal who has need of a master' (IaG 8: 23). The fact that the highest authority needed to realize humanity's moral predispositions ought to be 'just in itself and yet a human being' is a problem that appears in fact impossible to solve: 'out of such crooked wood as humanity is made, nothing entirely straight can be fabricated' (IaG 8: 16). If human agents are thus challenged in the ability fully to realize their own moral potential, only an approximation to the ideal can be expected.

Kant is sceptical here that political expedients are sufficient to bring about even an approximation to the ideal of universal justice. He lays his hopes instead on the benign intervention of 'nature' which has willed that 'human beings produce everything that goes beyond their mechanical existence out of their own labour and hands'. Reflecting on the potential for moral progress in the course of human development, he defends the relevance of a teleological perspective for understanding an otherwise meaningless aggregate of human actions as a system where the development of the parts promotes the organic unity of the whole.<sup>12</sup> Nature, Kant argues, 'is not superfluous and is not wasteful in the use of means to its ends' (IaG 8:19). It has willed that 'human beings produce everything that goes beyond their mechanical existence out of their own labour and hands'. In providing tools for their own development, everything has been tightly calculated so that the human being can only credit himself one day for reaching 'the height of the greatest skillfulness, the inner perfection of his mode of thought and (as far as it is possible on earth) thereby happiness' (IaG 8:19).

<sup>12</sup> On the relevance of teleological principles for distinguishing between aggregate and system and the role of the latter in Kant's philosophy, see Lea Ypi, 'The problem of systematic unity in Kant's two definitions of philosophy', in *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht. Akten des XI. Kant-Kongresses 2010*, ed. Stefano Bacin, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 773–786.

Kant appeals to the important concept of ‘predisposition’ (*Anlage*) to *unsociable sociability* (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) to explain how nature intervenes to promote humanity’s moral principles (IaG 8: 23). Indeed, he goes as far as praising the commercial spirit for facilitating the unfolding of that predisposition. ‘Thanks be to nature [...] for the incompatibility, for the spiteful competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess or even to dominate!’ he emphatically asserts (IaG 8: 21). The selfish instincts that accompany commercial sociability, the desire for competition, acquisition of property, the investment of labour and resources, are revealed in this context to form part of a productive cycle that turns human unsociability into a motor of social progress. Although human beings wish to lead a quiet and comfortable life, ‘nature wills that out of sloth and inactive contentment he should throw himself into labor and toils, so as, on the contrary, prudently to find out the means to pull himself again out of the latter’. This Kant, argues, betrays ‘the ordering of a wise creator; and not the hand of an evil spirit who might have bungled his splendid undertaking or ruined it in an envious manner’ (IaG 8:21).

Promoting a social order in which commercial relations are instrumentally valuable to the development of political institutions guaranteeing security and the undisturbed enjoyment of private property is not the only instance in which the predisposition to unsocial sociability appears as an integral part of nature’s beneficial intervention in history. Kant’s remarks on the role of trade for the development of such predisposition become even more incisive when we turn to the second dimension of antagonism examined in *Idea*: conflict amongst states and the general condition of enlightenment that such conflict brings with it. Indeed, trade is explicitly mentioned in the eighth proposition of the 1784 essay stating that the history of the human species could be viewed as the completion of a ‘hidden plan of nature’ to promote an internal and external perfect state constitution. Asking whether experience reveals anything that might allow us to make conjectures about the development of human beings in this direction, Kant identifies promising signs in the commercial interdependence of all states and the degree of enlightenment amongst both politicians and citizens that such civilized relations bring about. Culture, understood as a process of sophistication of both material and social habits in response to ever more complex human needs, plays a crucial role here too. States, Kant argues, ‘are already in such an artificial relation to each other that none of them can neglect its internal cultural development without losing

power and influence among the others.' Moreover, 'civil freedom cannot be very well infringed without feeling the disadvantage of it in all trades, especially in commerce, and thereby also the diminution of the powers of the state in its external relationships' (IaG 8: 27).

Kant then links the possibility of the human species making moral progress to the predisposition to unsocial sociability and the commercial spirit that drives social cooperation beyond internal conflicts within the state. Provided one respects mutual constraints on freedom, if 'one hinders the citizen who is seeking his welfare in any way he pleases, as long as it can subsist along with the freedom [...] then one restrains the vitality of all enterprise and with it, in turn, the powers of the whole' (IaG 8: 29). This reference to the value of individual welfare and the appeal to the laissez-faire attitude required to let individuals pursue their own ends as they see fit is very important. In later writings, Kant makes a structurally similar argument, emphasizing the interdependence of human actions and their importance for political institutions, yet the value cited as foundational to explain how agents are connected to each other beyond national boundaries is justice rather than individual welfare. I shall return to this point in the following pages; for now it is important to notice that the predisposition to unsocial sociability plays a crucial role in Kant's teleological narrative of how the selfish pursuit of private gains might promote the right kind of political institutions. Once that teleological narrative is revisited and systematic emphasis is placed on the role of agents' reflecting about their own position in human history, the assessment of commercial relations and the evaluation of the role of the state will also end up being reshaped.

But before analysing that point, and to return to the earlier essay on history, it is important to pay attention to how Kant describes the political processes triggered by the development of commercial sociability. The argument is of an elitist kind. Kant draws attention to the role of monarchs in removing barriers on their citizens' personal initiatives for the promotion of commercial interaction. He argues that the enlightenment of civil society will one day reach them too:

Hence the personal restrictions on the citizen's doing and refraining are removed more and more, and the general freedom of religion is ceded; and thus gradually arises, accompanied by delusions and whims, enlightenment, as a great good that must raise humankind even out of the selfish aims of aggrandizement on the part of its rulers, if only the latter understand their own advantage. This enlightenment,



however, and with it also a certain participation in the good by the heart of the enlightened human being who understands the good perfectly, must ascend bit by bit up to the thrones and have its influence even on their principles of government. (IaG 8: 29)

Kant does not say exactly what sort of principles and governments are required to promote a process of ‘enlightenment’ which is described here in rather general terms. He defends a more specific definition of the term in his famous article ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in which he also stresses the importance of removing obstacles to freedom in order to guarantee the public use of reason (WiA 8: 37). Interestingly, he there defends the freedom to pursue commercial initiatives through an important distinction between the private and the public use of reason applied to the potential injustice of taxation. Although a citizen cannot in his private capacity refuse to pay the taxes imposed on him, Kant argues, ‘the same citizen does not act against the duty of citizen, when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts about the inappropriateness or even injustice of such decrees’ (WiA 8:37). The critique of taxation in the Enlightenment essay therefore complements the defence of commercial relations presented in *Idea for a universal history* and indicates a sympathetic stance towards unrestricted commercial relations.

Moreover, like many of his predecessors, Kant’s analysis of the Enlightenment is at this point not hostile to the idea of European civilization spreading to the rest of the globe. He argues that if one approaches the study of history in a systematic fashion, ‘one will discover a regular course of improvement in our part of the world’ and that this part of the world ‘will probably someday give laws to all others’ (IaG 8: 29). He identifies the means for such development in the expansion of the commercial spirit and the benefits of international trade on the relations between states. The selfish instincts that accompany commercial sociability, the desire for competition, acquisition of property, the investment of labour and resources, are revealed (and justified) in this context as part of a productive cycle that turns the predisposition to human unsocial sociability into a motor of social progress.

### 4.3 The Teleology of Racial Hierarchy and Commercial Relations

In examining these passages it is important to emphasize that the position concerning the effects of commercial society and the expansion of the

European model is not one that Kant takes without passing judgement.<sup>13</sup> Rather, the account of race endorsed throughout the 1770s and early 1780s suggests that Kant approved of European attempts to dominate the rest of the world and genuinely believed that other populations were unable to rule themselves.<sup>14</sup> As the notes from his lectures on anthropology from 1780 to 1781 illustrate, he thought that 'Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves'; 'they serve only as slaves,' and are similar to 'children' (VA 25: 877–8). In his 1788 essay on the use of teleological principles in philosophy, he cites approvingly a 'knowledgeable man' who criticized the proposal to emancipate slaves on grounds that when they are set free, 'they soon abandon an easy craft which previously as slaves they had been forced to carry out, and instead become hawkers, wretched innkeepers, lackeys, and people who go fishing and hunting, in a word tramps' (TTP 8:174n).

Kant's hierarchical view of human races and the analysis of unsocial sociability on which his defence of commercial relations is based are clearly connected. But in what way? To illuminate that connection we need to consider the systematic role that the concepts of 'predisposition' (*Anlage*) and germs (*Keime*) play in Kant's philosophy of nature and his account of the generation of organisms. The first of these, the concept of predisposition, is one that, as we saw, Kant also introduces to explain how unsocial sociability is at the heart of processes that trigger the appropriate kinds of social relations, thus preparing the way for the development of morality. The second, the concept of germs, plays a particularly important role in Kant's analysis of the human race.

Both germs and predispositions are systematically introduced in the context of a familiar eighteenth-century debate about the unity of the species and the modality of transmission of character traits from one generation of organisms to the next. To better understand their relevance to Kant's teleology of nature, we need to turn to the trilogy of essays in which the natural history of human beings is explicitly discussed: *Of the different*

<sup>13</sup> I disagree here with the position Sankar Muthu takes in Muthu, *Enlightenment against empire*: p. 186. The idea that Kant's views should be understood as a simple matter of fact statement and contain no evaluative features has also been defended by Todd Hedrick, 'Race, difference, and anthropology in Kant's cosmopolitanism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008): pp. 245–268, at p. 262.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent discussion of this point, see Pauline Kleingeld's contribution to this volume.

*racés of human beings* (1775), *Determination of the concept of a human race* (1785) and *On the use of teleological principles in philosophy* (1788). Enquiring upon the reasons for the origin of different races, Kant offers the following explanation:

The grounds of a determinate unfolding which are lying in the nature of an organic body (plant or animal) are called *germs*, if this unfolding concerns particular parts; if however it concerns only the size or the relation of parts to one another, then I call them *natural predispositions*. [...] This care of Nature to equip her creature through hidden inner provisions for all kinds of future circumstances, so that it may preserve itself and be suited to the difference of the climate or the soil, is admirable. [...] Chance or the universal mechanical laws could not produce such agreements. Therefore we must consider such occasional unfoldings as *performed*. (VRM 2: 435)

Kant's remarks on germs and predispositions are here situated in the context of a longstanding eighteenth-century scientific debate among defenders of epigenetic theories of natural development versus preformist accounts. The former, revived in the eighteenth century in the defence of 'mechanistic' epigenesis offered by G. L. L. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* that appeared in 1749 explained organic development by referring to the action of a *moule intérieure*, a kind of vital force understood in analogy with the Newtonian microforces, which organized the interaction of the various *molécules organiques* of which living matter was composed.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the generation of new organisms was here illustrated with reference to a capacity inherent in matter to transform itself and generate new organic forms. Preformist accounts, on the other hand, developed in a climate of scepticism about epigenetic theories. They gained particular prominence in Germany through the work of Albrecht von Haller, later also reinforced by the analysis and microscopic observations of the Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet. Both Haller and Bonnet, refined existing accounts of preformation by referring to the existence of preformed germs which were thought to be present in all natural beings that contained the seeds for their future development. Germs therefore pre-existed the fully formed organism, not in the sense that all the properties of a fully formed organism could be interpreted as already developed

<sup>15</sup> See Phillip Sloan, 'Preforming the categories: Eighteenth-century generation theory and the biological roots of Kant's a-priori', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (Apr. 2002): pp. 229–253.

in the germs, but as seeds which required an ordering cause to facilitate their growth. Preformist theorists like Haller and Bonnet could thus respond to both biological and theological disputes about the relation of God to living matter, reconciling the natural development of organic parts with the defence of a purposeful intervention in the way natural forces with innate teleological direction could organize and develop.<sup>16</sup>

Although, as many interpreters have pointed out, Kant's general position towards epigenesis is complex (in the first *Critique* he went as far as calling the entire system 'an epigenesis of pure reason' (KrV 3: B 167), his commitment to a version of preformation is consistently clear in his early writings, and particularly in his essays on race.<sup>17</sup> Already his 1763 work on the *Only Possible Proof of the Existence of God* had illustrated Kant's familiarity with these different theories of generation, and indeed displayed an attempt to go beyond both epigenetic and preformist theories to elaborate a more sophisticated defence of physico-theological proof for the existence of God. It is in the context of his search for such proof that the concept of predispositions (*Anlage*) is mentioned for the first time:

One presumes not only in inorganic, but also in organized Nature a greater necessary unity than directly meets the eye. Because even in the structure of an animal it is to be supposed that a single predisposition [*Anlage*] will have a fertile adaptability for many advantageous results, for which we might initially find necessary a plurality of special arrangements. Attention to this is as appropriate to philosophy as to the physico-theological inference. (Bew 2: 126)

The use of the term 'Anlage' is here not very different from the one we find in Kant's later essays on race and in his account of commercial relations. But it is interesting to observe Kant's insistence that a deeper understanding of the teleological potential of predispositions will make clearer the link between the teleology of natural forms and the attempt to infer from that link an intelligent designer of the universe (physico-theology). In the later essays on race, the definition and technical use of the concepts of germs and predispositions are unchanged. Here, too, Kant notes that germs and predispositions should be understood as purposive conditions

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent review of the thought of different authors involved in such controversies, see John H. Zammito, 'Kant's persistent ambivalence towards epigenesis, 1764–1790', in *Understanding purpose: Kant and the philosophy of biology*, ed. Philippe Huneman (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), pp. 51–74 and Sloan, 'Performing the categories.'

<sup>17</sup> For further analysis of this issue see Sloan, 'Performing the categories.'

for the development of natural beings that specify their capacity to adapt and survive in particular environmental and atmospheric conditions. They represent innate structures, independent of mechanical causes, which precede the empirical development of organisms yet contain the seeds for their future growth and allow them to adapt in different environments (VRM 2:435). As Kant puts it, ‘the human being was destined for all climates and for every soil’ and ‘consequently various germs and natural predispositions had to lie ready in him to be on occasion either unfolded or restrained, so that he would become suited to his place in the world and over the course of the generations would appear to be as it were native to and made for that place’ (VRM 2:435).

These reflections are particularly useful in understanding how Kant ends up solving the core theoretical problem faced by his essays on race: explaining the diversity of human races whilst also tracing them all back to the same human species. Faced with the usual difficulties of invoking mechanical laws to analyse the unity of a species and explain how the characteristics of a particular organism could be preserved and transmitted to the next generation, a version of ‘preformist’ theories is endorsed to account for the evolution of human traits that are already contained in it as germs and predispositions. Yet, while predispositions refer to certain conditions of development with regard to the size and relation of parts (organs) in a living being, germs are conditions for the development of new features.<sup>18</sup> This then allows Kant to explain the unity and the diversity of the human species as well as its capacity to adapt to external different circumstances. Different races develop as a result of different germs coming into contact with different environments. Predispositions, on the other hand, provide the structural conditions under which the development of certain germs could be occasioned. They are therefore the same for the whole human species.

The implications of this theory are crucial for understanding Kant’s analysis of the historical development of the human species, the sort of relations humans develop in the course of adapting to different

<sup>18</sup> See for clarification of this distinction, Zammito, ‘Kant’s persistent ambivalence towards epigenesis, 1764–1790’ and Gunther Zoeller, ‘Kant on the generation of metaphysical knowledge’, in *Kant: Analysen, Probleme, Kritik*, ed. Hariolf Oberer and Gerhard Seel (Würzburg: Koenigshausen & Neumann, 1988), pp. 71–90, at p. 75. For a discussion of Kant’s preformism in relation to his philosophy of biology, see also Philippe Huneman, *Metaphysique et biologie: Kant et la constitution du concept d’organisme* (Paris: Kime, 2008).

environments, and the reason for his racially differentiated theory of commercial development. Kant explains how germs account for the different characteristics inherited by every race within the same human species, but also emphasizes how the influence of a particular environment, the character of the soil or certain atmospheric conditions establish differences in human traits. Therefore germs serve to explain biological, physical, cognitive, and also moral differences inherited by representatives of various races, whereas predispositions are shared by all human beings but can develop more slowly or more quickly depending on the empirical circumstances in which they evolve.

One such predisposition, central to the topic we are examining here, is that of 'unsocial sociability' which, as we saw earlier, should also be understood as the means deployed by nature to facilitate progress toward a civilized condition. Kant's theory of racial hierarchy and his stadial narrative of human history are related: if the theory of germs (*Keime*) explains the different abilities of human races, the Anlage to 'unsocial sociability' will develop to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how different agents operate in different geographical and cultural environments. Kant implicitly refers to this issue when he discusses the capacity to work on the side of people with different skin colour. 'Especially interwoven with certain natural predispositions', he argues, are 'in addition to the faculty to work... an immediate drive to activity (especially to the sustained activity that one calls industry), which is independent of all enticement' (TTP 8: 174n). Yet, non-whites have not only different individual skills but are also unable to produce 'culture'.<sup>19</sup> And this lack of ability, Kant explains elsewhere, is due to the different development of innate germs and predispositions: 'Who[ever] has seen a savage Indian or Greenlander, should he indeed believe that there is a germ innate to this same [being] to become as a man in accordance with Parisian fashion [would become]? He has, however, the same germs as a civilized human being, only they are not yet developed' (VA 25: 651).

The teleological constitution of human beings is therefore intrinsically related to the teleological constitution of nature and has important implications for humanity's prospects of historical development. Human history is seen as the process of realization of predispositions and germs that

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent discussion of the development of Kant's views on race in relation to his account of teleology, see Storey, 'Nature's law and empire in Kant's "second thoughts" on race.'

are innately implanted in natural organisms, and can only be explained in light of this assumption of natural conformity to ends. This principle reveals, in the writings of the early Kant, how the predisposition to ‘unso- cial sociability’, which obtains its maximal development in commercial societies, is instrumental to nature’s positive role in the course of human history. Once we understand human history as a process of development of such predispositions, we can explain Kant’s commitment to applaud- ing certain activities that promote the refinement of certain talents and skills and his unproblematic endorsement of Europe’s mission to expose other peoples to the same beneficial effects. History is presented here as a meaningful succession of human actions rather than a meaningless series of destructive events; nature and freedom are interpreted in a harmonic relation that allows the former to be a condition for the further develop- ment of the latter.

But how can purposiveness in nature determine the course of human history without somehow undermining the capacity of human beings to freely pose their autonomous ends? Kant’s theory of germs and predis- positions seeks to solve the difficult problem of the relationship between natural and moral teleology by introducing the idea of natural condi- tions for development able to account for both immutability and change in the course of human history. Yet, as we saw, they are also linked to long-standing debates on the possibility to infer from such teleological constitution of nature, the existence of an intelligent designer of the uni- verse as required by the physic-theological proof to which Kant explicitly refers. But the status of the assumption of intelligent intervention in the course of human history is empirically dubious and normatively problem- atic: if natural teleology is to be understood as the condition of possibility for the development of preformed predispositions, freedom and with it the space for moral agency end up being significantly restricted.

Needless to say, the consequences of this question for Kant’s moral phi- losophy are enormous. The problem that I have only sketched here tor- ments Kant for a number of years and leads to the lengthy analysis on the status of reflective judgement in the third *Critique*. There Kant returns to talk about predispositions in order to distinguish organic beings from mechanical ones. However, and very strikingly, there are no longer any ref- erences to the concept of *Keime*, which as we saw played an important role in Kant’s qualified endorsement of preformationism and in his explanation of differentiated human development. Although Kant maintains some

references to the concept of natural predispositions, they are now seen as 'inner purposive predispositions' [inneren zweckmässigen Anlagen] and integrated with an epigenetic account of generation.<sup>20</sup> And what is even more important for purposes of this chapter, Kant now makes it clear that this analysis of biological organisms has no moral implications: it is only possible to refer to ends of nature, not because nature is as such teleologically oriented, but in analogy with the kind of action conforming to ends that human beings exhibit in the practical realm.

The systematic implications of this development are subject to a vast interpretive literature and I have discussed them in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> Without repeating them here, let us consider the re-assessment of the place of commercial relations in Kant's later writings, once the assumption that the predisposition to unsocial sociability is best developed by nature in commercial societies is revealed to be untenable.

#### 4.4 Commercial Relations in Kant's Later Political Philosophy

The systematic developments of the third *Critique* in Kant's analysis of teleology have immediate implications for a number of important issues in his political writings. Conformity to ends is understood in the third *Critique* not as a feature of nature but as a reflective quality ascribed by human beings to the development of some of nature's products in analogy with the causality of freedom displayed in the practical realm. Nature, for Kant, is no longer in itself teleologically oriented. Rather, human beings can interpret it as such once they examine their own position in it and observe the analogy with the way they make use of its products to promote their practical ends.

It is therefore unsurprising to see that the assumption that unsocial sociability represents a predisposition that nature's benign intervention can further develop appears less persuasive to him at this stage. As Kant emphasizes in the third *Critique*, '[i]t is so far from being the case that nature has made the human being its special favorite and favored him

<sup>20</sup> Under the influence of Johann Blumenbach, Kant distances himself from preformism and seems to endorse a version of epigenesis. For further analysis of this argument, see Sloan, 'Performing the categories.'

<sup>21</sup> Ypi, 'Natura daedala rerum?'



with beneficence above all other animals, that it has rather spared him just as little as any other animal from its destructive effects, whether of pestilence, hunger, danger of flood, cold, attacks by other animals great and small' (KdU 5: 430). This means that once the moral implications of the theory of predispositions disappear it is implausible to maintain that the conditions for development of human nature are determined by the beneficial intervention of a providential force. With this assumption, the physico-theological proof of the existence of God also disappears from Kant's mature body of work.<sup>22</sup>

This development implies a re-evaluation of a number of key conceptual elements that played an important role in Kant's earlier narrative of moral progress and the consequent defence of commercial relations within a stadial theory of human history. The first of these elements is the idea of a harmonious relation between the predisposition to unsocial sociability of human beings and nature's intervention to promote this predisposition in a way that is conducive to the development of morality. In the essay on universal history, the predisposition to unsocial sociability develops in externally favourable circumstances in the context of an optimistic, if hierarchical, narrative of the transformation of the human species. The concept of happiness, the pursuit of which characterizes the commercial spirit, plays an essential role in explaining how nature has given human beings the means to promote their own skills and abilities so that whatever level of moral development they have achieved in the course of their lives could only be credited to themselves (IaG 8:19–20). To this end, competitive instincts, the desire to possess, and the will to dominate others are seen as vehicles through which predispositions are further developed and reveal the ordering of a 'wise creator'.

In the third *Critique* however, Kant is critical of the logic underpinning these links. Not only do these natural predispositions not stand in natural harmony with nature, but the conflict between them is so profound that 'even if the most beneficent nature outside of us had made the happiness of our species its end, that end would not be attained in a system of nature upon the earth, because the nature inside us is not receptive to that' (KdU 5: 430). All the instincts Kant cites favourably in the earlier essay on history to show how

<sup>22</sup> See on this issue Lea Ypi, 'Teleology and system in Kant's architectonic of pure reason', in *Politics and Metaphysics in Kant*, ed. by H. Williams, S. Baiasu, and S. Philstrom (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2011), pp. 134–151.

nature can turn the predisposition to unsocial sociability into a feature that is beneficial to moral progress ('the oppression of domination,' 'the barbarism of war') are now mentioned to illustrate the resistance that human nature poses to such teleological intervention, even assuming its plausibility.

It is unsurprising therefore to see that at this point Kant's assessment of the role of the commercial spirit has also changed. Commercial sociability, which was once praised for contributing to a state of affairs in which conflict between states would gradually lead to peaceful solutions, is now contrasted with the spirit of war, but Kant expresses surprising admiration for the sublimity of the latter. As he puts it, war, 'if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and at the same time makes the mentality of the people who conduct it in this way all the more sublime, the more dangers it has been exposed to and before which it has been able to assert its courage'. On the contrary, he continues, 'a long peace causes the spirit of mere commerce to predominate, along with base selfishness, cowardice and weakness, and usually debases the mentality of the populace' (KU 5: 263).

These are not isolated remarks. The observations on the sublimity of war and the accompanying derision of the spirit of commerce that we find in the *Critique of Judgement* resonate with Kant's other writings of the 1790s. In *The conflict of the faculties*, Kant refers to the revolutionary wars fought by France against defenders of the Ancient Regime to contrast the enthusiasm of those who fight to promote justice with the incentives obtained by monetary rewards. The latter, Kant says,

will not elevate the adversaries of the revolution to the zeal and grandeur of soul which the pure concept of right produced in them; and even the concept of honor among the old martial nobility (an analogue to enthusiasm) vanished before the weapons of those who kept in view the right of the nation to which they belonged and of which they considered themselves the guardians. (SdF 7; 86)<sup>23</sup>

These remarks fit neatly with Kant's modified account of the process through which moral predispositions are historically developed. War, provided it is compatible with the pursuit of the principle of right, brings with it enthusiasm, a motive which characterizes the sublime state of mind and elevates the human spirit to acknowledge the force of the moral law. The revolutionary struggle of the French against a backward and corrupt

<sup>23</sup> See also in relation to this and to the assessment of war the following passage in

enemy triggers enthusiasm on the side of those who observe their deeds and could be interpreted as a 'sign' that human beings can make progress towards the better.<sup>24</sup> In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant examines the issue of progress, not by relying on evidence of the contribution of nature to the development of human predispositions, but by examining what human beings themselves do to create a social order in which justice is promoted. This is compatible with his remarks on the foundation of teleological principles in the third *Critique*: culture is no longer understood here as the process through which nature assists the human being in the progressive development of his skills and abilities but as the 'aptitude for setting himself ends at all and (independent from nature in his determination of ends) using nature as a means appropriate to the maxims of his free ends in general' (KdU 5: 431).

In the third *Critique*, Kant analyses the process of cultural development of human beings in a way that appears structurally similar to the earlier essay on history but differs at several critical points. Here too Kant considers inequality amongst human beings an incentive for the advancement of industry and the arts, the development of talents, and the spread of luxury among the population of commercial states. Whilst he preserves his praise for the beautiful arts and sciences and their contribution to the refinement of taste and the reduction of 'the tyranny of sensible tendencies', he appears more critical of the effects of trade relations and the inequality they trigger. Indeed, far from being praised as a 'source of much greater evil but also of all good', inequality is here considered as an immediate cause of political conflict and social disruption. Luxury, defined as 'the tendency of what is dispensable to destroy what is indispensable', is blamed for producing calamities affecting both those who provide 'the majority of the necessities of life [...] for the comfort and ease of others' and those who

*Perpetual Peace*: 'War itself, however, needs no special motive but seems to be engrafted onto human nature and even to hold as something noble, to which the human being is impelled by the drive to honor without self-seeking incentives, so that military courage is judged (by the American savages as well as by the European savages in the age of chivalry) to be of immediately great worth, not only if there is war (as would be reasonable) but also in order that there may be war, and war is often begun merely in order to display courage; hence an inner dignity is put in war itself, and even philosophers have eulogized it as a certain ennoblement of humanity, unmindful of the saying of a certain Greek, 'War is bad in that it makes more evil people than it takes away' (Zef 8: 365).

<sup>24</sup> I have discussed the relevance of enthusiasm for Kant's **philosophy** of history in Lea Ypi, 'On revolution in Kant and Marx', *Political Theory* (forthcoming).

'cultivate the less necessary elements of culture, science and art' and maintain the former 'in a state of oppression, bitter work and little enjoyment' (KdU 5: 432).

In Kant's earlier essays the development and promotion of commercial relations was perceived as beneficial to the trajectory of moral development of human beings. Conflict amongst states was seen as determined mostly by their ambition for power, the issue of internal social unrest and dissatisfaction amongst different social classes hardly received a mention, and the promotion of trade and commercial relations was constituted an antidote to war and led to the promotion of peaceful interdependence among nations. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant's analysis takes a different form: the development of commercial sociability is itself seen as part of conflicts, both within the state (due to the dissatisfaction of oppression between classes) and between states (due to their ambition, greed, and commercial rivalries). The type of political relation able to put an end to this conflict is not necessarily one in which each individual is left alone to pursue his own good in the hope that his isolated activities will have a positive impact on the welfare of the whole. The problem becomes one of designing political institutions able to administer justice impartially for all concerned. Enlightenment is thus no longer expected from the progressive moderation of political elites, as we saw earlier, but from the learning process enacted by revolutionary events realizing specific principles of right and justice.

All these passages are consistent with the development of Kant's reflections on the role of the state, its relevance in promoting principles of justice, and the importance of human agency in transforming political institutions so that moral predispositions are promoted. They also make sense in the light of developments in Kant's analysis of teleology, placing more emphasis on the artificial intervention of human beings than on the benign assistance provided by nature to cultivate its innate predispositions. While Kant's earlier essays on history did reflect on the necessity of coercive laws, and also of a cosmopolitan political body, for placing collective constraints on freedom, the nature of the principles according to which such transformations ought to take place was never considered in any detail. Kant's later account of human nature, his clarification of the form and role of teleological principles in human reflection about progress, and the new emphasis placed on the necessity for moral imperatives in reforming political institutions required a much more sophisticated

analysis of the nature of the state, its relation to rights, and the kind of representation required to ensure that institutions expressed the collective will of those subjected to them.

## 4.5 The Critique of Colonialism and Commercial Relations

The developments in Kant's philosophy of history experienced during the 1790s brought with them also a new evaluation of the relationship between colonialism and commercial relations. As we saw above, the essay on universal history was silent on the negative effects of unregulated commercial expansion and unambiguously celebrated the role of Western states in progressively establishing a universal legal order subjecting to European rule all other societies. Rooted in a hierarchical account of human races and supported by a stadial theory of human history, such an account culminated in the allegedly superior age of commercial relations.

Kant's later political writings are more nuanced on this point. Both the *Doctrine of Right* and his essay on perpetual peace revisit the traditional right of hospitality, central to the justification of commercial expansion since the writings of Vitoria, but take it in a different, anti-imperial, direction. The right to hospitality, also labelled as 'cosmopolitan' right, is limited to the conditions under which one can 'seek' commercial interaction with others without expecting to be treated with hostility for having made such an attempt. Although such a right protects human's natural interest in sociability and can be abused by those resisting commercial expansion, if one contrasts the alleged unsociable behaviour displayed by 'barbarian' peoples with that of states pursuing commercial profit, the latter, Kant emphasizes, is much more striking in its brutality. '[T]he *inhospitable* behaviour of civilized, especially commercial, states in our part of the world, the injustice they show in *visiting* foreign lands and peoples (which with them is tantamount to *conquering* them) goes to horrifying lengths,' he declares. 'When America, the negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, and so forth were discovered' they were considered 'countries belonging to no one, since they counted the inhabitants as nothing.' The foreign soldiers called up under the pretext of setting up trading posts only brought with them 'oppression of inhabitants, incitement of the various Indian states to widespread wars, famine, rebellions,

treachery, and the whole litany of troubles that oppress the human race' (ZeF 8: 358).

The critique of chartered commercial companies and their complicity in the oppressive actions of European states in the New World were far from original in the late eighteenth century. To take one relevant example, Adam Smith, often simplistically interpreted as a mere apologist of free markets and commercial expansion, denounced the pathologies of joint-stock trading companies for their corruption, mismanagement, and detrimental effects on the proper development of commercial sociability. In doing so he focused on the same examples as Kant: the East Indies, the Spice Islands, and the activity of English and Dutch trading companies.<sup>25</sup> He highlighted the contradictions embedded in the activities of agencies who could not be trusted to be able to both pursue private profits and commit to acting as government representatives serving the interests of a whole country. Although Smith remained much more sceptical than Kant on the prospects of developing appropriate juridical and political relations to contain such contradictions and tensions,<sup>26</sup> the critique of colonialism developed from a critical account of chartered commercial companies was clearly common.

Kant's views are distinctive in placing the critique of colonialism in the context of a theory of justice which on the one hand develops themes already present in his earlier essays on history, on the other hand departs from them in significant directions. The *Doctrine of Right*, published in 1797, is particularly clear on the limits of unilateral appropriation of distant territories, and the conditions under which one can make rightful use of a particular piece of land and its resources. In contrast to *Conjectural beginnings of human history*, where agriculture and the farmer's attempt to protect the 'fruits of his labour' triggers the need to establish a common political authority guaranteeing one's property entitlements (MAM 8: 119), the *Doctrine of Right* mentions the role of labour and agricultural activity only to dismiss it as a criteria of appropriation: 'whoever expends

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent discussion of this critique, see Sankar Muthu, 'Adam Smith's critique of international trading companies—Theorizing "Globalization" in the age of enlightenment', *Political Theory* 36, no. 2 (2008), pp. 185–212.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of Smith's scepticism on institutional solutions to international conflict, see Fonna Forman-Barzilai, 'Adam Smith as globalization theorist', *Critical Review* 14, no. 4 (2000), pp. 391–419.

his labor on land that was not already his has lost his pains and toil to who was first' (MdS 6: 269).

Moreover, in the *Doctrine of Right* Kant seems to have abandoned the stadial theory of history that characterized *Conjectural beginnings of human history*. In the latter, commercial society was seen as the last, superior, stage of a development that begins with 'the savage life of hunters', continues into a 'comfortable' and 'secure' pastoral existence, and follows the triumph of the agricultural way of life over the shepherding one. The *Doctrine of Right* displays a more tolerant attitude towards a variety of ways of life. Kant argues, for example, that nomadic peoples may be entitled to common possession of the land, citing Mongolia as an example (MdS 6: 265), and he also insists that groups with different life styles can legitimately resist the imposition of a different method of interacting with the land, provided they do not interfere with each other. To mention one example: a hunting people, Kant says, can resist a pasturing or farming people since 'as long as they keep within their boundaries the way they want to *live* on their land is up to their own discretion' (MdS 6: 266).

The implications of these reflections for the critique of colonialism are unambiguous. Since nomadic people are entitled to remain on the land that they occupy, they also have a right to exclude others whose attempts to enter into relations with them violate principles of justice. Settlement is legitimate provided it does not encroach with the claim of native peoples to use the land in accordance with their habitual practices. Kant says that 'if these people are shepherds or hunters (like the Hottentots, the Tungusi, or most of the American Indian nations) who depend for their sustenance on great open regions, this settlement may not take place by force but only by contract'. Moreover, the kind of contract required is one that 'does not take advantage of the ignorance of those inhabitants with respect to ceding their lands' (MdS 6: 353).

It is clear here that trade has to be placed in the context of rightful relations and can no longer be relied upon to pave the way to a peaceful political order. Whilst in Kant's earlier writings, commercial sociability was the tool through which nature guaranteed the emergence of political institutions protecting individual claims to property, here such institutions take precedence and are themselves a condition for the assertion of property rights and the development of commercial relations. Global interdependence implies that the absence of justice in one part of the earth

is immediately felt in another and efforts to resist such injustice are intertwined.<sup>27</sup> This argument differs significantly in both content and structure from the one we analyzed in *Idea for a universal history* which emphasized that it is hindering the individual pursuit of welfare that will threaten the stability of the whole international system thereby dictating an end to war. The passage in *Perpetual Peace* where Kant articulates this thought is well known:

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. (ZcF 8:360)

It is important therefore to insist that although political institutions are central to Kant's theory of human progress throughout his philosophical trajectory, both in the essay on history and in his later political writings, the analysis of the conditions under which they can emerge appears more sophisticated. At first, their justification is embedded in a narrative of gradual moral development out of the refinement of particular psychological predispositions, guaranteed by the benign intervention of nature. Although, Kant never completely abandons such references to nature, they cease to play a systematically important role, once the justification of the principles that allow us to think about nature as a teleologically organized system is modified.<sup>28</sup>

To see this point, we can focus on the interpretation of passages in *Perpetual Peace* where Kant still refers to commercial relations but in a slightly different perspective. Discussing the possible mechanism by which nations will join each other in the creation of a cosmopolitan condition, Kant argues that 'it is the spirit of commerce (*Handelsgeist*), which cannot coexist with war and which sooner or later takes hold of every nation' that will bring together nations. But the argument is qualified: it applies to those nations that 'the concept of cosmopolitan right will not have secured against violence and war' (ZcF 8: 368). Since 'the power of money may well be the most reliable of all the powers (means) subordinate

<sup>27</sup> See Muthu's chapter in this volume.

<sup>28</sup> I have tried to account for the persistence of such references to nature in Ypi, 'Natura daedala rerum?'



to that of a state, states find themselves compelled (admittedly not through incentives of morality) to promote honorable peace and, whenever war threatens to break out anywhere in the world, to prevent it by mediation, just as if they were in a permanent league for this purpose' (ZeF 8: 368). And yet the kind of assurance that nature provides here is not one that can allow us to conclude that a change in the desired direction will certainly occur; it is certainly not, Kant emphasizes, 'adequate for *predicting* its future'. What he is interested in is a reflective endorsement of a pattern that allows us, for practical purposes, to think about the world *as if* it were teleologically ordered thus making it 'a duty to work toward this (not merely chimerical) end' (ZeF 8:368).

It turns out then that commercial relations are not important because they guarantee an end to war or prepare the entrance to a peaceful international order. Indeed, as the passage above reveals, Kant thinks that the commercial spirit plays a role precisely in those cases where war (for whatever reason) ceases to deliver the predicted outcome of motivating nations to entering into reciprocally rightful relations. Commerce is for Kant simply another route through which we might explain the emergence of global interdependence and communication; it no longer demarcates a privileged set of social relations or indicates an intermediate stage between a condition of conflict and one of perpetual peace. If commercial relations simply illustrate the empirical conditions under which cosmopolitan right can be established, there is no need for a moralized defence of them. The descriptive narrative Kant provides here is consistent with his explicit endorsement of protectionist measures, including the protectionism of nations like China or Japan when refusing to enter into commercial relations with European merchants. Kant no longer defends commercial relations from a normative perspective, he simply invokes them to explain under what circumstances people from different countries can come into contact with each other and create the empirical conditions that might in the future favour the emergence of principles of right. What really matters for his position is the duty to create just political institutions able to remedy the conflicts present in such conditions of interdependence, and only the actions of humans themselves are ultimately able to account for the possibility of this duty being realized.

## 4.6 Conclusion

We may wonder at this point what happened to the caution with which Kant approached the issue of humans legislating for themselves, and to the pessimistic remarks on the human beings' need for a master with which we began our analysis. It seems that Kant views on this matter have come full circle: although in the later political writings the idea that out of the crooked wood of humankind nothing entirely straight can be produced is still present, Kant also believes in the force of moral imperatives to redirect the course of politics without need for further support from nature. The following passage from *Perpetual Peace* directly connects to some of the issues concerning the ability of humans to govern themselves raised by the essay on universal history:

It is then said that he who once has power in his hands will not let the people prescribe laws for him. A state that is once in possession [of the power] not to be subject to any external laws will not make itself dependent upon the tribunal of other states with respect to the way it is to pursue its right against them; and even a continent, if it feels itself superior to another that does not otherwise stand in its way, will not leave unused the means of strengthening its power by plundering or even conquering it and so all the plans of theory for the right of a state, the right of nations, and cosmopolitan right dissolve into ineffectual, impracticable ideals.

But the way in which this challenge is addressed illustrates the straightforward answers Kant's later writings provide to the question of what guarantees that human beings will make progress in the direction of building common political institutions:

Admittedly, if there were no freedom and no moral law based upon it and everything that happens or can happen is instead the mere mechanism of nature, then politics (as the art of making use of this mechanism for governing human beings) would be the whole of practical wisdom, and the concept of right would be an empty thought. But if one finds it indispensably necessary to join the concept of right with politics, and even to raise it to the limiting condition of politics, it must be granted that the two can be united.

The only plausible guarantee of moral development is then political progress conforming to the duty to promote principles of right. As Kant's later reflections indicate: to ask whether human beings will ever take that imperative seriously requires examining whether there is any evidence that they might have done so in the past and invoking that evidence as a possible, weak, assurance that they might continue to act in the same way

in the future.<sup>29</sup> The French Revolution provides an example or *sign* of that tendency and it is instructive precisely because it is directed by human agents. Out of the state, and out of the attempt to build state institutions that reflect the collective will of all citizens, there are no guarantees that moral progress will be possible but ‘it can be required of the one in power that he at least take to heart the maxim that such an alteration is necessary, in order to keep constantly approaching the end’ (Zef 8; 372).

Commercial sociability therefore no longer indicates a privileged instance of human communication, facilitated by nature’s will to promote the development of human moral predispositions, nor does it provide a route of transition from conflicts in the international sphere to improved political institutions. The development in the analysis of teleology that Kant completed during the 1790s implied that he could no longer rely on a spontaneous mechanism of coordination supported by an inherently beneficial teleological narrative clarifying how human beings can govern themselves collectively despite the potential for corruption inherent in their nature. This development, combined with the increasingly sophisticated analysis of the state that Kant elaborated during the 1790s provoked a return to a more artificial account of the development of political institutions, in line more with the contribution of Hobbes and Rousseau to an understanding of rights and politics than with that of his Scottish philosophical heroes. As we have seen, a similar development also paved the way to a novel critique of European politics and trade, a clear condemnation of colonial exploitation, and a renewed emphasis on the legitimate intervention of sovereign states to contain the damaging expansion of commercial relations. It is easy to see, in light of these reflections, why Fichte’s advocacy of the closed commercial state was perceived by his supporters to follow naturally from Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*.<sup>30</sup> But with that development, a new chapter in the history of ideas begins to unfold.

<sup>29</sup> See on this issue Ypi, “On revolution in Kant and Marx.”

<sup>30</sup> See on this issue, Isaac Nakhimovsky, *The closed commercial state: Perpetual peace and commercial society from Rousseau to Fichte* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011).

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Katrin Flikschuh, Rainer Forst, the late Istvan Hont, Michael Sonenscher, and to audiences at the universities of Cambridge, Darmstadt, and McGill for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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