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# Kantianism in 21st century politics

An analysis of cosmopolitanism from a multidisciplinary review

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## Abstract

In 1999, Mary Kaldor defined cosmopolitanism as a positive political vision embracing multiculturalism, civility, and democracy. This philosophical thought combines respect for universal Human Rights principles with a commitment to non-sectarianism through promotion and embracement of cultural diversity. However, the placement of moral universalism as a guide to conduct international relations can be seen in earlier studies from diverse disciplines. Therefore, this research is developed under a multidisciplinary analysis and it aims to raise a concise debate on cosmopolitanism based on different theoretical approaches from Philosophy, Sociology to International Relations. Initially, Kant, and then, Habermas and Linklater have posited different names, definitions, and concepts, but an onward analogy can be raised in their key message by recognizing common aspects of their ideas related to cosmopolitanism. Although cosmopolitanism has been considered idealistic by a few researchers, it has northern the discourse and work of international institutions as the United Nations and regional projects as the European Union. Noteworthy, even though cosmopolitan ideas have been embedded in international life, the ascension of nationalist discourses through politics of exclusion presents a daunting perspective to the previous endeavor to embrace multiculturalism in international relations. Furthermore, this paper acknowledges aspects of our contemporary international structures that illustrate underlying notions of cosmopolitanism in public life – many perceived in the earlier studies of Kant. Above all, this work aims to induce International Relations scholars to think politics beyond the state and re-evaluate social relations beyond the bias of nationalism.

**Keywords:** Cosmopolitanism, Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace, Habermas, Philosophy

## Introduction

The definition of a cosmopolitan society might carry a certain burden of utopia and idealism that does not seem to fit today's international politics. However, is it possible that this perception is a reflection of statehood and sovereignty construction which have influenced political analysis into modern nation-based frameworks? The debate is profound and requires a multidisciplinary approach. That is because aspects from what we think today as cosmopolitanism can be recognized in the studies of diverse disciplines - such as the urge of a moralistic universal bond, as a goal to bind as well as to improve politics, economy and social life as a whole - not fragmented, not as nation-states. In the 18th century, Kant defined in *Toward Perpetual Peace* several actions that could cease war and lead us to a stabilized state of peace as federal states, based on moral universalism. However, this is an analysis from the 1800s and since Kant's writings, nations have gone through the failure of the League of Nations after World War I, and the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, subsequently, new international security paradigms were posed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991. In this sense, contemporary politics challenge the 1800s analyses, and consequently, a few researchers might consider Kant's ideas utopian. Or, more or less "Kantian". Nonetheless, this paper explores whether Kant might have inspired the development of notions of cosmopolitanism to academics, and additionally, to the discourse, normative and practices of current international institutions. In this sense, cooperation through multilateralism has facilitated the social, economic, and political relations of pluralist states.<sup>1</sup> But this did not impede nationalist discourses to re-ascended and intensify a political polarization in Europe, South America, and the United States. So, there are a few questions to start this work: is cosmopolitanism obsolete? Is it utopian? How cosmopolitan is the European Union? The UN General Assembly (UNGA)? The World Trade Organization (WTO)? It could be pointed out whether these projects and institutions have succeeded at all, especially with the recent Brexit and the recurring stalemate of the UN Security Council's decisions. Although most of these projects have presented flaws, the essence of the project of a universal and integrative society is still alive today. The first section of this work aims to analyze cosmopolitanism from

a multidisciplinary perspective according to Kant, Habermas, and Linklater, the second section elucidates common confusing terms similar to cosmopolitanism, the third section presents cosmopolitanism in our current international system and finally, a conclusion is developed based on the literature review and our current international system.

## A multidisciplinary perspective of cosmopolitanism

One of the main challenges of cosmopolitanism throughout its history is that the formulation of the term has wavered between an interpretation in terms of a highly idealistic project and one in terms of a long-term process of socio-economic and political change (Marchetti 2012, p.352). For that matter, it is important to highlight that a process can be idealistic and still work. Hence, here it is suggested that the establishment of a cosmopolitan society comprises both scenarios cited by Marchetti (2012). In this sense, cosmopolitanism is an idealistic project which can be achieved by a long process of mainly, substantial political change through the empowerment of cosmopolitan law. Nonetheless, it is interesting to point out that since this process relies on idealistic goals it means that we – as an international society, realize what would be the most auspicious scenario in the international system to promote and stabilize peaceful relations and work towards it.

Since the definitions of cosmopolitanism have changed through history, it is important to comprehend the origins of this philosophical thought from different fields and what they have hitherto added to our critical thinking. For that matter, it is fundamental to understand Kant's contributions to cosmopolitanism, as Kant has envisaged terms like *cosmopolitan law* and *cosmopolitanism* in his studies. However, to fathom Kant's views, it is necessary to contextualize principles as *state sovereignty* and *nation-state* which have been embedded by states and have been mainly associated with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). The establishment of state sovereignty has claimed that authority is concentrated in the domestic affairs of the state, making states sovereign (Krasner 2001, p.12) and this is considered a mark in the history of International Relations because it is seen as a transition from feudal principalities to sovereign states. Hence-

<sup>1</sup>This argument is based on the development of several democratic and multilateral decisions by states at international platforms like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN General Assembly. For that matter, cooperation is more likely to be strengthened in multilateral decisions as the outcome of these resolutions reflects the will of the majority of states.

forth, sovereignty claim has also enabled a stronger base to the development of nationalism (Farr 2005, p.156). In this regard, Anderson (1983) has evaluated the relation between nation and state as a socially constructed project to advance socio-economic goals established by the state. However, according to Krasner (1993, p.235), this connection between nation and state became more strained in the 19th century. In this sense, even after the Peace of Westphalia, political leaders were still legitimated by tradition and divine authority. Consequently, when Kant wrote his essays in 1795, the international system had not yet embedded the concept nation-state so fiercely as it can be perceived today. Thus, it might appear like an odd anachronism to relate Kant's work to cosmopolitanism since his essays were written when states were not well-organized as nation-states,<sup>2</sup> therefore, what is highlighted here are the aspects of Kant's thoughts to what was later recognized as cosmopolitanism to researchers in Philosophy, Sociology and International Relations. On 5 April 1795, during the French Revolution, the Peace of Basel containing three peace treaties were signed by France and Prussia. Following, in the same year, Kant offered to Königsberg publisher, Nicolovius, an essay entitled *Toward Perpetual Peace*<sup>3</sup> which proposed instruments and mechanisms to develop stable peace based on cosmopolitan law. According to Molloy (2017, p.2), Kant's essay is elaborated as a repudiation to the Basel treaty, as Kant had reproached the truce because peace treaties accorded at that time were formulated to be employed to last throughout a pre-determined period. Additionally, Kant develops arguments on whether peace treaties should be constructed under certain bases to be "perpetual". The arguments introduced by Kant visualizes lasting peace built on strong roots, and these concepts were later developed by Galtung (1996, p.82) in *Peace by Peaceful Means*, as Galtung defines positive peace as not only the absence of war but a well-sustainable absence of violent conflict which is maintained by the rule of law and democratic institutions.<sup>4</sup>

In his essay, Kant envisages an international sketch to organize social and political relations and has developed a system that would lead to perpetual peace. This state of complete peace would be developed under cosmopolitan law and consequently, cos-

mopolitan peace (Kant and Kleingeld 2006, p.40). By analyzing the political context surrounding him, Kant has suggested a system of republicanism to organize federal states, but while states should bond through a law-alike force, it has been also propounded that any sort of interference – such as an intervention in the domestic affairs of a state, could develop insecurity at the international level. Regarding the relations between the people inside the republic, Kant debates on hospitality, as every foreigner should be respected and treated properly in a foreign country, however, this would not entitle one of citizenship (Kant and Kleingeld 2006, p.82). In this sense, Kant proposes federalism mainly to organize the relation of citizens inside the republic, between foreign individuals and between the republics, visualizing how to promote and maintain peaceful relations globally. Noteworthy, Kant wrote with a limited historical perspective, the challenges that modern states face have presented different social, historical, and legal paradigms. Nonetheless, Kant has set underlying bases for cosmopolitanism and has recognized the need for international law to organize pluralist sovereign states.

From a sociological perspective, cosmopolitan aspects are also recognizable in Habermas's theory of democracy with reflections to cosmopolitanism and nationalism (Mertens 1996, p.334). In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1996) abolishes historical contingencies and proposes a re-formulation towards a world-republic. According to Habermas's analysis, even regional projects as European citizenship is seen as a temporary project towards a world community by disconnecting national identity and citizenship to a particular nation. In this sense, as one does not associate its citizenship to a nation-state, it associates with something greater, another parameter. Moreover, both Kant and Habermas highlight the need of moral obligation in the relations of states, but opposing to Kant, Habermas defends global citizenship in a sort of detachment of one's association to its nation.

It is interesting to connect Kant and Habermas to cosmopolitanism because both determinate that the bases to a cosmopolitan society are law and morality. That is, modern law (according to Habermas) or cosmopolitan law (according to Kant), but certainly, international law would be the primary key to global

<sup>2</sup>This point is raised by Mertens (1996, p.329) in a comparison study between the cosmopolitanism proposed by Kant to Habermas.

<sup>3</sup>Introduction written by Allen W. Woods from Stanford University, in: *Toward Perpetual Peace (1795)* by Immanuel Kant, Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/practical-philosophy/toward-perpetual-peace-1795/60398614F441BC660CE7BA143BC10F58>, accessed: 10/07/2020

<sup>4</sup>Galtung (1996) has differentiated Positive x Negative Peace. The definition of Positive Peace is the absence of war strongly based on the rule of law and democracy. While Negative Peace is delineated as the absence of war but under fragile bases that throughout time can become breeding grounds to the development of violent conflicts – such as social inequalities, corruption, and justice impunity.

social integration. However, it is relevant to indicate that they have presented different perspectives for cosmopolitanism at the individual level. This divergence has to do with how contemporary politics have posed different paradigms on citizenship, such as the increasing complexity of matters of migration which can be perceived with the escalating flow of refugees in the last decades. In this sense, the different historical scenarios have influenced the views of Kant and Habermas in their studies on citizenship and nationalism. Moreover, according to Farr (2005, p.158), the *Peace of Westphalia* has enabled a stronger base to the development of nationalism and even though the treaty has marked history, it does not necessarily reflect how people perceived nationalism at that time. Additionally, Farr (2005) has affirmed that nationalism has flourished after the French Revolution, in this sense, Kant has developed arguments of citizenship and nationalism coherent to his time. Consequently, it is comprehensible that Habermas has tackled on matters of citizenship and has developed it beyond Kant on his essays.

Furthermore, Linklater has added cosmopolitan ideas to the field of International Relations by gathering points of view discussed previously in Philosophy and Sociology. Based on Kant and Habermas, Linklater (1998, p.34) recalls the need to establish ethical principles to all humankind to find better solutions to conflicts, especially regarding issues resulted from division and polarization of societies. In this sense, according to Linklater, it is crucial to criticize state-centric theories as his cosmopolitan ideas are developed under critical reviews about the politics of exclusion employed by states. Therefore, according to Linklater, the problem of conflict resolution would be a result of the radical sovereignty of states and the lack of solidarity. Both Habermas and Linklater claim it can be developed a *moral-practice rationalism* through norms, practices, and institutions to diminish inequalities, and subsequently, this would amplify politics beyond the state level (Nogueira and Messari 2005, p.155).

It is possible to make analogies from the cosmopolitanism of Kant, Habermas to Linklater as they have presented similar perspectives even though from different fields. Moreover, they have also highlighted the need for an imperative moral universal obligation through a binding connection that would allow this obligation to be put into practice, such as international law.

## Understanding concepts: cosmopolitanism, multilateralism and pluralism

After analyzing the theoretical approach for cosmopolitanism, the concepts may become confusing compared to other common studied concepts in International Relations as *multilateralism* and *pluralism*. To clarify these concepts, it is relevant to elucidate what each concept means. While Keohane has defined multilateralism as the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states (Keohane 1990, p.731), Ruggie poses the term as an institutional form which coordinates relations based on '*generalized*' principles of conduct (Ruggie 1992, p.598). Moreover, pluralism according to the Global Centre for Pluralism in Canada defends that the concept means toleration and acceptance of multiple opinions, values, and theories, additionally, Harvard University has developed a Pluralism Project which seeks to understand relations across cultures and religions divide. Both concepts present similarities, as they convey mutual respect between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. However, while cosmopolitanism embraces common roots to pluralism and multilateralism, one of its main characteristics might not be perceived in these other concepts – the embracement of global citizenship. In this sense, cosmopolitanism aims to advance multilateralism (visualizing that multilateral actions enable all nations to have a voice in the international system) while respecting pluralism (culture and identity diversity of nations) but envisaging that individuals see themselves as global citizens and nations develop cosmopolitan policies at the national and international level.

## Beyond theory: Cosmopolitanism in the 21st century

The assessment of the literature of cosmopolitanism has been posed to ground a theoretical approach to debate the following empirical scenarios. As presented previously, the analyses of Kant, Habermas, and Linklater have differed according to their historical perspectives, but they have posed universal moralism as mandatory to conduct international relations. In this sense, Kant has recognized the need for universal morality reflected in a respect to all human beings, independent of their nationality, culture, and creeds, a vision that was later established at the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948). Furthermore, Kant has also suggested control of hostilities during violent conflicts, which has been materialized in international law with the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the Geneva Conventions (1949) and its additional protocols (1977). There are several declarations, conventions, and treaties concerning human rights, and Kant's ideas are well-reflected at our current Human Rights regime. Consequently, the ideas of Kant are perceived in international law – as an instance of cosmopolitanism in practices and norms of our current international system. Furthermore, cosmopolitanism can be perceived in international institutions, as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Since these platforms possess mechanisms that strengthen a multilateral system while trying to give voice to each nation, then this type of structure enables a more democratic resolution, and consequently, encompasses cosmopolitan ideas by empowering different nations to the same level of decision-making.

Global cosmopolitanism has been articulated and embedded in international life, in practices, norms, and international institutions. It is easily noticed how flawed these platforms may function at times, however, as initially proposed, cosmopolitanism is achieved under a long process, so, it is possible to reflect whether we – as an international society are underway in this process.

## Conclusion

This paper has aimed to introduce a literature review on cosmopolitanism according to Kant, Habermas, and Linklater in diverse fields. In a debrief, it has been concluded that the three researchers have agreed on a need for a moral obligation at the international level, and they have proposed a system of international law to regulate this. Furthermore, they have disagreed on matters of citizenship and nationalism, but it has been raised the possibility that their different historical perspectives have influenced their divergent views. More recently, in the fields of Sociology and International Relations, a more updated review on matters of citizenship and nationalism has been analyzed. Subsequently, this paper has presented instances of cosmopolitanism in international life in the 21st century – from practices, norms to international structures. Also, it has elucidated the definitions of possible confusing terms similar to cosmopolitanism – such as multilateralism and pluralism.

Cosmopolitanism is not obsolete, but it is a long-term process that has been envisaged since earlier times – as seen in Kant. And initially, it might seem like an ancient perspective, but the vision has been debated more recently in Philosophy, Sociology, and International Relations. Moreover, the term *utopia* might be used pejoratively, however, as previously analyzed, if a project is based on idealistic goals it does not necessarily mean it is unfeasible to apply in pragmatic terms. Furthermore, a few examples of projects based on idealistic projects are raised – such as the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the European Union, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Under a globalized system, nations have been facing overlapping issues, such as financial crises as seen in Europe in 2008, for example, and violent conflicts which besides representing a violation of human rights locally, have also increased the number of refugees worldwide. To resolve such issues, it is necessary to develop interlocking policies globally, aligned to national policies. In this regard, Cavallar (2012, p.96) has pointed out that the elements to develop a cosmopolitan society proposed by Kant would only function if they are well-interconnected in an international system. That is, the elements to construct a cosmopolitan society cannot be detached from one another. For instance, if a nation has developed a well-embedded rule of law with strong democratic institutions but has also developed an ultranationalist discourse, then, the country is not working towards a cosmopolitan society. The recent nationalist waves in North America, South America, and Europe have shown that globalization is not the same as cosmopolitanism. Even though the world has become more globalized – economically and socially – people from different cultures and identities are not necessarily more open to these differences.

In this sense, it is necessary to align discourse, practices, and norms to evolve towards a cosmopolitan society, as an opposing discourse to global citizenship is counterproductive to the establishment of cosmopolitanism. According to Delanty (2014), the development of cosmopolitanism involves a deep socio-cognitive transition in the way society sees itself. In the following studies, as in *Boundaries and Allegiances*, Scheffler (2001, p. 115) has suggested a more moderate form of cosmopolitanism to a better application of the concept in public life. From the same field, Sociology, Beck in *Risk Society* (1992) clarifies that the consciousness of cosmopolitanism is not a denial of identity. Moreover, at the individual level, Appiah (2006) defends a feeling of rooted cosmopolitanism, where one would cherish its cultural particularities but would also take pleasure from the presence of different cultures and tradi-



tions.

Cosmopolitanism proposes a world view very interconnected and humanized, in which nations maintain their national ties but empower global citizenship by bonding people in humankind. It encompasses a long process, based on idealistic terms, but it is feasible – and the achievements of the Human Rights regime and our multilateral platforms are compelling examples that we have advanced towards cosmopolitanism.

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