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On The Possibility of a Global Political Community: The Enigma of 'Small Local Differences' within Humanity¹

Heikki Patomäki

Introduction

Is anything like a global political community – and thereby ideals such as global democracy and justice – achievable? This is a key question not only for political theory but also for contemporary political practices. For instance, a call for global solidarity in the face of rapid global warming (UNDP 2007), which seems ever more urgent in 2017, assumes a shared planetary identity across the currently prevailing differences and divisions. It seems that there can be no solidarity without a common identity at some level of human being. Environmentalists maintain that all humans share an important thing in common, namely planet Earth and its sphere of life, to which we essentially belong.

In contrast, many political realists believe that humans are essentially tribal beings, or at least will remain so in the foreseeable future. This belief may be grounded on anything from speculative philosophical accounts of the human nature to sociobiological theories

¹ This paper has been in progress for a decade. I first wrote it in 2007 and presented it in a few conferences, workshops and the like, including the Calcutta Research Group Winter School in December 2007. That presentation led eventually to a limited-circulation publication “Is a Global Identity Possible? The Relevance of Big History to Self-Other Relations”, *Refugee Watch*, (13):36, 2010, pp.53-77. A couple of years later I used the last two sections of this paper in a revised form in “The Problems of Legitimation and Potential Conflicts in a World Political Community”, *Cooperation & Conflict*, (47):2, 2012, pp.239-59. This is a thoroughly rewritten and up-dated version of the paper, best seen as the first fully finalized edition of it, first published in *Protosociology. An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (33), ‘Borders of Global Theory – Reflections from Within and Without’, ed. by B.Axford, 2017, pp.93-127.

about selfish genes or memes. For tribal beings a shared political identity is possible only if it implies different outsiders, understood largely in negative evaluative terms, perhaps antagonistically as enemies. From this point of view, a global identity is possible only to the extent that there are outsiders to the humankind as a whole. Hence, in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan discussed with Mikhail Gorbachev the possibility of encountering extra-terrestrials as a plausible source for a shared global identity. As Reagan (1985) explained, “We’d forget all the little local differences that we have between our countries, and we would find out once and for all that we really are all human beings here on this Earth together”. These discussions and re-visions were part of the process that led to the end of the Cold War.

However, no extra-terrestrials have showed up and the condition of particularistic and often parochial identities persists in the 21st century. Skeptics may even claim that a cosmopolitan ethico-political identity is impossible in principle; humanity is destined to stay partitioned. For instance, according to many versions of the Nietzsche and Heidegger inspired hermeneutics of suspicion, hierarchies and violence stem from deep structures of meaning that imply the definition of others as lower beings and/or enemies. Several post-structuralists and related theorists believe that there is no position outside deep structures of meaning in this sense (for a critique of Carl Schmitt inspired post-structuralism, see Abizadeh 2005). Hierarchies and violence at least in some sense are therefore almost inevitable; and a truly cosmopolitan identity is virtually impossible. Although it can assume a wide variety of forms and although not all of those forms are equally parochial, the problematic of inside/outside of a political community and thus boundaries will remain with us for a long time to come, if it can ever be overcome. (Walker 1993; 2015).

My aim is not to review and scrutinize every single skeptical argument against the possibility of a global ethico-political identity. The point is merely to tackle the most plausible candidates for anchoring the skepticism in some relatively unchanging realities: either in the nature or genetic constitution of the human species; or in the nature of language making meaningful politics possible. Moreover, I argue that in addition to conceptual and philosophical weaknesses, arguments for the necessity of particular political identities appear increasingly narrow also in view of recent advancements in the sciences and global history. A unified theory of temporal emergence and increasing complexity through different layers of the universe locates human geo-history as an important but small and vulnerable part of a much wider whole. Thus Big History is relevant to our understandings of self-other relations, not least by relativizing and reframing them.

Although I argue that humans are not inevitably tribal, and that ultimately there is no language-based logic of identity that would exclude the possibility of a global political community, I concur with the post-structuralist skeptics that negativity and thus some “othering” is inevitable. Thus it is essential to go beyond demonstrating negatively the possibility of a global identity. We should ask “possible yes, but exactly how?” If some othering is inevitable, what are the possible structures of a global identity-construction? I examine three options. Firstly, as indicated by President Reagan, otherness can be placed outside the human species and planet Earth. From a non-antagonistic perspective, the cosmic context of our evolving beingness can provide an important source for a global identity, but it is not in itself a sufficient solution to the problem of identity.

Secondly, otherness can be located either in our own past or, alternatively, in our contemporary being, when seen from a point of view of a possible future position in world history. As any process of identity-construction is temporal, this constitutes a fruitful perspective, but does not address all the key problems or tackle the onto-logical underpinnings of the standard identity-theories. There is thus, thirdly, a need to rethink the basic onto-logic of identity from a perspective that is compatible with Big History, seeing our cultural evolution as continuation from cosmic and biological evolution. Utilizing the concept of a horizon of moral identification, and developing further Tzvetan Todorov's axis of self-other relations, I conclude by outlining a cosmic, temporal, relational, and ethico-political conception of global identity based on both positive and negative elements.

Voices of skepticism 1: political realism

Since its emergence after the failed liberal revolutions of 1848, political realism (*realpolitik*) has been a conservative reaction to the liberal cosmopolitanism of Enlightenment philosophies, most notably to Immanuel Kant.² Its relationship to the Enlightenment tradition has been ambiguous (compare Morgenthau, 1947, and Niebuhr, 1944, to the global-reformist reading of classical political realism by Scheuerman, 2011).

² Kant (1983) constituted the international problematic by arguing, in "Perpetual Peace" and other essays, that all human development and progress, indeed human survival, is dependent upon cosmopolitan solutions to the problem of peace and war. By applying Hobbes's notion of state of nature to the sphere of relations between nations and states, he proposed an international social contract: the problem of war could be overcome by an arrangement of rule of law, republicanism, free trade and "league of nations". After 1848, the German reactions to Kant's "idealism" (starting already from Hegel's Kant-critique) were labelled as *realpolitik*. The *realpolitik* reactions were subsequently re-innovated in Britain and the US, in part as an import from Germany. Smith (1986, 15) argues that "to understand the characteristic approach of contemporary realists the best place to begin is with Max Weber". Weber, of course, synthesised a lot of German late 18th and 19th century thinking, combining elements of liberalism and *realpolitik*, of positivism and hermeneutics. Weber adhered to a Hobbesian (or Hegelian-Nietzschean) picture of international politics while being committed to the ideology of nationalism (the good of a particular nation is the highest or only possible collective value in the modern world). For a genealogy of the international problematic, see Patomäki 2002a, ch 1.

These ambiguities notwithstanding, the most characteristic move of political realism has been to challenge the cosmopolitan belief in the possibility of hasty progress towards a viable league of nations associated with true collective security, or to a world community or world state proper, however imperative that may be seen in the long run. This is particularly true of neorealists such as Robert Gilpin (1984, 290), who tend to universalize and eternalize the idea that the human species must remain divided into separate groups:

Homo sapiens is a tribal species, and loyalty to the tribe for most of us ranks above all loyalties other than that of the family. In the modern world, we have given the name “nationstate” to these competing tribes and the name “nationalism” to this form of loyalty.³

Oftentimes the belief in the tribalist propensity has been based on mere arm-chair philosophy about unfalsifiable “laws” and “natures”. The scientifically oriented neorealists can – and sometimes also do – turn to experimental social psychology and, more strongly, to sociobiology in search for hard science evidence for their views. Sociobiology contends that genes play a central role in human behavior. Human behavior is seen as an effort to preserve one’s genes in the population. At the fundamental level, in spite of apparent differences, human beings are no different from ants or bees, whose complex division of labour and social behavior is largely determined by genes.

³ Gilpin downplays the vast differences between tribes (and especially small bands of hunter-gatherers) and modern nation-states in order to stress the idea of perennial laws and conditions of politics (for a systematic critique of claims about neorealism’s “perennial laws”, see Vasquez 1996). Nation-states are bigger and more abstract, impersonal, complex and bureaucratic forms of collectivity than bands or tribes. Arguably, as political communities nation-states are closer to a world state than to bands or tribes. For the complexities and socio-historical conditions of nationalist social imaginaries, see Patomäki & Steger 2010, 1056-9.

The most famous socio-biologist is probably E.O.Wilson (the classic articulation being Wilson 1975). His usual strategy for arriving at socio-biological “laws” is to start with the model of social organization developed in connection with his study of insect societies and to generalize that model into a law of social organization displayed by all social species. Such analogies and generalizations are likely to be unreliable even in cases where they are based on apparently similar features in an insect and human society. The main problem is that genetic explanations ignore the fact that human societies change and vary much more than would be possible if the relevant information was merely genetic. The relevant pools of genes and biological species change very slowly, taking a large number of generations to take systematic effect. Secondly, they ignore the possibility that similar consequences may be the result of very different causes, including meaningful cultural practices and historically varying social structures. (See Harré 1979, 11-15; Horan 1986) Recent research indicates that human genetic change has accelerated with population growth and cultural change. Thus it is not only that cultural evolution has its own emergent dynamics, but also that this dynamics has effects on the human genetic constitution too. (Hawks et.al. 2007)

If the only way to rescue the necessity of particular group loyalties and identities was this kind of biological reductionism – i.e. the assumption that ants and humans are no different in their capacity to communicate and learn – then Gilpin’s political realism would rest on weak grounds. Richard Dawkins’ (1976) conception of self-replicating “memes” does not fare much better, as the ontological status of “memes” is indeterminate (physical or cultural) and their scientific status evasive (can they be observed?, can claims about them be falsified?). However, although Gilpin and other neorealists may occasionally allude to

the notion that the tribalist propensity is inscribed in the invariant (possibly genetic or memetic) essence of homo sapiens as a species being, many political realists confine tribalism merely to a widespread disposition of preferring allegiance to particular groups and of defining one's identity in particularistic terms, whatever its fundamental causes.

The point of many classical political realists such as E.H.Carr, Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr has been to redefine the project of cosmopolitanism in a more cautionary and, at times, skeptical way. They have not been opposed to cosmopolitanism, although they can be harshly critical of many of its actual materializations. For Carr, for example, a cosmopolitan world community based on the recognition of equality and rule of law would be a typical global utopia. "Political science must be based on a recognition of the interdependence of theory and practice, which can be attained only through a combination of utopia and reality" (Carr 1964, 13). Thus Carr developed the idea of open-ended peaceful changes to replace various utopian proposals for liberal harmonious order, which he also argued to be ideological and a key cause of conflicts and wars.

In Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, the "children of light" are democrats and cosmopolitans. It is evident that Niebuhr does not accept the ideas of the children of darkness; ultimately he sides with the children of light. However, he also criticizes a number of concrete manifestations of the then prevailing utopian idealism and their unfoundedly optimistic conceptions of human nature. Thus Niebuhr's (1944: 168) key argument – in the context of world politics – was that "...the transition from a particular to a universal community is a more difficult step than is usually assumed." Some hope and appreciation of change can well be justified:

Pure idealists underestimate the perennial power of particular and parochial loyalties, operating as a counter force against the achievement of a wider community. But the realists are usually so impressed by the power of these perennial forces that they fail to recognize the novel and unique elements in a revolutionary world situation. (Ibid., 176)

In a similar fashion, Morgenthau was a critic of parochialism. He maintained that the human moral imagination tends to be limited and thus humans find it difficult to see things from others' different perspective. Group solidarity is formed by setting against the outsiders. Self-criticism is difficult and often censored. Groups are expecting conformity. Sanctions and other mechanisms discipline those who dare to challenge its understandings. By exposing these and related mechanisms, such as the effects of modern rootless uncertainty and how that uncertainty tends to fluctuate with business cycles and economic crises, Morgenthau (1961, 111) tries to open a perspective for wise moral and state leaders to see beyond the limited imagination of masses and nations. What Morgenthau (1961, 11) especially stresses is that political realism refuses to confuse the particular aspirations and actions of one's own nation with the moral purposes of the universe. Against these kinds of ideological temptations, diplomacy should be free of all crusading spirit and always look at the political scene from the perspective of other nations (see 1961, ch 29).

Morgenthau joins Carr and Niebuhr in articulating a passionate critique of false universalisms. At the same time, Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* is a normative argument for a world state and a guidebook for diplomacy during the long period of

transition. The case for political realism rests on the expectation that it will take a long time to establish a cosmopolitan world community and that this process is beset with difficulties and dangers. This condition stems not only from the effects of human limitations and existing historical realities but also from the contemporary tendency to rely on one-sided and false utopias that generate further conflicts and violence. Moreover, as long as the world community does not exist, everyone will have to continue coping with the contemporary realities, involving particularistic power politics, the best they can. Skeptical political realists in this sense can push the cosmopolitan identity to a far away future. This is particularly true if no clear mechanism can be established via which the currently powerful social-psychological forces could be rapidly overcome. As Morgenthau (1961, 539) concluded – originally in 1948 – a major transformation and “the world state is unattainable [...] in the world in our time.” He could easily make the same claim in 2017.

Morgenthau argued that as long as the world state is not actual reality, the classical practices of diplomacy, balance-of-power and so on are the chief tools available for preserving at least some order and, to an extent also peace.⁴ To the extent that the reasons for skepticism are only temporal, however, we should ask whether – and to what extent – circumstances either have already become or will become different in the 21st century?

Voices of skepticism 2: post-structuralism

⁴ Of course there is the counter-final possibility that political-realist practices such as power-balancing prove to be an obstacle to the development of a cosmopolitan community. Power-balancing may well contribute to reinforcing parochial realities by depicting others as threats and through processes of securitization.

There is another possible explanation for the exclusive nature of political identities. A meaningful identity can only be defined in and through language. From Ferdinand Saussure (1986/1916) comes the idea that linguistic signs are arbitrary and that within systems of language, there are only differences, that is, elements defined negatively in terms of what they are not. “A language is a system in which all elements fit together, and in which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all others” (ibid., 113). “The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside of it”, that is, by other elements of a system (ibid., 114). Content and “value” are essentially connected, and values always involve:

- (1) something different which can be exchanged for the item whose meaning and value is under consideration, and
- (2) similar things which can be compared with the item whose value is under consideration.

By drawing on Nietzsche, Kirkegaard and Heidegger and their “hermeneutics of suspicion” (see Dreyfus 1991), Jacques Derrida (1997, 30-73) radicalized Saussure’s linguistics into an immanent criticism of a long philosophical tradition as a whole. Derrida treats the principle of difference “as constitutive not only of modes of signification but of existence in general” (Giddens 1987a, 82). Our self-conscious existence and thus our identities are possible only because of language and, especially, writing.

Derrida (1988, 1-21, 63-77; cf. Searle 1977) does not deny that language is used for everyday communication or that words or sentences can have non-discursive referents, but he claims that (i) many and especially the iterative and metaphorical aspects of language can, and in effect are, abstracted away from subjects, intentions, contexts and referents; (ii) these aspects of the language form a system which makes subjects, intentions, contexts and, in some ambivalent ways, even referents possible; and (iii) intentionality, consciousness, and self-aware identity are largely – although never only – *effects* of a system of inscribed codes and negative differences. Language is thus much more than just a medium of expressing already existing ideas and thoughts that have their corresponding parts in the real world. Ideas and thoughts – as well as the speaking or writing subject him- or herself – could not exist without a pre-existing system of language (writing). Moreover, references to the external world are always complex and at times irrelevant. There is no language-independent way of postulating the identity of any particular being.

These points have far-reaching implications. They give rise to the suspicion that conventional language and thus also ethico-political identities are tied to metaphysics that is, in effect, hiding the real nature of signs and language by constructing apparently undeniable centers or foundations, or by assuming that such centers exist (see for instance Derrida 1981, 20). But what exactly are these metaphysical systems trying to hide? They are hiding that human subjectivity, intentionality, consciousness and identity are relational and historical, stemming from changing and ultimately arbitrary differences in the codes and signs of writing. They may also be hiding the fact that writing in this sense emerged rather late in human history (see Derrida 1988, 4-5; Derrida 1997, 74-93; cf. Jaynes 2000). Reflective consciousness and reflexive subjectivity are not something that we have by

virtue of being born and having bodies. They are shifting effects of the emergent layer of culture and its historical development through background capacities and learning.

At least in the Western systems of thinking, but perhaps also more widely, differences between ego and alter are not usually understood as differences in this sense.

Consciousness is not seen as a historically changing effect of language, conceived as a codified and inscribed system of writing largely but always ambiguously shared by speakers/writers and their (often absent) audiences across a range of contexts. Derrida thus assumes that at a deep level of language, at the level of “arch-language”, meanings cannot be much more than mere play of differences effected in and through language and thus, in the last instance, random possibilities of meaning. And yet they are always excluding other possibilities. Thereby, when meaning is determined, a construction of a certain kind of alterity or otherness is effected through the background system of language that no speaking subject can control in any significant way.

Unfounded and most of the time inconspicuously changing historical identities are based on contrasts and oppositions – on the play of negative differences – and always exclude something. Yet it is not possible to step beyond differences and thus, presumably, otherness. What is more, it would also seem that the thus constructed others are often evaluated as lower beings and/or enemies (for a discussion, see Bernstein 1991).

Deconstruction is a rhetorical strategy to resist the violence and repression constituted by layers of writing (Derrida 1988, 112-53; 1997, 111-12).⁵ However, the existing systems can

⁵ Derrida is also using the metaphors of battle and war to denounce the effects of othering, without explicating the reasons for this metaphor or the normative basis of his criticism. The somewhat overcharged anxiety about

be only deconstructed locally and step by step. The process of deconstruction is thus never-ending and can take almost any text as its object, reflexively also Derrida's own texts.

Can anything remain outside of deconstruction? Derrida (1994) declared that justice cannot be deconstructed. Derrida conceived justice both in terms of a respect for otherness and a possible future (global) democracy, where differences, even if always in the process of becoming, are just let-to-be as recognized differences. Thus Derrida distinguishes between the inevitability of negative difference from the contingent effects of othering (cf. Abizadeh 2005, 56-8). However, given Derrida's generalized hermeneutics of suspicion and metaphysical assumptions, why should his very specific notion of justice (cf. many other models, theories and ideologies discussed in Patomäki 2006) remain immune to the ever skeptical rhetorical operations of deconstruction? Moreover, while the process of deconstruction may lead toward a cosmopolitan direction through deconstructing parochial and exclusionary systems of meanings, the cosmopolitan direction itself cannot be established in any secure way; and the end-state of a global identity can never be reached.

In his essay on cosmopolitanism, Derrida (2001) focuses on Kant's narrow concept of hospitality as an exemplar of universal cosmopolitanism. Kant's (1983, 118) third definitive article for a perpetual peace is explicitly purported to restrict universally applicable rights: "cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality". It comes nowhere near to proposing global citizenship or worldwide socio-

potential violence, including in extended metaphorical senses of the term, seems to connect Derrida to pacifist and Buddhist ethical traditions. It also makes it difficult to take a positive stand on any substantive ethico-political issue and, perhaps inadvertently, aligns Derrida with the spirit of the no-harm principle of liberalism, while being evidently incompatible with many other ethico-political principles.

economic or political rights. It means only “the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another’s country” and the “right to visit [other parts of...] the earth’s surface” (ibid., 118). Kant’s point was to oppose European colonialism from a moral perspective that appeared universalizable given the late 18th century situation:

Compare [universal hospitality] with the inhospitable conduct of civilized nations in our part of the world, especially commercial ones: the injustice that they displace towards foreign lands and peoples (which is the same as *conquering* them), is terrifying. When discovered, America, the lands occupied by the blacks, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc., were regarded as lands belonging to no one because their inhabitants were counted for nothing. [...] China and Japan (*Nippon*), which have had experience with such guests, have therefore wisely restricted contact with them. (Ibid., 119)

At first Derrida questions Kant’s naturalistic (universalistic) interpretation of the right to hospitality and then, moving to another direction, the strictly delimited sphere of its application. There is nothing natural about Kant’s cosmopolitan right. It is a human creation that comes about in writing. Simultaneously, Derrida (2001, 17) argues for extending its application to the reception and inclusion of the others, implying a right to asylum and residence. He also allures us, like in so many of his later writings, to an unspecified new form of law and democracy to come (ibid., 23), thus anticipating further unknowable shifts in language, probably towards a more cosmopolitan direction.⁶ Yet

⁶ For an interesting attempt to integrate Habermasian and Derridean insights into the conditions of the new post-national democracy to come, see Morris 2006. Morris argues that, while Habermas provides an account

Derrida steers clear from the path of Kant (1983, 118) who wrote unambiguously that eventually human relations across the planet will “become matters of public law, and the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a cosmopolitan constitution”. A key reason for Derrida’s cautiousness lies in his understanding of the role of language as a system of relational differences. Every determination of meaning implies negativity and othering at least in some sense, although its concrete manifestations and effects are contingent. Hence, any positive claim about cosmopolitanism has always a negative counterpart that is potentially problematic also from an ethico-political point of view, not least because exclusion and opposition always involves violence at least in the metaphorical sense of the term, and often also concretely.

It is true, as Derrida argues, that the largely unconscious and unacknowledged background system of repeatable codes and inscribed signs is a condition of possibility for any successful act of reference, truth-claim or speech act. For instance, demonstrative pointing cannot directly define meanings; rather it is the other way around, meanings organize demonstrative pointings. The meaning of the term must be already known when, by simple demonstration, we have indicated an instance satisfying the recognative criterion. Hence, at the epistemological level, it is not possible to distinguish clearly between sense and reference. However, being is not only about negative differences and the possibility of making references to the real world are a condition of our existence. Derrida seems to choose to ignore “that even to mention the identity of a code presumes some component of

of postnational public spheres and political spaces, Derrida provides important qualifications in two ways. First, he emphasises the constructed and open character of identities; and, second, he points to the difficulties of creating political spaces free from asymmetrical or biased relations of power. Morris thus takes Derrida’s metatheory of writing as a qualifier of more substantial normative theories of democracy and justice, i.e. as a constant reminder of their metaphysical tendencies and potential for (justifying) violence (and repression).

a reference” (Giddens 1979, 37), designating the elements of the code as belonging together, for instance “vocalizations,” “marks,” “inscriptions” etc.

Although there are good reasons for Derrida’s choice to focus on the structural-historical background of language-use, it does not come without unwelcome consequences. One of them is the implicit denial that beings and thus identities include also positive elements. Positive non-discursive realities are the condition of possibility for language, writing and social structures. Social beings are embodied; our bodies follow the laws of physics; and our existence presupposes complex biological systems. What is needed is an independent and ontological notion of being to which we can refer; and a related concept of referential detachment. (See Harré 1970, 69-70, 179; and Sayer 1984, 55). By referential detachment I mean the detachment of the act of reference from that to which it refers (Bhaskar 1994, 51-53). Referential detachment is implicit in all language-use and conceptualized practices, such as for instance playing football – or writing about writing. It is impossible to play football if one cannot, practically, make a distinction between the act of reference (saying “take the ball forward”) from that to which it refers (the ball, directions in the football field defined in terms of goals etc). The same applies to writing about writing.

Moreover, in social practices, by saying something we also do something, for instance evaluate, promise, warn, or threaten. Speech acts include institutionally positioned actors performing actions that constitute beings, processes or commitments (a state-leader declaring threats to national security, implying securitization, or signing a treaty and thus bringing about collective commitments) or actions that the sentence describes by saying or writing the sentence itself (for instance, a judge declaring a verdict). Speech-acts are often

indirect and complex, with the multiple indirect – sometimes ironic or sarcastic – meanings indicated by the context. Also ethico-political identities are constructed through speech-acts. The simple pronoun “we” in numerous sentences presupposes a collective identity that it simultaneously also reproduces or occasionally transforms.

“God bless America” presupposes that the name of the continent refers also to a country called the United States of America; declares and reproduces that particular national identity; and imagines it on a higher onto-ethical plane as something that is directly linked to God. Historical stories about the origins and development and, say, struggles, wars, sufferings and glory of France or Russia or China are also constitutive of the national identity that they may also naturalize and personalize. The unconscious background system of language and writing is an enabling and constraining component of the causal complexes that bring about social and political effects, but these complexes include many other elements as well. Agency, for instance, is co-constituted by cognitive and social-psychological mechanisms of learning. The production of group conformity and solidarity implies power-relations. The effects of these and other components depend also on fluctuating uncertainties of the world economy (business cycles, crises). And so on.

My critical remarks notwithstanding, I believe that Derrida and his followers are right in arguing that there can be no ethico-political identities that consist only of positive elements. Every identity defined in language involves implicit and explicit negative differences with implications to others, whoever they are and where-ever they may be. Being in general presupposes various absences, level-specific voids and other forms of ontological negativity (see Bhaskar 1993, 46) and, as Derrida has stressed, negativity plays out also at

ethico-political levels of identity. All definitions and constitutions of social beings exclude some other forms of social being. Although beings could not exist without positive elements, and although the relationship between ego and alter may be constituted in profoundly different ways, and although this constitution depends on concrete historical circumstances, a degree of negative exclusions and othering seems inevitable.

A cosmic perspective: the identity of human beings living on planet Earth

Thus far I have focused on explanations of differences and divisions that in some contexts can also be taken as their justification. It is time to switch perspective and see also what is common to humanity and other earthlings. As Morgenthau stressed, parochialism stems from the inability to see one's self, understandings and surroundings in a wider context and from others' viewpoint. The world as a whole is a wide context. This "world" exists on the surface of Earth, itself part of a solar system, which in turn is a part of a large galaxy.

It is no coincidence that Kant the cosmopolitan was also a cosmologist, sharing this interest with many of his fellow Enlightenment thinkers. In his early work Kant made important contributions to cosmology. In the *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* (1755), Kant explains how one can explain the formation of the solar system from an initial state, in which matter is dispersed like a cloud, solely by means of the interaction of attractive and repulsive forces. Kant's view is accepted by today's astronomy. Kant is also well-known for being one of the first to develop the concept of galaxy. Drawing on earlier work by Thomas Wright, he speculated that a galaxy might be a rotating body of a huge number of stars, held together by gravitational forces akin to the solar system but on a

much larger scale. From a scientific point of view, these observations and insights must have raised the question whether Earth and humanity have emerged from cosmic evolution.

Cosmopolitanism is not only tied to the idea of order in nature (which is the original meaning of the Greek word *cosmos*) but also to this kind of a wide cosmic perspective on one's identity and place. Near Kant's tomb in Kaliningrad is the following inscription in German and Russian, taken from the "Conclusion" of his *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." In the *Critique* itself, Kant explains further that neither of these things is beyond his horizon. On the contrary: "I see them before me and connect them directly with the consciousness of my existence." Similarly he also talks about "universal and necessary connections" to both. (Kant 1952[1788],360-361)

A sufficiently wide temporal and spatial perspective allows us to see simultaneously the limitations of both political realist socio-biology (biological reductionism, whether literal or metaphorical) and post-structuralism (linguistic reductionism). Ants and bees do not have science or technologies, nor can they learn much. Insects' learning is very limited and insect-societies do not change (in our historical time-scale). But from a scientific point of view, it is also evident that humans share the evolutionary history and most of genes with ants and bees and other complex living organisms. The required capabilities for language and cultural learning have gradually emerged over a very long period of time on the surface of a particular planet in a particular solar system located in a particular galaxy consisting of

at least two hundred billion solar systems. Ultimately we have all emerged from stardust, sharing a long causal history from cosmic through biological to cultural evolution.

Together, the cosmic, biological and cultural evolutions provide a rather distinctive perspective on the question of identity. As emphasized by the popular astro-physician Carl Sagan, it is possible to define our shared identity as humans and earthlings in the context of a cosmic setting. As Sagan did not want to rush answers, he formulated a question:

The nature of life on Earth and the quest for life elsewhere are two sides of the same question. The search for who we are. (Sagan 1985, 13)

Astrobiology – one of the growing areas of the early 21st century sciences – has made it increasingly obvious that so far the theory of evolution and biology has been based on the study of one case only (see Jakosky 2006; Barrow et.al. 2008). Life sciences cannot make universal claims in the same way as physics and chemistry can because little is known of the conditions of life elsewhere. The laws of physics apply everywhere but many of the biological and ecological mechanisms we know may be particular and specific to the planet Earth. Technical means to study other planets and solar systems have been gradually emerging and evolving in the late 20th and early 21st century. In July 2007, Enceladus, a moon of Saturn, was confirmed to have extra-terrestrial liquid water. By early-2017, about 2000 exoplanets have been discovered to orbit around stars in the neighboring parts of the Milky Way, a few of them rocky planets with water and within the habitable zone. These findings would not have surprised many of those who have suspected for centuries, even

millennia, that our world is only one of many. We not only share a long and complex causal history, but we are earthlings – and this has ethical and political consequences.

The vastness of the cosmos and the idea of cosmic pluralism encouraged tolerant cosmopolitanism already in the ancient agrarian empires of Eurasia such as China, Rome, and parts of India, as well as in religions such as Buddhism. The large empires were self-centric, but within their own sphere, they often represented limited cosmopolitanism.⁷

Later, a new and more explicit form of cosmic pluralism emerged in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The cosmic perspective enables and encourages distance from one's own identity and from the prevailing ideas and practices of one's own society. The proponents of cosmic pluralism laughed at human differences and smallness.⁸ Of course, the cosmopolitanism of early modernity and the European Enlightenment was not based on merely a cosmic viewpoint, but also on the increasing familiarity with the existence and

⁷ The belief in extra-terrestrial life may have been present in ancient Assyria, Egypt, Arabia, China, Babylon, India and Sumer, although in these societies, the notion of alien life is difficult to distinguish from that of their particular gods, demons, and such. Following Thales and Anaximander, the Greek atomists took up the idea, arguing that an infinite universe ought to have an infinite amount of populated worlds. The Roman poet Lucretius (99-55 BC) spread these ideas – importantly, he also talked about “illimitable space in every direction – across the Roman Empire. (See Dick 1998, 7-8) It seems that Chinese astronomy, perhaps until the time of the late Ming Dynasty or so, cultivated similar ideas (for a summary, see Needham 2004, 24-30). Arguably, Chinese astronomy was more modern in its conception of space and distances than the geocentric system of Ptolemy, while at least as accurate in its predictions of the movements of celestial bodies.

⁸ The best known early-modern proponent of cosmic pluralism was Giordano Bruno, who argued in the 16th century for an infinite universe in which every star is surrounded by its own solar system. In 1600, he was burnt at the stake as a heretic by the Roman Inquisition. The attitude towards science was nearly reversed already in the late 17th century Holland. Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) crowned his celebrated career as a modern astronomer, mathematician and physicist by writing *Cosmotheoros. The celestial worlds discover'd: or, conjectures concerning the inhabitants, plants and productions of the worlds in the planets*. In this book, which was published posthumously in Latin and translated to several European languages soon after Huygens' death, Huygens imagined a universe brimming with life both within our solar system as well as elsewhere. This work among a few others paved the way for Kant's mid-18th century astronomical speculations and for the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. A good example is Voltaire's *Micromégas* (1752), a story of a 36,000-metre tall alien Micromégas who travels through the Milky Way and almost by coincidence realizes that there is life on our insignificant planet. Through the perspective of Micromégas, Voltaire laughs at us silly humans who are killing each other in wars over religion. Voltaire's sci-fi satire thus takes moral distance from the Earthly disputes and wars.

perspective of non-European others. For example, Voltaire was influenced by the image of “noble savages” by baron de Lahontan’s *Curious Dialogues Between the Author and a Savage of Good Sense Who Has Travelled* from 1703, on the one hand; and by invocation of China as an ancient and sophisticated civilization, on the other (see Muthu 2003, 24-7).

The cosmic scale that puts the drama of life and human history on our small planet in a very wide perspective. In one sense this is an optical effect: the wider the imaginable scale of possibilities – also in terms of differences – the smaller the within-the-humanity differences appear. Alienation in this sense makes possible a critical sensibility, the basis of any cosmopolitan identity. In another sense, the cosmic vision insists on the idea of interconnectedness. Humans, as matter and energy and as biological organisms, are dependent not only on each other but also on a variety of cosmic processes and, most importantly, on the long-standing but thin and fragile biosphere of Earth. All humans form part of an interdependent whole; our fates are closely interconnected.

The more we view the Earth from the outside, the more we come to see it as an exquisite, tiny world, everyone dependent on everyone else. (Sagan 2006, 215)

Mutual dependency and fate has to do with a widening of the sphere within which the basic moral principles apply. Any form of morality has to do with the capacity to generalize normative claims in an acceptable way and, most importantly the ability to see things from the point of view of others. Thus Morgenthau’s (1961, 561-4) fundamental rules of diplomacy are essentially principles of cosmopolitan morality, albeit confined to the sphere of diplomacy and international relations. “Diplomacy must look at the political scene from

the point of view of other nations.” “Nations must be willing to compromise on all issues that are not vital to them.” Morgenthau’s rules of diplomacy may constitute a rather limited vision, tied to nations and diplomats, but they nonetheless exemplify the fundamental principles of morality, namely the attempt to see things from others’ perspective.

Is a cosmic perspective necessary for a cosmopolitan morality? Morgenthau, for instance, was not an explicitly cosmic thinker, although the planetary danger posed by nuclear weapons was of major concern and an argument for the necessity of a world state for him. My point is merely that a cosmic and planetary perspective clearly facilitates and encourages the adoption of such a moral viewpoint. The level of moral consciousness is directly connected to identity-formation. Thus a possible and plausible argument for global morality and thus for planetary identity involves an idea that we should work together as a species to preserve and cultivate the human potential on a cosmic scale.

Cosmic pluralism can also contribute to extending the variety of living beings with which we can identify. Carl Sagan talks about the extension of our “identification horizon”, the category of beings to whom we are willing to apply the basic moral principles:

If we survive these perilous times, it is clear that even an identification with all of mankind is not the ultimate desirable identification. [...] It is important that we extend our identification horizons, not just down to the simplest and most humble forms of life on our planet [by-products of the same biological evolution that resulted in us], but also up to the exotic and advanced forms of life that may inhabit, with us, our vast galaxy of stars. (Sagan 2000, 7-8)

Sagan's point is important and his moral vision astounding in its comprehensiveness, but it also bring us back to political theory. Even with a cosmic-scale distance to human differences, and even with a wide identification horizon, the problems of false universalisms and negative othering within humanity persist. The skeptical arguments against a global identity continue to carry weight in the 21st century. Therefore the adoption of a cosmic perspective is not enough. The prevailing dispositions to identify with and favor particular groups are based, in part, also on the human condition. Social beings are necessarily relational and presuppose also negativity and differences.

The temporal aspect of a possible solution: negative otherness in one's own past

Although othering may in some sense be inevitable, the most relevant identity-constituting others need not be those contemporary humans on the planet Earth who are in some regards different from us, whoever 'we' are. Otherness can also be located either in our own past or, alternatively, in our contemporary being, when seen from a point of view of a possible future position in world history. In other words, what we are can be defined in terms of critical distance from what we once used to be. And what we may become – and would like to become – can be defined in terms of critical distance from what we are now. Critical distance from one's own past entails the possibility of normative improvement and ethico-political learning and development over time.

Two 20th century examples illustrate how one's own past can take part in constituting one's present or future identity: (i) the case of post-1945 Germany and (ii) the case of truth and

reconciliation commissions in various late-20th century post-conflict situations. First, Germany: in the Nuremberg trials it was concluded that Nazi-Germany had committed crimes against humanity. Attempts to come to terms with one's own past have not only been constitutive of the German identity but have also led to moral development. Harold Marcuse (1999) argues, using Jürgen Habermas' categories⁹, that "the identity of (West) German society has developed from a pre-conventional form in the Nazi and immediate postwar years, to a conventional stage in the 1960s, and is now, in the 1990s, showing many post-conventional traits."

Nazism rose from the muddy and bloody trenches of the First World War. Generally, it can be argued that wars cause unlearning and moral regression. While the Nazi-era meant moral regression toward an egocentrism and overtly physical and behaviorist pre-conventional stage, the deep post-war German guilt was something that the Germans themselves had to tackle. This required critical reflexivity that enabled moral learning. Post-conventional morality attempts to define good and bad according to principles that transcend the groups holding the principles. In the post-conventional stage, systems of norms lose their quasi-natural validity and require justification from a universalizing, yet reflexive, point of view.

⁹ Habermas (1979), following Lawrence Kohlberg and others, outlines three basic stages of moral learning, pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. In the *pre-conventional stage*, people understand and follow behavioral expectations and perceive concrete actions and actors. This is the stage of punishment and obedience, fitting also for the child. In the *conventional stage* people understand and follow reflexive behavioral expectations (norms) and distinguish between actions and norms, individual subjects and role bearers. Although actors can adopt the other's perspectives and also take the perspective of an observer, the standard is that people conform to a given social role. Finally, a stage is reached, where moral decisions are generated from rights, values or principles which are (or could be) agreeable to all individuals composing or creating a society designed to have fair and beneficial practices. In the *post-conventional stage*, systems of norms lose their quasi-natural validity and require public justification from universalizing points of view. People understand and apply reflexive norms (principles) and distinguish between heteronomy and autonomy. In Habermas' scheme, in the highest stage the ability to universalize concerns need interpretations – which become the object of practical discourse for the first time – and include, at least potentially, all human beings as citizens of an imagined cosmopolitan world society.

The developments in Germany, perhaps especially in the 1960s and thereafter, have facilitated the cosmopolitanisation of German citizenry (cf. Beck et al. 2003).

The late 20th century truth commissions have generally been created following a military dictatorship or a civil war (see Hayner 2001). The point of truth commissions has been to establish some kind of basis for democracy and justice as well as to enable moral learning and building a basis for a we-feeling across a divided community. Particularly in South Africa, the idea has been to let the truth out into the public sphere by allowing diverse people to tell their stories about past suffering. However, there is no well-defined mechanism to determine what the truth is in the case of contradictory accounts. Although truth commissions have often been established as a substitute for judicial trials, for instance the 1980s Argentinean truth commission was complemented with the opening of criminal trials against past human rights violators.

The success of truth and reconciliation commissions to achieve reconciliation has been at best only limited, but in some cases they have fostered human rights activism that may be taken as a sign of moral learning (for instance Bakiner 2016; for a somewhat more positive account, see Brahm 2007). In contrast to the case of post-1945 Germany, the aim has been less to come to terms with one's own collective past than to create a public sphere within which past and perhaps also present grievances concerning others can be brought to the attention of everyone concerned. Although this procedure may in principle enable the adoption of a post-conventional moral perspective to the conflict in question, in practice this tends to be difficult, particularly if actors make reciprocal loaded charges against the

other. Moreover, if these charges make sense but no formal prosecutions are possible, the work of truth commissions may feed further feelings of bitterness and injustice.

A key to a successful overcoming of violent antagonisms seems to lie in collective learning via collective self-criticism. If one looks deep enough, the history of every group, every class and every country is filled with episodes that not only could but also should have been otherwise. For instance, the Finnish civil war in 1918 led to concentration camps and mass killings; and the so called “continuation war” in 1941-44 was an alliance with Adolf Hitler, in which the Finns contributed to the Siege of Leningrad. It is always possible to locate layers of negative otherness in one’s own collective past, whether national or otherwise – and from a universalizing perspective, we know that this applies to everyone.

An even more important possibility is locating otherness in our contemporary being and identity, when seen from a point of view of a possible future position in world history.

Alexander Wendt (2003) formulates a similar idea in the context of making an argument for “the inevitability of a world state:”

[...A] world state could compensate for the absence of spatial differentiation between its present and its past [...]. The past here is [international] anarchy, with all its unpleasantness. In Hegelian terms we could say that ‘history’ becomes the Other in terms of which the global self is defined. Of course this Other does not have a subjectivity of its own, and so cannot literally recognize the world state. But a functional equivalent to recognition can be achieved by an act of temporal self-differentiation. (Ibid., 527)

For Wendt the temporal self-differentiation would occur in the future when the world state is established. However, the idea of temporal self-differentiation and otherness can be made concrete already now by imagining for instance a future historian or sociologist looking back. This device has been successfully utilized in some science fiction writings (e.g. Brunner 1971; Wagar 1999). The act of imagining a future historian generates far-reaching questions about his or her identity, about our identity, and about the truth of his or her historical stories and explanations. Who is she? What kind of a historical story and explanation can be argued to be true and relevant? What is the appropriate spatio-temporal framework for writing world history? How will she view us? The future may be contingent, but attempts to establish visions of a meaningful future can become co-constitutive of our current identities and, in turn, take part in constructing the future (Berenskoetter 2011).

Most versions of classical political realism recognize that the reasons for skepticism about a world community are only temporal. At some point things may be different: there may be no more reason for more than some realist cautiousness anymore. Whenever this kind of world may come to being, our future historian is likely to identify with the planetary political community, looking at the past from a global vantage point. A leap ahead into the future seems thus to suggest a standpoint of global history. This general standpoint does not stop interpretation of history from being ethico-political or contested. As in any political community, history will be periodically re-interpreted and constantly debated also in a

future global political community.¹⁰ But in contrast to more limited histories, world history covers the planetary history of humanity in its entirety.

From a global system of communications to Big History

In the mid-20th century, Karl Jaspers (1953) argued that the world is now a single unit of communications. This, he assumed, gives rise to a growing drive toward political unification, possibly through mutual agreement in a world order based on the rule of law. Instead of following a simple linear logic and leading to the irreversible emergence of political unification, however, world history can be seen in much more complicated and dialectical terms. Modern society has involved an increasing differentiation of institutionalized contexts of activities and functions, including the emergence of contexts such as international/world law, politics and economy (see Albert 2015). It is not at all evident that a single institutionalized context and its associated spatial scale would become dominant within any system of multi-spatial metagovernance (Jessop 2012). Moreover, developments may be reversed and occur through crises and catastrophes, which have the potential of changing the identity of one or more of those differentiated domains and systems, and thereby also the emergent and historically evolving whole of these parts.

¹⁰ To an extent I agree with Bruno Latour (2004) who criticizes objectivist cosmopolitanism and argues for explicit *cosmopolitics*. For Latour, cosmopolitics recognizes the radical pluralism of understandings and the fact “that the parliament in which a common world could be assembled has got to be constructed from the scratch” (ibid., 462). However, at least Latour’s claim about “construction from the scratch” goes too far. In addition to the mostly shared causal history of humanity, the industrial civilization and its systems of governance connect every part of the world and is more comprehensive than anything that has occurred before. (Braudel 1995, 8-14)

These complexities notwithstanding, we may accord with Jaspers that the globalization of communications can be seen as the beginning of the world history proper. It is “the spiritual and technical acquisition of the equipment necessary for the journey; we are just setting out” (ibid., 24). This setting out can be a long process from the limited perspective of a human life-time. It also entails a new understanding of the essentially shared causal history of humanity. H.G.Wells worked on the idea of a universal history already during and after the First World War. In his two-volume *Outline of History*, Wells (1920, v-vi) argued for the importance of shared historical ideas. “There can be no common peace and prosperity without common historical ideas.” He continued by talking about “a sense of history as the common adventure of all mankind” being necessary for peace.

It is of course no coincidence that Wells framed his world history in cosmic terms, starting the story by outlining the origins of our solar system and explaining to the common reader the huge distances in space. In book I of the first volume, Wells narrates the origins of planet Earth before moving gradually to the history of humankind in book II. There had been universal histories – presentations of the history of mankind as a whole, as a coherent unit – before Wells, but most of them have told the story in Eurocentric terms, often assuming or suggesting that a particular (Christian or) Western society constitutes the end-point of world history. In contrast, Wells framed the world history in cosmic terms and imagined a future world society, indeed a world state, thus providing an entirely new vantage point. Wells’ angle remained unique for most of the century.

The late 1980s saw a systematic and globalist critique of Eurocentrism rising. The colonizers’ model of the world – Eurocentrism – is based on a simple and yet false

assumption: all important concepts, practices, technologies and capacities have emerged from Europe or from Europeanized parts of the world. Originating in Europe, the central concepts, practices, technologies and capacities have subsequently diffused to the rest of the world. Thus, world history is presented as the history of how the central dynamics of cultural evolution moved gradually from Mesopotamia westwards via Greece and Rome towards North-West Europe and, later, towards the United States of America. The decisive achievements of the great Eurasian civilizations of Arabia, China, India, Japan and Persia have thus been largely neglected and the parallel developments in Africa, Americas, and Pacific mostly ignored. (Blaut 1993; Blaut 2000)

The critics of Eurocentrism have argued plausibly that this is a biased and one-sided account of the common adventure of all mankind (Amin 1989; Frank 1998; Hobson 2004; Needham 2004; Pomeranz 2000). The Greco-Roman civilization was not unique – the Han Dynasty China and parts of India went through similar developments – and after the collapse of the Western part of the Roman Empire the areas north of Mediterranean formed an outlying part of Eurasia for a millennium. Until the 16th and 17th centuries, most important concepts, practices, technologies and capacities actually originated in China, India and Arabia and were slowly diffused to Europe. It is also possible to write counterfactual scenarios about how the Industrial Revolution could have taken place elsewhere on the Eurasian continent, most plausibly in China, with far-reaching world-historical consequences (Tetlock, Lebow, New and Parker 2006; Patomäki 2007).

The starting point of non-Eurocentric and post-Wellsian Big History is that human societies remain part of nature, “properly at home in the universe despite our extraordinary powers,

unique self-consciousness, and inexhaustible capacity for collective learning” (McNeill 2005, xvii). McNeill argues further that as natural sciences have been historicized at many levels, it is now the task of historians – and social scientists – to generalize boldly enough to connect their area of study with the history of the cosmos, solar system and life. In his programmatic statements in the second volume of the new *Journal of World History*, David Christian (1991; see also Spier 1996) phrased the task also in terms of scale of space and time:

What is the scale on which history should be studied? The establishment of the *Journal of World History* already implies a radical answer to that question: in geographical terms, the appropriate scale may be the whole of the world. [...] I will defend an equally radical answer to the temporal aspect of the same question: what is the time scale on which history should be studied? [...] The appropriate time scale for the study of history may be the whole of time. In other words, historians should be prepared to explore the past on many different time scales up to that of the universe itself – a scale of between 10 and 20 billion years. This is what I mean by “Big History.” (ibid., 223)

David Christian’s (2005) *Maps of Time. An Introduction to Big History* is a unified story of developments of the whole universe from the Big Bang about 13 thousand million years ago through the present into its distant future (Brown 2007 is another recent history of all of time and space; McNeill and McNeill 2003 starts from *Homo Erectus*; Christian, Brown and Benjamin 2014 is a beautifully illustrated textbook version of the same thing). The story of Big History is about the emergence of new layers of qualitatively distinct beings

and development of increasing complexity locally – against the background of the second law of thermodynamics that sees increasing entropy rather than complexity in the cosmos as a whole (see also Kauffman 1995; and Wheeler 2006). Finally, in the course of the development of a particular mammal species, *Homo sapiens*, the stage of collective learning was reached, Humanity acquired the “capacity to share information precisely and rapidly so that information accumulates at the level of the community and species giving rise to long-term historical change” (Christian, Brown and Benjamin 2014, 90).

Human cultural evolution has been fast and accelerating. During the most recent Ice Age – lasting for about 90,000 years – new developments started to take place. The “revolution of Upper Paleolithic” some 40,000-50,000 years ago was followed by “the Neolithic agricultural revolution” about 10,000–12,000 years ago, after the end of the last Ice Age (both “revolutions” were slow processes when compared to the pace of changes during the last 200 years). The first state-formations and systems of writing and mathematics emerged roughly 5,000-6,000 years ago. Similar developments were subsequently repeated quite independently in other parts of the world, including in the so called New World.

Gradually began the history of agrarian states and empires; of division of labor and taxation; of religions and new levels of abstraction; of wars and power struggles; of slavery and violence; and of increasingly rapid cultural evolution. Within Eurasia, a world economy of regular trade networks has existed for about 2,000-3,000 years. Many innovations have spread across different parts of Eurasia, opening up new possibilities to develop on previous innovations and practices, including writing, narratization and subjective consciousness. Two millennia later all this resulted in the Industrial Revolution.

The so called modern time has been the most dramatic era in the common adventure of humankind thus far. The Eurocentric waves of globalization – starting with the imperial reintegration of the American continent with Europe and continuing with the late 19th century and early 20th century waves of neo-imperial expansion – have intensified the new global coming together of humanity, often occurred under violent, oppressive and tragic circumstances. The Industrial Revolution led to a rapid global population growth from one to seven and a half billion people today. This growth continues until the benchmark of nine or ten billion will be reached in 2050 or so. Simultaneously, the Industrial Revolution and its consequences have also complicated and obscured the connection between available resources and control over land.

The 19th century was exceptional because for the first time in centuries there were long periods of absence of war in Europe (outside Europe the situation was different, not least because of European expansion and competition elsewhere). A few occasional wars notwithstanding, the European heartland was no longer plagued with recurrent warfare. The contrast to the inter-dynastic era of 1689-1815, characterized by nearly constant warfare both in Europe and European colonies, was evident (see Hamilton and Herwig 2003, 2-10). The core of the industrializing world economy seemed to have become relatively peaceful. Moreover, many mid-19th century liberals anticipated the end of the colonial and imperial era. Since Napoleon, imperialism had been a bad word.

In industrial capitalism there are mechanisms and processes that tend to generate outcomes reminiscent of classical imperialism, including competition over raw materials and markets,

at times assuming the form of explicit imperial projects. The era of new imperialism began in the 1870s. (Patomäki 2008) Moreover, industrialization created also new powers of destruction. The North-American civil war of 1861-5 and the Franco-German war of 1870-71 were the first modern industrial wars (Giddens 1987b, 222-232). In 1914, the First World War came as an immense surprise to most Europeans. Even though writers and intellectuals had been anticipating a major war, only very few of them warned that it would be unprecedented in destructiveness and likely to spread to imperial peripheries (see Clarke 1966, 68-9). Moreover, at the outbreak of the war, the prevalent expectation was that the war would soon be over. This error and miscalculation made, in part, some of the decisions for beginning or joining the war easier. (Stevenson 2004, 8)

Thus the 20th century, “the age of extremes” (Hobsbawm 1994), began with a largely unanticipated massive catastrophe, which recurred in 1937-1945. Furthermore, the Russian revolution is unlikely to have occurred without the war (and German support for the Bolsheviks). Thus, also the Cold War was a co-product of the First World War and its aftermath. It was at this time that humanity reached the technological capacity to destroy itself and large parts of the ecological systems of the planet; and it was at that time that world history proper emerged for the first time.

Big History is oriented not only towards the past but also towards the future. Big History presupposes the possibility of collective learning. It encourages the anticipation of possibilities such as global security community and favors the development of better systems of governance of global processes and problems (Patomäki 2002, ch 8; Patomäki 2008, chs 7 and 8; Patomäki 2013, ch 8). Christian (2005), like many other advocates of

Big History, remains agnostic about the possibility of a world state. Should there be a world state proper, it will probably be rather different from the current exclusive territorial states and their institutions (Wendt 2003, 506; Partington 2003, 101-148).

Big History frames world history in cosmic terms and imagines a future world community that may eventually take the form of a world state in some sense, thus providing a new vantage point for writing history and viewing ourselves. From that perspective, what we are now constitutes a form of (possibly negative) otherness. And yet, this is far from being the end of the story of those ‘small local differences’ that beset humanity in the 21st century.

The problem of ‘small local differences’ restated: a possible solution

Big History can provide an overall framework for thinking about who we are, but it does not mean abolishing cultural and historical differences. Moreover, the background system of language depends on a system of differences and similarities. Language is constitutive of social relations and thereby co-produces social and political effects, even if only through actions in social contexts that involve unacknowledged conditions, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Also, actions tend to have unintended consequences that can form a part of a systemic whole. Social structures and systems can have emergent properties and powers that are not reducible to their parts. While the open-systemic historical processes of causal determination are thus in no way reducible to language, various causal processes can accentuate language-constituted differences into intensely and perhaps violently negative self-other relations. There is thus a need to rethink the fundamentals of identity-constitution from a perspective that is compatible with the critics of false universalisms.

What is more, progressivist readings of Big History and related processes of temporal othering involve horizontal self-other relations here and now. Even if every individual of the currently existing humanity would eventually adopt a future-oriented globalist identity, their learning and development would be non-synchronous. Some would be “lagging behind” in the progressivist temporal axis, which they may also try to challenge and change. They would represent negative otherness for those who have learnt more rapidly (whose learning must remain subject to criticism, as pluralism and controversies are essential for learning; Rescher 1977; 1993). They might in turn develop negative modes of responsiveness and forms of counter-othering. Even when everyone is fully aware of the vastness of the long-term global matrix of Big History, these apparently small-scale differences are significant to our lives. We can also see that even at the level of syntagmatic competencies – making speech and action possible – there are often wide differences in the grids, measures, matrixes and relations of exclusion that constitute self/other-relations. It would be a dangerous illusion to ignore the importance of these kinds of differences.

One consideration is that many aspects of global togetherness may be possible only to the best educated and wealthiest part of humanity. The wealthy and powerful may celebrate a form of cosmopolitanism – say market globalism (Steger 2005) – that becomes a source of resentment for a multitude of actors, especially if they experience increasingly uncertain living conditions and existential insecurity. Furthermore, closer interactions and experiences of interdependency not only create new points of contact but may equally engender new points of conflict. Encounters with otherness are enmeshed with practical concerns and anxieties of everyday life and mundane things such as competition over jobs

under the conditions of un- or underemployment. Various labels, ways of legitimization and myths are sedimented into the deep structures of language, from where they can be drawn also for strategic purposes. The concerns and anxieties of everyday life can thereby be mobilized for support for antagonistic platforms and political activism.

Tzvetan Todorov's (1984) three axes of ego/alter-relations help to analyze the problem of 'small local differences' further. The first is the epistemological axis. What do we really know about the other? Ego can either know or be ignorant of alter's history, identity and values. Knowledge or ignorance of the other can have deep roots. From many philosophical standpoints, differences are difficult to see. Answers to the questions "what is there in the social world?" and "how can and should we acquire knowledge?" enable and constrain visions and knowledge of the others. There is no absolute knowledge about the self and other but an endless gradation of the lower or higher states of knowledge.

The axiological axis, the basis for value judgments, is at least partly independent of knowledge. The other can be seen as good/bad or superior/inferior (or something else, perhaps something more nuanced). Coming to know the other better can help to understand and evaluate it more positively, but more knowledge can also make the value judgement more negative. How and on what basis this judgment is made varies significantly. The "desire to grasp the unknown by means of the known" (1984, 128) often means that improved knowledge about differences makes the evaluation of the other worse, perhaps just by increasing sensitivity to these differences. Distinctions play an important role in social differentiation in the most familiar everyday contexts (Bourdieu 2010) and these distinctions are instinctively used in evaluating also the more different or distant others. A

lot depends of course on what is known – on ego’s experiences and familiarity with frames, metaphors and myths – and on the cognitive level of ethical and political reasoning.

Todorov’s third axis, the praxiological axis, has to do with rapprochement with or distancing from other’s real or imagined identity and values in practical terms. If the existence of alterity, of a truly other human substance, is denied, the others can be only either identical (implying assimilation) or inferior (justifying submission). That is, inability to perceive alterity on the epistemological axis precludes any position on the praxeological axis. If real alterity can be perceived, one possibility is neutrality or indifference based on the capacity to take distance, which is one of the potential functions of Big History.

The different others can also be recognized as equal in terms legal and other entitlements or rights, such as Kant’s universal right to hospitality or universal human rights. The right to equal participation or representation implies global democracy. A problem is that the more precisely and comprehensively these entitlements and rights and the possibly corresponding duties are defined, the more this recognition makes others identical, implying assimilation. Todorov writes (*ibid.*, 249) that “we want equality without its compelling us to accept identity; but also difference without its degenerating into superiority/inferiority.” Todorov’s problematic is closely connected to the struggles over recognition especially typical of the last half-a-century. Particular forms of recognition are bound up with specific possibilities with regard to identity. When a new claim or constitutive possibility emerges, it regularly results in a struggle for the social recognition of a new form of identity. (Honneth 1996)

What we are witnessing in the late 2010s is a dialectic between three logics of identity. First, from the philosophical standpoint of market globalism, differences are hard to see. The economistic logic of this form of globalism precludes any position on the praxeological axis. Everyone must be identical and submit to market globalism and its characteristic modes of subjectivity (e.g. Chandler & Reid 2016). Second, the concerns and anxieties of everyday life are being mobilized for antagonistic politics against both globalism and associated forms of otherness such as immigrants. This mobilization occurs in terms of frames, categories, metaphors and myths that have been sedimented into the deep structures of national or religious imaginary (cf. Patomäki & Steger 2010), from where they are again being drawn also for strategic purposes. These categories and myths may include also claims about our tribal nature, perhaps anchored in our genes or memes.

The third logic of identity concerns the struggle for recognition. These struggles will continue to diversify claims and open up new possibilities. To the extent that these claims and possibilities can be confined to the private sphere, they may be compatible with the liberalism of market globalism (in spite of its techno-logic; see Amadae 2016). They can, however, politicize market globalism, in particular in terms of problematizing the privileges and inequalities characteristic of market globalization. There are other ways organizing democracy and relations of production and exchange. The third logic is reflexive and has to do with the general relationship between socio-economic equality and identity.

Conclusions

The skeptics do have a point. As the increasingly apparent failure of market globalism indicates, the process of building a cosmopolitical community is beset with difficulties and dangers. Many forms of universalisms are false. Political realists are right in criticizing (liberal and other) utopias of harmony and seeing various mechanisms that generate and reinforce group-thinking on a large scale. Post-structuralists, in turn, are right in maintaining that negativity and some othering are inevitable. While not all negative contrasts and exclusions are illegitimate (i.e. legitimate norms can be violated), there is a constant quest for hermeneutics of suspicion and deconstructionist analysis.

Attempts of reducing human beingness to genes, memes, nature, structures of language, or something else that is not changing, are implausible and geo-historically false. We humans, our language, and our capacity to learn have gradually emerged over a long period of biological evolution on the surface of a particular planet in a particular solar system located in Milky Way. These developments have made cultural learning and the emergence of reflective consciousness and increasingly reflexive ego-identity possible. Language too is changing and evolving. On the basis of these and related reflections, I have contended that the most relevant identity-constituting others need not be those contemporary humans who are in some regards different from us. The cosmic perspective and the possibility of cosmic pluralism encourages the adoption of a broad moral perspective, facilitating the widening of moral identification horizon also to all forms of life and (possibly) to other sentient beings.

I have further argued in this paper that otherness can be located in our own past. As the past is often present in contemporary beings, this has implications to contemporary self-other relations as well. Or, alternatively, it can be located in our contemporary being, when seen

from a point of view of a possible future moment and position in world history. What we may become – and would like to become – can be defined in terms of critical distance from what we are today. Critical distance from one's own past entails the possibility of normative improvement and ethico-political learning and development.

The global grid and matrix of Big History corresponds to the emergent forms of time and space evident in many social practices and ethico-political concerns, such as global warming. Big History means understanding the human history in cosmic scales of time and space. In a Wellsian manner, I have argued that Big History is necessarily oriented also towards the future, anticipating the possibility of cosmopolitical unification through collective learning. Although world history is non-linear and although the emerging social forms and wholes are complex, we can rationally anticipate that these kinds of developments will pave the way for a global ethical and political community in some meaningful sense.

However, although Big History may provide an overall framework for thinking about who we are and where we are heading, it does not abolish cultural and historical differences. A global political community would not put an end to negative differences, conflicts or tragedies of social action. Rather the cosmopolitical perspective I have developed in this paper is compatible with what William Connolly (1995, xv) calls the “ethos of critical responsiveness.” This means that the self-confidence and congealed judgements of dominant identities and understandings of the political community and constituency should be recurrently challenged. It also means that the basic onto-logic of identity needs to be

repeatedly and reflexively rethought from a perspective that is compatible with both the criticism of false universalisms and with the basic tenets of Big History.

A key point I have made in this paper is that although the open-systemic historical processes of causal determination are not reducible to language, various causal processes can accentuate language-constituted differences into intensely and perhaps violently negative self-other relations. From this perspective, I have discussed Todorov's three axes of self-other -relations: epistemic, axiological and praxiological. "Knowledge does not imply love, nor the converse; and neither of the two implies, nor is implied by, identification with the other" (Todorov 1984, 186). By distinguishing the three axis and by avoiding reductionism, we can make more nuanced and plausible claims about their interconnections in different world-historical contexts. I have suggested that what we are witnessing in the late 2010s is a dialectic between three logics of identity. Market globalism cannot acknowledge differences or privileges, which is one of the reasons why the concerns and anxieties of everyday life are currently being mobilized for antagonistic politics based on re-imagining the nation. Meanwhile, the struggle for recognition continues to diversify claims and possibilities, reflective of the ambiguities of equality and difference.

It is obvious that my conceptualization of the problematic is not indifferent with regard to different options within the wider whole of Big History. It entails contrasts and differences and an evaluative stand. I clearly prefer the third logic of differences and collective identity. At the meta-level, however, my argument is that we can let many differences just be and evolve in terms of their own dynamics. Also, we can see the on-going dialogues and

debates in terms of a co-constitutive and mutually transformative temporal relationship between self and other within the expanding set of relevant ethico-political possibilities.

Humans can and do learn through practical experiences, encounters and dialogues. Due to learning they can also revise their values, goals and identity. It is entirely consistent to believe in the superiority of one's position and see how the others are rationally entitled in their circumstances – given the path of their particular historical experiences – to hold a position at variance with ours. Pluralism is the best guarantee for further collective learning in our planetary and cosmic setting – that may also have cosmic-scale significance.

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