

Book Prospectus

Another Genealogy of Cosmopolitan Thought
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Byline

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Headline

The book uncovers hidden roots and future pathways of cosmopolitan thought in an age of fragmentation and realignment.

Pitch

For a brief moment after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Kantian-inspired vision of cosmopolitanism seemed to prevail in academic and wider discourses and to be confirmed by real-life events. Today, informed by the shift of economic power from the Western to the former developing world, the ecological crisis, the emergence of a multipolar world order, populist attacks, and postcolonial critiques of cosmopolitanism, adherence to this idea seems helplessly naive. The central question of this book is, then, how cosmopolitanism can be (re)conceived vis-à-vis these challenges and counterforces. My thesis is that this does not require a new, more refined moral or political theory, but a historically situated self-reflection.

The book begins by noting that cosmopolitan ideas are not unique to the Enlightenment or the Stoic school, but have antecedents going back to the pre-Platonic Sophists. This insight, gained through historical and philosophical analysis, has significant consequences for the genealogy of cosmopolitan thought. In this light, Plato emerges as the first anti-cosmopolitan philosopher. Unsurprisingly, Plato again plays an important role in today's authoritarian discourses. To meet the fundamental philosophical challenge, I read Kant's political philosophy not as a timeless idea representing 'Western rationalism' but along the lines of the Cambridge School of the History of Ideas (Quentin Skinner) as a historically located intervention; one, in fact, whose dialectics Kant himself had already diagnosed in his religious and anthropological writings. On this basis, I argue that current developments in international law can be read in a new light through the lens of Hans Kelsen's theory of law. In a contextual reading it is not to be seen as a variant of contemporary Anglo-American legal positivism, but rather as a post-Nietzschean response to the fundamental value conflicts of modernity. The book ends with two models of post-foundational thought as a way of rescuing the Kantian account for better times to come. It is framed by the voices of Sappho and Hölderlin to reveal, beyond the boundaries of philosophy, a poetic mode of communication across space and time.

Key features and benefits

- Uncovers the hidden roots and future pathways of cosmopolitan thought in an age of fragmentation and reorientation.
- Identifies the influence of Martin Heidegger behind the authoritarian and critical counterforces challenging cosmopolitanism today.
- Interprets Plato's Republic as a political response to the proto-cosmopolitan mindset of the 4th century BCE, presenting his metaphysics as a framework that challenges readers to choose between the Sophists' universalism and the dialectical inquiry under the spell of Socrates.
- Shows how Kant responds to Plato's challenge, highlighting the limits of Kant's legal cosmopolitanism and extending his ideological critique of institutions.
- Presents Kelsen's legal theory as a post-Nietzschean response to the value conflicts of modernity, and delineates two models of post-foundational thought.
- Integrates the voices of Sappho and Hölderlin to reveal a poetic mode of communication across space and time.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism, Geopolitics, Heidegger, history of political thought, Plato, Kant, Kelsen, Schmitt, legal philosophy, critical legal studies

Short synopsis of the aims, scope, argument, and approach in the book

We have told, in academic and public discourse, numerous times and in varied ways of how we have been through the dawn, the middle and the end of cosmopolitanism, This book asks: what have we learned? And also, what learning is missed when cosmopolitanism is thought of as a historical moment, a destiny, or a threat? This book brings together political and legal philosophy with the history of political thought through a genealogical reflection of the tradition in order to break through the conventional mould of what cosmopolitanism is meant to propose as its purpose. The dynamic, though indicatively selective, rereading of the tradition via Kant, Plato and Kelsen in this regard aims to point at rather submerged alternatives to conventional understanding, and, crucially, to construct ways of subterranean communication between opposing camps as key to a new understanding. The book shows that the debate on cosmopolitanism goes beyond variations within the (broadly conceived) liberal camp, since the opponents also have philosophical resources. Reflecting on the conditions and pitfalls of philosophical theories – even of the practice of scholarship itself – is part of the endeavour. It presents two practices of post-foundational thought: critical legal analysis and the debunking of foundationalism, rather than proposing or defending a particular form of world order on philosophical grounds. In this way, the Kantian account can be rescued (*Aufhebung*) for better times to come.

Chapter-by-chapter description of content and form

1. Preface

I introduce the study to follow by reminding of the cosmopolitan moment in world politics after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and relating this historical moment to the “cosmopolitan plateau” as a fundamental conviction in political theory. This needs to be set in the context of contemporary conspicuous counterforces and challenges to the Western synthesis of liberal and democratic values within a global capitalist economy. Perpetual economic crises and looming environmental disasters make the mode of, earlier modes and dogmas of, development unsustainable. Today, with increased intensity, Russia and China aim to establish a multipolar world order as an alternative to the Western, cosmopolitan-minded model. Internally, western liberal culture is also attacked by populist movements and criticised from postcolonial and feminist perspectives as an ideology from its very beginning. Many newly elected western governments and parties reject cosmopolitanism in their manifestos and governance policies.

What can a genealogical study of cosmopolitanism offer us? My strategy is to observe how the western tradition of cosmopolitanism has been formed, philosophically, legally and politically, but not present or merely critique once more that narrative. Thus, the central question of this book is how cosmopolitanism can be conceived vis-à-vis these contemporary (and I would argue genealogically longstanding) challenges and counterforces. I explain why instead of an abstract confrontation of two key currents of thinking cosmopolitanism in Rawlsian and Heideggerian philosophy, I pursue a close contextual reading of Plato, Kant, and Kelsen following the methods of the Cambridge School. The core proposition being that a historically situated self-reflection as a genealogy of cosmopolitan thought, opens up the path to reflect on both the conflicting tendencies within the Western tradition and the interrelations to other traditions, at the same time. I propose two models of post-foundational thought that can help us withstand counterforces in difficult times. The poetic framework enhances the philosophical account, revealing another way of world literary conversation across time and space.

2. Prelude: Sappho's calling

As the debate on the philosophical foundations of cosmopolitanism is already multiform, more recent contributions have focused on specific applied topics, such as the rationale for a just climate regime, immigration, or a tax policy from a cosmopolitan perspective. Given this variety and specialisation, one might fairly ask how a contextual, genealogical perspective can contribute anything valuable to this debate. The prelude, here, is the first response to this question. It starts with a reading of a poem by Sappho, a text that was written before the advent of occidental philosophy. It shows that a kind of ‘civic cosmopolitanism’ from a female ‘queer’ (non-heterosexual, Athenian and male) perspective might have been at the beginning of the tradition. In this way, it derails the common narrative that civic cosmopolitanism or intercultural, feminist, postcolonial, etc., perspectives on cosmopolitanism have only been conceived recently. Perhaps the story needs to be told in reverse order, I propose. Additionally, the more we open ourselves up to an ancient perspective, the more the common taxonomy of cosmopolitanism (a certain cosmopolitan way of the world, one could say, including a way of reading) becomes questionable, as it prefigures the way of looking at unfamiliar writings and inhibits

understanding. However, this book is not arguing that critical western philosophical propositions, such as the Heideggerian tradition of reading philosophy as a continuing oblivion of being, or Derrida's most sophisticated reformulation of Heidegger's ontological difference, are better suited to account for Sappho's calling. Sappho's poetic voice resonates throughout the centuries and will find a different response in the coda.

3. Chapter 1: Plato and the challenge to cosmopolitanism

The first chapter starts like the beginning of a conventional entry on cosmopolitan thought and can therefore be read as a 'second beginning'. After a brief outline of current discussions on cosmopolitan thought, I trace the basic ideas of the discussion back to the pre-Socratic Sophists. This might sound like a daring stretch of an established, if not outworn, discourse. However, it turns out to be its nemesis: Plato, with Socrates as his spokesman, is not the founding father of contemporary philosophy but the first anti- or, to be precise, uber-cosmopolitan philosopher. He conceived metaphysics to silence the philosophers who thought they could give laws to "Greeks and barbarians alike," as cosmopolitan theorists *avant la lettre*, who, however, according to Plato, lacked true insight into the nature of the good. This is reached by applying the methods of the Cambridge School to the *Republic*, interpreting it as a text aimed at the political situation in the 4th century BCE, where different historical possibilities, including that of a Greek federal system, were still open. Therefore, I present Plato's philosophy as a challenge then and a challenge now: both to post-Rawlsian cosmopolitanism's specific philosophical narratives and to the Western tradition's self-understanding of its cosmopolitan 'destiny'. Not the first time that a rereading of the challenge of cosmopolitanism has been posed within western philosophy. Heidegger, or perhaps Derridean deconstruction, might lurk around the corner of the reader's eye, here. However, I propose that two straightforward answers to the challenge need to be examined instead: introducing the principle of subjectivity as developed by Kant and considering modern law as the structure of modernity. Kant's account is at the heart of most contemporary cosmopolitan theories. But it would be fainthearted to make a bold leap of 200 years and ignore the philosophical and political developments in between. In Heidegger's reading, Kant's categorical imperative ends in an existential decision. Kelsen (as a post-Nietzschean sceptic) acknowledges this position, but shows that a pure theory of positive law is nevertheless possible and can (within limits, as the following discussion will show) have a reconciliatory effect. Kant's philosophy and Kelsen's legal theory are therefore crucial turning points in understanding the predicament in which we find ourselves.

4. Chapter 2: Kant and the end of cosmopolitanism

This chapter is the implicit heart of the genealogy studied in this work, not only because Kant is often invoked as a key reference for contemporary theories of cosmopolitan thought, but also because the philosophy he initiated, from Hegel and Marx up to Nietzsche and Heidegger, shapes our understanding of the modern world in a way that continues to question our philosophical common sense certainties. Yet the task of such a rereading is not straightforward. In Kant's case, the contextual reading of the Cambridge School that I pursue here takes time to bring us on the right track. When looking more closely at the political structure of the city of Königsberg and the political discourse of Kant's time, we find

ways of coming up with Cambridge-style stories about texts aiming to change the politics of the time, and thinkers actively engaged in typically enlightened concerns, such as denouncing the oppression of free city governments, arguing against the death penalty or favouring women's rights. However, it is not Kant who takes these positions, but other intellectuals from Königsberg.

Kant held, on nearly all matters, conservative views. So did Kant, as later German idealists would say, only initiate a revolution in thinking? Only after working through Kant's entire thinking, his critical philosophy and his 'empirical science of knowledge' (*Welt- und Menschenkenntnis*), as expounded in his popular lectures, will we see that, at a well-chosen moment, Kant practised biopolitics by setting his old but dietary-restricted body against the young but obese body of the king. The political dimension of Kant's writings on religion is often missed, just as the specific crypto-religious tradition it triggered remains outside the canon of liberal thought.

The contextual reading pursued here, thus, has two upshots. Kant's legal philosophy is shown to be deeply entangled in the inner systematic problems of his thinking and less attuned to contemporary liberal convictions. At the same time, his ultimate practical idea, freedom as autonomy realised through an ethical community, is so radical that every commitment or institution falls prey to an ideology of critical disenchantment.

Most accounts of Kant's political philosophy, and those that concentrate on his cosmopolitan thought in particular, somehow take a courageous 200-year leap to introduce Kant directly into contemporary discussions while studiously ignoring the philosophical discourse in between. As I revisit Kant's thinking contextually, including in my regard his empirical writings and the tensions in his critical program, I suggest a different trajectory into the 20th century.

5. Chapter 3: Kelsen and the dusk of the 20th century

The third chapter will reflect upon the dusk of the 20th century through the lens of Hans Kelsen's thinking. After explaining that Kelsen's thought is shaped by reacting to the 'circumstances of modernity,' as encapsulated in the conflicts and ideas virulent in fin-de-siècle Vienna, we will see that he experienced and reflected upon two further fundamental revolutions in the 20th century, symbolised by the dates 1932 and 1948. By following his contestations with Carl Schmitt and Eugen Ehrlich, we will also encounter a specific anti-cosmopolitan stance and mark the existential limits of Kelsen's approach. A story from Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones* serves to support a meditation, here, on the relation of all theorising to (illegitimate) power. This does not mean that after the demise of theory, only existential decisions (like Jägerstätter's, a conscientious objector during the WWII, decision to resist, depicted in Terrence Malick's film *A Hidden Life*) are left. Through Kelsen's contestation with Eric Voegelin, two models of post-foundational thought can be gleaned, which might provide an orientation for the future: engaging in critical legal studies and debunking foundationalism.

6. Coda: Hölderlin's response

The prelude started with Sappho, a poet before philosophy, and the coda ends with Hölderlin, a poet after philosophy. Heidegger and Schmitt used his translation of Pindar's saying, "the law is the king of all," in a national-socialist manner (though Derrida, Agamben,

and Zartaloudis have revealed other connotations). Through a reading of Hölderlin's translation in the context of other Pindar fragments and by relating it to his philosophical outlook, I show that Pindar conceives of a cosmopolitanism after philosophy, a playful, poetic way of communication over time that is self-aware of its failings and one from which we can learn more than perhaps it was first thought.

7. Afterword

The Prelude and coda frame the more technical philosophical arguments (in the chapters). The afterword will relate the genealogy to everyday politics mentioned in the introduction, yet bringing the fruits of the genealogical method to bear upon them, while refraining from any direct normative recommendations.