

This book is a fine contribution to the literature, exemplifying the interdisciplinary scope and appeal I mentioned at the start, and as such a text that could be read with profit by scholars not just in political theory, but IR, history, African American, and above all, philosophy. There are too many things I liked to mention all of them, but in particular, I was struck by the originality—in retrospect, so obvious, why had no one done this before?—of contextualizing both Kant’s and Du Bois’s writings with reference to an evolving timeline of events; the recognition that the “problem space” (David Scott) of the Kantian project is very different from one oriented toward questions of corrective global justice for the Global South; the underlining of the ongoing exclusion in the mainstream literature on these matters of the insights of people of color, both historic figures and contemporary thinkers, despite the fact that they are precisely the ones who have been forced to grapple with these structures of national and global oppression; the expansion of the cast of actors and the historical schedule of key events and dates in the official Western Political Drama of Modernity; the redrawing of the imperial cartographies of the polity and the re-periodization of its complementary imperial temporalities; and in general the exposure of a familiar Euro-normativity beneath the assumed guise of post-colonial inclusion and racelessness.

On Kant’s Problems and Ours

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Valdez’s book offers a profound intervention in the literature on cosmopolitanism, one that proposes to reorient cosmopolitanism’s normative frame, re-narrate its intellectual lineage, and reconfigure its core concepts. Her notion of “transnational cosmopolitanism” highlights the assumptions about international hierarchy and the forms of Eurocentrism built into much of the mainstream cosmopolitan tradition. In its use of Kant, much like the literature on liberalism on empire, the book seeks to contextualize a universalist tradition. Yet by following Kantian cosmopolitanism through its more recent inheritors, and reading it alongside Du Bois’s thought and political projects, the book recasts cosmopolitanism’s normative principles in a way that, it argues, better corresponds to our present, proposing its titular concept as a more worldly response to problems of hierarchy.

What emerges is not only a theory of cosmopolitan ethics in the abstract but an account that both arises from and describes cosmopolitanism as a

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“political craft”: a “transformation in consciousness [which] allows domestically marginalized subjects to reenvision themselves as part of a transnational collective” (7). That transformation both rests on and enables the formation of a transnational counterpublic. Valdez is adamant that her book, while seeking to contextualize Kant, grounds its interpretive authority firmly in the present. In doing so, the book aims to confront what Valdez terms the “problem of hierarchy,” which characterizes the international for Kant, DuBois, and us, as well as the “problem of correspondence”: that Kant’s questions and concerns are not our own (4, for first reference).

Central to Valdez’s project is a rereading of Kant and of Kantianism in cosmopolitan political thought. The first chapter provides a reading of Kant in historical context, placing *Toward Perpetual Peace* in a timeline of six geographically disparate conflicts referenced in the essay. And yet, she argues, Kant’s focus remained adamantly European: the lessons he drew were about the risk to peace posed by conflict among European powers. What is more, the project of peace was conceived as beginning in Europe, and radiating outwards. As a result, she concludes, “there is little correspondence between the problem space that motivated Kant’s cosmopolitanism and the normative goals that a cosmopolitanism must serve today, to theorize (in)justice in a deeply unequal world bearing the marks of European imperialism” (54).

The second chapter traces “the problem of hierarchy” and “the problem of correspondence” forward into twentieth-century and contemporary literature on cosmopolitanism, focusing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, as well as James Bohman, Seyla Benhabib, Pauline Kleingeld, and Lea Ypi. While these thinkers, she argues, succeeded to some extent at transforming Kant’s claims, their versions of cosmopolitanism bear the stamp of his “federative,” “unworldly,” and “ahistorical” Eurocentrism (57–58). This is despite, as Valdez tells it, their efforts to read Kant against himself—to read Kant, as Habermas’s own title puts it in the essay that is central to Valdez’s treatment, “with the benefit of two-hundred years hindsight.” As Valdez reads Habermas, this allows one to see the limitations of certain projects of international governance, and instead to argue for extending sources of democratic legitimation “upwards” through federative forms. To Valdez, this produces an excessively vertical vision of politics; a more horizontal version, she argues, would better account for and thematize forms of transnational solidarity. Habermas’s reading prioritizes European integration and Western systems in a way that repeats some of Kant’s own prioritization of the problem of peace within Europe. While other neo-Kantian cosmopolitans have attempted to correct this, Valdez argues, they unwittingly repeat it.

Valdez argues instead for a horizontal reading of Kant that builds on his notion of hospitality, proposing that “the notion of complementarity and the mediating role of hospitality in exchanges between realms can be repurposed to consider forms of relationality not envisioned by Kant” (83). She presents her reading as a “disloyal” one and defends anachronism as a strategy that, by grounding “interpretive authority” in the present, allows for more creative and politically fruitful theorizations (17, for example). Perhaps

surprisingly then, the first two chapters offer a highly contextual reading of Kant's cosmopolitanism. Even Valdez's core normative move in chapter 2, extracting a notion of complementarity and hospitality from Kant, arises in dialogue with work by Sankar Muthu and by Christopher Meckstroth and grounds a reading of Kant's notion of hospitality in its intellectual and broader historical context. Her complaint with the neo-Kantians is explicitly framed as Skinnerian: they address the retrospective significance of the text, providing a version of Kant that would be unrecognizable to Kant himself (54). On Valdez's account, Kant's meaning is constrained by his "problem space"—a term she borrows from David Scott, who defines it through reference to R. G. Collingwood and Reinhart Koselleck. This contextualism is essential to one of the book's core complaints with neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism: that it neglects the lack of correspondence between Kant's problems and those which, she argues, we ought to be concerned with in the present. While Valdez proposes to read Kant "against the grain of his Eurocentrism" (59), this reading is only possible following a reconstruction of Kant that purports to be *more* loyal than a neo-Kantian one.

From here, Valdez could take Kant's notion of hospitality, properly understood, and redeploy it to theorize a cosmopolitanism adequate to our present. Instead, she turns to a different thinker from the history of political thought, Du Bois. As I read it, this move highlights one of the book's arguments: that our thinking about the history of cosmopolitan political thought itself requires pluralization. Kant matters to Valdez's argument because he provides certain normative material she wishes to redeploy and because he is central for later cosmopolitan thinkers. The third and fourth chapters consider Du Bois more closely, not only to augment Kant but to decenter him. This is necessary not only for the sake of pluralization, but also because part of the Kantian legacy has been a failure to emphasize the transnational itself.

The third chapter begins from a reading of Du Bois's writings on empire, identifying the connections he drew between slavery, colonialism, and neocolonial forms in his diagnosis of the "color line" and highlighting his indictment of narratives of progress. Valdez places Du Bois's work between 1896 and 1961 into three intellectual phases, tracking transformations in his anti-imperialism from Eurocentric, to "Ethiopian," to "mature," the final coinciding with his socialist internationalism. Across these phases, in dialogue with his broader political context, his notion of political subjectivity also transformed, shifting from "domestic-centered" to "weak transnational" to "transnational" (90–91). Valdez dates Du Bois's reconsideration of Africa and departure from Eurocentrism to the first decades of the twentieth century, attributed in part to Franz Boaz's influence. On her description, Du Bois's essay "The African Roots of the War" holds a pivotal place in formulating a critique of colonialism as part of a broader description of the lasting harms of the slave trade and echoing while also transfiguring the critiques of imperialism present in Hobson and Luxemburg, and the intersection of the "color line" with finance capital. This led into a critique of a new kind of "democratic despotism." It is here, Valdez concludes, that "the reversal

of Du Bois's developmentalism is complete, to the extent that he pairs progress in the West with exploitation abroad" (94).

In Du Bois Valdez finds a critique that directly inverts the Kantian picture, asserting that "progress is regress" (89) and that the true threats to perpetual peace are precisely Kant's would-be enlightened leaders of civilization. It also inverts the neo-Kantians, tying modernization and democracy in the West with imperialism and barbarism abroad (94). But the remainder of chapter 3 as well as chapter 4 move the argument beyond a claim that Du Bois offers the intellectual basis for an alternative theory of cosmopolitanism. Valdez expands her scope to consider Du Bois's political engagements along with his writing, described collectively as his "political craft." This is not merely an effort to identify in Du Bois's work an instantiation of Kantian concepts, and Valdez resists the suggestion that his work was somehow "vernacular" or an "applied cosmopolitanism" (89). Instead, she suggests it helps bring forward "the radical possibilities of redeploying Kantian concepts from below" (115). It is not Du Bois who does this redeploying; as I read it, Valdez proposes we ourselves do this through the idea of "transnational cosmopolitanism" itself.

Transnational cosmopolitanism operates for Valdez not only as political concept or even political stance, but as an epistemological category. Solidarity and hospitality, she argues, are aesthetic practices that, in a Rancièrian vein, reconfigure the sensible (100). Du Bois's political projects were themselves also aesthetic in this sense, generating new lines of connection and solidarity. She traces this through the 1919 Pan-African Congress, his advocacy around the founding of the United Nations, and his 1947 presentation of "An Appeal to the World." In one sense, this is a project of recovery. But it is recovering and reconstructing these events, Valdez argues, that "transfigures the notions of communication and hospitality that are central in Kantian and neo-Kantian accounts" (111–12). Chapter 4 expands on this, while also turning to Du Bois's later work, particularly *Darkwater*, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," and *Dark Princess*. Building on Tommie Shelby's theorization of solidarity, Valdez argues for reading Du Bois as offering a theory of consciousness—not just of "double consciousness," but of transnational consciousness as well, in dialogue with his account of imperialism.

The close of chapter 4 and much of chapter 5 turn back to Habermas, and to the Habermasian-inflected notion of a "counterpublic" as articulated by Michael Warner and Nancy Fraser—and if the book is disloyal to anyone, I would suggest, it is Habermas as much as Kant. In chapter 5 Valdez argues that Du Bois's work (here focused on his work at *The Crisis*) provides a vision of an imagined transnational anti-imperial counterpublic. This is particularly important because, in my reading, it works alongside the idea of "democratic despotism" to provide, implicitly, a response to Habermas's justification for his "vertical" emphasis: a response to the problem of a democratic deficit that, to him, allegedly characterizes transnational institutions. Importantly, it does so on Habermas's own terms.

This book offers, in one sense, a theory of cosmopolitan politics that is more indebted to Du Bois than to Kant. But it also offers a transfiguration of Kantian notions of hospitality and communication read not only through Du Bois, but from the standpoint of the present. Valdez highlights the problem of correspondence: that Kant's problems were not our own, or more precisely that those problems appeared to him in the way they did because of the questions he asked and the horizon of the sensible that he took for granted. Yet "correspondence" suggests separate moments. This is the aspect of the frame that seems at odds with its erstwhile historicism: Kant's moment and ours are treated as two distinct data points. But part of the history the book tells is a multicentury history of imperialism and racialized international hierarchy against which both Kant and Du Bois were writing. It is not simply that Kant's context was different from ours; he understood it differently than Valdez wants us to understand not only our own, but also differently from how she is asking us to understand his. One wonders why it did not appear to Habermas more like it does to Valdez—with, after all, two hundred years' hindsight. Answering this would probably require contextualizing Habermas and the neo-Kantians themselves, as part of the twentieth-century history the book's later chapters provide.

This book asserts that Kant's questions and assumptions should not have been his, and should not be our own. Our understanding of the present should arise instead from reading Du Bois. In articulating the "problem of correspondence," Valdez's use of the first person plural hails us into the very transnational counter-public she advances theoretically: we, she insists, should understand the problems of the present for cosmopolitanism as problems of transnational solidarity in the shadow of racialized imperialism and international hierarchy.

The Untaken Turn: Transnationalism in Political Theory

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For thirty years, three paradigms have ruled global political theory in the North Atlantic world: statism-nationalism, globalism, and empires-colonialism.¹ We

¹Isn't comparative political theory also a paradigm? Perhaps. But not in the sense that it offers models of how the world does and should work, as these three certainly do. By "paradigm," I mean a research program that offers such models.