

Crooked Wood, Straight Timber – Kant, Development and Nature

Rafael Ziegler

Ernst Moritz Arndt University of Greifswald

Abstract. Development is a widely used political concept, yet it receives relatively little philosophical attention. Conceptual clarification can draw on Kant's writings on history and politics, which centrally include a theory of development. This theory posits developmental goals, and means of development, it presents these goals and means from a sophisticated epistemological perspective, and moreover a comprehensive perspective that includes human and non-human development. Via a discussion of the material transformations of Prussia during Kant's time, and the resonance of this transformation in Kant's writing – the "crooked wood" of the text, and the "straight timber" of Prussian "scientific forestry" – an argument is made for an extended theory of development that includes public reason as a means of development. It is argued that Kant's reasons for a concern with development and the methodological spirit and scope of his approach remain pertinent, but that it is the spirit rather than the letter of Kant's approach that can serve as a model for current theorizing.

Key words: development, public reason, sustainability, Kant, environmental history.

Due to the complexity of history, the possibility of a theory of development seems unlikely; due to wars and catastrophes a theory of development may not be desirable. It could serve as a legitimizing tool for "a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require – for the reproduction of society – the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations" (as Gilbert Rist puts it in his *History of Development* (2006)). And yet, in spite of many and repeated criticisms, *development* has remained a widely used political concept. The often instrumental use of the concept in the context of economic growth and asymmetrical North-South relations (Shiva 1988, Sachs 1992 and 1999, Deb 2009) suggests the task of continued conceptual clarification.

This paper investigates Kant's contribution to this task via an examination of his writings on cosmopolitanism and history, and especially his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (published in 1784 in the *Berlinische Monatszeitschrift*). The *Idea* has been primarily discussed as a contribution to the philosophy of history (see inter alia Fackenheim 1957, Yovel 1980 and Kleingeld 1995), or more specifically universal history.¹ Yet, this contribution centrally includes a theory of development, of interest for its own sake and thought-provoking for the current discussion of development. This paper first introduces goals, motivations and means of Kant's theory of development in *Idea*. Via a discussion of the material transformations of Prussia during Kant's time, and the reso-

1] The genre 'universal history' was well established in the eighteenth century. As the adjective 'universal' indicates, it was to be history of humankind in general, and not of a specific political event or national culture.

nance of this transformation in Kant's writing – the “crooked wood” of the text, and the “straight timber” of “scientific forestry” – an argument is made for an extended theory of development that includes public reason as a means of development. It is then argued that the epistemic status of Kant's theory is at the very least also practical rather than primarily theoretical. It is in these respects that the paper seeks to contribute to the discussion of Kant's philosophy. Drawing on this assessment, it is argued that Kant's reasons for a concern with development and the methodological spirit and scope of his approach remain pertinent for the discussion of development today, but his discussion of the goals and means of development needs to be extended, and his biological assumptions need to be replaced. It is the spirit rather than the letter of Kant's approach that can serve as a model for current theorizing.

I. KANT ON MOTIVES AND MEANS OF DEVELOPMENT

Kant's theory of development has a goal-oriented structure: “One can regard the history of the human species, in the large as the realization of a concealed plan of nature, meant to bring about an internally, and to this end, externally perfect state constitution, as the sole condition in which nature can fully develop all of its predispositions in human-kind” (*Idea*, eighth Proposition). His theory posits an end goal, i.e. the development of all of humanity's ‘predispositions’ or ‘natural capacities’. He states but does not normatively justify this end goal in *Idea* (a point that I will return to below).

Due to the relative neglect of development as a concept in current political philosophy – the philosophical discussion of development hardly shows the extent and depth of discussions of justice, equality, freedom and community – I will first introduce Kant's arguments motivating the theory of development as a contribution to practical philosophy:

1) *Consolation and hope in this world* (*Idea*, 8:30): Human history, Kant notes, makes us turn away with indignation and we doubt that we can ever find a completed reasonable purpose in it. We turn our hope to ‘another world’ and look for consolation there. But, there is no need to despair if it is possible to develop a theory of development. Therefore, if we think that a consoling outlook on the future is desirable², a theory of development is needed.

2) *Acceleration* (*Idea*, 8:27 and 8:31): If we grasp the means of development, then we can “by means of our own rational projects hasten the arrival of this point in time, which will be such a happy one for our descendants.” (*Idea*, 8:27). The argument assumes that we are not indifferent with respect to future generations.³

2] In “On the Common Saying” Kant notes “this hope for better times, without which a serious desire to do something that promotes the general good would never have warmed the human heart, has always had an influence on the work of the well-thinking” (Kant 8:309).

3] For Kant's view on duties towards future generation see “On the Common Saying”; for a more recent Kantian argument see Rawls 1999, §44.

Kant also addresses the historians:

3) *Disburdening future generations (Idea, 8:31)*: Historians describe the past with “otherwise notable thoroughness” – and as a result place a burden of history on future generations. But, he argues, these generations will have one primary interest in history: how have past peoples and governments contributed or harmed the cosmopolitan purpose. Therefore taking into consideration the interest of future generations is a motivation for the historian to contribute to universal history.

And he addresses the politicians:

4) *Honour (Idea, 8:31)*: Heads of governments and their servants need to understand that they will be remembered and be honoured by future generations for their contribution to the cosmopolitan purpose. If they understand that contributions to this purpose will give them the highest and lasting honour, then development will again be promoted and accelerated, or so Kant seems to imply.

This brief survey of the motivations for a theory of development shows a concern for future generations as part of the motivation for a theory of development (especially with points two and three). This concern is today associated with the call for sustainable development in response to climate change and irreversible damages to ecosystems. As we will see below, however, the relation to the environment already plays a role in Kant’s account. Finally, Kant’s motivations are practical: they revolve around the idea of a cosmopolitan purpose, as already stated in the title of Kant’s essay. They concern the possibility of progress.

However, there is also a theoretical motivation. In the introduction to *Idea*, Kant notes that history concerns the appearances of the will, which in his view are like all events determined by universal laws. It should therefore be possible to discover laws and causes in history. Kant ends his introduction speculating that nature might produce a Kepler or Newton to compile such a history (*Idea*, 8:17-18). According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, theoretical reason strives to establish a systematic unity of knowledge, thus theoretical reason also strives to establish unity in history here understood as a science (Kant 1787, A653-654/B681-682; Kleingeld 2008)

As far as the means of development are concerned, societal antagonism is the primary driver of development, according to Kant. He specifies this antagonism on two levels. On the first level, he speaks of *unsocial sociability*. Kant describes human beings in terms of two contradictory inclinations (Hang): to be in society, and to isolate themselves. Kant describes the inclination to isolation in terms of a will to have everything according to one’s own will. Yet, having one’s will requires overcoming the resistance of others, and hence forces human beings to overcome their inclination to laziness. The conflict forces them to develop their predispositions.

The desire for honour and power, and also greed require for their attainment other human beings who have to recognize deeds, to obey and to follow property and labour

rules. The attainment of these desires therefore not only leads to a development of predispositions, it is also not possible outside society.⁴

Selfish creatures can exercise their free will only if there is a constitution that secures the freedom of these creatures from the attack and infringement of others. According to Kant, the principle of this constitution is the highest freedom of each compatible with the freedom of others (*Idea*, 8:22). But the constitution also has a disciplinary effect and as such promotes the further development of capacities. In this sense, it is an indirect means of development.

The complement to the unsocial sociability in civil society is war between states on the societal level. While this antagonism, in Kant's view, hinders the development of natural predispositions - due to the destructions of war and the necessity to be constantly ready for war - it does force the states to eventually work towards a cosmopolitan state, an idea that Kant only hints at in *Idea*, but specifies in his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace* as a federation of republics. As such a federation promotes the development of predispositions, it is a further indirect means of development.⁵

This specification of the means of development in turn suggests where to look for evidence or at least traces of development in history: in the means of unsocial sociability and law. If only very sketchily and cautiously, Kant does claim that "a little" and "faint signs" can be discovered in history (*Idea*, 8:27, eighth proposition). The example he gives is the "regular course of improvement in the constitution of the state in our part of the world" (*Idea*, 8:30, ninth proposition).

II. CONCEALED PLANS OF NATURE AND A PRUSSIAN EPISODE

"One can regard the history of the human species at large as the realisation of a concealed plan of nature, meant to bring into being an internally and, to this end, externally perfect state constitution, as the only condition in which nature can fully develop all of its predispositions in humankind" (*Idea*, 8:27, eighth Proposition). At a second look, this sentence is puzzling: why does Kant write "a concealed plan of nature . . . in which nature can fully develop all of *its* predispositions in humankind" (*italics added*)⁶, i.e. all of *nature's*

4] These contradictory inclinations leave open and enable human diversity across time and peoples. "Kant's anthropology lectures are, accordingly, permeated with claims about human role-playing in society, our 'concealing' and 'dissembling' egoistic intentions before others and with the social necessity of developing 'characters' . . . our unsocial sociability makes possible the plasticity and perfectibility of human nature." (Sturm, forthcoming).

5] In view of *Perpetual Peace* the development promoted thereby is chiefly due to cosmopolitan demand of hospitality and the commerce this makes possible (see the third definitive article of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*).

6] The original German sentence reads as follows: "Man kann die Geschichte der Menschengattung im großen als die Vollziehung eines verborgenen Plans der Natur ansehen, um eine innerlich- und zu diesem Zwecke, auch äußerlich- vollkommene Staatsverfassung zu Stande zu bringen, als den einzigen Zustand, in welchem sie alle ihre Anlagen in der Menschheit völlig entwickeln kann."

predispositions? “All of nature’s predispositions” refers to more than human predispositions. Does Kant mean to say that the development of humankind is a condition for the development of all of nature’s predispositions? Such a reading of the passage would not only much enlarge the scope of development, but also raise the question why humankind (and its development) is a condition for the development of all of nature’s predispositions.

No doubt, it is also possible to call Kant’s phrasing unfortunate, a minor ambiguity in a text that focuses on human development.⁷ Still, even on this reading there remains the question how the other predispositions of nature are related to Kant’s theory of (human) development. Not only humans have predispositions, according to Kant, and the predispositions of non-humans also ‘unfold’ or ‘develop’. So how are these ‘developments’ related? This question, which concerns the dynamic relation of society and its environment in history, is not only a condition of acceptability for a development theory in the age of sustainability, it already plays an interesting role in Kant’s theory of development.

The material transformation of the land had a prominent place on Prussia’s political agenda throughout the eighteenth century. When Kant wrote his essays on morals, politics and history in the 1780s and 1790s, this dimension of policy was well established, and it therefore could be expected to be present some way or other in Kant’s writings on these issues. Before turning to the respective places, a clarification of policies for material transformation of the land is called for.

In the concluding section of his chapter on Prussian water politics, historian David Blackbourn notes: “The wetlands of the North German plain were physically transformed in the second half of the eighteenth century.” (2006, 75). Prussia was home to many wetlands, and especially Frederick (“the Great”) had noted that the transformation of land that had no human use offered the possibility of a large-scale reclamation policy. The policy made available more agricultural land that in turn could feed a growing population and staff the military. Blackbourn’s exemplar is the Oderbruch, a marshy area between Oderberg and Lebus in the East of Berlin. Areas of this kind, Blackbourn writes, could be found everywhere in Prussia (2006, 27). Land reclamation in the Oderbruch had been attempted for some time, but only with Frederick a large-scale transformation of the area was pushed through. A team of bureaucrats, engineers and scientists (including the noted mathematician Leonhard Euler) surveyed the area, a plan was drawn up, and from 1747-1753 a major effort was made to implement it, requiring at times up to 950 soldiers from the Prussian army. In the end, the marshes had been drained, and colonists were called in to establish agriculture in the former wetlands (62).⁸ “The changes brought a new physical security to men and women who settled once inhospitable land, yet they exposed much

7] In the second proposition Kant specifies that those “predispositions aimed at the use of reason are to be developed in full only in the species, but not in the individual”. But this is a reason-specific point, and it does not follow that other predispositions in nature could not “develop” on the level of species or some other level (for example the “development” of a species due to breeding techniques).

8] For an account of the scale of the Prussian effort of this type of internal colonisation see Blackbourn 2006, 41-42.

larger number of people to potential insecurity. They also destroyed ecologically valuable wetland habitats. How do we strike the balance?” According to Blackbourn, “we can choose to celebrate a triumph of modernity, or lament a world that was lost, but neither really does justice to what the transformation meant” (62).

Blackbourn notes that this transformation was made possible, in part, due to the information made available by cameralism and its statistics (43).⁹ An observation that is as pertinent for the draining of marshes as it is for the sustainable growth of forests, another important domain of policy. If the water politics just described increased agricultural land (at least in the short-term), scientific forestry primarily was meant to increase revenue (Scott 1998, 12). From the state perspective, the forest was an economic good that ought to be exploited and sustained as a source of income. It is in the context of scientific forestry that the term ‘sustainability’ (Nachhaltigkeit) was coined with reference to nature as a resource in Carlowitz’ *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* of 1713. The maxim to only cut as much wood as can be re-grown conceptually links sustainability and growth. And as in the case of water politics, the state focus is in tension with local uses and ecological functions of the forest.

These water and forestry policies in eighteenth century Prussia show the state ‘developing’ its environment. In this sense, nature’s predispositions are ‘developed’ in humankind, quite selectively to be sure. The material changes to the land primarily serve as a means to promote the interests of government, especially economic and military power. Nature’s predispositions (*anlagen*) appear as nature’s interest rate; ‘sustainability’ policies coincide with a threat to ecological sustainability and local justice.

III. CROOKED WOOD AND STRAIGHT TIMBER

The transformation of the land appears in Kant’s *Idea* in two ways: as evidence and as metaphor, both invoked to persuade readers of his theory of development. In the opening passage of his article, Kant notes “that the free will of human beings has such a great influence on marriages, on the births that result from these, and on dying, it would seem that there is no rule to which these events are subject and according to which one could calculate their number in advance” (*Idea*, 8:17). However, he notes that the “relevant statistics compiled annually in large countries demonstrate that these events occur just as much in accordance with constant natural laws as do inconstancies in the weather, which cannot be determined individually in advance, but which, taken together, do not fail to maintain a consistent and uninterrupted process in the growth of the plants, the flow of rivers, and other natural arrangements” (*Idea*, 8:17).

9] On this early root of “statistics” see Lazarsfeld 1961. On cameralism and scientific forestry (discussed below) see Lowood 1990.

Kant was familiar with the work of statisticians such as Johann Süssmilch.¹⁰ A Prussian theologian influenced by the English political arithmeticians, Süssmilch had compiled numbers on births, deaths, and sex ratios for his main work: the *Divine Order*. The work offered a mix of politics and religion; taking God's first commandment to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, it followed for Süssmilch that 'order' was best evaluated with population surveys. In *Idea*, statistical tables serve as initial, suggestive evidence for Kant's conjecture that we could discover order and development in history. Anticipating the 'statistical enthusiasm' of the nineteenth century, Kant highlights the (surprising) discovery of order by statisticians. This discovery prepares an initial plausibility space for Kant's *Idea*.

The cameral sciences also provide a powerful metaphor. Following the introduction of unsocial sociability as the primary means of development, and of the civil constitution as a necessary requirement to discipline societal antagonism, Kant notes: "It is only in a refuge such as a civic union that these same inclinations subsequently produce the best effect, just as trees in a forest, precisely by seeking to take air and light from all the others around them, compel each other to look for air and light above themselves and thus grow up straight and beautiful, while those that live apart from others and sprout their branches freely grow stunted, crooked, and bent" (*Idea*, fifth Proposition). If considered in the context of cameralism and its scientific forestry, this metaphor resonates with a major change of eighteenth century Prussia: the effort to maximise and sustain the revenue from timber via the growth of straight "normal trees"¹¹, the planting of commercially viable trees and the resulting monocultures. Viewed in this context, the metaphor points to the idea of a parallel development in human society - from *normalbaum* to *normalmensch*, who optimally develops his or her predispositions in the unsocial sociability of civil society. The metaphor supports a social thesis, though with characteristic caution, Kant adds in the next proposition: "nothing entirely straight can be fashioned from the crooked wood of which humankind is made" - to which foresters might have added after their many failed attempts to maximise sustained yield that trees are too crooked as well.

If this use of evidence and metaphors from cameralism and its Statistik is noted, as is not the case in the philosophical literature on Kant as far as I can tell, Kant's language resonates with and points to material changes in the eighteenth century: the work of government to maximise revenue yield from forestry, and to desiccate the land so as to increase agricultural areas and so forth. It points to "the *growth* of plants, and the *flows* of rivers" (*Idea*, 8:17), i.e. the growing of timber for maximum revenue and the rectification of rivers for transport. As noted, these material transformations introduce 'sustainability' as a concern tightly linked to political and economic power. So understood, they therefore also

10] Kant's readings can be accessed at http://web.uni-marburg.de/kant//webseite/ka_lektu.htm (accessed June 3, 2009).

11] I take the expression "Normalbaum" from Loowood and his discussion of Georg Ludwig Hartigs "Neue Instructionen für die Königlich-Preussischen Forst-Geometer und Forst-Taxatoren, durch Beispiele erklärt" (see Loowood 1990, 332).

necessitate to consider ‘unsocial sociability’ – and the way the trees “compel each other to look for air and light above themselves” – not only on the level of individual antagonism, of individual against individual and of tree against tree, but also and especially on the political level: who compels humans and trees to grow straight, and what is the implication for the theory of development?

IV. WHAT WAS ENLIGHTENMENT?

Idea, as noted, focuses the accounts of means of development on unsocial sociability and on the power of the state (and a federation of states) for disciplining the social antagonism. The historical perspective, with an ‘enlightened’ absolutist ruler ‘developing’ land and people according to his view, puts into perspective the focus on ‘unsocial sociability’/ trees compelling each other – *scientific forestry* seeks maximum sustained yield – and on the disciplinary force of the state – to what end and how does scientific forestry ‘develop’ the forest? The tree metaphor, considered as an image issuing from eighteenth century practices, points to political, economic and scientific power, from a focus on trees compelling each other to a focus on state power to exploit and ‘develop’ the land. Thus, is the account of means of development sufficient given the Kantian formulation of the end of development?

In *Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, an article published in the same year as *Idea* in a later issue of the *Berlinische Monatszeitschrift*, Kant tells his readers that humankind is still by and large immature. Out of convenience and cowardice, human beings prefer to follow the experts rather than use their own understanding. “It is so comfortable to be immature. If I have a book that reasons for me, a pastor who acts as my conscience, a physician who determines my diet for me, etc., then I need not make any effort myself” (Kant 8:33). At first sight, this “comfortable” situation seems quite removed from the diagnosis of ‘unsocial sociability’!

In the context of this Enlightenment episode of ‘universal history’, Kant introduces a distinction between the private and the public use of reason. The private use of reason is the use of reason in a “civil post or office with which one is entrusted.” (Kant 8:37). The public use of reason is “the use that anyone makes thereof as a scholar before the reading world” (*ibid.*). The public use of reason, Kant argues, promotes a process of social learning that moves society closer to the state of justice. He performatively suggests that the use of public reason with respect to laws and policies is oriented by a criterion of justice. More precisely, “the touchstone of anything that can serve as a law over a people lies in the question: whether a people could impose such a law on itself.” (Kant 8:39¹²). Thus, the public use of reason is not only characterised negatively as not subject to private orders (institutional requirements of foresters, military etc.). As a contribution to policy discussions,

12] This touchstone is closely tied to the fifth proposition in *Idea*, and to the idea of autonomy in Kant’s moral philosophy.

Kant subjects it to a “touchstone”: are the forestry, land and water regulation appropriate to the ideal of a people imposing law on itself?¹³

With respect to the public use of reason, the tree metaphor breaks down. Citizens do not “mutually compel each other”, they address each other independently of their private mandates and offices, and they address “the entire reading world”. According to Kant’s famous argument, their public use of reason is critical for the process of social learning promoting development. His argument can be strengthened via a consideration of environmental history. With a view on the material transformation of the land, the public sphere and the information and considerations it makes available can play a role of taming where the state proceeds with policies (called ‘developmental’ or not) that incur significant costs to citizens as well as the non-human world, or that at any rate have an impact on citizens and the non-human world that is considerably more complex than what the state could see with its statistics (Scott 1998, 5). Precisely, because there are many and inter-related social and ecological functions of forests, rivers and land, the inclusion of voices that would not be heard by existing institutions, or that would not be heard “in” them, is critical (also to do justice to what that “transformation really means”). This environmental history argument is different from but not in conflict with Kant’s own argument in *What is Enlightenment*, which strongly draws on the idea of a vocation of human nature to think for itself (Kant 8:41). According to both arguments, the public use of reason is a means of development (and according to the second even an end). So as to highlight the use of public reason as a development means we can speak of Kant’s extended theory of development (“extended” because it is not given much consideration in *Idea*)¹⁴.

13] Joseph Lewandowski has discussed Kant’s public-private distinction in terms of freedom and constraints in this journal. In his view, Kant “over-reaches in his characterization of the ‘public’ as a kind of cosmopolitanism outside of all constitutive constraints” (Lewandowski 2009:7), and Kant insufficiently addresses the inequalities and exclusions of the private use of reason (ibid. 6). In Lewandowski’s view, the role of reason is to reflexively optimize constitutive constraints. But what is optimization? On one set of views (subjectivist and/or relativist), there is no general answer; on a second (economic) view, optimisation concerns the efficient allocation of resources given subjective preferences, and on a third view optimization needs to be spelled out in terms of principles of justice, equality and liberty. The second view simply blocks reflexivity (‘preferences’ are given) and hence is not a plausible interpretation. If the first view also is rejected (compare Lewandowski on Nietzsche and others, 2), we are driven towards some account of criteria of justice, i.e. a “touchstone”. Therefore, I would question whether Lewandowski’s account shows Kant to “over-reach in his characterization of public reason”. Kant offers one way to spell out the “optimization” and “maximization” of human freedom (ibid 1). The use of public reason so understood can be “informed” by “private” considerations and knowledge, but in the limit it can raise up to the level of citizens of the world: every institution can be scrutinised by public reason with a view on its inequalities and exclusions (as viewed against the criterion of justice). The accompanying vision is not one of a “market-based democracy” (10), but if anything of a democracy-based market, or in Kantian terms a republic-based unsocial sociability. No doubt, this normative vision can be criticised (is self-imposed law and the accompanying idea of autonomy the correct normative and constitutive constraint?), but not, I think, by an argument appealing to reflexivity as optimisation of constraints.

14] As with the other means of development, public use of reason concerns *possible* development. Will local people make their voice heard, or will their voice be “reinforced” by “learned” people (*gelehrte*), will they be listened to etc.?

To be sure, there are hints at the public use of reason as a means of development in *Idea* (*Idea*, 8:28). And there is also a closeness of choice of imagery in the two articles: *Idea* speaks of “childish” foolishness, destructiveness and wickedness; *What is Enlightenment* describes enlightenment as an “exit” from “immaturity”, and the paradigmatic case of *unmündige* human beings are children. Still, Kant’s theory of development as outlined in *Idea* does not put much emphasis on the public use of reason as a means of development. It is as if the focus on the plot of ‘universal history’ leads to a fading away of, and a neglect of the episode Kant witnesses in his own life. Yet, it is in this Enlightenment¹⁵ episode that important ‘development’ policies of the state, involving large-scale material transformations of the land, have their beginning, and with them a vocabulary, involving the concepts of *development* and *sustainability* that still affect us materially today, and also the way in which we think about these issues.

V. THE “FINAL END”: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The last section proposed a refinement of Kant’s theory of development as stated in *Idea*. This section turns to the meta-level: how to think about Kant’s theory on the epistemological level. Is Kant’s primary interest a contribution to method in history, is his primary interest practical (advancing the cosmopolitan purpose), or is it a mixture of these interests? According to Pauline Kleingeld, Kant’s purpose is primarily theoretical rather than practical. “As a matter of fact Kant solves a theoretical-speculative question, viz the question regarding the purposive unity of the world of appearance, with the help of moral-practical concepts, yet this does not turn the question itself into a moral-practical one. *Idea* is primarily philosophy of history with a theoretical purpose.”¹⁶

In support of this interpretation, there is Kant’s introductory claim that history as concerning the world of appearance ought to be subject to the laws of nature, and hence to theory-building akin perhaps even to the works of a Newton. And there is a theoretical motivation for this effort in theory-building, i.e. Kant’s claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the mind strives to establish a systematic unity of knowledge, universal history being one domain of application or exertion of this strife.

However, Kant not only states this theoretical interest. He immediately follows up on his introductory observation with the “hope” that we can discern a “progression”, even a “steady” progress of the capacities of the human species. Thus, from the start the theoretical is directly tied to the practical concern. That this relation is not merely that of an added on hope becomes clear if the second more difficult point from the *Critique of Pure Reason* is also taken into account.

15] On the public use of reason as constitutive of Kantian Enlightenment see Deligiorgi 2005.

16] Kleingeld, ‘Fortschritt’, 31, my translation.

Kant's discussion of the regulative use of ideas of science in the *Critique of Pure Reason* still receives much praise (Tetens 2006, 294). However, at least for the present issue some qualifications are in order.

1) The claim that theoretical reasons naturally strives to establish a systematic unity of knowledge as a claim about what scientists actually do needs to be heavily qualified or else is simply false. A pluralist spirit that accepts and endorses the limits of scientific unity is arguably as frequent among scientists as is the spirit of systematisers who for example want to reduce all science to physics. In particular, historians frequently focus on the singular historical event rather than on law-based explanations. Thus, with a view on science as practiced, the argument for unity is far from self-evident.

2) This observation of the plurality of theoretical approaches in practice prepares a second qualification. Even the strife for systematic unity does not explain the specific focus on a theory of *development* that Kant chooses for his approach to 'universal history'. The strife for unity is *prima facie* indeterminate as to what system of unity is to be chosen for the temporal ordering of events: a progressing one as in Kant, one with ups and downs as in Mendelssohn, an apocalyptic one etc. According to Kleingeld, Kant for all the sophistication of his approach "fails to pose the question how one would go about choosing various competing proposals for regulative ideas" (Kleingeld 2008:527). Yet this point has to be modified if the purpose is a *practical* one. For practical reasons, a focus on a theory of development with ends and goals can be motivated (see the discussion above), and this practical purpose offers criteria for theory choice and the selection of explanatory 'mechanisms'¹⁷. For example, with these practical interests the Darwinian theory of evolution as such is not very "useful" (though it might provide background information and constraints). The present considerations have two implications: a) they tend to support the view that Kant rather than having overlooked the problem of theory choice, did not see the problem because his primary interest was practical, not theoretical; b) affirming this practical purpose opens a quite different question of choice: that of normative goals and their justification. The paper will return to the last point below.

3) Arguably, the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers a theoretical argument for the focus on a theory of development with goals and means. Kant claims that the purposive unity of things is the highest formal unity (A 687/B715). Thus, a systemiser with respect to history should opt for a "purposive unity". Yet, is this "highest unity" as a regulative principle always beneficial and never harmful from a theoretical perspective? For example, in the *Groundwork*, Kant uses teleological reasoning to argue that human beings are not made to be happy, because reason is a bad instrument for this end; the result is his infamous theo-

17] 'Mechanism' is a difficult technical term in Kant's theoretical philosophy concerning the blind causal relation between material objects (for an extended discussion see Breitenbach 2008). As the discussion of the use of public reason above will have illustrated, on the present reading, such blind causal relation fails in the present context. Following Kleingeld, this paper uses the term 'means'. The relation between 'means' (*mittel*) and 'mechanism' in the light of Kant's philosophy and his account of development is a topic that would deserve a paper of its own.

retical disinterest in the “science of happiness” for the first problems of moral theory (Kant 4:395). Thus, by hindsight the benefit of teleological reasoning seems doubtful here, even as a heuristic device. More importantly, perhaps, why should the teleological order be the *highest* order? It could be argued that a teleological unity orders all appearances under one final end. Yet, no doubt it is logically conceivable to think of history as governed by *one* evolutionary mechanism (or ultimately by the second law of thermodynamics). Again, a theoretical justification of this superiority claim at the very least does not seem self-evident. However, practical purpose explains quite well why a goals-means structure is useful for ‘universal history’: human agency is, at least for all practical purposes, difficult to explain without the distinction of goals and means.

In conclusion, “the primacy of theoretical purpose” does not seem to be plausible with respect to *Idea*. In the text, the assertion of theoretical interest is interwoven with practical interest. Moreover, practical purpose seems to better explain the theory choices Kant makes than a pure theoretical purpose. Thus, the justification and specification of the systematizing theoretical intent at least *co*-depends on practical reason (the theoretical ones being indeterminate or simply too problematic). On the present interpretation this has two implications: What is the precise practical purpose, and how is it justified? What follows from this practical purpose for the empirical study of history and development? I will turn to the first question below. For the second, question Kant makes the point clearly: the practical purpose offers an *idea* with which to study development in history. It does not license the expectation or claim that history has been such. Rather, it orients the search for signs of possible development. In short, this is a practical and epistemically cautious perspective.

VI. DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

The specification and reconsideration of Kant’s (extended) theory of development raises numerous questions. In this section, I would like to emphasise three issues concerning the relation of human development to the environment: 1) the relation between Kant’s conceptualisations of nature and the extended theory of development, 2) the ethical significance of *all* of nature’s predispositions, and 3) Kant’s biological assumptions (*anlagen*).

In *Idea*, nature features as providence and as system of laws. In terms of this first conceptualisation Kant writes of the hidden “intent of nature” (*Idea*, 8:17), that “nature has willed that” (*Idea*, third Proposition, 8:29), of the “concealed plan of nature” (*Idea*, eighth Proposition, 8:27), and of “nature, or rather of providence.” (*Idea*, ninth Proposition, 8:30). This conceptualisation takes a “divine” view on history from distant beginnings to the equally distant cosmopolitan purpose; and it takes a teleological view of a nature that has willed predispositions to develop (according to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, such a teleological approach is the best-available research heuristic). Kant asks whether signs of such a teleological development can be discovered, and hence whether development so understood is possible. *Idea* also includes the conceptualisation of nature as the exis-

tence of things, so far as it is determined according to universal laws. Kant invokes in the introduction to *Idea* events that “occur ... in accordance with constant natural laws” (*Idea*, 8:17), and as noted calls for a Kepler or Newton of ‘universal history’ (*Idea*, 8:18).

Now, these conceptualisations of nature, and in particular the idea of providence, also play a role in the politics of development. In this introductory context, Kant draws on “statistics compiled annually in large countries.” (*Idea*, 8:17). As the Prussian episode shows, such statistics were generally compiled for a practical purpose such as the physical transformation of the land according to (‘sustainability’) maxims and other goals: maximising and sustaining revenue from timber, desiccating the land to increase agricultural yield and so forth - in short, practical, human-imposed law. Such goals and laws can be specified by the ruler and his experts with or without accountability to those affected by them. There are various degrees and forms of accountability: from public debate to the accountability of leaders and laws in elections and referenda. But for the present purpose, a more general point is sufficient. Rulers and policy-makers can and have justified their proposals and actions as in harmony with nature or in line with or even fulfilling “divine providence”. Here the conceptualisation of nature, along with the idea of progress, have played a powerful legitimising role. Yet, the consideration of the “Prussian episode” and the material transformations of the land in the last sections suggested that such ‘development’ require scrutiny. It is difficult to do justice to these transformations. Especially the record of ‘development policy’ issuing from large organisations, be it states or corporations, with no accountability to the public is poor: many human uses of nature’s predispositions will be ignored, local ecological insight lost, “all of nature’s predispositions” will hardly develop, and monocultures can replace biodiversity as techniques for taking nature and society into account created unprecedented possibilities for central state (and economic) power. The use of public reason is a means to open development to its multi-perspectival complexity: to do justice to transformations, and to possibly achieve just transformations.

This point on the relations between the conceptualisation of nature and the theory of development leads to a further point regarding “all of nature’s predispositions”. As current theorizing about development tends to be thoroughly anthropocentric, the comprehensive significance of this claim is easily passed over. And no doubt, Kant does not offer an environmental ethic that would ascribe value to nature independently and on par with the value of human beings. If anything, “all of nature’s predispositions” are hierarchically ordered with human values on top (Düsing 1968). Still, two points are worth mentioning: 1) the extended theory of development (i.e. including the use of public reason as a means) is likely to better take into account nature’s predispositions, which co-evolve with particular groups and their ways of interacting and using the environment, to the extent that this co-evolution can be articulated and voiced by the respective groups (Norgaard 1994); 2) Kant’s hierarchical order of purposes with human purpose on top at least includes other “lower” purposes - a comprehensiveness not achieved by the majority of most recent theories of development, but no doubt a desideratum for current theorizing about (sustainable) development.

Finally, Kant's account of natural and given predispositions as constitutive part of his theory of development is hard to defend. It relies on a theory of generic pre-formation that Kant adopted from Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (Kleingeld 1996, 125ff). According to this theory, the creator has endowed the species with predispositions. There is an a-historical, biological background to Kant's universal history: species are endowed, *ab initio*, with predispositions; these predispositions are given and remain the same; they only have to "develop" in history. It is a pre-evolutionary account that will be rejected by biologists. However, and this point is closely linked to the point about environmental ethics above, in abstract and vague terms, Kant's approach based on "all of nature's predispositions" is no doubt attractive. In the sustainable development discourse, it is widely understood (and governments have officially and repeatedly stated) that a mere focus on "human development" is insufficient; ecosystem functioning is an important condition of human development, and human development in turn impacts this functioning. Therefore, even if the biological assumptions of Kant's theory of development are rejected, on a more general level the epistemic spirit of his theory of development is still attractive: the theory of development ought to turn to the best current biophysical theories (as Kant had turned to Blumenbach) for a properly comprehensive theory of development, even if that necessitates the repeated revision of the theory due to the falsification process of science.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Kant's theory of development is as interesting as it is problematic. Let me therefore conclude with some remarks regarding the distinctive features of Kantian theory of development, with a view on current debates in political philosophy and sustainable development:

Development as a normative concept: If the predisposition biology is dated, is then not also the reason for the development language removed (that is the *entwicklung der anlagen*)? The consideration of the arguments motivating the Kantian theory of development – consolation, acceleration, disburdening future generations, and honour – indicate that there is a genuine normative space occupied by the theory of development. *Development*, even if often abused, is not just a concept of abuse. A further exploration of this space is required, or so I would like to suggest.

Taking nature into account: Kant's theory of development unlike many current theories is based on a comprehensive theory of development that includes the human and non-human world alike. Even if the letter of the biological theory employed by Kant will be rejected, the spirit of this approach remains pertinent. As development centrally involves the question of the nature-society relation, drawing on the best currently available biological (and other theories) seems inevitable – and necessarily raises the next issue as to how such an interdisciplinary approach is to be worked out. In addition to Kant's own suggestions, the search for "signs" or "traces" of (possible) development in history will

have to look out for more than legal changes - the ways in which the land is transformed is more than a matter of metaphor.

History: I have focused on the theory of development that is a constitutive part of Kant's universal history. However, universal history also indicates something that much current theorizing of development seems to ignore: a properly *world historical* perspective. An important task for a theory of development is the attempt to do "justice to transformations" (as Blackbourn puts it). Without such care, there is little prospect for "consolation".

Goal justification: Kant's development goals (see section 2) are posited rather than justified in *Idea*, not least, perhaps, because Kant relies on what he takes to be a plausible biological theory. However, the development of predispositions is morally and ethically considered an ambiguous process. This concern is a moot point to the extent that the predispositions-biology is rejected; however it implies the valid lesson that developmental goals require normative justification rather than postulation. Perhaps, a trivial theoretical point, but an important practical one to the extent that the focus on development as economic growth still prevails.

(Not so) Hidden Plans: Kant puts much emphasis on the idea of a "concealed plan" of nature (specified primarily in terms of the societal antagonism). However, reconsidering the Kantian theory of development in the light of the Prussian episode suggests a mixed picture. "Hidden" means such as the societal antagonism might play a role, in particular perhaps in the economy. But if public reason is considered a further, complementary means of development, then developmental goals cannot just be "hidden" – the use of public reason ultimately relies on some grasp and discussion of developmental goals, an open cosmopolitan plan in the making so to speak. This non-hidden nature is doubly important to the extent that self-proclaimed developers turn "trees into thalers", and "straighten" human crooked wood according to their visions. The use of public reason is one antidote against these objectification tendencies in real world 'development' by large organisations such as states and corporations. Finally, such a mixed account of the role of human beings as ends and means seems also required by Kant's motivating arguments for a theory of development: acceleration of development, disburdening future generations, and considerations of honour all require a plan that is at least not only concealed.

rziegler@uni-greifswald.de

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