Race, Difference, and Anthropology in Kant’s Cosmopolitanism

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Although current interest in Kant’s cosmopolitanism is no doubt tied to the widespread attention being paid to his practical philosophy as a whole, surely the most decisive factor is that, at a time when the global interconnectedness of cultures, nations and economies is becoming all the more apparent and intensified, Kant appears to speak to both the promises and problems of our present condition.¹ His formulation of a cosmopolitan union of nations dedicated to perpetual peace and his vision of that union’s development have struck many as a promising place to start thinking about the possibility of peaceful and just international relations without leveling the differences between the world’s diverse cultures. Although Kant gives a number of permutations to his formula for perpetual peace, his insistence that differences among nations and cultures will and ought to be preserved is a constant feature of his thought on the matter.

To some, this has suggested that Kant was something of a proto-multiculturalist who thought of cultural diversity as having some sort of intrinsic value; such readings are particularly inspired by Kant’s attacks on the colonial policies of European nations.² For readers of Kant’s lesser-known writings on race, geography and anthropology, however, a very different picture suggests itself. His opinions regarding colonialism notwithstanding, one need not look far in Kant’s writings on races and world cultures to dredge up remarks that reflect rather poorly on

¹When referring to Kant’s texts, I will cite the page numbers of the English edition, followed by the Akademie Edition numbers.

²See Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 122–209. As will become apparent, I think Muthu rather seriously overestimates the degree of worth that Kant accords to less-developed, non-European cultures, and tends to conflate the instrumental value that Kant assigns to cultural and national difference with an endorsement of diversity’s intrinsic value.

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his alleged multiculturalism. Thus, there are also those who paint Kant as a typically—or egregiously—Eurocentric and racist thinker.3

It can, of course, always be argued that, however unfortunate they may be, Kant’s views on race can easily be decoupled from his cosmopolitanism and moral philosophy. The temptation to pursue such an interpretive strategy is especially strong, given that Kant’s racism—which sets up a hierarchy of talents and potentials among different races—appears to stand in an intolerable tension with his moral and political universalism.4 And if we wish to preserve something from Kant’s thought, it is surely the latter rather than the former. Simply treating Kant’s universalism in isolation, however, covers over the systematic role that anthropology plays in his cosmopolitanism, and the philosophy of history which tracks into it. Although Kant’s anthropology and its significance for his philosophy in general is poorly understood, strides have been made toward comprehending the role that it plays in his ethics.5 The role of anthropology in Kant’s cosmopolitanism, however, remains largely unexplored, although it is crucial to understanding the role of difference in Kant’s political thought.

My aim in this paper is twofold: first, there is the more pedestrian goal of achieving some clarity about the role of cultural and racial difference in Kant’s cosmopolitanism, and to show, along the way, that his account is neither as innocuous nor as completely damning as some commentators have understood it. Secondly, and more speculatively, I argue that Kant’s insistence on the functional necessity of difference permanently inscribes certain kinds of inequality and antagonism into human history, which taint the prospects for moral progress and the achievement of humanity’s final end (Endzweck).

I. POLITICAL RIGHT AND COSMOPOLITAN RIGHT

Before developing the main lines of argument, it will be helpful to remind ourselves of some of the details of Kant’s cosmopolitan political philosophy. Within the scheme of duties laid out in the Metaphysics of Morals, the sphere of right is characterized by two main features: (1) relations of right are subject to coercive enforcement (among both individuals and nations6), and (2) relations of right govern external relations between moral actors.

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4Kant indicates that nations may be understood as if they were moral agents: “Here a state, as a moral person, is considered as living in relation to another state in the condition of natural freedom
For Kant, arrangements of right are counterfactual agreements that should govern relations among individuals who have united themselves under the rule of law. The contractual agreement that underlies political society is a “union which is in itself an end (that each ought to have) and which is therefore the unconditional and first duty in any external relation of people in general,” and such a union “is to be found in a society only insofar as it is in the civil condition, that is, constitutes a commonwealth.” By imputing a categorical ought to relations of right, Kant conceives of the social contract in explicitly moral terms. Unable to avoid mutually influencing one another, human beings are obliged to respect arrangements of right, such that their freedom harmonizes with the freedom of others.

By saying that relations of right concern only the external relations of agents, what is Kant excluding, and why? Duties of right abstract away from, and are inapplicable to, any ends given to human beings by their particular nature. Kant has in mind the end of happiness, which he takes to be an end given by nature to finite rational beings, and which is distinct from and subsequent to their status as rational agents as such. Conceptions of happiness are not determined by reason, encompass the diverse ends that humans take up, and thus admit a degree of plurality. This argument is essentially an anthropological one: Kant understands the inevitable diversity of conceptions of happiness to be a deep, empirical fact about human beings.

The establishment of right in the political union of a nation, however, is not the final formation of right for Kant, since the state of nature within which actors interact with one another in the absence of a coercive legal framework is reconstituted at the international level in the external relations among nations. Nations, whose relations with each other are not presently lawfully governed, are obliged to escape the anarchic condition of international relations, which, like the state of nature among individuals, is inherently unjust.


Kant, “On the Common Saying; ‘This May be True in Theory, But it Does Not Apply in Practice’” (“Theory and Practice”), in Practical Philosophy, 290; 8: 289.

Kant writes that “the concept of an external right as such proceeds entirely from the concept of freedom in the external relation of people to one another and has nothing at all to do with the end that all of them naturally have (their aim of happiness) and with the prescribing of means for attaining it” (“Theory and Practice,” 290; 8: 289).

“Since people differ in their thinking about happiness and how each would have it constituted, their wills with respect to it cannot be brought under any common principle and so under any external law harmonizing with everyone’s freedom” (Kant, “Theory and Practice,” 291; 8: 290). Hence, Kant’s rejection of any “paternal government” that attempts to coerce people to set certain internal ends. Such a state would not be respecting humanity’s rational capacity to set its own ends, it would be acting contrary to nature’s purpose (since nature wills the diversity of internal ends), and at any rate, it is impossible to legislate internal ends. For a discussion of Kant’s distinction between internal and external ends as it relates to the concept of law, see Leslie Mulholland, “Kant on War and International Justice,” Kant-Studien 78 (1987): 25–41.

“This is not strictly the case. In the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant recognizes a branch of right, situated between political and cosmopolitan right, which he calls international right (Völkerrecht). The content of international right largely concerns the norms that govern diplomatic contacts and the conduct of war. International right does, though, occupy a somewhat awkward position within the “Doctrine of Right,” insofar as duties of right are laws, and as such are supposed to be subject to coercive enforcement, but international right is defined in part by the fact that it is not enforced.

Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 482; 6: 344.
right—to secure and harmonize the external freedom of human beings—remains incomplete so long as the state exists in the unsecured environment of an anarchic international community.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, nations are obliged to exit the international state of nature by entering into a cosmopolitan union (\textit{weltbürgerliche Verfassung}) that would guarantee an end to all violent conflict.\textsuperscript{13} Kant’s first proposal for such a union comes in his 1784 essay, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” and is repeated in his writings from the 1790s: “Theory and Practice” (1793), “Toward Perpetual Peace” (1795), and \textit{Metaphysics of Morals} (1797).

The most concrete proposal comes in “Perpetual Peace.” There Kant outlines a set of “preliminary” and “definitive” articles for a union dedicated to peace. The preliminary articles define the conditions that would prepare the way for such a union—they largely concern the dismantling of national war machines, although notably there is a condition forbidding the intervention of one state in the internal affairs of another. The definitive articles that exhaust the lawful content of the cosmopolitan union are threefold: (1) all states shall have a republican government, (2) the rights of nations to security and self-determination shall be secured by a federation of states that forswears war forever, and (3) cosmopolitan right (\textit{Weltbürgerrecht}), which consists in conditions of hospitality regarding the proper treatment of visitors from other nations, shall govern the peaceful interactions between nations.

This proposal seems to represent a diminishment of Kant’s earlier hopes for the strength of such a union: in the fifth through ninth propositions of “Idea for a Universal History,” Kant insists that all nations should—and eventually will—submit themselves to the united power of a law-governed civil union. In “Perpetual Peace,” however, Kant denies that coercive power need be a feature of the pacific league.\textsuperscript{14} And in the \textit{Metaphysics of Morals}, he denies outright that perpetual peace is an attainable ideal at all, and that we can only hope to approximate it in the form of some sort of voluntary association, or league of nations (\textit{Völkerbund}).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12}Kant describes all arrangements of right prior to perpetual peace as “merely provisional” until the international state of nature among nations has been abandoned (\textit{Metaphysics of Morals}, 487; 6: 350).

\textsuperscript{13}Kant takes the parallel between the transition from the state of nature to a civil constitution and from the anarchic system of sovereign nations to a cosmopolitan union seriously: both transitions are morally demanded because it is inherently unjust for finite rational agents to be in a condition where they can mutually effect one another but are not under the auspices of law, but both transitions are also recommended by merely prudential considerations. In the case of the latter transition, Kant is clear that it is prudential motivations (the inherent insecurity of the anarchic international condition, the danger of intensifying wars, the eventual wearying of combatants, etc.) that can be expected to do most of the real work in bringing about the cosmopolitan condition. Still, it is a condition that we are obliged, as a matter of imperfect duty, to help bring about.

\textsuperscript{14}“This league does not look to acquiring any power of a state but only preserving and securing the freedom of a state itself and of other states in league with it, but without there being any need for them to subject themselves to public laws and coercion under them (as people in a state of nature must do)” (Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace” [“Perpetual Peace”], in \textit{Practical Philosophy}, 327; 8: 356).

Critics have remarked that Kant never really worked out how cosmopolitan right would be enforced when he speaks of a binding federation, and that he never explains how a merely voluntary association could prove to be stable and perpetual. In any event, Kant consistently maintains—even when he presents the compromise (“negative”) proposal of a voluntary association—that the practical ideal of perpetual peace that individuals and nations have a duty to strive toward is the binding, weltbürgerliche version of the union.

So far, I have been rehearsing some fairly well known aspects of Kant’s political thought. What I wish to emphasize from the preceding discussion is the structural parallel that Kant draws between formations of political right and cosmopolitan right: both comprise unities of difference, in that they always preserve a moment of internal heterogeneity within the established harmony of external relations. In formations of political right, the relevant units of difference are discrete individuals with varying internal ends and conceptions of happiness, whereas in the cosmopolitan union, they are racially and culturally differentiated nations and peoples.

Kant sees formations of right that serve human political freedom as always taking the form of a unity of difference: institutional arrangements that seek not only to harmonize external interactions, but also to homogenize internal features of the concerned agents invariably meet with his disapproval—they are not only impractical, but also wrong, in that they fail to respect capacities for self-determination. Kant condemns in no uncertain terms any paternalistic state that would seek to homogenize the internal differences among individuals.

At the cosmopolitan level, the object of his ire is the prospect of a “universal monarchy” or world-state (Weltstaat), which would erase the boundaries between nations and peoples. Kant’s reasons for opposing a world-state will be discussed more fully in section 3. For the moment, suffice to say that Kant views the moment of difference within external harmonies to be essential to formations of right. I have also suggested that difference has an anthropological foundation for him. He seems to regard it as a basic anthropological fact about individual human beings that their internal ends and conceptions of happiness are bound to vary, and while this is not totally uncontroversial, we may grant it for present purposes. Similarly, the divisions between peoples and nations have an anthropological foundation. While the notion that individuals inevitably come to have different ideas about happiness and personal fulfillment is a commonplace one, unpacking how Kant understands the ostensibly ineradicable differences between peoples and nations is a more complex and problematic matter, to which I now turn.

2. C O S M O P O L I T A N  D I F F E R E N C E:
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L  F O U N D A T I O N S

Kant’s understanding of the persistent diversity of nations and cultures is quite different from the sorts of accounts we have come to expect from contemporary defenders of multiculturalism. While I will argue that Kant does not—indeed,
cannot—take cultural and racial differences to constitute static hierarchies, there is no doubt that he understands peoples to be separated from each other by barriers that militate sharply against the possibility that races could mingle with one another enough to erode their distinctiveness, to be relatively culturally homogeneous within those barriers, and not to differ markedly with respect to talents and potentials. He takes the mixing of cultures and races to be antithetical to the “plan of Nature,” and thus does not envision the cosmopolitan union to be any sort of multicultural utopia.

Although he is not dogmatic on the point, Kant usually sees the concepts of “nation” and “people” as tightly bound together, with a national unit typically corresponding to a single people. When discussing peoples and their national characters, Kant writes that the character of a nation derives from both its racial and cultural characteristics. In civilized nations like England and France, national character is largely based on cultural distinctiveness. In most other nations, national character is based more upon racial characteristics given by nature: Kant says that generally the “natural character” of a people resides “in the composition of a man’s blood,” although he is somewhat equivocal in this passage about whether we can ever know the extent to which given traits are determined by culture or biology. His theory of racial biology holds that the original stock of human beings was implanted with a set of “seeds” (Keime) containing different sets of “natural predispositions” (Naturanlagen). In different climatic conditions, the seed appropriate to that climate is activated, causing some set of predispositions to flower, and others to become permanently dormant: “numerous seeds and natural predispositions must lie ready in human beings either to be developed or held back, in such a way that we might become fitted to a particular place in the world.” Kant holds that there are four races (white-European, red-American, black-African, and yellow-Asian Indian), which are then further differentiated into peoples; Kant is unclear about whether the further differences in character among peoples of the same race are due to culture alone, or some further difference “in the blood.”

When investigating nature and history, Kant holds that we must, when causal explanations prove incomplete, employ teleological judgments that impute ends to history and nature, thereby rendering such complex systems at least potentially

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18In the Anthropology, Kant begins his section on nations with the following statement: “By the word people (populus) we mean a multitude of men assembled within a tract of land, insofar as the comprise a whole. This multitude, or the part of it that recognizes itself as united into a civil whole by its common origin, is called a nation (gens)” (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View [Anthropology], ed. and trans. Mary Gregor [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974], 174: 311).

19Hence England, France, and (Kant predictably suggests) Germany, are to be praised, since, after all, culture is what men make out of nature, and as such, it is an expression of their rational humanity.

20Kant, Anthropology, 181: 7: 319


22Ibid., 20. Kant’s classification of particular peoples shifts over the years, although not in any essential way. In general, the class of “whites” always includes Europeans together with a shifting group of others.
comprehensible. From a teleological perspective, there must be some functional, natural purpose behind the differentiation of human races and peoples and their subsequent development of different sets of predispositions. The first and second propositions of “Idea for a Universal History” make the teleological claims that the natural capacities of creatures are destined to develop to their fullest extent, but that given the expansive possibilities of human freedom, coupled with the limited capacities of finite individuals, this development can, for humans, take place only in the species as a whole. When Kant applies these propositions to the investigation of racial diversity, he reaches the following conclusion:

The variety among human beings even from the same race was in all probability inscribed just so purposively in the original line of descent in order to establish—and in successive generations, develop—the greatest diversity for the sake of infinitely diverse purposes, just as the differences among races establishes fewer but more essential purposes.25

Thus, seeds functionally ensure the possibility of human life across the globe, and diversity among purposes and cultures. Given that any one group of people can only partially manifest the capacities of the species as a whole, it is necessary that humans spread across the globe and develop in a diversity of ways, such that all natural predispositions eventually can be fully actualized, and the species can progress toward its teleologically determined ends. Since nature has willed that there be racial diversity, it opposes the mixing and homogenization of races. For Kant, such homogenization extinguishes the distinctiveness and character of peoples, sapping their strength. As he puts it in the Anthropology, “nature’s law regarding a people of the same race (for example, the white race) is not to let their characters constantly and progressively approach one another . . . but instead to diversify to infinity the members of the same stock and even the same clan, in both their bodily and their spiritual traits.”24 Racial differences are rendered largely ineradicable and Kant gestures toward linguistic and religious difference as powerful enforcers of nature’s diversity.25

Relying on his empirical assessment (gathered largely from his study of travelers’ literature) of the relative levels and paces of cultural development among different peoples, Kant concludes that the four human races possess quite different developmental potentials, which are tied to the different predispositions (Anlagen) developed by the activation of different seeds.26 By Kant’s estimation, the peoples of the Americas display little if any capacity for cultural development, and seem entrenched in a primitive, nomadic lifestyle; the black race appears suited only for the toil of (relatively more advanced) agrarian societies. Asian-Indian peoples have a fairly high capacity for cultural development, but Kant thinks that their development has stagnated, leading him to conclude that they have reached their

23Kant, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” in Race, 42; 8: 166.
24Kant, Anthropology, 182; 7: 320
26This raises an important and vexing question that I cannot address here: how could Kant think that anthropological investigations about empirical factors affecting character were compatible with the noumenal freedom he attributes to moral subjects? On this, see Frierson, Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy.
developmental peaks, living in fairly sophisticated, but despotic, societies. It is only white Europeans that display the capacity to vigorously and rationally develop their culture to the point where they are capable of republican self-government and moral progress. In his lectures on anthropology, Kant states, “The white race possesses all motivating forces and talents in itself; therefore we must examine it somewhat more closely.”27 Other races show only limited or non-existent potentials for developing themselves to this point.

I must admit that I am unclear as to why Kant takes other races to be necessary for the full development of the species, if he thinks that the white race contains all of the necessary potentials within itself. When writing on these matters, Kant often says that racial diversity is necessary for the development of human beings adapted to all manner of different climactic conditions, which made it possible for the human species to spread all across the globe. But it is also unclear why he thought that this was important. Perhaps Kant merely sees other races serving as foil for the development of white Europeans. As ambiguous as his views on these matters are, however, it is also important to remember what he sees as the limits of teleological judgment. Kant notes the fact that there is racial diversity, that it seems permanent and, to him, intimately linked to various kinds of differences in culture and talents.28 He then asks how these facts about the species could be seen to contribute to its ends. But it is beyond the power of teleological judgments of this sort to establish whether racial difference is necessary for progress in any strong sense, i.e., whether there could be progress without it. Nor can we ask whether there are alternative versions of creation where the full talents and potentials of the species could be realized without racial difference, and all the problems associated with it; that is, it is beyond the powers of our reason establish whether, for example, human progress would have been better served if there was just the white race developing the potentials of the species on its own. Now, let us turn to Kant’s answer to the question of how racial, national, and cultural differences can be seen as part of nature’s plan for humanity, given that they do exist.29

3. National Difference as Cosmopolitan Unsocial Sociability: Kant’s Rejection of a World-State

To complete Kant’s teleological analysis of nature’s purpose in willing the diversity of nations and peoples, we need to see how this diversity promotes the putative

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27 Eze’s translation; see his “The Color of Reason,” 216. The source is one of Kant’s lectures on geography: Kants philosophische Anthropologie: Nach handschriftlichen Vorlesungen, ed. Friedrich Christian Starke (Leipzig: Expedition des europäischen Aufsehers, 1831), 353. The German is as follows: Die Race der Weißen enthält alle Triebfedern und Talente in sich; daher werden wir sie etwas genauer betrachten müssen.

28 As to whether Kant really regarded racial differences as permanent, it is true that he contemplates the possibility of races dying out. See Mark Lattimore, “Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the ‘Races’,” in Civilization and Oppression, ed. Catherine Wilson, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, supp. vol. 25 (1999): 99-125. But he seems to seriously weigh this possibility only with regard to native American peoples, for reasons specific to them: he thinks that they have been permanently weakened by crossing over from Asia, and are not really suited for any climate or vocation. Since this is not his view about other Asian and African peoples, and given the energy he devotes to arguing that racial mixing is antithetical to the plan of nature, it seems best to conclude that a number of different human races will be part of the long-term future of the species, and therefore, that any account of the species’ ends will have to incorporate them.

29 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the Journal for pressing me to clarify this point.
ends of human development: the most perfect civil constitution (designated by Kant as humanity’s ultimate end \( \text{Letzter Zweck} \)) and the ethical commonwealth or kingdom of ends (the final end \( \text{Endzweck} \)). On the face of things, the supposedly ineradicable divisions between nations and peoples would appear to hinder the prospect for perpetual peace, insofar as their presence ensures that some degree of antagonism will remain an enduring feature of international relations. But while it may be that, in the end, Kant has difficulty explaining how perpetual antagonism is supposed to serve the final moral purposes of the human species, there is no doubt that he consistently sees difference, and its inevitable association with antagonism, as an essential ingredient for both cultural progress and political freedom. The issue of how difference and antagonism is supposed to factor into moral progress—and hence, the achievement of humanity’s final end—I leave to section 4.

In a series of moves inspired by Rousseau, Kant sees the development of rational self-consciousness and sense of self as linked to a potent sense of self-esteem. In his essay, “Conjectural Beginnings of Human History,” Kant claims that the dawning of self-consciousness in human beings brings them to an inchoate sense of themselves as ends and as the highest end of nature itself. But this development has its share of less happy consequences: it transforms humans into anxious and unsatisfied beings who must fear and plan for an uncertain future, as well as into beings who find themselves confronted by others whose cooperation they require and approval they covet, but whose interests often do not mesh comfortably with their own. Moreover, emerging hand in hand with an otherwise healthy sense of self-esteem is the more sinister anthropological tendency of self-esteem to become self-conceit and its associated impulses toward self-aggrandizement and the domination of others. Kant emphasizes these antagonistic consequences of human self-consciousness in “Idea for a Universal History” with his notion of “unsocial sociability,” which he describes as human beings’ “tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up.” The phrase ‘unsocial sociability’ captures humanity’s dual tendency to seek the company of one’s fellow human beings and to cultivate one’s rational capacities in social settings, as well as the opposed tendency to “live...
as an individual” by attempting to “direct everything according to [one’s] own representations.”

Anticipating Hegel and Marx’s notion of “the cunning of reason,” Kant detects nature’s means for developing the capacities of the human species and promoting its ends in history in this anthropological tendency. Only when thrown into opposition and competition with other people—exacerbated by the self-aggrandizing desire to dominate them—are human beings prompted to advance themselves and consequently improve their culture (if not their morality). Groups that live conflict-free and idyllic existences (Kant’s favorite example being the South Sea Islanders) never emerge from the stupor of their natural contentment, and are therefore unable to contribute anything to the growth of human culture.

The deep-seated tendency toward unsocial sociability promotes progress by keeping people divided, and by accounting for enlightened self-interest, the combination of which prompts them to develop institutions (e.g., the rule of law) that promote self-interest through cooperation with others. The “social” component brings people together, so that they are compelled to form societies and cooperate to some degree, while the “unsocial” component causes them to withdraw into their individuality and struggle with one another. Kant’s contention that the different internal ends and conceptions of happiness that human beings contingently possess never can be expected to be brought into line with one another is here extended into an anthropological generalization about the tendencies that divide individuals, thereby ensuring difference and promoting progress. It is a deep fact about the human species that we are “unsocial” such that our individual projects and aspirations display a strong tendency to diverge.

The parallel that Kant maintains between political and cosmopolitan right becomes clearer when we see that a form of unsocial sociability also operates among nations. Progress is promoted through difference and struggle among nations as well as among individuals. This is evident in Kant’s views about the functional utility of war, which forces peoples to spread to the farthest reaches of the globe, and compels nations to develop themselves technically in order to prosecute wars more effectively. And Kant’s linkage between political freedom, cultural progress, and difference is apparent in his argument against the possibility and desirability of a world-state. In insisting that the cosmopolitan union ought to be a federation of free and independent states, Kant consistently rejects the notion that perpetual peace could be achieved by somehow fusing the nations of the world together, voluntarily or otherwise. First of all, he writes, “[t]he idea of the right of nations presupposes the separation of many neighboring states independent of one another.” A world-state could not be a formation of right at all, on Kant’s terms, since it would necessarily be a “soulless despotism.” But in any

33Of course, here Kant refers only to international right, but given his insistence on maintaining the independence of nations in the cosmopolitan union, it is safe to assume that the argument holds for cosmopolitan right as well.
event, he argues, we need not worry too much about such a possibility since the whole idea of a world-state is unfeasible, “as the range of government expands laws lose their vigor, and a soulless despotism, after it has destroyed the seeds of good finally deteriorates into anarchy.”

In this rather loose argument, Kant appears to be objecting to the idea of a world-state in several respects. He seems to think that he has a conceptual argument indicating the sheer impossibility of a world-state, in that the very idea of international and cosmopolitan right presupposes multiple and independent states. Most commentators do not make much of this point. Instead Kant is usually taken to be advancing empirical considerations that indicate the awkwardness and instability inherent in a world-state: the strains associated with administering and dominating a far-flung empire will eventually lead to the collapse of law and order. Kant also seems to regard it as a foregone conclusion that a world-state, if it were possible, could not possibly secure political freedom, and would instead necessarily lapse into a “soulless despotism.” Now, it may be that the idea of a well-administered state encompassing the globe is too fantastic to be taken seriously (although, in the long run of history, who knows?), but it would be somewhat worrisome if Kant were simply speculating about the sorts of arrangements that might or might not guarantee perpetual peace. Such concerns will not be laid to rest by Kant’s conceptual argument against the world-state, if he is begging the question of why cosmopolitan right presupposes multiple independent nations by assuming that lawful regimes are just naturally confined to localized areas of the globe.

But, as we have seen, Kant is not just dogmatically assuming that nations come about in confined regions corresponding to specific peoples that are destined to remain largely separated from each other. This is a premise drawn from his anthropology. To be sure, Kant does insert additional empirical considerations about the geographical limits of lawful administration into his argument against a world-state in order to bolster his claim. But the argument itself—sketchy though it may be—is a conceptual one, which is given concrete form by an anthropological account of nations and peoples. The notion of duties of right is a rational and a

34Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 336; 8: 367.
36On this point, Lutz-Bachmann criticizes Kant for his insistence on retaining the full sovereignty of independent states in his cosmopolitanism, taking this insistence to be based on largely arbitrary and empirical considerations which render his institutional formula for perpetual peace too weak. Lutz-Bachmann argues that Kant’s own republicanism requires a world-republic (Weltrepublik) rather than a league of nations (Völkerbund): “the central political thesis of Kant’s work—that a league of nations rather than a world republic should be established in order to bring about peaceful relations among nations—is inconsistent with Kant’s own assumptions and therefore proves to be untenable” (Lutz-Bachmann, “Kant’s Idea of Peace and the Philosophical Conception of a World Republic,” in Perpetual Peace, 59–60). Kant’s insistence on differentiated and independent nations is admittedly problematic for the formulation of the cosmopolitan union, but it will seem flat-out inconsistent only if one focuses solely on Kant’s republicanism and neglects the broad strokes of Kant’s cosmopolitan thought, including the systematic role that difference plays in the progressive philosophy of history that leads us to cosmopolitanism.
priori idea that determines which relations between rational agents are subject to coercive enforcement. The boundaries of right are determined by Kant’s distinction between internal and external relations, and although the distinction itself is conceptual, it can be given content only anthropologically. Among human beings, individuals freely set the ends of their happiness, unconstrained by the strictures of rational morality, and these ends tend to diverge significantly. Hence, they are internal and not amenable to enforcement by political right. This is an anthropologically grounded fact about the human species, not a claim about rational agents as such.\footnote{This is to say that there is nothing incomprehensible for Kant about imagining a species of finite rational beings whose natures happen to make it the case that their conceptions of happiness exhibit considerably less diversity and more harmony with the ends of others. For that matter, we can also imagine rational beings whose different individual conceptions of happiness set them more at odds with one another than ours do. The point is that, in any of these cases, the facts about kinds of differences and incompatibilities between individual members of a species are facts about the empirical anthropology of a given species, not claims about what is commanded of rational agents. Those demands are, of course, invariant for all rational beings, regardless of their anthropological differences.}

The same principles hold at the level of international and cosmopolitan right: the internal ends of nations correspond to national cultures, which also display a strong tendency to diverge and remain separated from each other. Thus, Kant’s claim that a world-state would necessarily be a soulless despotism is rendered comprehensible: since there is such strong natural resistance to the breaking-down of national borders, only a violent despotic power that crushed human freedom could conceivably accomplish this task. Now, it must be said that Kant’s analogy between individual conceptions of happiness and cultural differences among peoples is an imperfect one, since while it might make sense to attribute the inevitability of clashes between individuals to the impossibility of harmonizing everyone’s conception of happiness, it would be absurd to suggest that conflicts of interest among nations could be reduced to cultural differences; after all, nations may actually often want the same sorts of things (e.g., power, natural resources, prestige, economic clout). What cultural differences do for Kant is to ensure that nations will not unite (at least not on a permanent basis) to pursue these goals collectively, and are instead impelled to compete with one another. One must concede here that it is not plain why this would not still be the case if all the world were under one state, if the divergence in individual conceptions of happiness already inscribes a certain degree of difference and competition in human history that enables political freedom within nations. In other words, it is not obvious why cultural differences among culturally differentiated nations are additionally necessary. It must seem to Kant that racial-cultural differences are simply permanent, that these differences have a strong natural tendency to correspond to divisions among states, and that therefore his theory needs to account for these kinds of difference within the teleological scheme he lays out.

In “Idea for a Universal History” and “Perpetual Peace,” Kant holds that the culmination of nature’s project for humanity—the most perfect civil constitution—comes about largely (if perhaps not entirely) through natural, mechanical processes.\footnote{On this, see Paul Guyer and Henry Allison’s exchange on the degree to which acts of moral willing must supplement nature’s design in order for perpetual peace to be achieved (Guyer, “Nature, Morality and the Possibility of Peace,” and Allison, “The Gulf between Nature and Freedom,” both in Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress, vol. 1, 37–49).} Hence, Allen Wood appropriately dubs the period of human history
prior to the inauguration of the cosmopolitan union the “epoch of nature.”39 In this period, the natural human tendencies toward unsocial sociability drive persons to form associations and cause these associations to clash, thereby spreading humanity across the globe; further conflict and competition between peoples leads to advances in cultures of skill and discipline.40 As nations—or some nations at any rate—become more advanced, ties of commerce (which Kant takes to be one of the great pacifying forces of nature) increase, while at the same time, military advances lead to the intensification of conflicts. At some point in this story, nations develop their cultures of discipline to such a degree that they are capable of self-government, at which point it is possible for them to form republics, which, we recall, is one of Kant’s conditions for the initiation of a cosmopolitan union. In the end, it is not high-minded ideals, but rather sheer battle fatigue that drives nations to form a cosmopolitan union of perpetual peace.

It is plain enough how Kant understands difference at the international level to serve nature’s ultimate end. But, of course, conflict and competition, while they may serve the development of culture well enough, do little to produce moral progress—quite the opposite, in fact. Kant gives differing assessments of the level of moral progress that had been achieved in his own time among European nations. In places, he expresses modest confidence that some moral progress has been achieved.41 In other places, he claims that cultural progress has not been accompanied by any amount of moral progress of note.42 War, Kant seems to think, has had functional utility insofar as it has forced peoples to spread across

39Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 296–300. The epoch of nature is characterized by natural mechanisms promoting cultural progress, and culminating in the cosmopolitan union; the subsequent “epoch of freedom” is defined by the moral progress generated by acts of human freedom. It is admittedly hard to gauge the degree to which the distinction is a temporal or merely conceptual one. Kant seems to think that it is at least possible for moral progress to occur prior to the cosmopolitan union, and nature’s mechanisms for cultural progress will certainly remain in effect during the epoch of freedom. The epochs would seem to be temporarily divided at the point of the cosmopolitan union’s inception, but there is also some evidence that Kant understood the union’s development to be a slow and gradual process. The fact that Kant, in his later writings on the topic, settles for the compromise proposal of a voluntary *Völkerbund* in place of a legally binding cosmopolitan constitution is an especially relevant complication. (See note 36.) Wood’s distinction seems to imply that, in the epoch of freedom, problems of a legal and political nature have been solved, clearing the way for moral progress. But with a *Völkerbund* this would not be entirely so: political problems will persist to the extent that the project of the cosmopolitan union is a never-completed ideal. The question of whether Kant should have settled for the compromise of a *Völkerbund* is not an essential question for my purposes, however. It seems enough to claim that the compromised *Völkerbund* solves the most serious, morally corrupting political and legal problems (i.e., those associated with war), setting up an unprecedented opportunity for the pacifying and civilizing of national cultures, and hence the most realistic possibility thus far in human history for genuinely widespread moral progress. This process of pacifying and civilizing might well, in turn, generate moral motives for the preservation of the cosmopolitan union, and its development into a more binding form. At any rate, while I acknowledge that we are unlikely to be able to draw a clean line between epochs, I do not regard this likelihood as presenting a serious threat to the viability and analytic utility of Wood’s distinction.

40The contrast between cultures of skill and discipline is another distinction introduced in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. There Kant writes: “The production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom) is *culture*” (299; 5: 431). Cultures of skill largely refer to any sort of knowledge that helps us attain ends, whereas cultures of discipline refer to training that “consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires” in that we may be free to set our ends.

41Kant, “Theory and Practice,” 89; 8: 310; and “The Contest of the Faculties,” in *Political Writings*, 301–03; 7: 85–86.

the globe and served to develop cultures of skill and discipline in some ways. But at this juncture in history, he believes it to have outlived its usefulness, and its continuing presence is nothing more than a blight that debases the morality of the species. Kant’s theory, however, demands from the epoch of nature no more than the genesis of conditions for the perpetual cessation of violent conflict. Only then (during what Wood calls “epoch of freedom”43) can the moral project of creating an ethical commonwealth be expected to make significant headway.

Thus, the separation of nations and peoples certainly has functional utility in the epoch of nature, in that cultural difference is instrumentally valued for the role that it plays in forcing the varied development of human faculties. But the nation-state is a persistent feature of Kant’s political thought, in both the epoch of nature and the epoch of freedom. The role of the differentiation of nations and peoples is less clear in the epoch of freedom, although it is to that epoch of moral progress to which we must turn in order to discern the role and value that such difference ultimately plays in Kant’s system.

4. Levels and Types of Difference in the Epoch of Freedom

The question of what, if any, role difference has to play in the epoch of freedom, and whether Kant’s anthropological account of difference is compatible with such a role, is a tricky interpretive question, since, while Kant obviously gave considerable thought to the role of difference in the historical genesis of the cosmopolitan union, he does not give similar consideration to the role of such differences in the epoch of freedom. In a way, this is understandable, because Kant has rather little to say about the course that history will take in that epoch for the simple reason that moral progress in the epoch of freedom is, in the end, dependent upon unpredictable acts of human freedom and not upon the mechanistic action of nature’s design. Thus, little can be said with certainty about the path that moral progress in the epoch of freedom will take. By itself, the advent of a cosmopolitan union is nothing more than a sort of halfway point toward the development of humanity’s final end of an ethical commonwealth. In a way, as Susan Shell puts it, the human species becomes truly human only once the union of perpetual peace has been achieved.44

There is, however, a prima facie problem that confronts us when thinking about the epoch of freedom: how could the deep hierarchies and divisions among peoples that power history forward during the epoch of nature be reconciled, not only with

43See note 39.

44Shell writes: “Unlike Alexandre Kojève, the twentieth-century Hegelian who worried that the end of history—the universal rational state—would spell the end of human negativity and thus the end of man, Kant sees it as the dawn of the first truly human, if not Saturnian, age. Prior to its emergence from the new and happier womb, mankind would presumably remain a sort of fetus, inwardly developing the organs of ethical culture which would allow it to be reborn at last as a fully determinate species” (“Kant’s Idea of History,” in History and the Idea of Progress, ed. Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995], 92).
the general prospect of moral progress, but also with the final vision of an ethical community? Clearly, one can say of the cosmopolitan union that it has removed the morally degenerative cancer of war. But, with regard to moral progress, there is much that could be said against the catalytic potential of an arrangement of separate, culturally homogeneous units, divided from, and even antagonistic to, one another. Among other things, it hardly seems like an arrangement that would facilitate moral progress in the form of mutual understanding across cultures. One has to wonder: are the ultimately uncollapsible divisions between nations and peoples anything more than vestigial, and unfortunately ineradicable, remnants of the epoch of nature, or do they actually have something positive to contribute to moral progress? In this section, I will address two related questions. First, what role, if any, can we envision Kant assigning to difference for the promotion of moral progress? Second, what sort and what degree of difference does Kant ultimately countenance in the long run of history? Kant’s positions on these questions are somewhat sketchy and my own remarks can aspire to be little more than plausible conjectures, based on the hints that Kant does give us about the development of species in the epoch of freedom.

As to the question of what difference contributes to moral progress, the answer, I think, is nothing positive. An arrangement of racially and culturally divided, differently abled nations existing in peaceful, though not necessarily friendly, relations is, by itself, no catalyst for moral progress. Kant values difference instrumentally insofar as it is conducive to cultural progress, which in turn lays the foundation for moral progress. One could argue that Kant always conceives of progress as requiring the tensions brought about by difference, but it is hard to see how hostility, hierarchy, and division are supposed to be conducive to, not to mention necessary for, moral progress. At any rate, Kant never claims that such antagonisms produce moral progress; he is clear enough when claiming that difference and tension create the necessary and arguably sufficient natural-historical conditions for human progress, but such conditions are hardly sufficient for moral progress. The latter, ultimately, can be achieved only through individual human beings struggling to overcome their own animality and unsociability.

So, is there a sense in which the diversity of national cultures, as Kant conceived it, serves the final end of the epoch of freedom? The most that we might say is that the persistence of difference in the cosmopolitan union is what ensures the perpetuity of perpetual peace. Difference remains necessary only because it ensures that the conditions for moral progress will not be interrupted. The perpetuity of the cosmopolitan union is guaranteed by the fact that it becomes a perfectly stable equilibrium: peace is “produced and secured, not as in . . . a despotism . . . by means of a weakening of all forces, but by means of their equilibrium in liveliest competition.”45 The vigor of the human species—by which Kant seems to mean peaceful though not necessarily friendly competition between individuals and peoples—is necessary for progress of any sort. Although the path to moral progress otherwise differs significantly from the path to cultural progress, in this respect they are similar. It is true that in the absence of opposing forces and ten-

sions, human beings would be less inclined to indulge in vicious rivalries, envy, and jealousy, but they would also not be moved, according to Kant, to improve themselves in any way. His models for situations where opposing forces have either collapsed or never existed in the first place is not a frictionless harmony, but rather the despotism of a universal state, or the idleness of the South Sea islanders, who are not only relatively incapable of improving themselves but are unmotivated to do so. The persistence of difference ensures that the opposing forces that nations apply to one another remain firm. By insisting that racial, cultural, and therefore, national diversity is an anthropological fact about human beings, Kant thinks that he has foreclosed the possibility that the cosmopolitan union could collapse into the idle torpor of unfreedom.

Although this reading allows a role—albeit a negative one—for difference in promoting moral progress, it does little to assuage the deeper worry about the compatibility of racial and cultural difference with the final end of the ethical community of virtue. We can begin to address this concern by getting clearer about just what sort of difference Kant actually countenances in the long run of history. In fact, while Kant sees the developmental paths and paces of nations and peoples as diverging through most of the epoch of nature, he also projects future developmental convergences, both before and after the inception of the cosmopolitan union. For him, there are at least three basic sources of cultural difference: differences of religion, different levels of cultural advancement (associated with modes of production), and differences of character (associated with racial difference). These differences correspond to unequal levels of development. I will discuss each of these sources in turn, and indicate how they can be seen as converging in the long run.

4.1 Religion

Kant qualifies his claim that religious difference constitutes a sharp barrier between peoples immediately after writing it, by inserting the following footnote: “Different religions: an odd expression! Just as if one could also speak of different moralities.” While he acknowledges that different religions will certainly have different confessional trappings and sacred texts, Kant considers the essence of religion to be its moral core, and thus, “there can be only one single religion holding for all human beings in all times.” In fact, Kant’s writings on religion give us an insight into how he envisions progress toward the ethical community. Religion is one of the main vehicles through which morality gets its hold on people. World religions are all, at bottom, articulations of rational morality, and moral progress can be achieved as those religions gradually strip away—or at least reflectively relativize—their inessential trappings, revealing their more or less identical moral core. This transition occurs when ecclesiastical faith becomes pure religious (i.e., moral) faith. In Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, Kant writes:

It is therefore a necessary consequence of the physical and, at the same time, the moral predisposition in us—the latter being the foundation and at the same time the interpreter of all religion—that in the end religion will gradually be freed of all

\[\text{Ibid., 336; 8: 368.}\]
empirical grounds of determination, of all statutes that rest on history and unite hu-
man beings provisionally for the promotion of the good through the intermediary 
of an ecclesiastical faith. Thus at last the pure faith of religion will rule over all, “so 
that God may be all in all.”

If local ecclesiastical faiths are to become merely “provisional” forms of a rational-
ized (i.e., roughly deistic Christian) moral faith, then it is hard to see why religion 
should serve to keep human communities deeply differentiated in the long run 
of the epoch of freedom.

4.2 Culture

At least in the early going of the epoch of nature, Kant sees a major source of 
productive antagonism in clashes between different civilizations with different 
modes of production: conflicts between nomadic and agrarian societies, and per-
haps later, clashes between commercial European societies and all others, which 
will eventually force the rest of the world to adopt European models. This clash-
of-civilizations model for progress is on display most prominently in “Conjectural 
Beginnings of Human History,” where Kant speaks of early conflicts between 
agrarian and nomadic peoples as being responsible for the development of more 
advanced societies, forcing underdeveloped nomads to either develop themselves 
or move on, thereby impelling peoples to spread across the globe.

There is no doubt that different levels of cultural development among peoples 
constitute a strong source of difference, as they correspond to genuinely different 
ways of life. It would seem, however, that this could not be a persistent source of 
difference in the long run simply because, in order for there to be a cosmopolitan 
union of all nations, all peoples must develop to the point where they are capable 
of being independent and self-governing nations. Such a level of development 
requires that peoples grow—or be helped to grow—out of the various hierarchical 
forms of life that the bulk of the non-European world appears to Kant to be mired 
in. In order for the cosmopolitan union to be viable, then, we must conclude that 
developmental differences between peoples will, one way or another, be smoothed 
out around the advent of the epoch of freedom.

4.3 Character

As we have seen, Kant sees differences in national character as stemming from a 
combination of racial and cultural factors. Teleologically speaking, different racial-
cultural groups are meant to have very different modes of life, so that the multiplicity 
of human capacities can become developed in the species as whole. In Kant’s 
racial theory, this teleological analysis yields the conclusion that different races 
develop human capacities differently, and to different degrees. We saw this in Kant’s 
characterization of Africans as suited for agrarian labor, Asiatic peoples as suited 
for despotic societies, and native North Americans as having no particular cultural 
predisposition (he thinks that they lack spirit, and may die out), while only white 
Europeans are naturally suited for advanced, republican commercial societies.

Kant, Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason [Religion], in Religion and Rational Theology, ed. 
With considerable justification, this vision has drawn the ire of readers of Kant’s writings on race, since it suggests a racial hierarchy, with white Europe on top. It does seem, however, that, whatever his views on the comparative levels of development among races, the levels of development themselves cannot be static (even though the hierarchy itself may be). I have already argued that disparate levels of development corresponding to different modes of production must be evened out before the advent of the cosmopolitan union. Therefore, Kant must hold that all peoples (except, perhaps, those that may vanish, like native North Americans) are capable of developing to a level sufficient to support republican institutions and operate commercial economies. On the other hand, all indications are that Kant believes white Europeans to be the only race capable of developing themselves to this point; all other races will somehow have to be brought along by Europe. He suggests just this in “Idea for a Universal History,” where he writes that we can “discover a regular process of improvement in the political constitutions of our continent (which will probably legislate eventually for all other continents).” This sinister-sounding remark may mean simply that the European model will gradually have to be exported to the rest of the world; it is hard see whether Kant views this process in terms of forceful imposition, or some other method of diffusion. Although this does show that Kant does not take Asia to be doomed to despotism, or Africa to be fated to remain a simple agrarian region, etc., it does little to make his view more palatable. His condemnation of European colonial policies makes it clear that this diffusion will not culminate in European direct rule of the world (or, at any rate, that it would not amount moral progress if it did). What seems more likely is that Kant envisions something much more like our own post-WWII, post-colonial condition, where the ethnically white nations of the world, while for the most part no longer actually ruling and occupying non-white peoples, nevertheless enjoy all manner of political, cultural and economic domination, which are legitimated (or perhaps rendered invisible) by certain kinds of racist views.

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48Thus, I disagree with Eze’s conclusion that, “It cannot, therefore, be argued that skin color for Kant was merely a physical characteristic. It is, rather, evidence of an unchanging and unchangeable moral quality” (“The Color of Reason,” 219). Eze is, I think, correct in his conclusion that racial biology is a fixed factor for Kant, but the developmental level of a given race must be variable, and thus, while the racial hierarchy itself may be fixed, the levels of development are not, and to that extent the hierarchy is not static. Besides, given that a static conception of racial hierarchies would render not only the final end of the species incomprehensible, it would also make the ultimate end of the cosmopolitan union itself nigh impossible, I conclude that it is unlikely that the static conception is Kant’s considered view on the matter.

49Kant, “Universal History,” 52; 8: 29.

50See Charles R. Mills, The Racial Contract (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). If this is an accurate assessment of the condition Kant envisions, it corresponds roughly to what Mills calls the second phase of the racial contract, where the racist views of whites are no longer conjoined to an ideology that explicitly denies the humanity or moral personhood of non-whites (as in the first phase), and therefore forms of systematic racial domination are not seen as a consequence of racism, making them invisible and compatible with the acknowledgment of moral universalism. For the view that the development of systematic racism in the West happened is actually linked to moral universalism, see George M. Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
While this story of convergence may render Kant’s hierarchical views marginally more palatable, such views on the necessity of cultural convergence toward a European model are quite contrary to those of multiculturalists and alternative modernity theorists, who would like to make a much stronger case for the value and long-term feasibility of diverse forms of life. As we have seen, Kant thinks of peoples as characterized by combinations of racial and cultural factors, and suited to different modes of life based on these combinations. I have argued that we need not take this to mean that the developmental levels of all peoples are statically bound to the roles they settle into during the epoch of nature. Kant must think that all peoples have some predisposition for the development of culture, and thus should be able to have their cultures shaped by the European model, such that they will eventually be capable of independent, republican self-government. So, cultural factors are potentially variable. Racial factors, however, on Kant’s view, are not; they are fixed “in the blood.” So, for example, while African peoples, whose allegedly limited talents are apt for relatively undeveloped agrarian communities, may somehow become capable of fitting into more advanced societies, they will never be naturally suited for such societies. That is to say, they will never be as good as Europeans are at the self-governing and commercial activities. And since these activities help to cultivate more effective cultures of skill and discipline, they will also probably lag behind with regard to the moral progress that is associated with such cultural development. Progressive cultural dynamism continues to reside with the white race, and European civilization will continue to drag the rest of the world behind it. So, although Kant’s cosmopolitanism may remain a formal model for the possibility of justice between states, his work cannot serve as an inspiration for an account of alternative modernities or endorsements of global multiculturalism; the historical antecedent to such views is Herder rather than Kant. Although his valorization of diversity strikes many as appealing, the fact that Herder ties it to a kind of romantic nationalism, and the primacy that he gives to peoples over individuals, makes him a problematic figure for the liberal political tradition. Thus, the task of reconciling Herder’s nationalist multiculturalism with Kant’s liberalism remains a daunting and important task for many philosophers and political theorists.

A brief comparison to a contemporary defender of multiculturalism and alternative modernities like Charles Taylor (who is, moreover, self-consciously more indebted to Herder than Kant) may help to clarify these conclusions. Central to Taylor’s own attempt to mediate between the more traditional liberalisms of Locke and Kant and a Herderian valorization of diversity is a version of liberalism that goes beyond conceptions of state and society, where the state secures formal protections and neutral social space within which cultures either thrive or die. Building on an argument for cultural recognition as “a vital human need,”[51] insofar as the prospects for the development of an undistorted identity are thwarted in

its absence, Taylor claims that taking the importance of culture seriously involves more than an affirmative answer to the “question of whether cultural survival will be acknowledged as a legitimate goal, whether collective ends will be allowed as legitimate considerations in judicial review, or other purposes of major social policy.” We must also “recognize the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive but acknowledge their worth.” Thus, all cultures are owed a (fallible) “presumption” that they have something important to contribute to our common humanity. The validation of this presumption in turn demands not merely tolerance, but a genuine openness to other cultures that would facilitate a Gadamerian “fusion of horizons”; the presumption of worth is only meaningful if we are prepared to let ourselves be changed by our encounters with other cultures.

Taylor expands this theory with an argument against what he takes to be the dominant species of modernization theory: “acultural” theories of modernity that view modernization as a faceless and autonomous process of forced adaptation that cultures must undergo at some point in their development. Taylor argues that modernity actually consists in a combination of acultural processes that work in tandem with aspects of culture (e.g., in Western modernity, a vision of moral order, which underlies a conception of society as a union for mutual benefit). Once we are convinced of this, we will see how vastly different “social imaginaries” can and will react in a plethora of ways to the acultural pressures of modernization. Just as the Gadamerian fusion of horizons that Taylor appeals to is not supposed to amount to cultural convergence (our openness to others produces diverse variations on our own cultural forms, which reproduces diversity in new ways, rather than leading to cultural agglomeration or homogenization), openness to process of modernization spins out new forms of cultural diversity. Space is opened up for considerable variation within the cultural self-understandings of societies that join the ranks of modern societies—more than most theorists of modernization and globalization are willing to countenance. It follows that we would gain by acknowledging, encouraging, and valuing these potential and actual variations.

Sankar Muthu has suggested that a similar attempt to reconcile liberalism with a valorization of cultural difference can be found in Kant himself. Muthu infers from the fact that Kant demands respect for what Muthu calls “cultural agency,” coupled with Kant’s criticism of colonial policies that interfered with the self-determination and ways of life of non-European peoples, to the conclusion that Kant must take diversity to be an intrinsic element of morality and its historical vocation. But this is an invalid inference. From the moral point of view, there is, for Kant, a categorical demand to respect the self-determination of individuals and groups, and to pursue just arrangements that would secure their freedom, equality, and independence. That said, Kant’s teleological and anthropological analyses surely cast doubt on the notion that he found cultural diversity worthy and valuable.
for its own sake, however strong the demand for respect and non-interference may be. Such points of view disavow Taylor’s presumption of value: white Europe represents Kant’s privileged locus of cultural dynamism, as it generates the social models appropriate to the epoch of freedom. Moreover, these considerations weigh heavily against the possibility of genuinely alternative modernities, never mind their desirability. No “fusion of horizons” between cultures is in the offing for Kant, nor would it be particularly desirable if it were.

6. DIFFERENCE AND THE FINAL END OF HISTORY

Here, as in other places in Kant’s thought, we are confronted with a tension between his insistence, from the moral point of view, on the recognition of formal equality between individuals and peoples in the cosmopolitan union, and the substantive inequalities that seem to be an unavoidable consequence of his teleological mechanisms—especially, in this context, the hierarchical theory of race. As revolting as many of Kant’s ideas about race and historical development undoubtedly are, is there reason to think that these features of his thought are anything more than unfortunate but largely disposable elements of his political cosmopolitanism and moral teleology? Whatever the answer to this no doubt vexing question may be, the fact is that Kant himself did not take them to be inessential footnotes. For Kant, deducing the form that perpetual peace would take was thoroughly conditioned by and dependent upon the project of thinking through the historical-developmental conditions that would make the weltbürgerliche Verfassung possible and necessary; for better or worse, here we find another place where Kant’s thought turns out to be less purely “formalistic” than his critics often charge. Moreover, the value of perpetual peace itself is in turn conditioned by its functionality in promoting the final ends of humanity. And not even the final end of humanity remains unaffected by the natural mechanisms that power Kant’s teleology.

Kant characterizes the final endpoint of humanity’s historical and moral vocation variously as the kingdom of ends in the Groundwork and the ethical community or ethical commonwealth in Religion. It is, however, the ultimate development of an ethical community of virtue (articulated in Religion) that Kant connects to the historical development of the species, as the triumph of “the good principle” over “the evil principle” in historical time.\(^55\) For reasons that we have touched on in the third section, Kant takes social intercourse to be a constant source of “mutual corruption” until that time when people undergo a quasi-religious “turning of the soul” toward a radically other-regarding orientation and structure their social relations around “laws of virtue” that support this orientation, rather than undermine it, as most conventional social relations do. Kant can allow that “the ethical state of nature” has been overcome, and the final end of the species achieved, only when such an ethical community has encompassed more or less the entire human race. And indeed, Kant permits himself the use of sweeping, universalistic language when articulating this final end: “Inasmuch as we can see, therefore, the dominion of the good principle is not otherwise attainable, so far as human beings can work toward it, than through the setting up and diffusion

\(^{55}\)See note 30.
of a society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue—a society which reason makes it a task and a duty of the entire human race to establish in its full scope. Kant characterizes the union of the ethical community as being akin to the constitution of a family, where all enter into a free, universal, and enduring union of hearts. But he issues the following qualification:

The sublime, never fully attainable idea of an ethical community is greatly scaled down under human hands, namely to an institution which, at best capable of representing with purity only the form of such a community, with respect to the means for establishing a whole of this kind is greatly restricted under the conditions of sensuous human nature. But how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?

The exact sense in which Kant understands “sensuous human nature” to compromise the project an ethical community is ambiguous here. Certainly, he acknowledges the need for religious trappings and practices as vehicles for rational faith and morality, and he further admits that some differences in these trappings will persist among different cultural groups, although, as we have seen, he has reasons for thinking that these differences will become increasingly relativized and inessential. And perhaps this is all that he has in mind when he tells us that human nature will permit only an approximation of the universal ethical community. But, given what we know of Kant’s views on race and development, he may well also be thinking that a pure community of virtue and mutual recognition is unlikely to materialize among peoples so divided and differently abled. And even if Kant is not thinking along these lines, we may well wonder, given his racist views, whether he could consistently envision a reasonably universal approximation of humanity’s final end.

But now we are making our way into the swampy issue of how much substantive inequality is compatible with the existence of formal equality. Kant would surely, after all, insist that differently abled peoples are at least potentially capable of participating in an ethical community and are fully entitled to recognition as moral persons. But as most any recognition theorist writing in the wake of Hegel will attest, genuine recognition requires more than the formal recognition of persons as viable legal-moral agents. It also demands some substantive recognition of persons as having something valuable to contribute to the community to which they belong. What recognition of the value and worth of one’s contribution to a community should consist in may be difficult to define, although from a Kantian perspective it would probably involve valorizing those qualities that promote moral progress: the participation in and development of cultures of skill and discipline, and cultivation of those virtues that support other-regarding orientations in others, for example. But whatever content we give to this dimension of

56Kant, Religion, 130; 6: 94.
57Ibid., 136; 6: 102.
58Ibid., 135; 6: 100.
59For example, see Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), especially chs. 4–5. Honneth draws on the social psychology of George Herbert Mead, in addition to Hegel, to establish the thesis that recognition of the worth of one’s contribution to a community is an essential component in the development of an undistorted relationship to one’s self.
substantive recognition, the attitudes that would be cultivated by the acceptance of Kant’s racist views—which could range from patronizing attitudes and treating racial others as invisible to hostility and contempt—are quite antithetical to it. A universal ethical community would surely be envisioned as granting full, formal recognition to all of its members, but would the contributions and worthiness of lesser-abled peoples be recognized and valued? One would tend to think not, as Kant denies that non-white races have much to offer humanity in the previously mentioned respects. And even if we agree with Kant that judgments regarding the character of individuals and judgments about the moral worth of persons are analytically distinct modes, it would surely be naïve to believe that, at the level of impure historically reality, the two modes have nothing to do with one another.

It may be the case that Kant was simply unconcerned with the prospect of unequal recognition, even within the context of the achievement of humanity’s highest good. He is, after all, maddeningly sanguine about permitting substantive inequalities within structures of formal equality, as his insistence that restricting citizenship to economically self-sufficient men is perfectly compatible with the moral demand for civic equality and freedom for all attests. Many of us today would, I think, be much quicker than Kant to claim that substantive inequalities often render formal equality empty, although the point at which substantive inequality undermines formal equality is more often than not debatable. If, however, Kant is forced to argue, as I believe he is, that the final culmination of morality’s vocation in human history is somehow compatible with racial hierarchy connected to asymmetric recognition, he may well have strained his credibility past its breaking point.

One of the enduringly valuable features of Kant’s cosmopolitanism is what we might call its immanence. That is, instead of merely remaining ensconced in a formal moral point of view, and contenting himself with articulating what abstract morality demands of international relations, Kant connects the demands for humanity’s moral progress with an anthropological and teleological investigation of the developmental potentials of human communities. For Kant, this insistence on attention to empirical factors does not imply the undialectical method of deducing a moral ideal and then speculating on how this ideal must inevitably be compromised by the shortcomings of human nature. In the abstract, Kant provides us with a richer and more integrated framework for thinking about these issues than do many of today’s liberal internationalists and advocates of cosmopolitan citizenship. Because of the teleological premises of his philosophy of history, the moral ideal is rooted in historical reality; but, on the other hand, because the theory of racial hierarchy and difference is an integral part of this story for Kant, it cannot be simply be surgically removed and quietly discarded, leaving the rest

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60 Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 458–59; 6: 315. See also “Theory and Practice,” 292–96; 8: 294–96; there, in addition to making this point about civic equality, Kant is emphatic that formal equality is quite consistent with a great degree of material and economic inequality.

61 See Robert Fine, “Kant’s Theory of Cosmopolitanism and Hegel’s Critique,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 29 (2003): 611–32, at 624, where Fine notes that Kant’s almost exclusive focus on the prohibition of war in his cosmopolitanism is a characteristic of his “minimal” theory, which leaves concerns about broader issues of social justice untouched.
of the system intact. Kant’s construal of difference among peoples as a teleological mechanism poisons his seemingly high-minded reflections on the course of human history and its cosmopolitan and universal aspirations in a number of ways, even, as we have seen, making its way into the ideal of an ethical community of virtue. And so cashing in on Kant’s accomplishments in these areas depends on our ability come up with empirically sound conceptions of how differences between peoples may be thought to persist in the course of global modernization that functionally substitute for Kant’s theory of racial hierarchy, without the undeniable ugliness of this aspect of his thought.