

Kant on Relations and the *Selbstsetzungslehre* [Self-Positing]

Lubica Učník

Abstract

In this paper, I outline Kant's attempt to account for the category of relations, which is concomitant with his effort to prove that atomism cannot describe human experience. Kant's journey from the *First Critique* to his last work the *Opus Postumum* is a struggle against atomistic versions of the world. In the last instance, it is a transit from *I think* to *I act*; and it is also recognition that to act can only be performed in a relational manner in community with others. In order to substantiate his explanation of *real* forces in the world, Kant rethinks and extends his understanding of the subject from the subject as the unity of apperception to the self-positing subject living in the world with others. In order to defend 'the being in the world' who 'has rights,' I argue that we need to return to Kant's general account of rights for all humans in the world.

In our day, it is the fact that power is exercised through both right and disciplines, that the techniques of discipline and discourses born of discipline are invading right, and that normalizing procedures are increasingly colonizing the procedures of the law, that might explain the overall workings of what I would call a 'normalizing society' (Foucault 2003, pp. 38-9).

In this paper, I outline Kant's attempt to account for relations, which is concomitant with his effort to prove that atomism cannot describe human experience.¹ The idea of 'relation' at issue is something much more general than the formal 'category of relation' of the *First Critique* (Kant 1996, A 80/B 106). The inquiry is directed to the spirit informing Kant's entire *oeuvre* rather than the letter of one of his texts. In order to make sense of Kant's renunciation of atomism, I sketch some influential theories that he reacted against. It might be objected that to revisit Kant's work is an

antiquated undertaking. Yet I want to suggest that, despite Kant's effort, in our age, the problematic nature of relations is entrenched in the privileging of atomistic individualism in opposition to community.² On the one hand, the emphasis on the consumerism of the individual based on her singular choices is presented as the only way to live in the world; yet on the other, global interconnection (most visibly expressed by Internet communication) is expanding daily. So, to understand this impasse, I propose to return to Kant's *oeuvre* and his struggle against atomistic versions of the world. In the last instance, it is a transit from *I think* to *I act*; and it is also recognition that to act can only be performed in a *relational* manner in community with others. It is a journey from 1747, when in his earliest pre-critical work "Thoughts on the Estimation of Living Forces" (*Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*), Kant refused the atomistic version of the universe to his last, unpublished work the *Opus Postumum*, where his rejection of atomism led him to assert the self-positing subject who has rights and is living in community with others in the world.³ So, in the light of what I just discussed, how can we explain relations?

Our experience in today's globalised world is described as individualistic. Allegedly, social bonds are dissolving and the basic unit of society is comprised of lonely, consuming individuals for whom the highest ideal of freedom is the choice between different consumer goods. By contrast, Jean-Luc Nancy claims that it is immaterial

how far back we examine the history of thought; we will always come across a sense of grieving for that elusive community, that, interminably, seems to be disappearing. Yet the next generation begins anew the same nostalgic grieving. It is as though community is something intangible. Thus, instead of identifying the individual and community as oppositional, we should realise that they depend on each other.⁴ I want to continue this line of thought but from a different perspective.

Background

I have argued elsewhere that the modern understanding of society can be seen in two ways.⁵ Here I note very briefly my contention. In 1625, for Hugo Grotius “man neither was, nor is, by nature, a wild unsociable creature” (Grotius 1901, p. 24). For Grotius, we all can rationally recognise the idea of justice and morality because we are *social* beings. Grotius argues that man lives with others and it follows that he can clearly see that the idea of justice “[appears] the same to all men” (*Ibid.*). Natural law is guaranteed by nature alone since it is an ‘innate’ law that is ‘implanted in the mind’ of us all (Grotius 1916, p. 5). Grotius always proceeds from the concept of humankind or people as his starting point, because he bases his understanding of society on the notion of sociability (*Ibid.*, p. 6).⁶ This social model underpins continental philosophy. By contrast for Hobbes in 1651, “the life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short,” because his life is a constant struggle for survival (Hobbes 1968, Book I, xiii, p. 186). As Jacques Taminiaux tells us, for Hobbes “man is apolitical, asocial,

and amoral by nature” (Taminiaux 1985, p. 5). Man is unfit to live with others without the controlling arm of a coercive government. Hobbes, impressed by success of natural sciences, turns to Galileo and his idea of motion. Thus for Hobbes, the world consists of nothing but matter and motion. A body is *free* if its path is not obstructed by another body. The concept of negative liberty, if not in name, has its intellectual beginning in the Hobbesian vision of society.⁷ Modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy starts with Hobbes and his understanding of the individual as a self-subsisting atom. In this version of society, relations are hard to account for.

To understand a difference between Grotius’s social man and Hobbes’s self-interested man, I will focus on the Kantian understanding of relations of which community represents one of the subsets to argue that these two versions of individualism are not only indicative of political theories, but also reflect differences in theories of knowledge. Using only wide brushstrokes, I want to claim that the conception of community and relations underlies the theories of continental philosophy. By contrast, Anglo-Saxon philosophy is based on atomism where the individual exists as a self-subsisting entity. Given this, no doubt controversial, claim, I propose that, to speak of community, we must necessarily start from a relational nature of being-in-the-world, because to speak of a society that is composed of individuals as free floating atoms forecloses any possibility of relational political space, and for Kant, space in general. As he says, “to frame the world according to the principle of atomism or corpuscular

philosophy is to make space into something which is yet nothing. *Atomi ac inane*” (Kant 1995, 22:89). I also suggest that if our understanding of the world is based in the Leibnizian system on ‘monads’ or the Lockean system on ‘ideas,’ there is no possibility of a synthesis of substances, that is, of community. Unless we admit the possibility of relations between substances, singular monads or ideas cannot account for a higher order of unification by themselves. The possibility of community becomes an enigma. The Leibnizian pre-established harmony between separated monads can only be guaranteed by introducing God into his system. Kant was the first to recognise this problem⁸ and in his work, basing its possibility on relations, he posits community as a formal, logical category and as a social phenomenon.

The Kantian attempt must be understood in its historical context. To account for the possibility of a world where not atomism but relations are indicative of our human community is a twofold struggle against dogmatic rationalism and empiricism. Thus, to follow Kant’s project, we should remember that, as he says, he was woken up from his slumber by Hume and Leibniz. His project is to overcome the pretentious claims of reason. As he says, “human reason has a peculiar fate in one kind of its cognitions: it is troubled by questions that it cannot dismiss, because they are posed to it by the nature of reason itself, but that it also cannot answer, because they surpass human reason’s every ability” (Kant 1996, A vii). Kant explains that a reliance on innate ideas as a basis of knowledge, without recourse to experience, or taking experience as

the only source of knowledge, will force reason to exceed its limit and end in antinomies. Leibniz and Locke make such errors.

For Leibniz, as for rationalists, all our ideas are innate, unchangeable, implanted in our minds by God. His example is a “block of marble”. The figure of Hercules is already in the marble and the sculptor sees the “veins in the stone.” He proceeds skilfully to “clear them by polishing, and by cutting away” the excess, thus liberating Hercules to the eyes of the future spectators. Similarly, our ideas are already in our mind. We are not always aware of them because of distractions or wants, but the ideas of “being, unity, substance, duration, change, activity, perception, pleasure” and others cannot come from experience; they are innate (Leibniz 1934, 141-91, pp. 146-7). By contrast, Locke and the other empiricists deny the validity of innate ideas. For the empiricists, there is no Hercules hidden in the granite. All our ideas come from experience. As Chaim Perelman writes, “Locke reverted to the old Aristotelian and Scholastic principle *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* – there is nothing in the mind which has not previously been in the senses” (Perelman 1965, p. 159). When we are born, our mind is like a white sheet of paper, or, as Locke puts it, a *tabula rasa*. Impressions from experience are imprinted upon it as ideas. Now, how can we acquire knowledge from those simple ideas? In reflection, the mind superimposes a variety of relations to link them together. Perelman notes that, unlike the rationalists, for whom the only relation existed between “a substance and its

attributes,” and not “the relation between correlated phenomena;” Locke was the earliest philosopher to recognise “the fundamental importance in knowledge of the idea of relation” (*Ibid.*, p. 162).

Since I claim that relations are important not only for human understanding but also for community interaction or, rather, that community is impossible without the existence of a relational spirit among its members, we need to understand how Locke explains this notion. Even a cursory look reveals that for Locke, relations indeed play an important role, especially given that this is one way in which the mind juxtaposes simple ideas to create new complex ideas and so on. As he says, “any *idea*, whether simple or complex, may be the occasion why the mind thus brings two things together and, as it were, takes a view of them at once.” So, from two ideas, such as mother and daughter, we can arrive at the idea of parenthood; or from the ideas of doctor and patient we understand sickness. One can see that those two ideas are comprehensible only in a relational manner. Does this, then, undermine my claim that Anglo-Saxon theory is based on atomism? A further claim by Locke makes my point clearer. He stresses that ideas are always singular, existing separately from each other. Relations are only superficial, and relative. Strictly speaking, there is no relation between the idea of doctor and the idea of patient. The mind — to be able to get a view of them simultaneously — introduces relations as a higher order. In themselves, ideas are discrete imprints in the mind and “any of our *ideas* may be the foundation of relation”

(Locke 1976, Book II, Chapter XXV, 1, italics in original). So, the two ideas of hot and cold produce the idea of temperature; the ideas of square and round result in the idea of shape. Using the example of Caius, Locke clarifies that the ideas father and son make the idea of Caius, in this case, the idea of parent. But the relation is inherent neither to the idea of father nor son, because if Caius's son dies, nothing will change in terms of our idea of Caius. Since the son ceases to exist, the link between the ideas of father and son is broken; therefore, Caius is no longer associated, or linked to the idea of son. We understand that he is not a parent anymore. As Locke writes "the *nature therefore of relation* consists in the referring or comparing two things one to another, from which comparison one or both comes to be denominated." In short, "two things" do not influence or alter each other, and, according to Locke, "if either of those things be removed or cease to be, the relation ceases, and the denomination consequent to it, though the other receive in itself no alteration at all" (*Ibid.*, italics in original). Ideas are singular and relations are, by Locke's own admission, relative. Since in Locke, ideas are combined through reflection, Leibniz pointed out that, despite Locke's insistence, those relations cannot be drawn from experience.

David Hume agrees that those relations are not in the world but only in our mind, and he extends this view one step further. He says that those relations are, in fact, nothing else but the illusion of our mind, based on our habits, superstitions, and tradition. The reason that we *think* that there is a relation between events in the world is "by means

of custom, which determines the imagination to make a transition from the idea of one object to that of its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to a more lively idea of the other” (Hume 1978, Book I, Part III, Sect. XIV). Hume’s solution was, of course, to deny that causation has any objective status by declaring that if we see certain events following one after the other, we *assume* that there is a relation, and hence causality.⁹ Hume rejects causality as something existing outside us. According to him, it is only our habitual way of thinking that makes us imagine that there are relations between different events.

The Humean solution has grave implications for the possibility of natural science. This problem became the impetus for Kant to reject both dogmatic metaphysics, represented by the name of Leibniz, which builds its system outside of the experiential world, and empiricism, which proclaims that all our knowledge comes from experience, and which yet, in the end, denies this worldly experience and explains it away as the work of our imagination. To put it differently, rationalists discard experience as unreliable, while building a tall tower of pure speculative reason, only leading to antinomies within reason’s domain,¹⁰ while empiricists try to derive “pure concepts of understanding” from experience alone. Yet, on the road from experience to ideas the latter abandon experience as well, leading, according to Kant, to fanaticism and scepticism.¹¹

So, how can we account for those relations that, according to Hume, are figments of

our imagination? The problem is important not only for our human understanding and the actuality of human community, but is also imperative for the possibility of physics, in other words, for the existence of the world.

The Copernican Shift

To avoid the Scylla of dogmatic rationalism and not be shipwrecked by the Charybdis of empiricism, Kant proposes altering the focus of metaphysics. Following the success of mathematics and natural science, he offers to perform an experiment modelling it on Copernicus's method that overturned the way celestial bodies were investigated. Copernicus's change of focus involved a shift from the geocentric universe where the world with a spectator was the centre, to the heliocentric universe where the world was just one of the planets rotating around the sun, with a spectator on one of those planets.¹² Likewise, Kant reverses the focus of metaphysics to assert *our* contribution to knowledge. For him, humans are "spectators and, at the same time, originators" (Kant 1995, 22:421). Instead of our cognition corresponding to objects in the world, as it was assumed until then,¹³ Kant acknowledges an "organon of pure reason," that is, our participation in shaping knowledge.¹⁴ As he says, "if our intuition had to conform to the character of its objects, then I do not see how we could know anything a priori about that character. But I can quite readily conceive of this possibility if the object (as object of the senses) conforms to the character of our power of intuition" (Kant 1996, B xvii). In other words, "transcendental philosophy is the consciousness

of the capacity of being the originator of the system of one's ideas, in theoretical as well as in practical respect" (Kant 1995, 21:93). An organon, or as Kant says in the *Opus Postumum*, an "instrument for transcendental philosophy" is "synthetic *a priori* knowledge" (Kant 1995, 21:92). The emphasis is on our human contribution to the formation of knowledge. For Kant, "transcendental philosophy is the doctrine of the complex of ideas, which contain the whole of synthetic *a priori* knowledge from concepts in a system both of theoretical-speculative and moral-practical reason, under a principle through which the thinking subject constitutes itself ... as person, and is itself the originator of this system of ideas" (Kant 1995, 21:91). Kant begins to investigate the possibility of human finite knowledge, i.e., epistemology and metaphysics in the *First Critique*. At the end of his life, in *Opus Postumum*, he ventures to account for the transfer from the metaphysical considerations of natural science to physics. In the process, Kant returns to his beginning by trying to explain forces in the world, in other words relations. In order to substantiate his explanation of *real* forces in the world, he rethinks and extends his understanding of the subject. Thus, the subject as the unity of apperception is extended and transformed to the self-positing subject living in the world with others.

According to Kant, if we start from the atomistic universe, the idea of relations, formal or real, and, by extension, the category of community, becomes a chimera. For Kant, in the first instance, "our judgment must surely be this: since through outer

sense,” that is space, “we are given nothing but mere relational presentations, outer sense can, by the same token, contain in its presentation only the relation of an object to the subject, but not the intrinsic character belonging to the object in itself. The same applies to inner intuition,” that is time (Kant 1996, B 67). The claim, as Locke has it, that knowledge is built by associating different ideas, means that our relation to the world is problematic. Ideas are not objects. For Kant, perceptions “without an object ... would be nothing but a blind play of presentations – i.e., they would be less than a dream” (Kant 1996, A 112). Associations between ideas cannot explain the coherence of our perceptions. In opposition to the empirical view (where ideas from experience are imprinted singularly on our mind, forming the basis from which we form our knowledge of the world by associating and comparing them in a certain way), for Kant, our understanding of the world is embedded in the relational nature of our intuition towards the thing in itself, the noumenon and *vice versa*: “Through receptivity an object is *given* to us; through spontaneity an object is thought *in relation* to that [given] presentation (which [otherwise]) is a mere determination of the mind)” (Kant 1996, A 50/B 74, square brackets in Pluhar’s translation, italics added).

Our experience is guaranteed by the relational nature of our human understanding, not the other way around, that is, our understanding is formed by experience. Kant says that “the complex of experience can only be founded *for* experience (for its sake) in knowledge – not *from* experience” (Kant 1995, 22:98-99, italics in original). Our

knowledge of the world is dependent not only on sensibility but also on our human concepts, on our human constitution: “Human cognition has two stems, viz., *sensibility* and *understanding*, which perhaps spring from a common root, though unknown to us. Through sensibility objects are *given* to us; through understanding they are *thought*” (Kant 1996, A 15/B 29, italics in original). Thus the ‘stuff’ coming from the world is ‘put through a mesh’ of categories ‘shaping’ it to structure our experience. As Kant summarises it, stressing our human contribution to the possibility of experience, “we do not derive the data of intuition from sensible representations (neither from impressions nor concepts); rather, it is we who first provide data out of which cognitions can be woven (into the cognitions possible from them): e.g. attraction, for the sake of determinations and laws of its relation in space and time. *He who would know the world must first manufacture it* – in his own self, indeed” (Kant 1995, 21:41, italics in original).

We can only experience the phenomenal world as it is structured by our understanding, since “sense-objects in experience ... contain the representation of objects as appearances (*phaenomena*) which does not present (*exhibit*) what objects are in themselves but how they affect sense” (Kant 1995, 22:318). To put it differently, we can only know appearances, never things in themselves. Yet noumena must have the property of relation, otherwise there would be no possibility for us to intuit them.¹⁵ There must be a relation between us and the world. Otherwise, as Kant

maintains, “an absurd proposition would follow, viz., that there is appearance without anything that appears” (Kant 1996, B xxv-xvi). If noumena were self-subsisting, there would be no possibility for us to intuit, and consequently, cognize them as phenomena. We cannot comprehend and subsequently experience “things each of which completely isolates itself through its subsistence” (Kant 1996, B 292-3). Self-subsisting, singular entities cannot influence each other by definition. So, if there are no relations between substances, there is no possibility of knowledge.

Furthermore, how could we make sense of different intuitions if our understanding was passive, based only on those percepts? As Kant remarks, “for who can enumerate all perceptions which can present themselves to his senses?” (Kant 1995, 22:95) Without acknowledging humans’ active contribution, “our soul” would be “filled with a crowd of appearances that yet could never turn into experience” (Kant 1996, A 111). Yet we can intuit something and understand the stream of percepts as something that is an object in the world. What is the mechanism that merges those different multiple intuitions into an experience of one single object? Surely, we do not see a tree at once. How is it that we know that all those fleeting impressions are impressions of one thing? Without the power to combine different intuitions according to the concepts of identity and relation – thus producing our experience of an appearance, say of a tree, as knowledge of one indivisible object out there in the phenomenal world – not only would the world disappear, but also our claim to knowledge. Kant writes that for us to

have experience, “appearances must in mere intuition be subject to the formal conditions of space and time, so must appearances in experience be subject to conditions of the necessary unity of apperception.” Essentially, as he claims, “this law says that through these conditions alone does any cognition first becomes possible” (Kant 1996, A 110). For Kant, “without sensibility no object would be given to us; and without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant 1996, A 51/B 75). Our experience of the phenomenal world is based on the property of the relation between noumena and sensibility, as well as the relational nature of intuitions and concepts. Hence, “the conditions of the thoroughgoing unity of self-consciousness” would be incomprehensible unless “everything must necessarily be subject to the universal functions of synthesis” (Kant 1996, A 110-2). As a result, the “synthesis through original apperception” would be impossible without relations (Kant 1996, A 94-5).

For Kant, relations are either logical, namely, “a priori, formal external relations” or, in a domain of appearances in space and time, they are “real relations” such as “action and reaction”. Accordingly, space is the form of our outer intuition, while time is the form of inner intuition that underlies all our understanding. Now, the question is: how can logical relations constitute “conditions for the possibility of real relations” and how can real relations, in turn, form “conditions for the possibility of community?” (Kant 1996, B 292-3) It is a question of how we can move from universal and

necessary claims about the world, expressed in analytic judgments, i.e., all bachelors are unmarried, where the truth of a proposition is affirmed without our need to verify it by experience – it is logical – to synthetic judgments, where our knowledge is dependent on experience. How can we move from the *formal* relations enumerated by Kant in his *First Critique* to *real* relations in the world? How is it that we live with others in community? Kant's claim is that our understanding and living in the world is relational.

There may well be other intelligent beings in the universe whose experience could be different. Yet Kant is concerned with our human condition. Instead of asking how experience corresponds to the world, thus ending in a perpetual regress of confirmation, he changes his focus and asks how human understanding *participates* in the understanding of the world. Hence, from passive perceptions of things in themselves which leave their marks on the mind as ideas, Kant turns around and acknowledges the active agency not only of human understanding, but also of moral-practical deliberation because, as he says, “in man there dwells an active principle” (Kant 1995, 22:55) that determines his knowledge of the world by three rules: “God, the world, and the concept of the subject which unites them and brings synthetic unity into these concepts” (Kant 1995, 21:23). For Kant, in his last unpublished work, the *Opus Postumum*, the first two – God and the world – are posited by the third, “the consciousness of my existence in the world in space and time” (Kant 1995, 21:24).

The Selbstsetzungslehre

We are familiar with the hyphenated description of human condition — being-in-the-world — from Martin Heidegger’s way of thinking. Yet a description of human existence in the world is already present in Kant’s *Opus Postumum*. For Kant, “the subject [is] rational world-being” or “the thinking world-being, man in the world” (Kant 1995, 21:27. See also 21:32). In his last unfinished work, Kant shifts his attention from theoretical, practical and reflective reasoning to explain human experience in the world.

Eckart Förster writes that, initially, Kant’s last work was driven by his realization that he left unexplained the possibility of physics.¹⁶ Accordingly, to account for physics, in other words the world, Kant revisited his previous claims to clarify the passage to physics from the metaphysical consideration of the world that was defined by humility. Rae Langton uses the notion of “humility” to refer to the idea that our finite understanding of the world is limited to phenomena only (Langton 1998, pp. 41-43). However, if, according to the critical Kantian system, we can only know phenomena, the enquiry of physics would be second-hand, research into the “appearance of an appearance,” so to speak.¹⁷ The existence of forces as such becomes a problem, since to examine them is to take them as really existing in the physical field of investigation. If there is no possibility of knowing things as they really are in themselves, how can we study forces? Yet if we accept that forces are not real, there

is no way to justify physics or the independent existence of the world. What has to be done?

Kant's preoccupation with forces dates to the beginning of his career. In 1747, he submits in a paper entitled "Thoughts on the Estimation of Living Forces," that if "body, in virtue of its own force, may have the tendency to move into all directions," and "if force is a perpetual effort to have an effect" on other bodies, then to say, as Leibniz does, that "active substances actually have an effect [only] on themselves" is contradictory.¹⁸ In short, if there are no relations between bodies, which can influence each other physically, how can we understand causality – that is change – in the world, and how is it possible for us to intuit things in themselves? In other words, the possibility to account for the world existing outside us is foreclosed.

In order to eliminate this aporia and to account for the possibility of the world, Kant begins his analysis again. Initially, he explains that, for physics, "the appearance of appearance, thought in the connection of the manifold, is the concept of the object itself" (Kant 1995, 22:325). Each perception is an appearance which is synthesised further into an object through the universal functions of synthesis according to concepts, such as identity, relations and community. In other words, we have an appearance of an appearance. Yet in the course of clearing up this dilemma, and accounting for real forces as real relations in the world, Kant changes his focus again. Förster notes that Kant realised that the transition from metaphysics to physics is

possible if “we focus our attention on the moving subject, rather than on the object that moves.” The reason is that “the subject is conscious of agitating its own moving forces,” thereby predicting “the counteracting moving forces of matter” (Förster 1995, p. xli). We should not forget that for Kant, matter is composed of forces, thus, the “aggregate of the moving forces of matter is itself only appearance” (Kant 1995, 22:317). Physics, then, is “knowledge of sense-objects in experience,” and it “contains the representation of objects as appearances (*phaenomena*) which does not present (*exhibit*) what objects are in themselves but how they affect sense” (Kant 1995, 22:318). Förster points out that “the moving forces of matter cannot be given to the subject by being passively received” (Förster 1989, p. 230). As already noted, there is reciprocity, mutual relation between affecting and being affected by forces, i.e., there must be something to affect our sensibility. For the subject to combine impressions through understanding is to synthesise them into unity (Kant 1995, 21:23). Thus Kant becomes aware not only that human beings are not passive recipients of ideas; but also that they can give rise to power from themselves. In the natural world they are the only ones who can act without impulse from outside. As he says: “Nature *causes* (*agit*). Man *does* (*facit*). The rational subject acting with consciousness of purposes *operates* (*operatur*)” (Kant 1995, 21:18, italics in original).

Hence, the consideration of physics, that is to say, the world, leads Kant to maintain that an “immaterial moving principle in an organic body is its soul, and, if one wishes

to think of the latter as a world-soul, one can assume of it that it builds its own body and even that body's dwelling-place [*Gehäuse*] (the world)" (Kant 1995, 22:97, square brackets in translation). Following on from this insight, Kant claims that man's "consciousness determining itself contains spontaneity" (Kant 1995, 22:57, italics in original). The *modus operandi* changes from *I think* to *I act*. As Kant writes, the "thinking subject also creates for itself a world, as object of possible experience in space and time. This object is one world. Moving forces are inserted in the latter (e.g. attraction and repulsion) without which there would be no perceptions; but only what is formal" (Kant 1995, 21:23) which would mean either God's point of view or a return to dogmatic rationalism. In order not to lapse into dogmatic rationalism, Kant asserts that man is a "personality" who "has rights, a body for whose possibility one must think of an organizing force, that is, a force which acts through internal purposes" (Kant 1995, 22:57).

In the *Opus Postumum*, Kant concentrates on the "capacity of the self-determining subject to constitute itself," or, "*to make oneself*" by reaffirming his moral-practical reasoning (Kant 1995, 21:93, italics in original). Man as a relational being is a "founder and originator of his own self, by the quality of personality: the '*I am*'" (Kant 1995, 21:14, italics in original). According to Kant, to know that *I am*, I must first posit myself according to *I think*, which is not yet knowledge, not even "rational inference." It is only a "logical act, without content" (Kant 1995, 22:95). In order to

understand myself as a person who exists, I must posit myself as a “sense-object in space and time and, at the same time, an object of the understanding to myself. [*I am a person*; consequently, a moral *being who has rights*” (Kant 1995, 21:13-14, italics and square brackets in translation). Transcendental philosophy is only a “principle of forms in a system of all relations. Of God, world, and the rational being in the world who comprehends them” (Kant 1995, 21:94). In other words, morality, nature and the subject, who “determines itself by technical-practical reason” and by “moral-practical reason” is the originator and the “object of both” (Kant 1995, 22:53).¹⁹ Kant comments that while technical-practical reason concerns “skill and arts,” moral-practical reason includes “duties.” In contrast, as Kant argues, God has only rights and no duties, thus no one can claim rights against God (Kant 1995, 21:9). Quite the reverse is true of humans. Human beings are “subject to the concept of duty” (Kant 1995, 21:94) since they are never singular. They always live in the world together and confer upon each other rights and duties because they are relational beings.²⁰ For Kant, then, the “*final end* of all knowledge is to know oneself in the highest practical reason” (Kant 1995, 21:156, italics in original). A person knows herself as a giver and maker of laws in line with the categorical imperative, that is, laws that apply to all in a community of equals. In Kant’s unfinished last work, a free autonomous person is a being with rights and duties living in the world in community with others.

Kant, in the *Opus Postumum*, moves beyond the understanding of the subject as the

unity of apperception; he asserts her moral acting in the world in relation to others as the primary consideration. It is this self acting, self-positing subject living in the world with others that is important for the consideration of community. As Heidegger reminds us, “Kant ... realizes ... that the real nature of the ‘I’ is not the *I think*, but the ‘*I act*,’ I give myself the law from the basis of my being, I am free” (Heidegger 1985, p. 92, italics in original). More to the point, if ‘I act’ is indicative of our living in the world, Arendt’s observation is important. For her, every action presupposes many; therefore its outcome is always unpredictable. We live in the world with others and everything we do influences somebody else, thus we need to learn how others think and take into account their standpoint in order to be able to achieve our common ends.²¹

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that there are two different ways to understand the concept of the individual. One conception is of an atomistic individual living in the world of her own choices without relations to others; on the other, the relational individual lives in community with others. Thus to return to Nancy, a continental thinker, the individual and community depend on each other. To understand an individual as a self-subsisting atom defined by her consumer choices alone is to misunderstand those relations that underwrite our human condition. To adopt the first conception is to forget that in our present world, relations have multiplied and spread

beyond our immediate community through globalisation. Whether we like it or not, an individual's acting in the world has repercussions globally. I have sketched Kant's thought about the concept of relations — from his earliest essay “Thoughts on the Estimation of Living Forces” to his last work *Opus Postumum* — as a shift from the critique of Leibniz's impossibility to think of relations amongst monads, through to a formal consideration of the possibility of knowledge, thence to Kant's final understanding of the subject as a self-positing agent living in the world with others. Unless we recognise that only a God can be — by its very nature — singular and exclusively defined by rights, we will not be able to address our essentially relational living in the world. We have rights and duties because we are not alone. We are persons with rights “against whom all other persons have rights” (Kant 1995, 22:56, italics in original). We are relational beings; our acting in the world has unintended consequences that influence others. According to Kant, we cannot *know* whether a God exists or not, but we know that we are finite human beings living in the world with others.

To conclude, “transcendental philosophy's highest standpoint [is] God, the world, and the thinking being in the world (man)” (Kant 1995, 21:32). For Kant, without the *thinking* being, there would be no possibility to think of God let alone to experience the world. Without the *acting* being in the world, the possibility of freedom, relations to others and community would be void. Without relations there would be no

possibility of community. Lastly, without community, the idea of rights that are by definition tied to the idea of duties would lose its meaning in every sense of the word, not only as a theoretical construct, but also as a practical guarantee of certain freedoms for humans. It is at this point that we need to return and affirm the Kantian doctrine of rights and duties to reclaim real relations in the social context as universal and encompassing all human beings equally, not only some who are privileged by instrumental contemporary claims of opportunistic governments in the name of the latest positive legislation.

References

Arendt, Hannah. (1958) 1998. *The Human Condition*. Second ed. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Barker, Ernest. 1957. "Introduction." In *Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500-1800*, ix-xci. Boston: Beacon Hill, Boston.

Bloom, Allan. 1987. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Cranston, Maurice. 1953. *Freedom: A New Analysis*. London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd.

Day, J. P. 1983. "Individual Liberty." In *Of Liberty*, edited by A. Phillips Griffiths, 17-29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ekeh, Peter P. 1974. *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Förster, Eckart. 1989. "Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre*." In *Kant's Transcendental Deductions. The Three 'Critiques' and the Opus Postumum*, 217-38. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Förster, Eckart. 1995. "Introduction." In *Opus Postumum*, xv-lv. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Förster, Eckart. 2000. *Kant's Final Synthesis: An Essay on the Opus Postumum*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended*. Translated by David Macey. Edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, *Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador.

Gierke, Otto von. 1939. *The Development of Political Theory*. Trans. Bernard Freyd. London: George & Unwin, Ltd.

Gillespie, Michael Allen. 1984. *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Grotius, Hugo. (1608) 1916. *The Freedom of the Seas or the Right Which Belongs to the Dutch to Take Part in the East Indian Trade*. Translated by Ralph Van Deman Magoffin. Edited by James Brown Scott. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grotius, Hugo. (1625) 1901. *The Rights of War and Peace: Including the Law of Nature and of Nations*. Translated by A. C. Campbell. Washington & London: M. Walter Dunne, Publisher.

Heidegger, Martin. 1985. *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Hobbes, Thomas. (1651) 1968. *Leviathan*. Edited by C. B. Macpherson. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Hume, David. (1888) 1978. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Second ed. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Kant, Immanuel. (1747) 1998. "Appendix: Living Forces." In *Kant's Earliest Solution to the Mind/Body Problem*, 241-309. Andrew N. Carpenter. PhD Dissertation. Berkeley: University of California.

Kant, Immanuel. (1781) 1996. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Unified (with all variants from the 1781 and 1787) ed. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc.

Kant, Immanuel. (1797) 1999. *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*. Translated by John Ladd. Second ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Kant, Immanuel. 1991. "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'" In *Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss, 54-60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, Immanuel. 1995. *Opus Postumum*. Translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Edited by Eckart Förster, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koyré, Alexandre. 1992. *Astronomical Revolution: Copernicus-Kepler-Borelli*. Translated by R. E. W. Maddison. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Langton, Rae. 1998. *Kantian Humility. Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. (1765) 1934. "New Essays on the Human Understanding." In *Philosophical Writings*, 141-91. London and New York: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. and E. P. Dutton & Co Inc.

Lilla, Mark. 1994a. "Introduction. The Legitimacy of the Liberal Age." In *New French Thought: Political Philosophy*. Ed. Mark Lilla, 3-34. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Lilla, Mark. 1994b. "The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and its Discontents." In *Daedalus*. Vol. 123. No. 2.

Locke, John. (1690) 1976. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by John W. Yolton. Abridged ed. London and New York: Dent and Dutton.

Long, D. G. 1977. *Bentham on Liberty*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1996. *The Inoperative Community*. Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney. Edited by Peter Connor. Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press.

Nisbet, Robert A. 1993. *The Sociological Tradition*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Perelman, Chaim. 1965. *An Historical Introduction to Philosophical Thinking*. Translated by Kenneth A. Brown, *Studies in Philosophy*. New York: Random House.

Shell, Susan Meld. 1996. *The Embodiment of Reason. Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Skinner, Quentin. 1998. *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Streeten, Paul. 1953. "Appendix. Recent Controversies." *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory*, 208-217. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1953.

Taminiaux, Jacques. 1985. *Dialectic and Difference: Finitude in Modern Thought*. Translated by James Decker et al. Edited by James Decker and Robert Crease, *Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press Inc.

Troeltsch, Ernst. 1957. "A Lecture on The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity. An Address Delivered on the Second Anniversary of the German *Hochschule für Politik*, October 1922." Trans. Ernest Barker. In *Natural Law and the Theory of Society. 1500 to 1800*, 201-222. Beacon Hill, Boston: Beacon Press.

Tuschling, Burkhard. 1989. "Apperception and Ether: On the Idea of a Transcendental Deduction of Matter in Kant's *Opus Postumum*." In *Kant's Transcendental Deductions. The Three 'Critiques' and the Opus Postumum*, edited by Eckart Förster, 193-216. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Učník, Lubica. 2003. *European Discourses on Rights. The Quest for Statehood in Europe: The Case of Slovakia. Multiple Europes*. No. 21. Bern, Frankfurt/M., New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Učník, Lubica. 2003/2004. "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus." *Arena Journal*. No. 21, 127-150.

Vuillemin, Jules. 1989. "Kant's "Dynamics": Comments on Tuschling and Förster." In *Kant's Transcendental Deductions. The Three 'Critiques' and the Opus Postumum*, edited by Eckart Förster, 239-47. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

NOTES

¹ This is not Kant's *expressis verbis* but my extrapolation.

² For Kant, community is a subset of the category of relation (Kant 1996, A 80/B 106). He defines community, for example, as "interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) between agent and patient" or as "the causality of a substance reciprocally determining [and being determined by] another substance" (Kant

1996, B 111, square brackets in Pluhar's translation). The category of community is further defined by the "predicables of presence and resistance" (Kant 1996, A 82, B 108).

³ For an account of Kant's underlying theme of community from the early pre-critical writings to his latest, see Shell 1996.

⁴ See Nancy 1996.

⁵ See Učník 2003. See also Učník 2003/2004. For an argument suggesting differences between these two traditions, see also Bloom 1987; Barker 1957; Cranston 1953; Ekeh 1974; Gierke 1939; Lilla 1994a, 1994b; Nisbet 1993; Streeten 1953; Troeltsch 1957.

⁶ Translators render Grotius's expression "*populosque*" and "*gentium*" as nation. See, for example, Grotius 1916. Given the meaning of the word nation today, I use the term people instead.

⁷ Jeremy Bentham first proposed the term negative liberty in an effort to articulate the concept of the individual who is able to act freely in the absence of external constraints. See Day 1983, p. 18; Long 1977, p. 54; Skinner 1998, pp. 82-3.

⁸ "The monads ... are in fact efficacious merely within themselves. ... because of this, Leibniz' principle of the possible *community of substances* among one another also had to be a [*preestablished harmony*], and could not be a physical influence. For since everything is engaged only inwardly, i.e., with its presentations, one substance's state of presentations could not stand in any efficacious linkage whatsoever with that of another substance" (Kant 1996, A 274-5/B330-1, italics and square brackets in Pluhar's translation).

⁹ According to him, "the necessary connexion betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustom'd union" (*Ibid.*, Book I, Part III, Sect. XIV).

¹⁰ Late in his life, Kant explains to Garve, "Not the investigation of the existence of God, of immortality, etc. but the antinomy of pure reason was the point from which I began: 'The world has a beginning: it has no beginning, etc., ... There is freedom in human being, against: there is no freedom and everything is natural necessity;' it was this that first woke me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself to dissolve the scandal of the contradiction of reason with itself" (in Gillespie 1984, pp. 30-1).

¹¹ "Of these two illustrious men, Locke left the door wide open for *fanaticism*; for once reason has gained possession of such rights, it can no longer be kept within limits by indefinite exhortations to moderation. Hume, believing that he had uncovered so universal a delusion – regarded as reason – of our cognitive power, surrendered entirely to *scepticism*" (Kant 1996, B128, italics in original).

¹² See, for example, Koyré 1992.

¹³ See Kant 1996, B xv-xvii.

¹⁴ “*An Organon* of pure reason would be the sum of those principles by which all pure a priori cognitions can be acquired and actually brought about” (Kant 1996, A 11-2/B 24-5, italics in original).

¹⁵ See Langton (1998) for an explanation.

¹⁶ See Förster 1989, 1995, 2000. For a different reading of Kant’s *Opus Postumum*, see Tuschling 1989 and Vuillemin 1989.

¹⁷ For a further explanation, see Förster 1995, pp. xli ff.

¹⁸ Kant 1998, Section 12, pp. 288-89, square brackets in Carpenter’s translation.

¹⁹ See also 22:55-56; 21:12; 21:94.

²⁰ “Man is not an animal with internal purposes or *senses*, etc. (e.g. organs, *understanding*) but a *person* who has *rights*, and against whom all other persons have rights” (Kant 1995, 22:56, italics in original).

²¹ See Arendt 1998. See also Kant 1991, 1999.

Copyright © 2006 Minerva

All rights are reserved, but fair and good faith use with full attribution may be made of this work for educational or scholarly purposes.

Lubica Učník teaches Philosophy at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.

Email: L.Ucnik@murdoch.edu.au