

Kant or not Kant? Arguing on Kant's Ultimate Political Design for Global Governance and Cosmopolitanism. An Exchange between Claudio Corradetti and Allen Wood

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Abstract


In the following reflection Claudio Corradetti and Allen Wood engage in a controversy concerning the possibilities and the limits of textual interpretation. Should an interpreter still be authorized to call an author's interpretation the logical stretch of text beyond its black printed letters? The authors offer two different standpoints on what can still be defined as textual interpretation. Whereas for Allen Wood a clear-cut separation must be kept between what a text shows and what an interpreter argues starting from the text, for Claudio Corradetti such distinction remains internal to textual exegesis in so far as the interpreter's conclusions follow a logical pattern of justification starting from evidential hints.

Key words

Kant, Cosmopolitanism, World Republic, Regulative Ideal

In occasion of the publication of the monograph Claudio Corradetti, *Kant Global Politics and Cosmopolitan Law. The World Republic as a Regulative Idea of Reason*, Routledge, London-New York 2020, the book author and Allen Wood engage in a

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controversy concerning the possibilities and the limits of Kant's textual interpretation. Should an interpreter be authorized to stretch a text beyond its black printed letters even if in the 'spirit' of the author? Is it possible to draw a clear distinction between textual evidences and the interpreter's additions? Is there a middle ground? Allen Wood and Claudio Corradetti offer two different standpoints on how to approach Kant's exegesis of global politics and cosmopolitan law. Whereas for Allen Wood there must be a clear-cut separation between what a text shows and what an interpreter argues starting from the text, for Claudio Corradetti such distinction remains internal to textual analysis in so far as the interpreter's conclusions follow a logical pattern of justification. There are two main points around which this exchange unfolds: 1) the meta-questions concerning what a textual interpretation is and what its limits and possibilities are; and, following from this, 2) a disagreement on what the ultimate design and rationale of Kant's international relations is.

Allen Wood Kant conceives a progression in conditions of international right. Corradetti seems to think (I am skeptical about this) that Kant has a definite conception of the progression of rightful international orders, culminating in a World Republic. My view is that Kant does have a plurality of distinct conceptions of how a rightful international order might be constituted, which include a voluntary international federation, and its possible growth to include new states, such a federation with provisions for enforcement of its laws and decrees over its members, and finally a state of nations, whose members are themselves sovereign states. I do not see Kant as projecting a progression in history here, as if nations should first adopt one model and then a more demanding one. I think he is hoping that nations will do something to lessen the frequency and the danger of war between them, and to lessen their addiction to the preparedness for war, which Kant sees as a mortal threat to the political and even moral progress of humanity. But I do not see him as having even a clear favorite among the models. He is simply hoping that nations will agree on something that works. Perhaps he does favor the idea of a state of nations, since it comes closest to an international order that would resemble a condition of right among individuals. But I do not see him as projecting any future historical progression leading to that. It looked to me as if at times Corradetti was trying to use the idea of a regulative

principle in Kant to construct such a future course of history on Kant's behalf. I do not see that in Kant.

I certainly think Kant never entertains the thought of a world republic whose members are human individuals -- a single world-state encompassing all human beings. On the contrary, he regards that as a dystopian horror-vision, the worst form of tyranny and "the graveyard of freedom." The state of nations he favors would retain the internal sovereignty of separate states and have these states as its members. This would limit the capacity of such a state of nations to enforce its decrees, since if its members are to retain internal sovereignty and control over their own resources and enforcement capacities, it could not require them to go to war in order to enforce a rightful international order. At most, it could give its members permission to join in the enforcement of its laws and decrees against one of its members. It was not always clear to me that Corradetti did not see clearly Kant's rejection of the idea of a single all-encompassing world-state. But that may be either because he did not express himself unambiguously or because I am at fault in not understanding him correctly.

I also found a bit obscure Corradetti's discussion of *lex latae* or *lex permissiva*. This is, admittedly, a difficult and obscure concept in Kant's theory of right itself, about which nobody can be too sure what it is or exactly where it fits. Or at least that's true of me. There was an interesting paper about 20 years ago written by Brian Tierney, arguing that Kant's notion of permissive law constitutes an unsolved (maybe insoluble) problem in his theory of property. Tierney comes at this through his work on medieval canon law theories of property (B.Tierney, 2001, pp.301-312), such as those involved in the Franciscan claims to own nothing while having become a scholarly order that needed books and manuscripts that were, in effect in that society, like highly scarce and valuable works of art.

The main application of the concept of permissive law, as I understand Kant, is to resolving the theoretical problem within his theory of property - the transition from provisional to peremptory property. (I don't agree with Tierney that this represents an insoluble problem.) And then its role is that in a state of nature we are permitted (what we otherwise would not be allowed according to right) to compel others to join a condition of right in which provisional possession becomes peremptory possession and a right of property. Who owns what would be settled by a public authority which would also enforce

property rights. Is there something analogous that in Kant's view does (or could) operate on the international level? Could sovereign states be permitted to coerce others into an international order? I doubt it. All the models of international right I see Kant as entertaining presuppose the sovereignty of individual states, and the international order (however it is conceived) would have to be entered into voluntarily by them. One issue on which Kant's texts might give different verdicts is whether an international order would have to be such that any state could withdraw from it. Could voluntary membership be revoked at will, or would there be a true federation that is permanent? In the *Rechtslehre* (6:351) Kant seems to suggest that the most there could be is a voluntary congress with right of withdrawal at any time (Kant, 2006 [1797]). But is he merely describing that arrangement, or is he claiming (as some, such as Susan Shell, maintain) that nothing stronger than such a congress is rightfully possible? That would contradict what he seems to say in *Perpetual Peace*. Corradetti may be alluding to this late in the paper and trying to use regulative ideas to resolve the apparent conflict. I prefer to see Kant as merely describing what a Congress of nations is (one model for international right), not setting limits on what states could do. (Incidentally, Kant alludes here to the USA as a federation not permitting voluntary withdrawal -- thus anticipating by a half century the issue in our Civil War and taking the Union side.)

Claudio Corradetti At the top of Kant's practical philosophy is the regulative idea of transcendental freedom. In so far as freedom solves the dialectical opposition of **necessity and freedom** (as thesis and antithesis), its regulative property derives from its being an Idea of reason (Kant, I. 2000 [1781-7], A338/B396, p.409 ff.). The world republic represents a political regulative counterpart to the metaphysical idea of the republican idea of freedom as non-domination. But the world republic as an idea of reason expresses merely a **cognitive function** rather than a form of knowledge. Because ideas have a hypothetical character, the world republic provides us with a cognitive model for judging 'transitional' progressions in current politics. It does not represent an objective historical finality of world history, but a conceptual resource for judgement of it.

Let me just add two things: 1) the regulative idea of the *Welt Republik/Völkerstaat* (these are for me analogous terms) is something we can textually reconstruct from several passages which are all connected to freedom as a regulative idea.

The reading I propose ~~here~~ thus reinforces the assumption that, for Kant, law and politics are legitimate in so far as they reflect the ideals of moral freedom. Since freedom according the *Critique of Pure Reason* is an idea of reason (and thus it is regulative),¹ I conclude that the world (state) republic — in so far as it institutionalizes freedom for global politics — is also an idea of reason that thereby holds a regulative function.

Let us reconsider this conceptual puzzle by referring to the famous paragraph in *Toward Perpetual Peace* ~~in which~~ Kant draws a distinction between what is right in theory (*in thesi*) — as with the desirability of a world republic/multistate confederation (note that here Kant uses the term *Weltrepublik*) — and what is instead right in practice (*in hypothesi*), as with the realization of the federation/league of states seen as a negative, second best, surrogate.

If, according to the ideal standard of practical reason, the world (state) republic is the solution to adopt but nations “in accordance with their idea of the right of nations [...] do not at all want this, thus rejecting *in hypothesi* what is correct *in thesi*” (Kant, I., 2006 [1795], 8:357, p.328), then, a suboptimal solution becomes legitimate only in so far as it stays compatible and open to the normative demands of the defined ideal. In other words, the practical rejection of the ideal standard of global politics ~~by states~~ is justifiable *pro tanto* only if it shows that the second-best solution does not contradict the ideal of the

¹ According to P. Keating: “Thus, there is an important disanalogy between the laws of nature and the laws of freedom, because the latter are regulative and not determinative, that is, action guiding and not action determining... This explains Kant’s strange passage in the second edition Preface about how the human soul is both free and determined. (Bxxvi-xxx) The soul is thus free, not because it is capable of a dualism, but rather, because it is the site of unification for the laws of freedom with the laws of nature. Kant gives the example of a free action in the conditional: If (for example) I am now entirely free, and get up from my chair without the necessarily determining influence of natural causes, then in this occurrence, along with its natural consequences to infinity, there begins an entirely new series ... For this decision and deed do not lie within the succession of merely natural effects and are not a mere continuation of them ... (A451/B479) So when we view ourselves as capable of freedom (the intelligible standpoint) we assign free choice to our actions”. P. Keating, 2007, pp.63-64.

practical demands of reason ~~as those presented by the model of the world (state) republic.~~
The normative demand for a *formal congruence* between theory and practice persists.

Accordingly, just as the league of states, in order to result as a normatively significant entity (not just as a brute fact!) must incorporate within its suboptimal institutional arrangement the normative ideal of the world (state) republic, similarly, the concept of a global arrangement of world politics must be turned into a regulative ideal. It is exactly at this textual juncture that Kant's elliptic introduction of the conceptual possibility for the idea of the league of states 'as if' it were a world (state) republic should be seen. But this, in Kantian terms, requires a consideration of the relation between the league of states and the world (state) republic in a way similar to the relation between the regulative ideas of reason and the empirical occurrences of experience.

Such point opens the problematic issue of how to conceive the relation between theory and practice in Kant's global politics. Some passages are indicative of this difficulty.

First, in the aforementioned text of *Toward Perpetual Peace*, just before the introduction of the distinction between theory and practice Kant explains that the international state of nature among states cannot be abandoned in any other way "but war" (Kant, I. 2006 [1795], 8:357, p.328), similarly to the way in which individuals are forced to leave "their savage (lawless) freedom" (Ibid.).

Yet, the possibility that "an (always growing) *state of nations (civitas gentium)*" (Ibid.) would arise and "finally encompass all the nations of the earth" (Ibid.) is prevented by the will of states who will never freely subordinate themselves to a superior power. Therefore, one might conclude, "if all is not to be lost" (Ibid.), the world (state) republic can be assumed only as a conceptual guidance for the arrangement of interstates relations. The distinction Kant draws between what is correct *in thesi* and what is instead feasible in practice could be interpreted in relation to a regulative role of the idea of theoretical correctness.

By suggesting the view that the world state republic provides a practical guidance to the structuring of international relations, Kant safeguarded the unity of theory and practice through the hope that peace among nations is an achievable ideal. This is not to exclude the possibility that a universal state – not a republic – could be brutally brought about through force.

In the writing *On the Common Saying*, Kant had already affirmed that: “such a universal state of nations [...]is possible *{in praxi}* and [...]can be” (Kant, I. 2006 [1793], 8:313, p.309). Yet, in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he reminds us that only by subordinating politics to public right under the guidance of the world (state) republic can we hold “a well-founded hope [that] *perpetual peace* [...] is no empty idea but a task that, gradually solved, comes steadily closer to its goal” (Kant, I. 1795, 2006, 8:386, p.351).



2) regarding the *leges latae*, they are adopted by Kant in different contexts and not only in private law contexts (which I do mention, by the way). More interestingly for my purposes is Kant's indication of the preliminary articles 2-3-4 of *Toward Perpetual Peace* in terms of *leges latae*. Within it, Kant refers to the provisional, but not rightful, toleration of inheritance of states (which contradicts the self-determining will of the people), state financial debts with other countries, and finally and perhaps more importantly the standing armies to be adopted to solve interstate conflicts. All of these concessions tolerate transitional phases towards a rightful international order.

Allen Wood My chief reservation about the later version of your paper -- which was much clearer (at least to me) than the earlier version -- have to do with whether your project really involves an interpretation of Kant or is really about contemporary international relations. There is no doubt that Kant is an important source for anyone thinking about these questions and represents an earlier stage in offering proposals for how nations ought to relate to one another with the aim of keeping peace between them. But I would resist using the word 'interpretation' (of Kant) for ideas that are suggested to you by Kant but are not in Kant himself. I think you need to keep the distinction between these two kinds of ideas sharp and not blur it. Kant offers a series of models for possible future international relations - organizations or agreements between nations with the aim of securing a peaceful relation. Here are the ones I would distinguish, beginning with the least ambitious and going on from there:

1. A peace pact between two or more nations, concluding a war (Kant, I. 2006 [1795], 8:356).

2. A congress of nations with longer duration, but entered into voluntarily and with the proviso that any nation may withdraw from it unilaterally at any time (Kant, I. 2006 [1797], 6:351).



3. A federation of nations (*Völkerbund*) organized with the aim of keeping a just peace between them, to which the member nations commit themselves to remain a party (Kant, I. 2006, [1795], 8:356 and 8:311; Kant, I. 2006 [1797], 6:351; Kant, I., 2012, 8:24, pp.107-120).



4. A state of nations (*Völkerstaat*), with a permanent constitution, of which sovereign states are the members.



(4) but not (3) would have coercive enforcement mechanisms to be used against states (whether members or not) that resist the rule of international law and attack member states of the state of nations. But for the sovereignty of member states to be maintained, the state of nations could not rightfully coerce its members to participate in such a war, but could only permit them to do so if their internal sovereignty led to their decision to participate. Each of (2)-(4) Kant hopes will expand its membership. If (as Kant considers highly unlikely though desirable) that membership encompassed all the nations of the earth, this would result in:



5. A world republic, whose members are states



Kant rejects the idea of a:



6. World monarchy, abolishing the sovereignty of individual nations.



As I read Kant, he views this list (excluding (6) of course) as a list of possible models of international co-operation. He is hopeful that nations will eventually choose one model or another to promote peace and if possible make it perpetual. Which of the models nations should adopt is not something Kant proposes to decide. It would depend on pragmatic considerations. He might prefer (4) or even (5) to (3) and (3) to merely (2). But Kant

DOES NOT view this list as a progression (or to use your word, "transition") moving from (2) to (3) to (4). This would suggest a speculative historical teleology which is no part at all of Kant's thinking about international relations.

As I read your paper, it seems on the contrary to suggest precisely that - this is how I understand your term 'transitional'. And you are offering this way of understanding the models of international co-operation as (in your words) an interpretation of Kant. This is where I must disagree strongly with you. It would be an abuse of the word 'interpretation' to attribute to Kant the thought that there will be, or even ought to be, a progression from (3) to (4) to (5) and even to (6). An interpretation of a philosopher ought to be an attempt to state clearly and accurately what the philosopher's views are. But in that case, the 'transitional interpretation' of Kant would be simply a wrong interpretation of him. Perhaps this historical teleology is something you find appealing, which you wish would occur and whose occurrence you might like to advocate. That thought (of a progression with a historical teleology) may even have been suggested to you by reading Kant. But it is not in Kant. Not at all. He does not believe in such a teleology of international relations and is not arguing for one. It is at most a thought suggested to your mind by what he thought and wrote. But it is not his thought at all. A thought that bears this relation to a historical philosopher is not an interpretation of that philosopher, as I understand the word 'interpretation'. I think there are indications in your paper that you realize that what I have just said is true. But you nevertheless want to continue to speak of your idea of a 'transition' from (2) Perhaps I have misunderstood you. If so, I'd appreciate your explaining your view more.

So let me complete my thought briefly.

As I understand you, you are attracted by the idea of a historical transition from (2) a congress of states, through (3) a federation of states, to (4) a state of nations and then even to (5) a world republic. But I think you realize this idea is not in Kant. He does not advocate such a developmental process. It is an abuse of his notion of the regulative to suggest that he is thinking of this progression and the notion of a world republic 'regulatively.' I think you are aware of all this. But nevertheless you want to call YOUR idea of a "transition" from (2) to (5) an 'interpretation' of Kant, and want to appeal to his idea of the regulative to suggest that (5) is a regulative idea governing the transition. Whatever appeal the notion of a 'transition' may have for you, you should not use the term

"interpretation" to describe its relation to Kant. That is my objection to your paper, as I understand it. The only element of your view that I find in Kant is the thought that whatever model of international co-operation nations may choose to adopt (whether (2), (3) or (4)), it would be a good thing if the membership were to expand and more states to join. But this falls well short of your conception of the 'transition'. So your "transitional interpretation" of Kant should not be called an "interpretation". To do so is to abuse the word 'interpretation'.

Perhaps I have misunderstood you. If so, I would be grateful if you would correct me, and explain your view more.



Claudio Corradetti So here are my replies to your replies:

- 'transition' is used with reference to 'approximation to peace' as it appears from the same use of 'zu' in the title of *Towards Perpetual Peace*, but also in later passages.
- I believe you misunderstand me when you consider that at some point I see the world republic as realizable. I never say that. What I claim is that the world republic is a way 'to think the unity' of international law. This is why it is a 'regulative' idea as they are described in the Dialectic of Reason.
- progression 1 (as inter-transnational-political-entities shifts) is desirable but it is not an objective teleological direction we can reconstruct in history. Yet, it is a benchmark (of a cosmopolitan kind) we can use to judge history according to a cosmopolitan perspective. This does not mean though that the plurality of the shift from the *Kongreß* to the *Völkerbund* etc. is nullified by historical progression. On the contrary: the plurality of these institutional options available at the international level remains, BUT, their external constitutional arrangements (their external relations) must approximate the ideal of a world republic as well as of the cosmopolitan right to visit (the 2nd and the Third definitive article).



states must be republican, similarly transnational entities must approximate a republican ideal for a reciprocal arrangement of international affairs.

-progression 2, I believe it is a fair interpretation of Kant's Enlightenment and ideal of human emancipation to make sense of his understanding of history according to a 'cosmopolitan point of view'. It is Kant himself who devotes an entire work to explaining how we can look back on history and judge it according to a cosmopolitan progression. The idea of a 'cosmopolitan constitution' serves precisely as a standpoint for adjudicating

empirical progression in that respect through the advancement of the constitutionalization of domestic, international and cosmopolitan law (the three constitutional layers Kant mentions in a footnote of Perpetual Peace).

Allen Wood I accept that you do not think of a world republic as realizable in Kant's view. And I agree that this the way you describe his use of ideas in the Dialectic is the way Kant thinks of ideas in the Dialectic of *Critique of Pure Reason*. But he never applies it to international law in the way you do in this paper. It is a misinterpretation of Kant to read him that way. Kant does use the word 'idea' in relation to history in his 1784 essay. But there he is seeing the idea of a perfect civil constitution as an idea to be approximated in reforming the constitutions of individual states. One thing he thinks will assist this process of political progress is the creation of a federation of states seeking peace. But in that essay he does not entertain a plurality of models of international co-operation. Still less does he entertain the thought that there might be a regulative idea relating different models. When you apply the notion of regulative ideas to a progression of such models, you are extending Kantian ideas in a way Kant never does, and you should not call such an extension an 'interpretation' of Kant.

I am not clear whether in the above you are intending to describe Kant's views or are merely putting forth your own views. This is what I wish had been made clearer in your paper. I see nothing whatever in Kant to suggest a transition between different models of international co-operation is anything Kant intends to put forward or to entertain. If offered as an interpretation of Kant, it is without textual support and should be rejected as an interpretation of Kant's thoughts about how we should think about the quest for world peace. In *Idea* (1784) he presents such an idea toward which states might progress as a way of thinking about political progress. In *Religion* (1793-4) he entertains the idea of an ethical community along with hopes that existing churches should make progress toward that idea. But nowhere do I find Kant suggesting a progression from treaties, to a congress of nations, to a federation, to a state of nations as a progression (or 'transition') in terms of which we should think about the efforts toward perpetual peace that he is advocating. Again, in *Idea* (1784) he thinks this way about the progress of individual states toward an ideally just constitution. I never see any evidence of the same way of thinking about the efforts toward world peace. In your paper I saw various signs that you are aware of this,

and realize that what you call a “transitional interpretation” (of Kant) is not a textually defensible interpretation of Kant, but instead is a way of looking at his models of international co-operation that apparently appeals to you, and can be constructed using an innovative (never used by Kant) application of the Kantian notion of a regulative idea. You are extending Kant's conceptions in ways he never does. He uses the idea of a just constitution in *Idea* (1784) in this way when discussing political progress in individual states (domestic right), but he never applies the same pattern of thinking to international or cosmopolitan right. Perhaps the extension of that way of thinking to these two international realms seems attractive to you, but that it appeals to you is not a ground for attributing it to Kant or offering it as an interpretation of Kant.



[Follow-up comments]

Allen Wood Let me try to discuss what appears to be our disagreement over how to read Kant on international right and peace, and explain why I read him as I do. We may simply have a disagreement (common enough among scholars) about how certain texts or passages are to be read. But I also suspect that your position is not merely (or not entirely) about how to read Kant. So below I will also make a suggestion regarding how I understand the motivation behind your paper, and see if you think it is correct.

The issue of Kant-interpretation. As I read the main texts in which Kant discusses international right and what nations might do to secure perpetual peace, I do not see him as ever proposing that we move from more modest models of international co-operation to more ambitious ones. In *Idea* (1784) he never proposes anything stronger than a peaceful federation (*Völkerbund*) (Kant, I. 2012, 8:24, pp.107-120). As I read him, this is the only model he suggests in that text, so it cannot support the claim that he envisions a "transition" from weaker to stronger international organizations (from a congress to a federation to a state of nations). He does suggest here, as he does everywhere about any international organization that he hopes it will expand over time to include more nations as members. This is the only developmental or ‘transitional’ claim I see him ever making. In this work, Kant is indeed interested in a regulative idea. But it is a regulative theoretical idea for understanding human history. It is not even a practical idea, though towards the end it converges with one, and it is an idea that would be helped by an international peaceful federation. But this is not an idea used regulatively in international relations, but

only an idea citizens and rulers might use in perfecting the civil constitution of individual states.

His next discussion of this idea occurs in the third section of Kant's *Theory and Practice* (1793). Here he proposes a new model: a cosmopolitan constitution which I take to be a version of the *Völkerstaat* (Kant, I. 2006, 8:310-311). It would be an organization having coercive power to preserve peace and justice among nations. But no sooner does Kant propose it than he considers that it might be "more dangerous to freedom than the lawless condition in which states find themselves; this leads him to back off to the model of a federation of nations.

In *Toward Perpetual Peace*, there is this same conception, with perhaps a more favorable attitude toward the state of nations, but nevertheless the same thought, at 8:357. He suggests that nations might choose to give up their lawless freedom (analogous to the way individuals do in entering into a condition of right) and form a state of nations. He again suggests that such an organization might be 'always growing' -- that over time, more and more nations might join it. But then as he did before he pulls back from supporting this model as a practical alternative, suggesting that existing states do not want to lose their lawless freedom, and that in accordance with their idea of international right, they reject 'in hypothesi' what might be correct 'in thesi' - refusing to form a state of nations. Kant then retreats once more to the idea of a peaceful federation instead of the quest for a world republic (which is what the state of nations would become if it included all states as members). It is interesting that the only use of 'idea' in this context is that of the 'idea of international right' that existing states possess, and it is one that would lead them to resist a state of nations. Still, by proposing that a state of nations is correct 'in thesi' I think he is voicing support for such a stronger model, while doubting its practicality and offering the weaker model of a federation as the most realistic likely alternative.

Finally, in the discussion of international right in *Rechtslehre*, he distinguishes a "permanent congress of states" (with states free to leave it at any time), from a federation based on a constitution. Susan Shell thinks he is abandoning the stronger conception of a federation in favor of the weaker conception of a mere congress. I don't read him that way, but merely suggesting the weaker idea as one states might consider if even a federation is too strong for them. Again, Kant's pattern of thinking is to suggest something stronger

(which he might himself favor if it were practicable) but then back off and suggest something weaker that states might be willing to accept.

If you ask about the various models of international organization which ones Kant favors, I think it would be correct to think of him as wishing for the stronger ones - a state of nations growing toward a world republic or a federation instead of a mere voluntary congress. But he is always doubtful that states would accept the stronger models. And he thinks only the weaker ones would accord with the 'idea of international right' that existing states have. In *Theory and Practice*, he even suggests that the stronger model of a cosmopolitan constitution (i.e. a state of nations) might be a danger to freedom.

In no text does Kant offer us the suggestion that there might be, or that there should be, or that we should even think in terms of, a historical development from weaker models of international co-operation towards stronger ones. Thus I see your idea of a 'transition' (if I understand it) as absent from his writings about international right and the striving toward perpetual peace. This is why I think a 'transitional interpretation' of Kant on these matters is not a textually supportable interpretation.

My question about the deeper intention of your paper. But now I have a question for you about your intention in this paper (and perhaps in your book, which, however, I have not had time to read). You speak in the paper's title of Kant's 'legacy' You say you will defend the transitional interpretation as one Kant 'relies on'; and you say you will 'reconstruct and explain' how the international entities Kant talks about 'are to be considered part of a single pattern'. A bit later you distinguish a long-term standard from a 'short term feasibility standard'. Passages in your paper like these lead me to offer the following suggestion as to what you might intend in this paper. I'd like to know how far you might agree with my characterization of your intentions.

What I suggest, then, is this: You are not offering the 'transitional interpretation' as an account of what Kant actually thought or wrote. You are instead extending Kant's ideas in a direction he did not, and therefore intending to use what Kant thought like a legacy (something inherited from him, which might then be employed for ends he did not himself propose, as an heir might use inherited resources to fund some enterprise or cause which was not among the activities of the person from whom the resources were inherited, but at most could be thought of as something that person might have approved. You could accept what I have said above about Kant's intentions in his texts, and say: "Yes, he was focused

more on short term feasibility standards than on long term goals, which he might not have thought practicable”. As Fichte did with many Kantian doctrines, you might be consciously revising Kant in a direction you think attractive and which you think further some deeper (but never explicitly expressed) intentions of the spirit of Kant’s philosophy.

In that case, what you are calling your ‘interpretation’ (a term I regard as inappropriate if my suggestion is right) is not to be judged by the standards of accuracy to his texts, but perhaps by standards of desirability as a way of thinking about international relations today or in the future. Your references to later thinkers such as Klabbers, Habermas and Benhabib lead me to conjecture that this is your real aim. Then my thought is that perhaps Kant was right to limit himself to more modest and short term suggestions, and that this is especially plausible now that we live in an age when, sadly, the whole idea of international co-operation appears to be in decline and tribes and nations seem to be retreating behind their cultural walls and military power. I might wish your suggestions were practicable, but fear they are unrealistic for the near (perhaps even the foreseeable) future, and I might even fear that Kant was right in pulling back from your extension of him. Kant might have considered you, and also Fichte, as what he sometimes called a ‘visionary’ (*Phantast*), a person morally admirable but not practically wise. And he might have called a politician who tried to implement your ideas under conditions where they are not practical a ‘despotizing moralist’, who does not unite morality with politics in the right way because he goes against political prudence, through “measures prematurely adopted or recommended” (Kant, I., 2006 [1795], 8:373).

This, I suggest, is what Kant might have thought of your interpretation of him. And it is a further reason for rejecting your ‘transitional interpretation’ as an interpretation of Kant. But I am not necessarily in agreement with Kant here. I am myself a big fan of Fichte [redacted]. So if your project is like his, I might still be sympathetic with it even if Kant’s more cautious attitudes led him to resist it. Sometimes Fichte extends Kantian ideas in ways that he claims are more consistent than Kant’s own development of those same ideas. Perhaps you might defend your ‘transitional’ interpretation in that way. But what I would like to know from you is whether my guesses about your intention in this paper are correct. You do not really intend the transitional interpretation as an interpretation of Kant’s meaning, but instead as an extension of some of Kant’s ideas in a direction Kant himself was perhaps too cautious or conservative to extend them. This is my most

sympathetic take on your paper. I wonder if you think it is correct.

Claudio Corradetti Let me preface this by saying that I do agree with both your Kantian texts' observations in the first part of your comments, as well as in understanding my interpretation of Kant as a way of 'filling in the gaps' of his reasoning. It might be pretentious but at least it is a useful attempt particularly for current times. I don't find myself to be a naive political thinker by defending this overall picture, I do take the realistic point of what is feasible in *hypothesi* as something valuable.

It is in this respect that I propose a 'transitional' reading of Kant's global politics. What does it mean to progress towards peace? The 'transitional' movement of the political approximation towards peace and the realization of the 'cosmopolitan constitution' which Kant mentions in different ways along several writings. Here are some examples: "a cosmopolitan constitution" (*Weltbürgerliche Verfassung*) (Kant, I. 2006 [1795], 8:358, p.329 and Kant, I. 2006 [1793], 8:307, p.304), a "cosmopolitan commonwealth" (*Weltbürgerliches gemeines Wesen*) (Kant, I. 2006 [1793], 8:311, p.308), or, even, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, "a cosmopolitan whole" (*Weltbürgerliches Ganze*) (Kant, I. 2000 [1790], 5:432, p.300).

Kant titled his philosophical sketch ~~on peace~~ *towards Perpetual Peace*. He adopted the prefix 'zu' with the idea of indicating a meaning of 'movement towards'. Peace is for Kant an asymptotic concept. Asymptotic concepts in mathematics are values which can be approximated along an infinite series of numbers, that is, a value containing a variable tending to infinity.

The possibility of progressing towards peace occurs through steps approximating a never empirically realizable world (state) republic. Kant speaks in *Toward Perpetual Peace* what is ideally desirable (a world republic/*Völkerstaat*) and what is instead empirically feasible, namely the *foedus pacificum* (*Völkerbund*). The never-ending process of approximation is what I call the 'transitional' condition of Kantian cosmopolitanism.

How do we measure our progression towards peace? Institutional arrangements are relevant only in so far as they point to a progressive legalization of international relations. For Kant, it is the overcoming of the international state of nature that we have to pursue by means of the regulative function of the world republic. This means that peace becomes a

realistic utopia only when international relations are arranged on the basis of an overall system of public law.

The final destination of this journey is the realization of what Kant calls in various writings ‘the cosmopolitan constitution’. It is a system of global public law principles that should govern international relations, subjecting both states and supranational entities to itself.

Indeed, Fichte in his *Review of Toward Perpetual Peace* affirmed that “[...] the federation of nations [*Völkerbund*] proposed by Kant for the preservation of peace is no more than an intermediary condition [...] (Emphasis added)” (Fichte, G. 2001 [1795, 1796],p.319).

So, you are right in noticing that I think - as Fichte did - that there are missing elements in Kant's overall argument on global peace. This is why I think we should resort to the world republic in terms of a regulative idea (specifically the problematic appreciation of Kant of Plato's ideas as Plato's Republic is interesting here).

What I do not agree with is that you claim that my interpretation has no Kantian textual reference whatsoever. I reject this and I invite you to re-read (besides all other passages that we already mentioned and particularly the unfulfilled theory/practice gap between the *in thesi/hypothesi* lines of *Toward Perpetual Peace*) the following text from the *Religion* and the *Preparatory* work of the *Rechtslehre*. I'll reconsider this later. Secondly, the ‘transitional’ interpretation claims that we can formulate judgments on history by reconstructing possible trajectories of approximation towards the ideal of perpetual peace. These remain subjective standpoints but never objective steps, as it will be later for Hegel, in which we can see an ‘unconditioned’ to redeem the conditionality of contingency.

Here is the text from the *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*. Within it Kant draws an analogy between the objective unity of religion as a rational idea and “the political idea of the right of a state [*der politischen Idee eines Staatsrechts*] insofar as this right ought, at the same time, to be brought into line with an international law which is universal and endowed with power” (Kant, I. 1998 [1793], 6:124, p.129).

For Kant we cannot have much ‘hope’ for the empirical peaceful realization of such trajectory. As he immediately exemplifies, whenever we look back at history and how any state has ever tried to approximate such ideal, one cannot help but notice that this has been through “subjugati[ing] all others to itself and achiev[ing] a universal monarchy”

(Ibid.). Yet, soon after, this empirical unity proved not to last very long and disintegrated “to split up from within into smaller states” (Ibid.).

Similarly, Kant affirms, we cannot nurture much hope for achieving the empirical unity of the church, that is, a unity realized within one single “visible church” (Ibid.). Rather, in both cases, such unity should be conceived in terms of an “idea [...] of reason [*eine Idee ... der Vernunft*] [emphasis added]” that is, as a “practical regulative principle [*als praktisches regulatives Prinzip*]” (Ibid.).

And again, noumenal unity is connected to the visible church in so far as it provides its same normative presuppositions. The phenomenal unity of state and international law appears along interstate relations in the unfolding of the different stages of approximations to the ideal. This connection is testified also in the preparatory drafts of the *Rechtslehre – Reflections on the philosophy of right* [1764-] – where Kant asserts that “there is no salvation outside the republic. – A world republic [is] one where no individual state would have enough forces to fight the great republic if necessary” (Kant, I. (2016 [1764-] §807, p.68). Clearly, the relation between the noumenal and the phenomenal world remains in a perennially unsolved tension: the phenomenal can never exhaust the noumenal. This point is raised again for the domestic domain in the writing *On the Conflict of the Faculties*. Here Kant observes that: “The Idea of a constitution in harmony with the natural right of man [...] signifies a Platonic Ideal (*respublica noumenon*) [and] is not an empty chimera” (Kant, I. 1979 [1798], pp.163-5).

Allen Wood I was not accusing you of being a *Phantast* or a ‘despotizing moralist’. I was saying only that this is how I think Kant would regard the position you want to ascribe to him. Keep in mind that I do not automatically agree with every position I find in Kant. I read Kant according to what Kant says, not according to what I think is true or what I might wish Kant had said.

I do not dispute that Fichte would like to read Kant on international right the way you would like to read him. If your ‘transitional interpretation’ were applied to Fichte, I think it would be correct. I might even favor Fichte's position over Kant's. My only point here is that this would not be a correct reading of Kant. All the textual evidence is against it.

If you presented your transitional interpretation as ‘thinking beyond Kant’ I would accept it as that. What it does not do is think ‘with’ Kant, in the sense of agreeing with what Kant thought.

What does it mean to ‘resort to the world republic in terms of a regulative idea?’ This vague formulation, using Kantian terminology in a context, and in a way, that Kant never uses it, remains very unclear.

One might think it means: We should seek to approximate as far as possible in reality the world republic. Kant seems to think that would be ideally desirable but not feasible and he does not in the end recommend it.

So this is not Kant's position and not a correct interpretation of Kant. Or does this phrase mean something else? If it means something else, please tell us what.

In my previous message I have said what the ‘*in thesi/in hypothesi*’ distinction in *Toward Perpetual Peace* means. It means that Kant would approve of it if nations could form a world republic but does not think they will accept that, so he recommends a peaceful federation instead. Nothing in *Theory and Practice* takes a different position from this. In *Theory and Practice* he even offers a reason why states might not accept a world republic -- they fear a loss of freedom.

Here again, it is unclear what you mean. It seems clear from this remark that you do not believe history will move toward a world republic, and of course Hegel would not believe any such thing as that either. But what does it mean to adopt a ‘subjective standpoint’ which reconstructs possible trajectories of approximation? If it does not mean to seek to bring about in the real world actual approximations to a world republic, then what does it mean? Is it simply the approval of subjective fantasies (about ‘possible historical trajectories’) that you find pleasing? I don’t think Kant favors that either, and it is never what he means by the regulative use of ideas.








The text you cite does not say what you wish it said. Kant does favor the unification of churches and faiths, though also without expecting it to happen. But he does definitely favor it, as he never does regarding approximations to a world republic. But this passage does not say specifically that there should be a world republic. It says only that there should be some organization with the right of a state under international right. We know from other texts that Kant thinks the idea of international right that states have is not compatible with a state of nations. And whatever he might have meant here, he

immediately goes on to say that ‘experience refuses to allow us any hope in that direction’. Kant's views about the voluntary ethical commonwealth (the church) are quite different from his views about international right and the coercive power that belongs to states. The footnote on 6:124 is in any case about the church (Kant, I. 1998 [1793], footnote at 6:124), and its vague reference to the right of a state and international right is used only to explain that. As it happens, I have just discussed this difference myself in a book that is in press. Here I discuss the difference between voluntary ethical community (the church) and coercive rightful community (the state).

Noumenal unity is connected to the visible church in so far as it provides its same normative presupposition. The phenomenal unity of state and international law appears along interstate relations in the unfolding of the different stages of approximations to the ideal. We have other passages in Kant's writings, especially in *Toward Perpetual Peace* 8: 357, where he indicates his favorable attitude toward a state of nations that might grow toward a world republic. But there he makes it clear, as he does in other such passages, that we cannot expect existing nations to accept this arrangement. That he omits this further thought in the Reflection does not mean he repudiates it. On the contrary, one must read this unpublished reflection in light of parallel passages in the published writings where he says the same thing, and then it is quite clear that this Reflection would not support your ‘transitional reading’ as an interpretation of Kant. The phenomenal/noumenal distinction is one of the most misunderstood and most abused parts of Kant's philosophy. It seems to invite obscurantism and fantasy. I prefer to avoid it unless I can explain very clearly what it means in that specific context. I understand ‘noumenal’ to mean: as thought by the understanding (or reason) and ‘phenomenal’ to mean: as cognized theoretically by the understanding and the senses together. I can't make sense of the claim that the phenomenal does not exhaust the noumenal. I hope it does not mean something like: “Reality does not exhaust our wishes, and our wishes have some higher reality than reality”. That is just nonsense (*Schwärmerei*).

[Regarding Plato's ideal of a *respublica noumenon*], here Kant is talking not about any international organization but about progress toward an ideal civil constitution in individual states. So again, this passage is not about what you are discussing and does not say what you wish it said.

So I do not see in any of the passages you now cite any real support for your interpretation. But even if they did support it, or even if you found in some other Reflection or footnote in some work on another subject, some slight evidence for it, we should agree with David Hume: “a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence”. I see no evidence at all that supports your interpretation. But even if some stray bits of evidence from this footnote or that reflection did support your interpretation, the overwhelming evidence in Kant's published writings on the topic of international right goes directly against it. We should not interpret texts in philosophy according to what we wish they said, but according to what they do say.

Claudio Corradetti I think we have come close or even covered all the issues of our disagreements. Certainly your critical remarks will be very useful ~~to me~~ in my second step, namely, in developing a contemporary theory of international relations.  me just state this  there may not be clear evidence  you said about what I defend as ‘filling in the gaps’ in Kant’s argument.  ~~I think that there is also~~ no counterevidence  any of Kant’s texts  ~~what I’m claiming~~. We interpret differently some key political notions starting from the terminology Kant uses. When he claims that there are undesirable international arrangements  he refers only and consistently to the *Weltmonarchie* but never to the *Völkerstaat/Weltrepublik*. Should we just be content with a suboptimal political arrangement as the *Völkerbund* is? I don’t think that this conclusion would be Kantian in any normatively significant way. Anyhow I enjoyed this exchange and I thank you for this.

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