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**Cosmos, Cosmopolitanism and  
Cosmopolitics throughout History**

**Edited by**

**Soraya Nour Sckell  
and Damien Ehrhardt**



**Duncker & Humblot · Berlin**

SORAYA NOUR SCKELL / DAMIEN EHRHARDT (Eds.)

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## Table of Contents

<i>Soraya Nour Sckell and Damien Ehrhardt</i>	
Introduction .....	7

### Part I Since ancient times

<i>Carlos João Correia</i>	
Cosmogony .....	17
<i>Nguyen Quy Dao</i>	
A Far-Eastern reading of the sky .....	25

### Part II Through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

<i>Susana Antas Videira</i>	
Republicanism, representation and equality in the works of Thomas Paine . . . .	39
<i>Alexei N. Krouglov</i>	
Struggle against the “Best of all Possible Worlds” Doctrine within mid-18 <sup>th</sup> Century German Cosmology .....	49
<i>Gualtiero Lorini</i>	
<i>Völkerrecht</i> as <i>Staatenrecht</i> . Unpacking Kant’s definition of cosmopolitan right	69

### Part III Through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

<i>Oliver Schlaudt</i>	
Alexander von Humboldt – ein moderner Anthropologe? Eine foucauldianische Lektüre des <i>Kosmos</i> .....	83
<i>Dirk Michael Hennrich</i>	
Landschaft oder Kosmos. Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie der Landschaft im Aus- gang von Alexander von Humboldt .....	99
<i>Damien Ehrhardt</i>	
Musique et cosmos : l’émergence de la forme dans l’œuvre au XIX <sup>e</sup> siècle . . . .	109

**Part IV**  
**Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

<i>Juvenal Savian Filho</i>	
The world as experience .....	125
<i>Soraya Nour Skell und Thorsten Fath</i>	
Dialektischer Kosmopolitismus: jenseits der Polarisierungen dreier paradigma- tischer Ansätze bei Horkheimer, Habermas und Hardt/Negri .....	129
<i>Frauke A. Kurbacher</i>	
Cosmopolitan critique – On being a world citizen alongside Kant, Arendt and Derrida .....	157

**Part V**  
**Contemporary approaches**

<i>Paulo de Brito</i>	
Reflections on MacCormick’s “civic conception of nation”, the idea of a “world state” and Pogge’s cosmopolitan approach .....	169
<i>João Pinheiro</i>	
A naturalist agenda for cosmopolitan research: The cosmopolitan conjecture ..	177
<i>Gérard Raulet</i>	
Le cosmopolitisme est-il une réalité ? Antinomies et stratégies discursives ....	223
Biographies .....	247
Personal Index .....	253

## Introduction

*Soraya Nour Sckell and Damien Ehrhardt*

The relationship between the human being and the cosmos, from ancient times to the present, has developed in divergent mythical, poetic, religious, philosophical, scientific, political-judicial and ecological ways. From the term cosmos, several others such as cosmology, cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan citizenship, cosmopolitan law, and cosmic consciousness are derived.

Cosmopolitanism relates to the ethical ideal of belonging as a citizen of the world to a universal community, beyond any links to particular communities. Cosmopolitics corresponds to a dual concern with affording local politics a cosmopolitan dimension and to ensuring that global politics has a democratic dimension. Cosmopolitan law, on the other hand, regards the individual as a subject of law regardless of their state affiliation, as can be seen in cases of individual responsibility for international crimes and the human right to an individual right. The cosmos is subjected to a scientific view as well as the poetic gaze towards the mysteries of the night (Chateaubriand, Novalis, Poe, Rilke), the comets (Whitman, Hugo), the king-sun (Valéry, Artaud, Tardieu, Prévert), the moon (Orpheus, Plutarch, La Fontaine, Yeats), and infinity (Lucretius Schiller, Byron, Lamartine).

This book intends to discuss the various perspectives on the cosmos, cosmopolitanism (as world citizenship) and other derivative concepts. It begins with a study of mythological cosmogonic models. In Chapter 1, Carlos João Correia analyses the main cosmogonic models within a cultural matrix that came to shape different mythic narratives. He produces a comparative study of mythology about the origin of the world, pinpointing the philosophical principles guiding that knowledge. Usually, studies on cosmogony within anthropology and comparative mythology are not categorical, meaning they are not aimed towards a universal model. When they are, he argues, they fail because they are too close to the visual representations they intend to explain. The most interesting model proposed so far was Charles Long's one, in his work of 1963, *Alpha: The myths of creation*. In sum, Long argues that mythical narratives about the creation of the world can be divided into five major categories: (1) myths about the creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), (2) creation from chaos or a cosmic egg, (3) creation from two parental principles, (4) creation as an emerging phenomenon and (5) myths in which creation derives from a being, usually human, diving into an abyssal reality. Correia proposes a different typology focused on the following concepts: (1) creation from nothing; and (2) creation from a primor-



dial matter (*creatio ex materia*), in which we include the notion of creation by God (*creation ex Deo*).

This chapter is followed by an investigation into readings of the sky in Far-East-Asia. In Chapter 2, Nguyen Quy Dao explores how the observation of the sky is a consistent preoccupation of people in Far-East Asia. Periodic changes according to the hours of the day or the seasons of the year are interpreted and related to human life. Unusual phenomena appearing in the sky are a sign of bad or happy news concerning important people on Earth, or pertain to some major events soon to come. Everything is already written in the sky for those who know how to interpret it. The sky is also the source of inspiration for poetry, music and for legends. Nguyen analyses the tradition of the observation of the cosmos in Far-Eastern Asia, as well as some well-known legends, songs, and poetry inspired by the night sky.

The book's analysis then turns to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and begin of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Chapter 3, Susana Antas Videira scrutinises the cosmopolitan concepts of republicanism, representation and equality as they appear in the works of Thomas Paine. Modern legal naturalism tends to progressively expand individual freedom and human rights. In classical liberalism, the natural condition was considered an example of perfection and a model to follow, with society constituting a corruption of the original human excellence. However, in the transition from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only society and the State were deemed capable of limiting the wishes of individuals, and conceiving, amidst precarious circumstances, obligatory rights. Doctrinally, attempts to substitute natural rights in favour of social rights emerged. Although liberalism remained centrally individualistic, for Paine and his English fellow contemporaries, it began to indicate means of improving the opportunities of those less favoured by their social condition. In this context, Paine's work reflects the changing meaning of the term "revolution", which became salient between 1775 and 1815. The doctrines of the French Revolution find support in his writings, which, in essence, appeal to a cosmopolitan model of society that preserves above all political freedom and material equality between men elevated to citizen status.

In Chapter 4, Alexei N. Krouglov scrutinises the struggle against the doctrine of the "best of all possible worlds" within German cosmology with regard to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the debate about the best world came to a head within cosmology as a metaphysical discipline. On the one hand, the award of the Berlin Academy of Science in 1755 contributed to this debate; on the other hand, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 transformed the problem entirely. But beyond Voltaire's polemics against Leibniz and the natural disaster in Lisbon, a heated discussion about the "best world" took place at the end of the 1750s, conducted between Crusius and Crusians and followers of the teachings of Leibniz and Wolff. Surprisingly, at the centre of Kant's polemics against Crusians (Reinhard and Weymann) were problems of God's freedom (*libertas contradictionis* and *libertas contrarietatis*) and corresponding problems of human freedom. As such, the main argument concerned not whether the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 was "an examination of the axiom: all is well", but

rather deliberated whether the doctrine of the “best world” in itself dissolves the freedoms of God and man.

Moving on to the end of the 18th century, Gualtiero Lorini inquiries into the pre-suppositions of Kant’s systematic definition of cosmopolitan rights in Chapter 5. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explicitly states that the concept of *Völkerrecht* should instead be called *Staatenrecht*. In light of this claim, Lorini aims to investigate the role played by the concept of *Völkerrecht* in Kant’s *Public Right*. The leading hypothesis is that a proper understanding of the meaning and value of a right regulating the relationships between the States allows for a richer assessment of the cosmopolitan right, which is the further and final step of Kant’s *Public Right*. He firstly provides an overview of the origin of the term *Völkerrecht* and illustrates its potential misunderstandings from a Kantian point of view. He then exposes and analyses the reasons why the acknowledgment of the States as juridical subjects represents a crucial assumption, which thus allows him to appraise the peculiar characteristics of Kant’s cosmopolitan right.

This contribution is followed by an analysis of the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Chapter 6, Oliver Schlaudt asks if Alexander von Humboldt can be considered a modern anthropologist – a question that he answers with a Foucauldian reading of the *Cosmos*. Looking at what Alexander von Humboldt had to say about anthropological questions, it is striking to see that he reflected much more on man as an observer of nature than on man as a part of nature. Does this mean that Humboldt’s anthropology can be classified as “modern” in the Foucauldian sense, i. e. based on a notion of man as a “doublet empirico-transcendental”? The question is difficult to answer, and Schlaudt provides in his paper evidence both for and against its claim. It seems that, on a programmatic level, Alexander von Humboldt thought of anthropology as a reflective project, but believed this project to have been achieved in his brother Wilhelm’s work.

The view of the whole, from the point of view of the natural and often the human sciences, which Humboldt aspired to in his life’s work, *Cosmos*, as the highest knowledge to be achieved, is still deeply present in the natural sciences. However, our contemporary social and economic system considers the unification of the whole in a way that polemically eliminates anything that is unique. Although by Humboldt and by many of his contemporaries the scientific view is accompanied by a landscape-aesthetic view, the first always remains a superordinate theory. In Chapter 7, Hennrich argues that the landscape is not to be experienced only aesthetically, but “aesthetically”, with all the senses. Each landscape must always be understood as an individual form of life. A direct bodily experience of landscape, a recovery of the versatility of the senses in the age of the monopolisation of the senses by the eye, would be a necessary cornerstone of education. This would make possible a meaningful concern for natural phenomena and spread an appreciation of landscapes as comprehensive forms of life and as guarantors of global biodiversity.