THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF KANT’S GUARANTEE FOR PERPETUAL PEACE

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1. Introduction

The idea of perpetual peace as the highest political good is introduced by Kant in the Metaphysics of Morals, more exactly in the Doctrine of Right [Rechtslehre], in the Conclusion to Chapter III, Cosmopolitan Right:

But if it [the idea that the best constitution is that in which power belongs to the laws, not to human beings] is attempted and carried out by gradual reform in accordance with firm principles, it can lead to continual approximation to the highest political good, perpetual peace. (MM 6: 355)

The Conclusion to Cosmopolitan Right is in fact also the conclusion to Public right, which is the second and final part of the Doctrine of Right. That Kant talks about perpetual peace in the concluding part of Rechtslehre is not surprising, since perpetual peace, as the highest political good, is supposed to be “the entire final end of the doctrine of right within the limits of mere reason”. (MM 6: 355)

Kant expresses doubts about the extent to which the idea of perpetual peace can be realised. In the Rechtslehre, he claims that the complete realisation of the ideal of perpetual peace might remain “a pious wish” towards which we must work “incessantly” for its “continual approximation”. (MM 6:355) In “Toward Perpetual Peace”, he begins with some comments on the title, regarded as a “satirical inscription on a certain Dutch innkeeper’s signboard picturing a graveyard”. (PP 8: 343)

Acknowledgements: I first met Harry Lesser back in 1996, when I was a PhD student in Manchester. He was a wonderful mentor and, later on, when I had my first temporary positions at Manchester, an excellent colleague. I remember with gratitude his support, as Head of the Centre for Philosophy at Manchester, at a difficult time for me and my family. He was also an extremely knowledgeable scholar, but in a very pleasant and unassuming way. As a result, although he had a deep interest in Kant’s legal philosophy, I realised the extent of his knowledge only later on. His invitation to a workshop on Kant’s Rechtslehre at the University of St Andrews in 2012 was inspiring and a starting point for my interest in Kant’s idea of the highest political good. This paper is dedicated to Harry’s memory. In part, work on this paper was undertaken during a period of research leave made possible by an institutional sabbatical from Keele University and support from the ERC Advanced Research Grant “Distortions of Normativity” at the University of Vienna. I am grateful to the grant’s PI and to Keele University for making this period of research possible. A version of this paper was presented to the ‘Jean-Jacques Rousseau’ Annual Conference organised at Keele University in November 2013; I am grateful to the commentator of my paper, Adrian Piper, for an excellent set of observations and to members in the audience for stimulating discussion. Special thanks are due to the editors of this volume, in particular to Paula Satne, for their patience during the relatively lengthy process of revision, for their support and useful comments.

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CPR: Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft) (1781; 1787), in Kant (1996a).
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Nevertheless, for Kant, the important question is not “whether perpetual peace is something real or a fiction”, since “adopting the maxim of working incessantly toward it [...] is our duty”. (MM 6: 354-5) In particular, the duty is to work towards establishing “the kind of constitution that seems to us most conducive to it [i.e., to perpetual peace] (say, a republicanism of all states, together and separately) in order to [...] put an end to the heinous waging of war”. (MM 6: 354) Moreover, for the realisation of perpetual peace, he is not simply relying on individuals’ sense of duty, but introduces the mysterious notion of a guarantee [Garantie] for perpetual peace.

In fact, the idea of a guarantee raises, for Kant, the question of the significance of perpetual peace, that is, the question of:

what nature does for this purpose with reference to the end that the human being’s own reason makes a reason for him, hence to the favouring of his moral purpose, and how it affords the guarantee that what man ought to do in accordance with laws of freedom but does not do, it is assured he will do, without prejudice to this freedom, even by a constraint of nature, and this in terms of all three relations of public right: the right of a state, the right of nations and cosmopolitan right. (PP 8: 365)

The end that our reason makes a ground of action for us is the highest political good of perpetual peace. Nature is supposed to constrain those who do not pursue this end and it does this without diminishing those persons’ freedom. But here Kant does not talk about nature in a metaphorical sense. This is clear from his answer to the question concerning the agency of nature:

When I say of nature, it wills that this or that happens, this does not mean, it lays upon us a duty to do it (for only practical reason, without coercion, can do that) but rather that nature itself does it, whether we will it or not. (PP 8: 365)

These quotations indicate clearly some of Kant’s claims that raise difficulties for commentators. There is first a claim that nature will constrain individuals at national, international and cosmopolitan levels to act in accordance with their duties of working incessantly towards perpetual peace. Secondly, there is a claim that these constraints will not restrain individuals’ freedom. Thirdly, there is a distinction between nature and individuals and an emphasis that “nature” is providing the guarantee, independently from the individuals’ will.

The main issue concerning the guarantee is how to account for it epistemically, given that it makes a claim which seems to go beyond our ken. Thus, Kant notes that we can regard nature “as necessitation by a cause”, which operates through laws, in which case we call this cause and its necessitation through laws “fate”; we can also regard nature as “purposiveness in the course of the world as the profound wisdom of a higher cause”, and we can call this wisdom directed to the final end of the human race and predetermining the course of the world “providence”. (PP 8: 360-2) Kant states explicitly that we do not “cognise” either fate or providence in the ‘actions’ of nature; in fact, he stresses, we do not even “infer” them. This is quite consistent with the limits he identifies in the Critique of Pure Reason for our cognition, particularly in the
Transcendental Dialectic, where knowledge of the world as a whole is not possible, since knowledge requires both concepts and experience and we cannot experience the world as a whole.

For this reason, Kant then claims that we “only can and must add it [fate or providence] in thought”, and we conceive it as possible by analogy with human actions. (PP 8: 362) To be sure, while this seems to avoid the problem that we cannot cognise that there is a guarantee, it makes also problematic this guarantee as a constraint; if it is something we add “in thought”, how could it determine us to act in accordance with the final end of perpetual peace – and not only individually, but also at national, international and cosmopolitan level? If the independent constraint of nature is simply an idea we add in thought, then there seems to be no constraint with an effective force beyond that of Baron Münchausen.

Kant’s answer is that the representation of the relation between the ‘actions’ of nature and the end of perpetual peace is an idea which “is indeed transcendent for theoretical purposes but for practical purposes (e.g., with respect to the concept of the duty of perpetual peace and putting that mechanism of nature to use for it) is dogmatic and well founded as to its reality”. (PP 8: 362) Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical purposes is related to the distinction between theoretical and practical cognition. In the First Critique, the distinction is drawn between “theoretical cognition as one whereby I cognise what is, and practical cognition, as one whereby I conceive what ought to be.” (A633/B661) His claim is therefore that the guarantee offered by nature is not the subject of a descriptive claim we could prove scientifically as referring to a state of affairs, in the way in which, for instance, we could prove the laws of friction; the claim of the guarantee has to do with the cognition we justify once we assume a certain moral purpose.

This answer acknowledges the limits of our knowledge, but asserts the reality of the guarantee in an unusual way, namely, as “dogmatic”. It is unclear how useful such a cognition would be, since usually we use cognition claims to try to convince an interlocutor of something, but claiming dogmatically the reality of perpetual peace will not seem to be very convincing for anybody who is not already convinced of its reality.

Another problematic aspect of Kant’s discussion is the similarity between the idea of perpetual peace and the postulates of practical reason, which Kant introduces in the Second Critique. (CPrR 5: 122-134) The postulates of practical reason, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, are asserted as necessary for making possible the notion of the complete good, which Kant thinks is essential for moral beings like us. This similarity is problematic since it encourages certain misinterpretations of the guarantee.

Thus, commentators avoid an understanding of the guarantee as performed by a force independent from the individuals’ wills. To regard the guarantee as provided by nature, and to understand nature as independent from us raises questions concerning our knowledge of the guarantee. By contrast, if we think the guarantee is provided by the will of the individual citizens in accordance with the moral duty of pursuing perpetual peace, then the problem of knowledge evaporates, since we do have practical cognition of our moral duties. This creates an additional problem, which is answered by a further misinterpretation of Kant’s idea of perpetual peace, as the highest political good. The problem is that it is no longer clear what function the guarantee performs in Kant’s philosophy. If our approach to perpetual peace is guaranteed by our duty to pursue perpetual peace and by our will to pursue it, then the guarantee is no different from the combination of the moral law and our status as moral agents. To answer this problem, commentators

3 I use interchangeably ‘knowledge’ and ‘cognition’, but without ignoring the important distinction between them. As Pluhar notes, his “translation [of the Critique of Pure Reason] consistently renders Erkenntnis as ‘cognition’ (and in a few identified instances as ‘recognition’), never as ‘knowledge’. The reason is that on Kant’s view certain cases of practical cognition (Erkenntnis), such as that of God, are not instances of knowledge (Wissen), but of rational (moral) faith.” (Pluhar, in Kant 1996: 5 n6) Hence, ‘cognition’ has a broader extension than ‘knowledge’; they can be used interchangeably when we talk about theoretical cognition, not practical cognition.
interpret the highest political by analogy with the highest ethical good, which includes two components – virtue and happiness. As a result, the guarantee is given the task of demonstrating that the two components can be brought together. Without the possibility of the highest political good, there cannot be a duty to pursue it.

I have dealt with second interpretative problem elsewhere. Here, I will only summarise the conclusions, and the focus will be on the first problem: understanding the guarantee as provided by nature independently from the individuals’ wills. I will look at a couple of examples in the literature, explain why this interpretation cannot work and then present what I take to be Kant’s construal of the guarantee and its epistemic status.

In the next section, I will briefly present the second interpretative problem and its solution; this will clarify the notion of perpetual peace as the highest political good and will pave the way for the discussion of the first interpretative problem. In Section 3, I will consider two examples where the guarantee is attributed to the will of the citizens, rather than to nature and will explain why this construal is unsatisfactory. Section 4 will present my reading of the epistemic status of the guarantee – this will clarify in what sense Kant thinks the reality of the guarantee is well grounded and is dogmatic for practical purposes; it will also clarify Kant’s claim that, although nature actually constrains individuals, it does so without prejudice to their freedom.

2. The Highest Political Good

The idea of the guarantee seems to be involved in Kant’s discussion of the Postulates of Practical Reason, in the Antinomy of the Pure Practical Reason of the First Critique. This may seem to be a good starting point for understanding his view of the guarantee. In the Antinomy, Kant seems to suggest that we can take the highest good as an end only if the highest good is a possible end. Kant regards it as necessarily the case that happiness will follow morality in a moral world understood as intelligible world. The cause of general happiness, Kant thinks, would be freedom under the moral law. Yet, once we focus on the actual world, where persons may not act according to the moral law, the nature of things in the world or the causality of the actions accompanied by the relation to morality can no longer guarantee happiness in accordance with morality.

The connection between worthiness of happiness and happiness is necessary only “if a supreme reason that commands according to moral laws is also laid at the basis of nature, as nature’s cause”. (A810/B838) This is, in nuce, Kant’s argument for the practical postulate of the existence of God in the Second Critique. The interesting and problematic implication of the discussion so far is that it seems the highest good should always be thought of by analogy with the idea of the highest good presented by Kant in the First Critique. In other words, whether we talk about the highest political, ethical or moral-physical good, we can understand it as the necessary connection between two elements of the moral world (virtue and happiness).

In “Kant’s Political Religion: The Transparency of Perpetual Peace and the Highest Good”, Robert Taylor notes that perpetual peace, the highest political good, is presented in the Metaphysics of Morals as an unachievable aim. If so, then we no longer need an appeal to postulates of practical reason to account for its possibility. Not surprisingly, therefore, Taylor notes, God plays almost no role in Kant’s Doctrine of Right. (2010: 9) Without a need for practical postulates, Kant’s moral religion virtually disappears. To save it, one possibility would be for him to revert to the claim he makes in the Second Critique that the possibility of the highest good must be assumed.

In “Kant’s Highest Political Good” (2013).
According to Taylor, this leads Kant in *Perpetual Peace* to the view that God offers a guarantee of perpetual peace. (Taylor 2010: 9-10) In other words, once we assume that the highest political good must be possible, in order for its realisation to be a duty, we need God to account for its possibility, in the same way in which, on the basis of the ‘ought implies can’ dictum, Kant must introduce the postulates of practical reason (including that of the existence of God) in order to account for the possibility of the highest good in the second *Critique*. The assumption, in other words, is that the similarity between the highest ethical good in the *Second Critique* and the highest political good in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace* requires the existence of God, as long as we assume that the highest goods are ends that must be possible in order to be adopted.

Nevertheless, I think that one crucial distinction that Kant draws in the *Second Critique*, as part of his argument for the possibility of the highest good, needs to be considered more seriously. At the beginning of the second chapter of the Dialectic of pure practical reason, Kant says:

The concept of the highest already contains an ambiguity that, if not attended to, can occasion needless disputes. The highest can mean either the supreme (*supremum*) or the complete (*consummatum*). The first is that condition which is itself unconditioned, that is, not subordinate to any other (*originarium*); the second is that whole which is not part of a still greater whole of the same kind (*perfectissimum*). (*CPrR* 5:110)

Kant talks here about an ambiguity that can lead to needless disputes and this ambiguity is over the adjective “highest”. The term can be taken to refer either to what is normatively primordial or to what is most complete. The supreme good is highest in the sense that there is nothing normatively more important. The complete good is highest in the sense that there is no other good which is not included in it.

If we understand Kant’s highest political good, perpetual peace, to refer to a complete good, then we can indeed raise the question of the asymmetry between the highest political good in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and the highest ethical good in the first or second *Critique*, as well as in *Perpetual Peace*, in particular the asymmetry of these notions in their relations to the practical postulates: no appeal to the existence of God in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, but reference to this postulate in *Perpetual Peace*. If the highest political good is understood as supreme, then there is at least one reason why the practical postulates are not needed: unlike the complete good, the supreme good does not have the two elements for the necessary connection of which we need to account.

Hence, one misunderstanding we need to avoid in an account of the highest political good is the view that it consists of two elements, the necessary connection between which would be explained by the guarantee. Now, Taylor thinks that what accounts for the need of the practical postulates in the case of the highest ethical good is given by the opacity of our motivations and, hence, of our ethical worth, as opposed to the observability of our external actions, the only actions Kant is concerned with in the Doctrine of Right of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Taylor devotes about one quarter of his article to an account of how opacity makes it necessary for Kant to argue for the practical postulates. (2010: 13-18)

If practical postulates are needed to explain the possibility of virtue or morality, then, given that the highest political good, like virtue or morality, is the highest good in the sense of a supreme good, there is nothing to prevent the need for postulates in relation to the highest political good too. And this seems to be behind Taylor’s suggestion that, in “Perpetual Peace”, Kant introduces the guarantee of peace that God can provide
to play a similar role to that of the postulates of practical reason. These, on his account, are meant to overcome the obstacle of the opacity of motivations, which makes it impossible for us to ascertain with certainty our ethical worth or, as Kant calls it, our virtue.

A similar presupposition reflecting a misconstrual of the highest political good can be found in Lea Ypi’s “Natura Daedala Rerum? On the Justification of Historical Progress in Kant’s Guarantee of Perpetual Peace”. (2010) According to Ypi, concerning Kant’s “Toward perpetual peace”,

the real issue is to understand why a ‘guarantee’ of perpetual peace is required at all and, if so, whether Kant’s thesis on human progress may be coherently disentangled from an a-Critical assumption of providence and still ultimately defended. (2010: 121)

Her answer to the first question, the question of the need for a guarantee, starts from the assumption that those who are expected to introduce the juridical norms of a condition of peace should act not simply on prudential motives, but should be inspired by universal ethical motives.5 (Ypi 2010: 123) This, she suggests, seems to imply that the task of bringing about perpetual peace presupposes also the task of developing humanity’s moral disposition, which requires coordination between citizens and continuous progress. Hence, this leads to her second question: can Kant justify coordination and continuity in a Critical way?

The misconstrual of the highest political good here is, as before in Taylor, given by the assumption that perpetual peace is an end that must be pursued with ethical motivations; however, the difference between perpetual peace and the highest ethical good is not simply that the former is supreme, whereas the latter, complete; given that perpetual peace represents for Kant the highest political good, perpetual peace should be understood as the supreme good given by the universal principle of right, rather than simply by the categorical imperative. Kant’s highest political good requires that we perform actions in accordance with juridical principles. The highest ethical good, by contrast, requires that we perform actions in accordance with ethical principles and for the sake of these principles. If so, then the highest political good does not raise the puzzle of opacity and does not need practical postulates to solve it. Assuming all this is correct, it follows that the fact that God plays no role in relation to perpetual peace in the Metaphysics of Morals is not an issue.

Now, having a better understanding of Kant’s idea of the highest political good, we can move on to the problem of the status of the guarantee. The essay on history, Ypi notes, suggests as solution the way in which nature intervenes teleologically to transform the human species, and this deprives human beings of moral responsibility, not to mention that such a claim seems to go beyond the epistemological limits Critical philosophy establishes; the approach in the first two Critiques, she continues, suggests that the highest good can be realised by the reciprocal recognition of the agents’ moral obligations, but then it becomes unclear what the function of the practical postulates is and, in fact, it becomes again unclear why we need a guarantee at all. (Ypi 2010:129-30)

Her solution makes recourse to Kant’s Third Critique and the starting point is the difference she notes between Kant’s view of physicotheology in the First and Third Critiques. (2010: 131) In addition, she thinks Kant reformulates the practical postulates in the third Critique through “the analysis of natural teleology from the standpoint of human history”, and this leads to a different “conceptualisation of a ‘guarantee’ for the realization of the highest good in the world”. (2010: 136) Here we have a first problem in

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5 Like Ypi, Guyer also introduces as a requirement for perpetual peace that it be done by “morally motivated acts of human will”. (2000: 425)
the understanding of the guarantee of perpetual peace. A discussion of the guarantee and its misinterpretations will be the focus of the next section.

3. Guarantee of Perpetual Peace

According to Katrin Flikschuh, we should not read Kant’s guarantee as giving support to the highest political good. Instead, we should understand the highest political good

from the perspective of one who acknowledges the concept of Right as a pure rational concept (MM, 6.229-30), and who is cognizant, in consequence, of the a priori obligation, in virtue of their freedom, to act in accordance with Right. (2006: 383)

I think both Ypi and Taylor would agree with this, although this is not a view that has always been taken for granted. Flikschuh’s account differs however from Taylor’s and Ypi’s, insofar as she no longer links the guarantee to the practical postulates. She thinks that, in the First supplement, Kant intends to show how it is possible to realise in our world the noumenal or non-sensible demands of the doctrine of right. She goes back to the contrast between ethics and juridical philosophy in Kant’s moral theory and argues that, in contrast to ethics, in juridical philosophy, we can regard agents as “externally compelled to act in outward conformity with laws of external freedom”. (2006: 387) One condition she introduces, in the domain of right, is that there be an “empirical manifestation or institutionalisation of coercive laws of external freedom”. (2006: 387)

According to her, Kant’s argument is that nature makes it possible for man to act in accordance with juridical norms, but does not bring about man’s moral ends directly. (Flikschuh 2006: 390) This can be seen in Kant’s account of “a possible future history”, where he introduces the idea of deliberate human agency – not as a result of the demands of practical reason (and, hence, as a moral problem), but through human understanding (and hence, as a “technical” problem). (2006: 391) Flikschuh discusses this in relation to Kant’s famous argument that “the problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is soluble even for a nation of devils”. (8: 366)

Kant’s intention here, Flikschuh argues, is not to take juridical norms to be justified with reference to inclinations, but to deliberately use inclinations for purposes of empirical institutionalisation; nor should this be interpreted, she adds, as an argument that self-seeking inclinations provide reasons for entering a republican state. (Flikschuh 2006: 391-2)

The suggestion is therefore that Kant’s guarantee presents features of human nature that can be employed deliberately in order to incentivise those who cannot determine themselves morally to follow juridical imperatives dictated by reason. In the same way in which those who draft a constitution can organise society in such a way that human frailty is overcome through the use of precisely the cause of this frailty, inclinations, those who realise the need for a federative union of states can employ private inclinations at the intrastate level to bring that union about.

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According to Flikschuh, the highest political good is going to be institutionalised in the following way: constitutions drafters will contribute to people’s compliance with the juridical norms of perpetual peace; aware of human moral frailties, “they employ the means of nature in order to effect an outcome that ensures outward conformity with these acknowledged principles even if individuals’ wills should fail them”. (2006: 392) It is not clear why she decides to interpret Kant’s guarantee in this way, although Kant clearly talks about nature as bringing about this compliance.

One hypothesis I have starts from Flikschuh’s claim that “Kant’s contention […] is not that nature brings about man’s moral ends directly”. (2006: 390) Instead, she emphasises the “deliberate employment of sensible inclinations for purposes of empirical institutionalisation”. (2006: 390) So perhaps one reason why Flikschuh offers this interpretation against Kant’s claim that it is “nature” that “does” something for the “purpose of perpetual peace” is that, by taking nature as an agent, we deprive ourselves of freedom. As we have seen, this was also an assumption behind Ypi’s interpretation of the guarantee. One difficulty, of course, is that there are various notions of freedom in Kant.

If we talk about a mere freedom to perform certain external actions, then, as Flikschuh acknowledges, although the enforcement of juridical norms may reduce our external freedom, it is nevertheless a legitimate enforcement. (2006: 386-7) Given that the government may legitimately restrict our freedom, it is unclear why it would be more problematic if nature did the same. In both cases our autonomy would be affected in the same way, hence, negligibly. If we talk about transcendental freedom, as freedom from the chains of causality, then this freedom is not going to be affected by additional causal links introduced by nature. With Kant’s Third Antinomy in mind, we can say that there is no freedom-related reason to attribute the guarantee to drafters, rather than to nature. The only situation which would make Flikschuh’s claim plausible would be that where nature acts upon our inclinations and makes them stronger and more difficult to oppose, and where the highest political good would again be taken to require that actions be performed with ethical motivations. But the latter condition is something I have been arguing we need to resist.

The idea of a guarantee for peace is mentioned by Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, as part of a right to peace:

> The right to peace is 1) the right to be at peace when there is a war in the vicinity, or the right to neutrality; 2) the right to be assured of the continuance of a peace that has been concluded, that is, the right to a guarantee; the right to an alliance (confederation)… (6: 349)

This guarantee presupposes some assurance besides the treaty that concludes peace. Now, of course, Kant’s “Toward perpetual peace” may be formulated as a peace treaty, which also needs a guarantee, but it is in fact “A philosophical project”, so the analogy with the right to peace is going to break at some point, especially since the project of perpetual peace is quite different from the standard peace treaty. I do not aim to explore in this paper the limits of the analogy; on the contrary, I will argue without questioning the assumption that the guarantee is addressed to parties to the treaty in order to protect peace.

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7 A claim formulated also at page 388.
8 Neither Flikschuh nor Ypi mention about this standard feature of a right to peace; see, however, on this, Eberl and Niesen (2011).
The political context enables us to see a possible solution: political power. In the context of an already organised state, citizens are incentivised to act according to juridical norms through political power, more exactly, the threat of punishment. The problem is, of course, that when we talk about the introduction of the right of a state, of the right of nations and of cosmopolitan right, there will be no political power to oversee the process. So I take it that the role of guarantee in Kant’s essay is to offer an argument to the effect that natural force will drive human beings towards the introduction of a condition of peace.

Consider now a distinct account offered more recently by Allen Wood. According to him, the guarantee for perpetual peace is supposed to play the following role:

Kant realises that before the sceptical (sometimes cynical, often fearful) heads of state to whom he is addressing his treatise are going to take steps to bring about a peaceful federation, they will need reassurances that the course to which Kant is directing them has some prospect of success in human history. (Wood 2006: 257)

Hence, for Wood, the guarantee provides the incentive for sceptical, cynical and/or fearful heads of state to conclude a peace treaty. According to Wood, the guarantee has an epistemic status that is the result of a combination of two types of principle. There is, first, a regulative principle, a heuristic standard which points to the creation of peaceful international order, from the perspective of which we can understand human history. There is, secondly, a practical or moral principle concerning “a duty to work together toward […] an order guaranteeing perpetual peace among states”. (2006: 254)

The regulative and moral principles are, for Wood, independent in the following sense: if something (say, perpetual peace) is a moral end, it need not be also an end that nature follows teleologically. Conversely, the fact that something should be treated for heuristic purposes as an end of nature does not imply that necessarily we have a reason for promoting it. (Wood 2006: 255) Nevertheless, although there is no necessary requirement that an end of nature be pursued morally, for Wood, part of the reason why we have a moral duty to perform an end is that the end is that towards which nature leads us teleologically. One way to understand this relation is to say that we have moral grounds to pursue a certain ideal (say, that of a civil constitution) only under specific contingent empirical conditions – for instance, the existence of institutions for the protection of human rights. It is this combination of the heuristic and moral principles that motivates also Wood’s agreement with Pauline Kleingeld that “Kant’s philosophy makes sense at all only if […] we see it as satisfying both a theoretical and a practical need of reason”. (Wood 2006: 257; Kleingeld 1995: 215)

Yet, according to Wood, Kant acknowledges that the heuristic reasons of the theoretical philosophy of history “fall short of providing a genuine theoretical guarantee” and “he falls back on the moral duty we have to promote the end of perpetual peace”; in short, “it is this rational hope […] that he emphasises as the guarantee of perpetual peace”. (Wood 2006: 208) I think this is problematic in two senses. First, there is a systematic problem. For Kant, the guarantee makes it the case that

what man ought to do in accordance with laws of freedom but does not do, it is assured he will do, without prejudice to this freedom, even by a constraint of nature, and this in terms of all three relations of public right: the right of a state, the right of nations and cosmopolitan right. (PP 8: 365)
But, then, a moral duty to promote the end of perpetual peace cannot provide the guarantee, since the guarantee is needed in spite of an acknowledgement of moral duty. The guarantee should move us from the acknowledgement of the duty, to action, even against our will, in the same way in which a peace treaty is enforced by the powerful state guaranteeing it, when one or more of the parties seem reluctant to comply with its conditions.

The second problem is interpretative. As mentioned before, Kant is quite clear that the guarantee is provided by an agency, which is independent from the will of human beings. Depending on what we take ‘will’ to mean, we can say that there is a sense in which the Categorical Imperative and the derived duty of pursuing the highest political good, are independent from a person’s will. But this is not answer to the problem, since it ultimately refers us back to the first problem: the guarantee is supposed to constrain when those who acknowledge their moral duties do not comply.

We seem to have arrived at an impasse; recall the various constraints that an account of the guarantee has to meet:

1. It should not present the guarantee in such a way that it make a claim beyond the cognitive limits formulated by Kant in the *First Critique*;
2. It should not represent the guarantee as a type of postulate of pure practical reason, since this turns the guarantee, which is a supreme political good, either into a complete or into an ethical good;
3. It should not conceive of the guarantee as the result of the decisions of individuals either ‘technically’ to manipulate inclinations or morally to fulfil their moral duty, and this because the guarantee is seen by Kant as the result of the independent agency of nature;
4. It should have an epistemic status that provides some motivating force in addition to the normative force of the associated moral duty.

In the next section, I argue that Kant does have an account of the epistemic status of the guarantee, an account that can respond to all four desiderata. In order for such an account to be a viable alternative, it is crucial that the claim to the guarantee be distinguished from knowledge claims and yet have an epistemic status which can command some degree of assent. In other words, the correct justification of the claim to the guarantee should be able to provide us with at least some good ground for holding this claim for true. The best starting point would therefore be the third section of the Canon of Pure Reason, “On Opinion, Knowledge and Faith”. (A820-31/B848-60)

4. Assent and Its Epistemic Value

Kant begins the section on opinion [*Meinen*], knowledge [*Wissen*] and faith or belief [*Glauben*] with a characterisation of assent or, literally, holding-for-true [*Fürwahrhalten*]. Knowledge, belief/faith and opinion are forms of assent. They hold a proposition to be true with more or less confidence. Assent is presented as “an event in our understanding”, “an event that may rest on objective bases but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of the person who is judging”. (A820/B848) When I assent to a claim, I may assert it on the basis of objective evidence, I may be convinced by it even when sufficient evidence is lacking or I may take the claim to be possible, but neither be convinced by it nor judge it as objectively justified. The attitude which I display in all these three cases, an attitude of consideration of the claim, is the subjective cause of

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9 For Leslie Stevenson, assent is a disposition, which is actualised in judging. (2003: 74) For Andrew Chignell, assent is the most general category of positive attitude towards a proposition – not pro-attitude, but a willingness to take the proposition on board. (2007: 35)
assent. This, Kant says, is required for assent. Objective grounds sometimes accompany this subjective cause, but they are not always sufficient.

Opinion is an assent consciously insufficient both subjectively and objectively. If the assent is sufficient only subjectively and is regarded as objectively insufficient, then the assent is called faith or belief. Finally, knowledge is the assent that is sufficient both subjectively and objectively. (A822/B850) Moral judgements, Kant says, issue from pure reason, and he thinks they cannot be held as opinion. Thus, since they are not based on experience, but on pure reason, such judgements are necessary and universal, so they can only be knowledge and provide certainty.

Thus, for Kant, it is absurd to have opinion in pure mathematics and, he adds, the “same applies to the principles of morality, where one must not venture upon an action on the mere opinion that something is permitted, but must know [wissen] this to be permitted.” (A823/B851) By contrast, judgements that are the result of a transcendental use of reason can be neither opinion nor knowledge – “holding an opinion”, Kant says, “is indeed too little, but knowing is again too much”. (A823/B851) Reason in its transcendental use goes beyond the limits of sensible intuition – whether a priori or a posteriori – and makes a theoretical claim about things of which we cannot have experience. One such thing is the guarantee for perpetual peace, and the claim to the guarantee will therefore be neither merely opinion, nor knowledge.

This offers an additional explanation for the tendency in the literature to regard the claim to the guarantee as having the status of a postulate, which Kant regards as a form of belief. This introduces also a further difficulty in distinguishing the guarantee from the postulates.

Now, in order for judgements concerning transcendent objects to be classed under the category of belief or faith, Kant says that a practical reference is needed. This practical reference or aim can be either of skill (for contingent and optional purposes) or of morality (for absolutely necessary purposes).10 (A823/B851) First, Kant distinguishes between pragmatic and necessary faith/belief. These are types of faith/belief concerning the conditions of attaining a contingent purpose. The example Kant offers here is that of a physician, who must do something for a patient who is in danger. The physician, on the basis of the evidence at her disposal, judges that the patient suffers from a certain illness, but she does not know anything better to conclude. Her belief/faith in the treatment she provides is a pragmatic, contingent one, according to Kant. By contrast, if she knew that the diagnosis was the best a physician could give, her belief/faith would be necessary. (B824/B852)

When a claim does not state a hypothetically necessary condition for attaining a certain purpose, the assent to the claim is merely theoretical. Even in this case, Kant adds, we can imagine in a merely theoretical judgement an analogue of practical judgement. We can imagine that, if there were a way of establishing whether the claim was correct or not, we could test our faith/belief in the truth of the claim through a bet. The example Kant offers is that of the existence of extraterrestrial beings. A bet would enable us to establish whether we deal with opinion or with faith/belief. Kant calls the assent to such a merely theoretical judgement doctrinal faith. (A825/B854)

Interestingly, Kant says that the existence of God, which is a theoretical judgement, belongs to doctrinal faith. This is interesting, since the existence of God is also the claim of one of the two postulates of practical reason, for which Kant thinks that the justification relies on moral grounds. By contrast, in the case of a doctrinal belief, the assent is not moral, but theoretical. Kant thinks there are theoretical reasons for

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10 One can easily notice here similarities with the discussion on perpetual peace in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. (MM 6: 354-5)
asserting the existence of God. This is because our cognition of appearances requires the condition of purposive unity, something Kant thinks experience richly illustrates.

He thinks this purposive unity is necessarily made possible by a supreme intelligence, but he takes this unity to be necessary for a “contingent”, although “not unimportant” aim, namely, to have guidance in the investigation of nature. (A826/B854) After noting that a similar argument can be formulated about a claim concerning the immortality of the soul, Kant reflects on the status of faith/belief, which he thinks combines an expression of modesty from an objective point of view with one of firmness of confidence from a subjective viewpoint.

Given the support that merely doctrinal faith/belief can obtain and given that speculation sometimes drives one away from this faith/belief, doctrinal faith/belief has something shaky about it. By contrast, moral faith starts from the absolute necessity that something must occur (that I comply with the moral law) Here the purpose is no longer merely contingent, but necessary or “inescapably established”. (A828/B856) But, Kant says, there is a single condition under which this purpose coheres with the entirety of all purposes and thereby has practical validity – the condition that there is God and a future world, which are the two postulates of practical reason. In addition, I know that no one else is acquainted with other conditions that would lead to the same unity of purposes under the moral law. Since this moral command should also be my maxim, I will inevitably have faith/belief in the existence of God and in a future life. To shake this faith would be to shake my moral principles, “which I cannot renounce without being detestable in my own eyes”. (A828/B856)

I think the clue for the problem of the guarantee is precisely this discussion of assent in the First Critique. Of the four desiderata mentioned at the end of the previous section, the first is obviously met: the claim to the guarantee, a claim to a transcendent object, which Kant clearly acknowledges cannot be the object of knowledge. On the contrary, Kant places such a claim under the heading of belief or faith. Now it may seem that the guarantee can be understood by analogy with the postulates: postulates are conditions for a necessary purpose, the complete good; similarly, the guarantee could be seen as a condition for the purpose of the highest political good, which is also a necessary purpose (since it is the object of a duty).

And, yet, there is a significant difference between the postulates and the guarantee: the guarantee is not a necessary condition for perpetual peace; perpetual peace may in principle be achieved, if all human beings decided to act in accordance with a rightful condition at national, international and cosmopolitan levels. In this case of perfect compliance, no guarantee were required for perpetual peace. There is a second and related reason for distinguishing between the guarantee and the postulates. The postulates are necessary conditions for the complete good, but Kant cannot justify the guarantee by reference to the moral duty of pursuing the highest political good; as Kant says, the guarantee provides a confirmation that “what man ought to do in accordance with laws of freedom but does not do, it I assured he will do, without prejudice to this freedom, even by a constraint of nature”. (PP 8: 365)

The role of the postulates is to enable persons to be ethically worthy and happy; the guarantee does not make possible perpetual peace, but offers assurance that it will be realised, even when human beings do not act morally. Hence, the claim to the guarantee is not a moral belief and this satisfies the second desideratum mentioned above. The guarantee appears as a doctrinal belief, which can also be grounded in the purposive unity of nature. To be sure, the purpose manifested by nature in its unity might not be perpetual peace or at least it need not be, if we take it simply to be a condition, which makes possible our cognition of appearances. The direction of the unity is fixed by moral purposes, but the idea of the guarantee in general (without the qualification that it refers to perpetual peace) only requires the doctrinal belief concerning the
purposive unity of nature. This confirms that the third desideratum is also met: the guarantee is an implication of an agency which is independent of that of human beings – it is the consequence of the agency of nature.

Now, this doctrinal belief, which is justified by reference to the regulative principle of the purposive unity of nature, may not seem to amount to much – hence, the claim by Wood\textsuperscript{11} that they cannot provide a guarantee. Yet, in the context of the discussion of knowledge, belief and opinion, the situation may seem differently:

(a) Belief is epistemically stronger than opinion.
(b) Opinion is not an arbitrary assertion, but also has some epistemic normative force.
(c) Knowledge is also a form of assent with a subjective component and with objectively sufficient grounds which may, however, be challenged and justified only subjectively.

Some of these claims are easier to defend than others, but here I can only take all of them for granted. Assuming they are correct, and assuming the discussion so far has been correct, the guarantee can be justified to produce belief. We can have a doctrinal belief that nature will enforce the conditions of the peace treaty and will discourage any attempt to break the rules. This shows that account of the guarantee defended here satisfies also the fourth desideratum.

5. Conclusion

There have been some recent notable attempts in the literature to clarify Kant’s project of perpetual peace and the related idea of a guarantee for perpetual peace. In this paper, I have pursued critically the same project with a view to a further clarification and defence of Kant’s guarantee. I have shown that an interpretation of perpetual peace as a highest (complete) ethical good leads to a view of the guarantee by analogy with the postulates of pure practical reason. By contrast, I have argued that perpetual peace is a juridical condition, which can legitimately be realised without a need for ethical motivation. I have also shown that the attempt to see the guarantee as the result of the actions (either “technically” or “morally” guided) of human beings is misguided both on textual and on systematic grounds. By contrast, I have argued that the guarantee is the result of an agency which is independent from that of human beings, an agency which may constrain us to act in a particular way, but does so without prejudice to our freedom. By an examination of Kant’s discussion, in the Canon of Pure Reason, of the distinction between opinion, belief and knowledge, I concluded that the guarantee can be defended as the object of doctrinal belief, a form of assent that can generate conviction about the enforcement of peace treaties by the “great artist nature”.

\textsuperscript{11} A similar claim is made by David Lindstedt (1999).
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